

2.5.2023 A Prayer Framework

As I said last week, one of the big themes in the Sermon on the Mount is that your interior life MUST match up with the exterior of your life. What we're *thinking, believing, and feeling* needs to match what we're *doing, saying, and being* because **Motive Matters to God.**

According to Jesus **“the Kingdom of God is at hand.”** And we are to be thinking, believing, and feeling as if it is. So that we are **doing, saying and being** what the Kingdom needs us to do, say, and be.

In **American Christianity** we mostly think of prayer in terms of “requests.” It's us asking God for this or that. But, **my experience as a follower of Jesus for 50 years** tells me prayer is less about that, and more about moving our hearts and minds into sync with what He already has for us.

We recently talked about Paul's **“thorn in the flesh”** [2Cor 12-losing his eyesight] Paul says 3 times he asked God to take it away. But God made it clear He wasn't going to take it away and **Paul would have to carry on with its constant presence.** He would have to depend on God's Grace. There's a case where prayer was the means of Paul grasping how to receive the thing that was already coming his way.

So to **assist His listeners** in their efforts to align their lives with the purposes of the Kingdom of God, Jesus offers them a pattern for prayer. In Luke [11] it comes about when the disciples ask for some prayer guidance – like John gave his disciples. Here [Matt 6] Jesus tucks it into this massive message about the Kingdom.

We call it the Lord's Prayer.

Matt. 6:9 “Pray, then, in this way:

‘Our Father, who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

10 -‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

11 -‘Give us this day our daily bread.

12 -‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 -‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’

Now millions of us recite this prayer just as it is, and that's just fine.

But it sounds to me as if Jesus' intention was to give the Galileans a framework for their prayers. Jesus doesn't say **“here's what you should pray.”** He says: **“this is the way you should pray.** Matt 6:9” Pray, then, in this way: or **fashion your prayers** according to this pattern I'm giving you. So think of this prayer like the four walls and roof of a house framed and raised up; to be finished off with your own materials: your own words, ideas, experience and perspective.

This morning I want to show you five parts of a FRAMEWORK FOR PRAYER.

First: God is the Primary Focus

Matt. 6:9 “Pray, then, in this way:

‘Our Father, who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

10 -‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

The first thing to notice about “the way” to pray is that **God and his Kingdom take first place.** William Barclay tells us: “*It’s only when God is given his proper place that all things fall into their proper places.*” It’s like the old Sunday School object lesson with the empty jar, a pile of rice and some really big rocks. If you put the little stuff in first- the jar fills up and the rocks won’t fit. But, if you give the big stuff first place- by putting the rocks in first- then all the little stuff falls into place- it all fits.

The Big stuff has to come first and God is unquestionably the Biggest of Stuffs.

And this prayer begins with a clear focus on God: He is **our Father**, which makes us the children He loves. His name is held as holy, meaning He is other, above all. There is none like Him. He has a **kingdom** making Him a King. And, as such, He has a **will** that is to be accomplished. His will and His Kingdom are in full swing in Heaven. **And as Father, God, and King of all that is, He will make it so on earth as well.**

Later, after describing the Father God’s care for things like wildflowers and songbirds Jesus instructs his listeners saying: **Matt 6:33** “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you. Our vertical relationship to God has to come first in our faith and practice and also in the framing of our prayers.”

So the starting point of your prayer time should be to focus on God, God’s nature, God’s sovereign will, and God’s Kingdom.

Second: Our Needs are the Secondary Focus

11 -‘Give us this day our daily bread.

12 -‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 -‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’

While God’s Kingdom and His will must be our priority focus, **God loves his image-bearing humans and he is acutely aware of what we need.** (Remember:*He knows what we need before we ask.*) In Jesus’ prayer frame the second half of the prayer is focused on us asking God to care for us at the most basic levels of life.

--Give us this day our Daily bread: We need food to survive - like every living creature. And just like all the other animals God provides for us as He does for them [see Psalm 104, 147]. So a simple request for what we need for this day is part of this prayer framework.

--Forgive us our Debts: This is about maintaining our right relationship with God. We trespass over boundaries, we go where we shouldn’t in mind or body, we sin. We do things God wants us not to do or we don’t do the things God DOES want us to do. To maintain a right relationship with Him we need to seek His forgiveness for our trespasses. And to maintain **good horizontal relationships** we must forgive when others trespass on our boundaries.

Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ As followers of a Crucified Messiah you can count on the fact that life is NOT gonna be butterflies and rose

gardens. Evil doesn't like love.

And tests [better word than temptation] of our commitment to Jesus WILL come. Until this broken, bent world is fully healed we will have to wade through the death and darkness that comes our way. But we are invited to pray to be kept from the worst testing and delivered from evil- or more specifically "the evil one." This is a prayer to stay strong when tested by Evil and also **a prayer that it might pass us by.**

These requests, as framed in Jesus' prayer encompass all of human existence: past, present and future. **Daily bread** is about our life needs right now - in **the Present.** **Forgiveness** is about actions from the past that need to be put right between us and God and us and our neighbors- **the past.** **Lead us not into testing and Deliver us from evil** is about trials and testings yet-to-come and the decisions we'll make then. This request is about our faith in the future.

With that, consider this: It's **God, the Father** who provides our life and food. It's **God the Son-** who provides forgiveness through his death and resurrection, and it's **God, the Holy Spirit,** who GUIDES us through evil and testing to deliverance. So in the frame Jesus has given, with God as the primary focus and us as second, we can lay the whole of our lives - past, present, & future- before all of God -Father, Son, Spirit.

Third: Prayer should be Communal

Matt. 6:9 "Pray, then, in this way: **'Our Father** 11 -**'Give us this day our daily bread.** 12 -**'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.** 13 -**'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'**

Later in ch6 Jesus will say: "Don't worry about YOUR life..." He tells us all that because, in our not yet fully redeemed state we tend to focus on ourselves, on the problems, struggles, and tragedies of our own life. Those are the ones we are feeling the most.

Of course intellectually and maybe even empathetically we know others are facing similar trials. And we certainly do **pray for others.** But I find that – in my own self-centeredness- even the prayers on my list that aren't about me can become about me.

If I'm praying for my kids, for their struggles and concerns, part of that prayer is me wanting their lives to be blessed and better- for everything to be sunshine and lollipops for them- **so I don't have to worry about them.** "Fix their lives, Lord, so my own life won't be so stressful." See: all about me.

But the frame of the prayer Jesus gives us is communal. It's like a holy "Groupon." Every part of it is US Praying for ALL of US. Jesus teaches us to pray to **OUR Father,** about **OUR daily bread, OUR debts, OUR debtors. Lead Us** not into testing, **Deliver Us** from the Evil One. The prayer is communal!

The prayer framework Jesus gives us acknowledges that *I am not the only one in need of daily bread, or forgiveness or deliverance* from the evil one. We are not alone in this. And God is not MY Father only. **He is the Father of all of us who need provision, forgiveness and deliverance** and that awareness of the communal nature of our life with God and one another, should come out in our prayers.

Fourth: Prayer should be Simple & Meaningful

The content of this prayer **is accessible and understandable to anyone, anywhere, at any time.** It's not magic or a chant requiring a trance state. There is nothing fancy or highfalutin' about it. *It's meaningful to anyone, anywhere, any time.*

In the Gospels Jesus regularly calls God: **Father.** This use of "Father" in this way wasn't unknown but it was unusual. It was a little *too familiar for most 1st century Jews.* Even more familiar, we know, from Mark [14] **Jesus also called God "Abba;"** the Aramaic word for "**Daddy.**" Now in both versions of the Lord's Prayer [Mt 6, Lk 11] the Greek for Father is used [pater]. **Certainly Jesus knew Greek,** or some Greek, anyway. **He also knew Hebrew.** But the common speech for Jesus, and most of those listening was Aramaic. So scholars think it likely Jesus began this prayer addressing God as Our Abba, in Heaven...

Now the point I want to make here with the **simple nature of the prayer** and **Abba** is that *Jesus taught the disciples to address God in their own common language-* the language of their daily lives -simple and meaningful.

This might seem like no big deal because you've always prayed in your colloquial language. But for the first century Jew, the scriptures were always in Hebrew as were all the prayers and worship. **Hebrew was THE sacred language for talking with God.** Just as classical Arabic is the necessary language for Muslim prayer and Koran-reading. **In both cases Arabic and Hebrew are considered sacred languages to God-** the only right language for prayer or worship.

And along comes Jesus, the God-Man, speaking Aramaic, the common language and teaching his followers they could address God directly using the common speech. **They could speak to God in the language that held the most meaning for them; and know they were heard.**

Kenneth Bailly (Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes) points out that *Jesus teaching the Ds to pray in Aramaic (Abba) means there is no sacred language to God.* God does not require Hebrew, or Arabic or King James English. **This prayer,** like the whole of the NT **is for every nation, tribe, people and language.** And if there is no single "sacred language" then there is no "sacred culture." **All cultures that embrace Jesus as Lord can be sacred so that we can look forward to the great scene in Revelation 7 of:** a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

In Jesus prayer framework we pray in content and language that is **meaningful** to us-

where we live. And God hears it and receives it.

Fifth and Briefly: Prayer is Relational [Paternal].

The center of the prayer is that God is Our Father. He is not an impersonal force, an angry tyrant, a disinterested clock-winder, or a deadbeat Dad. When we pray, we are talking with God in the context of a parent/child relationship.

Author Craig Groeschel says this about titles and relationship

If you call me "Pastor Craig," chances are you might know a little about me. You know what I do, maybe you've heard me speak, and maybe you're familiar with some of my favorite topics.... But your use of my title doesn't mean that you know me personally. **You might just call me "Craig,"** and I'd usually assume that you know me even better. My friends call me Craig. We're close.

Then there are those who possess exclusive rights to a few specialized, far more intimate forms of address. These are the six beautiful, small people, very dear to me, whom I allow to climb up in my lap. They rub their hands on my face and say things like "You need to shave" and "You're the best" and "Can I have some candy?" They call me "Daddy."

Abba is much like **"Daddy"** as used by a little child in our culture. From Paul's use of Abba in Romans [8:15] and Galatians [4:6] it's clear the early church kept the word as used by Jesus and used it themselves and taught others to use it too. "Our Abba in Heaven..." The title Abba is **intimate**, yes. But within its fundamental intimacy there is **deep respect and trusting obedience**. When we pray, we pray **in the context of relationship** - a comfortable intimacy, a deep respect and a trusting obedience.

In the prayer framework Jesus has given us we see WHEN WE PRAY...

- **Worship** and appreciation of God and His nature and seeking of His Kingdom must come first.
- **Second**: with God in first place, we can bring the whole of our lives before all of God.
- It should be **Communal**: reflecting the knowledge that we are a part of a global family in Christ who all need provision, forgiveness and deliverance.
- Jesus invites us to pray in **language that is meaningful** to us and our lives.
- Finally the entire prayer is founded on the idea that the God of the universe, the holy one, the almighty, the King of Creation is Our Father [Abba]- bigger, stronger, more playful, more encouraging and more faithful than the most perfect human Dad your imagination can dream up.

This is the way Jesus invited us to pray: God first, us second, others-focused, simple, & relational words, to our Father ...our Abba.

In closing let's say the Lord's prayer, or the Our Father Prayer together:

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and Glory forever- Amen.