

Model for Praying - Part 1

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God as our Father in prayer, highlighting the personal relationship and the transformative process of adoption into His family.

Duration: 48:32

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1

Topics: "Praying"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the concept of God as our Father and the importance of understanding the Fatherhood of God. He refers to a prayer where someone in the congregation suggests that we should call God our Father and ask Him to take action. The preacher explains that the idea of God as our Father brings Him close to us and highlights His love and care for us. He also emphasizes the concept of grace, explaining that God's love for us is unmerited and undeserved. The preacher concludes by discussing the vital link between the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of the Saints, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and honoring this connection in our prayers.

Transcript

Our Father in Heaven. Now someone may be tempted all at once to say that really there's nothing very much there to talk about. And probably it would be better if we just passed by the way and got to something which is meatier and more relevant and more significant.

Surely this is just a matter of addressing the deity and there is nothing much more than that to it. I want to tell you that there is. Indeed I would like to go so far as to say that unless you and I not only understand the meaning of these opening words, but can enter into the spirit of them, we shall rarely know anything at all of what the Bible means by prayer.

The tragedy is that we all too often come into the throne room of God and into the experience of what we deem to be praying, other than through this front door. Whereby out of the depth of the heart we come to our God and we say, our Father who art in heaven, and what that implies. Now two main things alone can I possibly attempt to bring out of this passage tonight, but they are nevertheless exceedingly important and basic to everything else that we shall have to say.

First of all, I would like you to gaze with me upon the person that we are to address in prayer. All eyes fixed upon God and upon God as our Father. That's what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying here.

You're coming to God, you're going to fix your heart, fix your mind, fix your thoughts upon him, see that you fix your thoughts rightly upon him, not simply as the deity, but as your very own Father in the heavens. Prayer as taught by Jesus is to be addressed to God the Father. Now another time perhaps we shall have more to say about this.

The only thing I want to add now to that statement is this. There are times in our worship and in our adoration where we offer equal adoration to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as to God the Father. How else could it be? Because the three are one and the one are three.

And he is very lacking in understanding and in much else if he does not come to the Father and to the Son and to the Spirit with a sense of wonder and of awe and adoration in prayer. But having said that, it would seem that the royal highway for prayer as laid out in the Scripture is ultimately to come to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. Which means this.

We come to the Father because of the work that Jesus Christ has done and is doing. Because of the work that he finished on the cross of Calvary and was sealed by his resurrection from the dead on the morning of the third day. And the work that is now proceeding as he sits at the Father's right hand making intercession for us even forevermore.

He ever lives to make intercession for us. We come then to the Father by the Son, who finished the work of atonement on the cross of Calvary and who continues his work of intercession on the throne in glory, but we come through the Son not in our own strength. We would never believe in the Lord Jesus by our own strength.

We would not want to please him. We would not want to come to God through him. But we come because of the ministrations of the Holy Spirit, turning our thoughts and our hearts and our wills Godward and giving us a desire for God and the constraint to come to him.

Until we find ourselves at his feet in wonder, love, and praise. Now let's just pick out one or two threads there. First of all, the God to whom we are to pray is a person.

Our Father. This may sound as something utterly unnecessary to say or to mention, even trite to someone. Well, as a matter of fact, it is nothing of the kind.

It is absolutely essential that the notion that you and I have of God should be of God as a person. Not just the sum total of our ideas about him, but a person. A real person who has will and understanding and the capacity to act.

He can hear. He can speak. He can do infinitely so and much, much else, constituting him a person.

Indeed, if we have been made after his image, as the Bible says, our personhood is related to the personhood of God. We are what we are as distinct from the creatures because God has made us after his image. You're a person.

I'm a person because somehow or other we reflect something of the image of God who is a person and that cannot be said of the animals. Now, let me add two things to that. Because of that, because of the fact that God is a person, we must proceed to say that he may indeed, to use C.S. Lewis's well-known phrase, he may indeed be beyond personality.

And when we speak of him as a person, there may be a far richer meaning that we must give to the word than when we apply it to ourselves. That is agreed. But it doesn't mean any less.

And one of the reasons for rejecting the attempt of modern radical theologians to reconstruct the doctrine of God is that they depersonalize God. The concept of God as the ground of being, the ground of our human being, is precisely this. It is not compatible with a God who is revealed in Jesus Christ who is a person we can talk to He hears us.

And then there is a negative thought that follows that, and it's a very practical one. When we pray, we do not pray to an idea. When we pray, we do not pray to men or somebody human.

When we pray, we do not pray to angels or archangels. When we pray, we do not pray inwardly to ourselves as if God were inside of us, even though by the Spirit he is dwelling in us. But we pray to a God who is objective, who was the first and upon whom we depend, and who is the last, the eternal and unchanging and unchangeable God.

Now if we do not have this concept of God in our mind as a personal living person, whose image we bear in some dim sense despite what ravages sin has caused in our lives, then we can never have the proper notion of God that is basic to real prayer. The God to whom we all pray as Christians is a divine person. I'm going to gloss over that in order to come to this.

The God to whom we are to pray is not only a person and a divine person, but most precious of all here. And yet we must put it in its context. Every detail is important, but this surely is precious.

He is our Father. He is our Father. This word Father is far more precious than we generally appreciate, though I know there are people who have been very unfortunate in their fathers.

And because of that, they cannot relate this word to a good, gracious, wise, heavenly Father. I guess that one of the worst struggles I have ever had in pastoral work was with a young woman who, over a period of at least three years, was quite unable to pray to God as Father. And it was because of the rascal that had brought her up.

Her very concept of fatherhood was such that she simply could not think of God as Father. God is the original Father. Every other fatherhood, according to the Bible, is based upon and grows out of the fatherhood of God.

Paul puts it like this, for this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. He is the original Father, and he's the perfect Father, and he's the ideal Father. Every other father falls short of his glory and perfection, yet he is the original of which every other father is but a faint copy, and sometimes very unworthy.

God is not our Father in that sense by nature. He is our Creator. He made us, and in that secondary sense, it may be quite legitimate to say that God is our Father.

Paul does that, you remember, in Acts chapter 17, where he is preaching on Mars Hill. He says about God, he made from every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth. I'm sorry, he made from one, from one person, every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, and then later on he goes on again, in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring, and he continues, being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deities

like gold or silver or stone, representation of any art or the imagination of man, etc.

God is not our Father by nature. He has made us, we are his creatures, but by nature we are not his children. It's amazing how many people get mixed up here.

It was the same in Jesus' day. There were good, moral, upright Jews who thought that they were everything that they could ever be, just because they were the children of Abraham, and Jesus had to speak most challengingly to them. Do you remember these words? I don't know whether you gloss over these words when you come to them.

They really are challenging. Jesus said to them, you, he says, now these are the intelligentsia from among the Jewish community. They are from the upper stratum.

You, he says, are from below. I am from above. You are of this world.

I am not of this world. And then later on, if you were Abraham's children, as they claimed they were, you would do what Abraham did. But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God.

This is not what Abraham did. You do, now notice how he comes to it, you do what your father did. They said to him, and they get angry at this point, we were not born in fornication.

We have one father, even God. They go behind Abraham now. Jesus said to them, if God were your father, he would love me, for I proceeded and come forth from God.

I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot hear, you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

He was a murderer from the beginning, and he has nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. What a terrible indictment.

Indictment? You are of your father, the devil. God nevertheless becomes a father to his people by an act of gracious adoption. Now there are two or three things involved in this, and I want to refer to them.

The first thing that is involved in adoption is a transition from one family to another. This is magnificently described by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2. I refer it to you, and you can read it at your leisure. He starts off in Ephesians chapter 2, and he says that all of us by nature are dead in trespasses and sins, and he says that all of us are children of disobedience, all of us are the objects of the divine wrath, the divine holy anger, and all of us are lost.

We are the children of disobedience, we are ruled by the prince of the power of the earth, we belong to an alien power, and we are utterly subjected to it. That's our spiritual condition. But by the time you come to verse 19 in chapter 2, something wonderful has happened.

Listen to what he says there. So then, he says, you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God. Now if you want a sermon, just check that up, just trace it.

Dead in trespasses and sins, but now you belong to the household of God, you share in the life of God's household. Under the power of the prince of the earth, yes, but now I'm in God's household. Lost and one of the children upon whom the wrath of God reigns and rules and rests, but now one of the children of the family.

This is part of the glorious things that take place when a man is adopted into the family of God. He moves from one family, from being in Adam to being in Christ. And you know, the Bible only accepts two families, and all of us are in either or of them.

You're in Adam, or you're in the last Adam. You're in the first, or you're in the last. You're in Adam and Eden, or you're in Christ, and because you're in him, you're in the heavenly places.

The transition then is from one family into the other family. That's the first element in adoption. And before you and I have the right to call upon God as our father, we've got to move out of Adam into Christ.

A transition from one family into another. But along with that transition from one family into another, there must be an underlying transformation, which means leaving behind me the likeness and the characteristics of the family that I once and originally belonged to, and I begin to show inwardly as well as outwardly the characteristics of the family to which I've come. Adoption.

This is an important, an important transition, this. Adoption is not simply a change of status, it is that, but it is a change of status that is always, always, without exception, accompanied by a change of state. This.

Whom God receives into his family as his child, he says, my child, I give you a new birth. I make you a new creature. I breathe my spirit into you.

You have my communicable nature. You're no longer the person you were. If any man be in Christ Jesus, there is a new creation.

Old things are passed away. Everything has become new and everything is of God, who reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ. In consequence of this, it can be said of the Christian as of Ephraim of old.

You remember how Hosea uses these words? Ephraim shall say, he's thinking of a coming day when the Spirit of God will deal with Ephraim's heart. He says, Ephraim shall say, what have I to do anymore with idols? Hallelujah. Now that's the miracle.

When a nation that has been absorbed with her idols, turning her back upon God, lost in idolatry, says, what have I to do anymore with idolatry? And she's turning her back on all her idols. Now that's the regenerate man. The man who having been adopted into the family has the life of the family infused into him.

He's not only transferred, but he's transformed. Then this must be added. Adoption involves a transaction whereby two things happen again.

The first is this. The adopted person is legally invested with a new name. Simple, but precious.

It universally happened in this way in New Testament times, and it universally happens this way in Christian experience. The moment you are adopted into God's family, you have a right to be known by his name. His new name.

And the second matter is this. At the same time, the adopted person is invested with his right to the inheritance of the family into which he has been legally admitted. This is as true when we are adopted into the family of God, as it may be.

In fact, even more true than it may be when we are adopted into an earthly family. Paul puts it beautifully like this. And if children, he says, then heirs.

Hallelujah. Isn't that wonderful? If children, then heirs. Wait a moment.

He hasn't said everything yet. He takes a big long breath, I believe, and then he gets the rest of it out and he puts it like this. Heirs of God.

Now, what can you say that's bigger than that? That doesn't mean to say that you're just on a list of heirs that God has made. It means that you're heir to God. God is your inheritance.

You know, this makes me dance. I don't know. One of these days I'm coming out of the pulpit.

God is your inheritance, my friend. And you see, this is staggering because that means everything is yours. It's no wonder that Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, says he has blessed you with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

It's no wonder that Peter says he has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness in the knowledge of him. Everything is yours in God. There's nothing left out.

God is his people's inheritance. But you know, Paul doesn't even stop there. Dear Paul, thank God for him.

If children, then heirs. Heirs of God. And in order for you to get it properly, he says joint heirs along with Jesus Christ.

Go through the estate. From end to end. From beginning to end.

Measure it out. Bring your computers in, if you like, and try to fathom the glories and the grace and all else that is involved in God's vast estate, or rather the estate which is God. And my friend, you and I in Christ are heirs to it all.

His adoptees are all heirs. Now the person to whom we pray is the very one who, even though he had a son, this is something that should shock us a little bit. You see, people usually adopt a child when they don't have children of their own.

Our God, our Father, had a son, an only son, an only begotten son, a well-beloved son. A son whose life he punctuated with statements that were heard by human ears to the effect, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. And when at last he had said it three times on the morning of the third day, he said it in unaction, which meant exactly the same thing.

And on the morning of the ascension, he took him back to sit at his own right hand, meaning that he had pleasure in his son. Why on earth adopt folk like you and me? What on earth does he want with me? Why should he come after you? With all our blemishes and all our sins and all our rebellions and all our miserable offenses, why on earth does God bring me into his family when he has one son like this? My friend, let's write it large across this edifice tonight, one word, grace. Grace.

It all explains it. Free, unmerited love of God, looking at worms of the dust, hell-deserving, and say, I will have mercy on them. They don't deserve it, but I will love them with an everlasting love.

And he comes down in Christ and takes us up in Christ. That's the gospel. Now, if you want to pray, you've got to be able to look into the eyes of the eternal God and say, our father.

With a sense of privilege that is yours as an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, you belong to the household by the blood of his son and the spirit of grace in your heart. One other thing I want to say. Can I take 10 minutes? Right.

I didn't hear you say yes. That's all right. One or two principles to guide us in prayer to our father in heaven, and they're very important.

These opening words given by our Lord in his model for praying, embody certain principles which the prayer practitioner ought always to bear in mind as he comes to the throne of grace. Now, the first thing I want to mention is this. There is a vital link between the divine fatherhood, the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of the saints.

There is a vital link, and unless you and I can get this and see it and respect it and honor it, we shall never get very far in prayer. There is a vital link between the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of the saints. This is how you should pray, says Jesus, and it's all wrapped up in these two words.

Oh my, I wish we could be as concise as the master. Our father. Our father.

The universal family of believers is here forcefully reminded that in addressing God as father, he needs to be everywhere and at all times acknowledged, not simply as my father, but as our father. Our father. And this is very important.

We've heard such a lot about the me generation. My friends, the me generation has always been here since the fall. We've remembered ourselves to the exclusion of other people.

And that has not shown itself anywhere more than in this matter of prayer. We pray for ourselves and ourselves and ourselves, if we pray at all, ad nauseum. God says, God, the son says, the Lord Jesus says, after this manner pray ye, our father.

So you must have a consciousness of belonging to the family of God if you belong to the father of the family. It's not enough just to say father. The father has other children.

And he doesn't think much of you if you can forget his other children. And if you are going to pray as Jesus wants us to pray and is teaching us to pray, you and I've got to learn to say not simply father, but our father. The privilege, it's just beyond us to comprehend it.

We simply can't begin to take it in. But here it is. And this is what Jesus says is ours by the purchase of his blood and the provision of his spirit and the guidance of his word.

It's all made over to us in Christ by the sheer grace of God. It was certainly mind boggling to both Jews and Gentiles of New Testament time. And indeed, they said that it smacked of the grossest kind of presumption.

Not that the I've heard it said in high places where people should know a little bit better that the concept of fatherhood was altogether new. And Jesus said it for the first time. Jesus brought it out for the first time.

Well, now, that's not true. And we Christians ought to be careful what we say. Even pagans spoke of God as father.

Homer wrote of father Zeus. And I can end his quote, father Zeus, who ruled God, why hast thou forsaken me? But in every other prayer, other than that, when he stood under our sin and curse, he cried father. And he came to the heart of his heavenly father in this way, with this word and this concept and this spirit of sonship upon his lips and in his heart.

Here he bids his disciples recognize the high privilege that is theirs on the basis of his redeemed work. We too may and we should look, may I say to reverently into the face of the eternal God and because Christ has died and is risen again and has given us the spirit, we should say father. The late Dr. Campbell Morgan of Westminster Chapel and America had a lovely story to illustrate this point.

Now, I don't know whether it's quite true. I can't tell you. It may have been one of these apocryphal things, but he does tell it anyway and it's gone into print.

Of a prayer meeting held in Yorkshire, England, five or six men who knew something about prayer, the prayer of faith and praying through met every week regularly to pray for their churches, to pray for the district, to pray for revival. One night a visitor turned up. Dr. Campbell Morgan describes him not as a man of prayer, but as a man who made many prayers.

If you don't know what that means, you'll have to ask Dr. Campbell Morgan the morning after the resurrection. He was a man who made many prayers more than a man who prayed. He got up to pray and he made a wonderful prayer, says Dr. Campbell Morgan, and all the phrases were nicely rounded off and the sentences were so long and so forth.

It was a beautiful prayer. And then he came to a point in his prayer where there was a minor pause and he said, and now Lord, what more shall we say at which one of the old boys who knew what prayer was got up and said, in good Yorkshire, not English, Yorkshire, in English it goes like this, call him father man and ask him to do something. In Yorkshire it goes something like this, call him father moon and ask him for summit, call him father man and ask him to do something.

See, they had the root of the matter. Father, the responsibility of acknowledging the universal brotherhood of God's redeemed people now must run parallel with that father. Yes, but our father, our acceptance of God's fatherhood of his people necessitates the acknowledgement of the entire brotherhood of the redeemed.

Since we have only one heavenly father and he is father of us all in Christ, we must positively acknowledge our acceptance of them in our approach to him. Is there somebody that you're keeping outside of your arms? Is there a brother or a sister because of the color of her skin or his skin? Because he's not of your own particular social class, doesn't wear your tie, doesn't have your accent? Is there is some saint of God that you can't bring within your embrace? My friend, you can't pray. I'm sorry, you can't pray.

If you cannot take within your arms as a child of God, all the family who belong to the father, there is an area beyond which you cannot go and you may pray till doomsday. The father has accepted that other

person, you must accept him or her too. There will be a million prayers unheard and unanswered for this one reason alone.

There are saints that have not received one another, though they claim to have received the father, they refuse so many of his children. And our Lord Jesus is very adamant. Now he can drive a pint when he wants to, can't he? You go on through this little prayer, it's so short.

But you notice how he's repeated this little personal pronoun in the plural? Our or we? Say our father, not simply my father. Pray for our daily bread. Ask forgiveness for our debts.

As we have forgiven our debtors and ask God not to lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. The implication is clear as crystal. You see, is God your father? Then you are members of the family and you must always see yourself in that context.

Never allow your own individuality to shut out one of God's little ones whom he has received. And the last thing is this. There needs to be an appreciation of God's imminence and of his transcendence.

Not the one or the other, but one and the other. When you pray, says Jesus, pray our father who are literally in the heavens. Now I'm going to sum it this up.

The concept of father brings God right down by our side because it's the concept of the ideal father. Jesus painted a picture of the ideal father in other places too, such as in the parable of the prodigal son. And this is a concept of imminence.

If we may use that picture now, please don't argue with me about the contextual understanding of that. One point I want to take from it, namely this. And wherever that boy went, the father went with him.

He was at his heels. And his imagination was thinking, where is he tonight? What's he doing tonight? What's going wrong? Is everything right with him? Has he had a decent meal today? The whole ethos of the parable involves this. You see, God was after him.

The father was after the boy. The boy went beyond the horizon, but the father was at his heels. He was close to him in thought because he was close to him in heart.

And if it had been humanly possible, he would have gone with him in order to be of some comfort to him. Jesus says that we need to see that God is our father, right by our side. He gave life to us, and he with his strong arms nurses us.

Now there is one thing that must be said here. When Jesus said this, it is almost certain that he used the word father in a particular sense. There is a Greek word for father, but sometimes in the New Testament, Jesus interjects, and he deliberately leaves that aside, and he uses an Aramaic word, Abba.

So does Paul do the same. Abba, father. Now you say, why bring all that kind of thing in now? We're in a hurry.

Well, hang on a minute. There's a very real and a very precious truth here, too precious to miss. Pater means father, the Greek word.

It means father in the right sense, in the legal sense. But this word Abba means something which is infinitely closer and nearer. It is actually the word that was used in the patriarchal age of the little child's

first reference to his mummy or to his daddy here in the masculine, to his father as his daddy.

The Talmud confirms this when it says that when a child is weaned, and I quote, it learns to say two words at least. The one is Abba, and the other is Ima. The first Abba is the equivalent to our daddy, and the second Ima is the equivalent to our mummy.

Now, not father and mother. Hasn't come to that yet. But the child is dependent upon its parents, you see, and its daddy and mummy.

It's this term of endearment. Now, that intimate designation would have sounded almost blasphemous in the years of an Orthodox Jew. The fact is, however, my dear friends, that by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has not simply become a father to us in the Greek sense, but in this intimate sense.

You can tell him everything. You can cry into his ear. You can smile with him.

You can open your heart. One of the words for prayer means come and open up everything. Paratia means open up everything free, everything open, nothing between.

Come freely to the throne of grace. There's nothing to hold back because you're talking to one who is dear and near. But oh, the balance of scripture, and I'm through.

The balance of scripture. We're having it on our Wednesday nights. We'll have it again next Wednesday night.

The balance of the word of God is something which makes us adore the God who gave us the book. If you and I lived on that, we might become sloppy and sentimental. Many of the saints of God have, and in their attitude to God, they're far too chummy with the deity, as someone has put it.

But you see, the scripture is balanced. Jesus said, pray our daddy who art in the heavens. The New Testament speaks of three heavens.

The birds of the heavens. The reference there is to the atmosphere encircling the earth. The wonders of the heavens.

The reference there is to the stellar spaces caught up even to the third heaven. That is beyond the stellar spaces to the place of the supreme manifestation of God, wherever that is. Our father who art in heaven? No.

The Greek says, in the heavens. In the three of them. Here is the doctrine of transcendence.

God is beyond everything. And here also is the doctrine of imminence. He's in the very air you breathe.

A God who is higher than my imagination can range or my feeble mind take in the Lord of all creation and the judge of it all and the king of kings and so forth. Yeah. But when I breathe the air, God is in the heavens in the atmosphere.

Now, have you got the point? Here is one truth that balances another. I come to him as my own heavenly father. But my father, and I must remember at all times, who is in the heavens, who rules over all, who upholds all things, who was the beginning and will be the ending.

And without him, nothing not only was made that was made, but continues that does continue. My friends, do you want to pray? Then says Jesus, here's the model. Start like this.

Say our father. That may be a major hurdle for some of us. May take a real tussle in our hearts for us to get there.

You must see that black brother, that white sister, that brown brother by your side, bought by the blood of Jesus. You must see that person in one of those camps described by one of our missionaries this week. In the grime of her own sickness.

And recognize a sister in Christ. And if you cannot bring the family that you know in with you, you cannot call him our father. The hedges that you have built have got to come tumbling down like the walls of Jericho.

And only then will the blood of Jesus be made efficacious to bring you near to God in prayer. Oh Lord, teach us how to pray. Let's pause for a moment.

God, our father, hear our inmost thoughts. Pardon our known and acknowledged transgressions. Teach us how to pray.

For the sake of your son, the mediator of your own choice, and the well-being of your church. Amen.

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