

Our Father: The Necessity and Wonder of Prayer
Part Three – Father So Near, Father Who Reigns

February 23, 2025
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Why does “Prayer Work”?

The basic answer is not so much that prayer works, like it’s a “thing we do to get a certain result.” No. It’s that the God to whom we pray works; and is always working. As Jesus says in John 5:17: “My Father is *always at his work* to this very day.”

I. Location: Our Father in Heaven

“Our Father in heaven...”

For some of us, “in heaven” might suggest, “way out there, up there, somewhere.” But not “here.” Suggests far, far away. Above. Beyond. Distant.

In the biblical languages, ‘heaven’, or “the heavens” as it might be a better translated, since it is a plural in this text – have a “range of meaning.”

In both Hebrew and Greek, “the heavens” can simply mean “the air” – like, what we’re surrounded by. So “heaven” does not mean “far away,” or “in the future.” It means, at one level, “all around us.” But, of course, because God is “Spirit”, heaven also suggests a sense of invisible.

And this is the idea Paul is reflecting as he explains the gospel in Acts 17 to the Greek philosophers and council leaders of Athens. He even quotes the Cretan philosopher Epimenides, to say “God is not far from any one of us ‘For in him, we live and move and have our being.’ – Acts 17:27-28.

To pray “Our Father in heaven,” is to pray “Father, all around us. Father, right here with us.”

Heaven is also used in both OT and NT to describe the “habitation,” the “abode,” or the “dwelling place of God.” “Heaven” means “God’s space.”

“Heaven is God's dimension of the created order...whereas 'earth' is the world of space, time and matter that we know... [heaven is normally] hidden from human sight, heaven is occasionally revealed or unveiled so that people can see God's dimension of ordinary life...” – N.T. Wright

II. Power: Our Father on the Throne

Heaven also has the sense of the space from which God reigns. Like, just earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says: “But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by earth, for it is his footstool” (Matthew 5:34-35).

To pray “Our Father in heaven” is to pray “Father, who is on the throne.”

And the significance this has for our praying is most beautifully illustrated in Revelation. In Revelation chapters 6 through 8, we see Jesus – the Lamb who was slain, the only one who is worthy – he’s now breaking seven seals of the scrolls of history. The secret of history is being ‘revealed’ one scroll at a time, and in every scene, someone prays to someone.

And then it comes to the seventh, and final seal, and we read: “And when he [Jesus] opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” – Revelation 8:1

Why the silence?

“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God’s people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” – Revelation 8:3-4

“The point of this episode is that prayer, from the human side of things, moves history. The “movers and shakers” of history are those who pray.” – Darrell Johnson

III. Posture: Praying the Imperatives

The verbs – the requests we are making – they are a form of imperative, as in, commands.

So, are we *commanding God*? Well, no. That’s not what it means. But it does suggest a sense of **boldness** to our praying, in our asking. Like, we are relating to our loving Father like a kid asking their dad for what they need, and even what they want. And then we trust him with how he answers.

Prayer Practice: Audacious Prayer

Because God is *Our Father, in heaven*, we ask in bold, audacious ways. We trust God for our good. And we do *trust* that because God is *God*, what *he* provides is *actually* for our best.

God does not always answer our prayers in the way we hope. Sometimes the answer is no. Sometimes it’s “later” – like, “wait.” But it’s always, “I have your best interest, your *ultimate good* in mind.”

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...”

– Romans 8:29

We might like to think we know what is ultimate the best thing for us. We might assume we have the maturity to know that. We don’t. In relation to God, our Father, we are 4 years old.

And so, we do ask our Father with boldness, and with trust, because we’re 4. We tug on his sleeve, with bold, audacious request in the imperative mood, because he’s, *our Father!* But we trust his timing, his goodness, and his will, because we’re 4. Because we can’t see what he can see.

1. What are you facing today that calls for renewed trust in your Father?
2. If there is one or two things you want to bring to “Our Father in heaven,” knowing that he hears and cares, what is it?
3. What is holding you back from asking God for what you need with audacious faith?

IV. Orientation: Prayer that Orients Our Hearts to God's Glory

"Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be your name." - Matthew 9:9

The Greek word often translated "hallowed" is "*hagiadzo*" – which is essentially the noun for "holy", *hagios*, and then making it a verb, and action word.

Hagiadzo (verb): "I make holy" or "I sanctify" or "I reverence."

It's also in the imperative mood – so we are addressing God, asking our Father to do this, something like:
"Our Father in heaven, make your name to be regarded as holy."

"Our Father in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name."

– Matthew 6:9b Common English Bible

1) To pray "Uphold the holiness of your name" re-oriens our hearts away from self-seeking, self-promoting, from trying to make a name for myself. It reorients the one who prays it toward the praise and honour of the Living, Loving God who made us for himself.

2) To pray "Uphold the holiness of your name" implicates me. "Uphold the holiness of your name – and let it start right here, in me. That I would be a person rightly oriented to the praise of God. Work in me so that how I, now bear your name, represent you well to the rest of the world; through how I act and live."

3) To pray "Uphold the holiness of your name" motivates our mission. It's a longing for the True God to uphold the holiness of his name...on earth as it is in heaven.

For after Jesus' death in our place, and his victory over death and evil through his resurrection, right at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus commissions his followers with these words: "Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name..."

– Matthew 28:18a

What are we praying for? The 'name' to be revered as holy. And we find out more! The 'name,' singular. Not "names", plural. We baptize "...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." – Matthew 28:18-19

To pray this prayer is a longing for the name of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, along with the Father, to be regarded as holy by all the nations.

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Open Up

What is the most outrageous, audacious thing you ever wanted to ask from a parent, spouse, or friend?

If you did ask, what gave you the boldness to? If you didn't, what prevented you from asking?

Dig In

1. If you were to make a list of the most pressing concerns on your mind right now – what two or three things come to the top of the list? If you're willing, share them (or some of them) with your group.

Read Matthew 6:9-13

2. In the message, we heard that to pray "Our Father in heaven..." was to pray "Our Father so near, and Our Father so powerful." How is that similar or different to how you previously thought about what "heaven" meant here?
3. Coming back to your answer from question one (whether you shared it or not), what difference would it make to pray to bring your request to "Our Father *in heaven...*" if we are addressing "Our Father so near, Our Father so powerful"? How might that impact your requests?
4. We learned that all the 'requests' in this prayer come as imperatives (technically, the last one, 'lead us not into temptation/the test,' is a subjunctive, but that functions in an imperative sense). Imperatives have a sense of 'command' to them. How do you think we can best balance that sense of asking God for what we need and what we want with audacity, and not commanding God?

Pray

The first big request we have in this prayer is for our Father is to "uphold the holiness" of his name. Take some time to pray for that specifically – that the name of the Lord would be held in regard and honour in your own life, in your neighbourhood, and in your work or school. Ask God to use each of you to bear faithful witness to him. Pray for each other, for those needs you raised as a group.