

(God-Centered Praying) 2. God Who Is Our Father

by Zac Poonen

God wants us to live in perfect security in His Fatherly love and care for us, recognizing His sovereignty and holiness.

Scripture: Proverbs 21:1, Matthew 6:9, Matthew 7:11, Luke 15:20, John 1:12, Hebrews 12:29

Topics: "God The Father", "Prayer And Reverence"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the significance of addressing God as 'Our Father Who art in heaven'. He emphasizes the privilege of calling God our Father, a title introduced by Jesus, and the importance of being born again to have this relationship. Poonen highlights the father-heart of God, portrayed in the parable of the prodigal son, and the loving and caring nature of God as a Father who delights in providing for His children. He also stresses the need to approach God with reverence as a Holy God and with faith as a Sovereign Ruler, acknowledging His authority and control over all things.

Transcript

"Our Father Who art in heaven"

Children usually pray to the Lord Jesus and there is nothing wrong with that. But it is good to remember that in the only prayer Jesus ever taught His disciples, He taught them to address their prayers to God the Father. We pray IN the Spirit THROUGH the Son TO the Father.

Not everyone can address God as Father though. On earth, it's only the man through whom you were born whom you can call your father. We must recognize this when we pray to God as well. It is only when a person turns from his sins, yielding himself to Jesus Christ as Lord of his life that he is born again as a child of God. Only then can he call God "Father".

Our New Testament Privilege

The Israelites could never call God their Father. That title was introduced for the first time by Jesus. It was the title that Jesus Himself used constantly in His own communication with His heavenly Father. We don't realise what a privilege it is to call God our Father.

In the Old Testament, God taught the Jews His unapproachable holiness by putting a veil in the temple, behind which was the most holy place, where He dwelt. Into this place no man could enter, except the high priest once a year. If you had gone to those Jews 2500 years ago and told them that one day, God was going to open a way for anyone to enter His presence freely, they would have considered it impossible.

Yet this is the privilege that is offered us today under the new covenant. The veil has now been rent so that we have freedom of access right into the Father's presence; and we can call Him "Father." We've got to read the Old Testament if we want to appreciate our new covenant privileges sufficiently.

It's wonderful to see the father-heart of God in the parable of the prodigal son. The son comes back after having wasted his father's property and ruined his father's name. As soon as the father sees him, he runs to embrace him. There we see a picture of God the Father. It's the only place in the Bible where God is pictured as running - and it is to embrace a repentant sinner (Lk. 15:20)!

That was how Jesus portrayed God to the people. He wanted to eradicate from their minds the wrong concepts of God that the teachings of the scribes and the Pharisees had given them.

After the resurrection, when Mary Magdalene met Jesus outside the tomb, Jesus said to her, "I ascend to My Father and your Father" (Jn. 20:17). Through the death and resurrection of Christ, His disciples had come into a relationship with God that had never existed before. They could now call God their own Father. As a child can sit on his father's lap, man could now be just as intimate with God.

A Loving Father

Many have the wrong idea that God the Father is a very strict Person and that it is only Jesus Who loves them. This is a Satanic distortion of the truth. It was the love of the Father that sent Jesus to save us from our sins. Jesus told His disciples, "The Father Himself loves you" (Jn. 16:27). He also told them that if their Heavenly Father fed the birds and clothed the flowers, He would certainly take care of them. There was no need for them to be anxious then, for their Heavenly Father knew all their needs (Matt. 6:26-34).

He also told them that if earthly fathers knew how to give good gifts to their children, their heavenly Father would certainly give good things to His children too (Matt. 7:11).

You may say that all this is very elementary. Yet many times when we come to God in prayer we don't really believe that God is going to grant us our request, because we are not sure of His tender, loving, fatherly care for us. Thus we limit God by our unbelief. Do you really believe that when you pray, you are speaking to a loving Father Who delights to hear you and Who cares for you?

Some may have the feeling that God will hear them only if they are mature saints. How is it with an earthly father? If he has a number of children, does he listen to his 20-year-old son more than to his 3-year-old daughter? Does he tell his little daughter, "You are too young to talk to me. I can't listen to you?" Certainly not. In fact, the father is more likely to listen to his youngest child than to His older children. It's even so with God.

He says, "All shall know Me (as Father), from the least (youngest) to the greatest (oldest)" (Heb. 8:11). Notice that the youngest are mentioned first!

Even if you were born again but yesterday, you can come to God boldly saying, "O God, You are my Father, I am Your child, and therefore I have a right to talk to You." That's the way Jesus encouraged His disciples to go to God in prayer.

Every time we pray, we must approach God as a Father who loves and cares, and who is interested in us. Only thus can faith be generated; and without faith it is no use praying at all.

God is a good God. He delights to give good gifts to His children. The Bible says in Psalm 84:11, "No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly." In Psalm 37:4 it says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." These promises in the Old Testament are endorsed and confirmed and amplified by Jesus in the New Testament along with many more promises.

This is the foundation for our faith - the conscious acknowledgement of God as our loving Father.

A Holy God

We are to address God as our Father WHO IS IN HEAVEN. He's not only our Father, He's also the Almighty God. We need to keep both these facts in mind when we come to Him in prayer.

We approach Him with reverence because He is a God Who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

Many Christians think of God as a grandfather!! You know how grandfathers are - always lenient with their grandchildren, ignoring whatever evil they do. Many Christians think that God is like that, not taking their sins seriously. That idea is totally wrong. God is a Father.

But He is also God. He is the One before whom the seraphs of heaven cover their faces and cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Isa. 6:3). Those seraphs have never sinned. Yet, when they approach God, they have to cover their faces, for they cannot bear to look upon the holiness of God. This tells us something about the infinite purity of God that our finite minds can never comprehend.

Consider the effect of the vision of God on some of the great men in the Bible. Isaiah felt he was a terrible sinner when he saw the glory of God (Isa. 6:5). Moses covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God (Exod. 3:6). Daniel felt drained of all his strength (Dan. 10:8), and the apostle John fell down as a dead man (Rev. 1:17).

Since most Christians do not know God in this way, their lives remain shallow and superficial.

There are two extremes that people go to in approaching God. There are those who feel that God is unapproachable; and knowing nothing of His love, they live in constant dread of Him, trying to appease Him in various ways. At the other extreme, are some Christians who have developed such an unholy familiarity with God, that they don't fear Him any longer as a consuming fire.

One who approaches God without reverence does not know God at all. The more we know Him, the more we'll fear Him and reverence Him when we come to Him in prayer. We come to Him with boldness, because He is our Father. But we come to Him with reverence too, because He is God.

Have you noticed that in the thirteen epistles of Paul (from Romans through to Philemon), he always begins with this greeting, "Grace and peace from GOD OUR FATHER." Paul knew Him as God and as a Father; and he wanted others to know Him in the same way too.

A Sovereign Ruler

"Who art in heaven," also reminds us that the One we are praying to is One Who is Sovereign and Almighty, ruling in the heavens.

Even in the Old Testament, God sought to impress His sovereignty upon His people. He told them, "Relax and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psa.46:10 - NASB margin). He rules over all the earth as Supreme Sovereign and that's why we can relax!

Perhaps the greatest truth that the Church needs to recognize in this day is the truth of the sovereignty of God and the total authority of Jesus Christ over all nations and powers.

Consider something that has taken place in the lifetime of many of us. We all know that one of Israel's greatest enemies today is Soviet Russia. Russia would be delighted if Israel could be wiped out of existence. Yet in May 1948, when Great Britain failed to keep its promise to the Jews to give them the land of Palestine, it was the Russian vote in favour of Israel that enabled the United Nations to accept the establishment of the state of Israel. Of course, Russia's aim was to get the British out of Palestine. But nevertheless, it goes to show how God in His sovereignty, could use even an atheistic nation to fulfil His word and help bring the Jews back to their land, when a so-called 'Christian' nation backed out on its promise.

God is on the throne and He is in total control of the affairs of the world. It is only as our faith is rooted and grounded on this truth that our hearts can be at rest, no matter what may happen around us in the days to come.

The Bible tells us to pray for the government (1 Tim. 2:1,2). It's no use doing that unless we believe that our prayers are going to change existing situations. I, for one, wouldn't waste my time praying for those in authority, if I didn't believe that God was sovereign enough to influence government decisions and even voting patterns at election-time, in answer to prayer. We have prayed for our country in past days and seen that our prayers have brought miraculous results - for the furtherance of God's purposes in our land!

"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1). God can make the greatest ruler in the world change his decisions, if we pray.

If the Prime Minister of India were your father, what a difference that would make in your attitude to problems and difficulties that you face in your life. If your landlord threatens you, or your boss makes life difficult for you, or somebody is unjust towards you, or you need something done urgently, would you have any worries? No. You'd just have to ring up your Dad and ask him to solve your problem.

Isn't the Lord greater than the Prime Minister of India ? What do we do then when we face some problem in our life? Do we say, "Well, I'll just tell my heavenly Father about it. He rules the universe, and He can surely sort out this problem"? Or do we say, "I wish I knew some influential cabinet minister or Police Officer, who can help me now"? Which is our first reaction?

Many Christians are atheists when it comes to the practical matters of daily life. They talk about faith in God in the meetings and even in their homes. But when it comes to earthly matters, they are full of fear and anxiety just like any atheist.

There has never been as much fear as in our day. Jesus said that in the last days men's hearts would faint from fear wondering what was going to happen next (Luke 21:26). But it is at just such a time, that we are exhorted to lift up our heads fearlessly and to look for Christ's return (Luke 21:28).

Perfect Security

We have an Almighty Father and so we're certainly not orphans. Let's not behave like orphans then. When you're fearful or anxious, you're insulting your heavenly Father - for you are thereby saying that you have no confidence in Him, that you feel He can't do anything for you in your difficult situation, either because He is powerless or because He doesn't care! That is the testimony of an unbelieving heart.

If you really believed that God loved you and cared for you and was Almighty, why would you ever need to be anxious? There's a poem about a two birds that has often challenged me:

Said the robin to the sparrow, "I would really like to know Why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so." Said the sparrow to the robin, "Friend, I think that it must be That they have no heavenly father such as cares for you and me."

Jesus said "Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows." (Matt. 10:31). If Jesus is Lord of our life, and we have no ambition on earth, but to do the will of God, then we can be sure that "all things WILL work together for our good," whatever may happen to us or around us (Rom. 8:28).

God wants us to live in perfect security in His Fatherly love and care for us. We must be convinced that His care for us began even before we were born. He was the One Who determined who our parents should be, what our temperament should be, how much education we would receive, where we would live etc., Once we are convinced of this, we will find that we live in perfect rest, without a single complaint against our circumstances or our parents or anyone else (Psa. 139:16).

God can make even the anger of man to praise Him (Psa. 76:10). One of the clearest examples of this is found in the life of Joseph. If you read Genesis chapters 37 to 50, you'll see how God's sovereign power made all the evil things that different people did to Joseph, to work together for his good, just because he was faithful to his God.

God promised the Israelites that those who honoured their parents would live long on the earth (Eph. 6:2,3). How could God promise that unless He was able to keep each such person from being murdered by an enemy and from dying of cancer or an accident etc., God is well able to do that - even today. It's only our unbelief that prevents us from enjoying the benefits of God's sovereign power.

The Father of a Family

Finally, remember that Jesus said that we were to call God, "OUR Father" and not "My Father". There's an important point here. This is a family-prayer. My heavenly Father has many children, and I must recognize this fact when I come to Him. I am only one among many of His children. No one in this family is more privileged than another. All are equal. He is OUR Father.

I cannot therefore have a proper vertical relationship with God, if my horizontal relationship with my fellow believers in this family is not proper. There are two arms to the cross - a vertical arm and a horizontal arm. Fellowship too has a vertical arm and a horizontal one. In other words, if my relationship with my brothers and sisters in the family of God is not proper, if I'm not on speaking terms with some of them, if I've a

grudge against one of them or if I am angry with someone or haven't forgiven someone, then I cannot come to God and say, "OUR Father." Isn't He also the Father of that other person whom I haven't forgiven?

We cannot come to God if we despise anyone in the Body of Christ. You remember how the Pharisee prayed, "Lord, I thank Thee that I am not like other people or even like this tax-gatherer" (Lk. 18:11). With such an attitude we can never come to God in prayer. You cannot pray this prayer if you are not willing to come down to the level of all your fellow-believers, recognizing that as far as God is concerned, your social status and your education and even your spirituality do not exalt you above them in any way. We are all members of one family.

God intended the fellowship of each local church to have the atmosphere of a home, where brothers and sisters are like family members and where strangers coming in would feel that they were coming into a home. Where this is not so, it is because God's children there have failed to recognise what Jesus taught in this prayer.

And so, each time we pray, we must approach God on this basis: - recognizing His Fatherhood and His loving care, and therefore coming to Him with boldness; - recognizing that He is a Holy God, and therefore coming to Him with reverence; - recognizing that He is the Sovereign Ruler in heaven, and therefore coming to Him with faith; and - recognizing that He is the Father of a large family, and therefore coming to Him, as a part of that family.

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