



# Central Peninsula Church

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## Talking To My Father

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

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I'm sure that most, if not all of us, have by now heard about the tragic death of Thomas Herrion, the San Francisco 49er who collapsed and died after the game last Saturday night. One of the amazing things about that story is what he was doing when he collapsed. After every game the 49ers gather together and say the Lord's Prayer. And that night, after the game, as they knelt down, sometime after saying "Our Father," Thomas collapsed and that was the last thing on his lips. I heard one of the 49ers interviewed this week who said he believed that as he said those words it was like in the very next instance there he was in the presence of his Father in heaven. It strikes me that when we pray we rarely realize how close we are and how thin the line is that separates us from actually seeing him face to face.

I think if we understood that it would change our prayer life. I have to admit to you that I have mixed feelings about prayer. On the one hand, I've experienced some wonderful moments in prayer where I almost felt like I was talking to him face to face. I've seen God answer prayers in miraculous ways. But, on the other hand, I say with some measure of embarrassment that my prayer life is often not what it should be. At times I feel like I'm talking to a wall. I struggle to know why some of my prayers have gone unanswered. I find myself preoccupied with things and asking for things that I know must seem trivial to the God of the universe. As a pastor, I know how important prayer is to the vitality of our church, but I find it easier to spend a morning preparing a sermon or planning a meeting than to spend an hour in prayer.

Perhaps you too have struggled with prayer. That's why it's so important that we turn to Luke 11 and let Jesus himself teach us to pray.

### I. The importance of prayer

Luke says, **"And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.'"**

Notice that before Jesus taught about prayer he modeled a life of prayer. This isn't the first time the disciples caught Jesus praying. We've seen in the Gospel of Luke that his life was drenched in prayer. He was praying at his baptism when the heavens opened (3:21).

He prayed all night before he selected the Twelve (6:12). He prayed just before he told his disciples for the first time that he was going to be crucified (9:18). He was praying on the mountain when he was transfigured (9:28). Last week we saw how Jesus commended Mary for sitting at his feet while Martha ran around getting dinner ready. Well, we know where Mary learned how to do that, don't we? Later, he will shed drops of blood as he prayed in Gethsemane. Luke sums it up when tells us that he would **"often slip away to the wilderness to pray"** (5:16). For me prayer is preparation for the battle, but for Jesus it was the battle.

But I don't think that surprises any of us. We would expect that of the Son of God. If anyone should know how to pray it's him! And that's why his disciples approach him and want him to teach them to pray. It was like asking him to do what he did best. It was like asking a stock broker how to invest or a professional golfer how to grip a putter. It's always struck me that they had watched him preach for two years, but they never came to him and said, "Lord, teach us how to preach." Instead, they said, "Teach us how to pray." It seems that up until now Jesus hadn't said a whole lot about prayer; he just did it. And from that, they want to know how they could do it too. "John the Baptist had taught his guys to pray. They have this really cool prayer that they say together. Can't you give us something like that?"

Out of that request comes this great prayer. It's a prayer that is known the world over as "the Lord's Prayer." That's a good title because he DID come up with it. But in another sense it's not so good because it was meant more for us to pray than for him. It's hard to imagine Jesus asking for forgiveness for his sins! So we might call this "the disciples prayer" instead of "the Lord's Prayer." Most of us know this prayer. Many of you memorized this prayer as a child. Personally, by the time I was about five I could say this prayer in about seven seconds flat, and I had occasion to do so over and over again! Before we even look at this prayer we should ask ourselves if that is what the Lord intended. While I'm the first to say that every word of this prayer is important and there can be great value in using these words to pray, I don't think Jesus intended for some kind of mindless recitation. In Mt.6:7 he warned against meaningless repetition in our prayers.

Not only that, this prayer comes to us in slightly different form here in Luke than it does in Matthew. Luke's version is shorter. If we were designed to just recite it over and over again, which one should we use? It's much more likely that Jesus was giving us a general pattern for prayer; principles to guide our prayer life. When Peter was sinking in the Sea of Galilee he cried out "Lord, save me!" I hate to think what would have happened if he had started out, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..." He would have been blowing bubbles before he got to the point! It's not the exact words we're to recite every time we pray; it's the spirit and logic of the prayer we're to follow.

## II. The spirit of prayer

In teaching us to pray, Jesus starts out and says, "*When you pray say, 'Father...'*" That's the single most important word of this great prayer. That single word sums up the most basic thing about the Christian faith and our relationship with God. When we come to the Creator of the universe, the One who flung the galaxies into motion, we're to come to him as our Father. For centuries philosophers have asked if the universe is friendly. When we say "Father" we're expressing our faith that behind everything there is not only ultimate power but ultimate love.

When Jesus began his prayer this way it would have sent shock waves into the heart of every one of those disciples. In the OT, God was addressed as Father only seven times. In every case, it wasn't a personal way of addressing God, but rather he's being addressed as the Father of the entire nation. There was never a time when Abraham or David or Moses fell on their knees in the quietness of their tent and dared to call him Father. The Jews of Jesus' day were hesitant to even take the name of God upon their lips. But then Jesus comes along and in almost every single one of his prayers recorded in the Gospels he personally addresses God as Father. Even more startling is the fact that speaking in Aramaic he would have used the term "Abba." This is the most intimate form of address. It's a little bit like "Daddy," but with a bit more reverence than we normally attach to it. Perhaps the best rendering of this would be "Dearest Father."

It's so good to know we have a *Father* in heaven. Last weekend we drove all the way to Spokane and left our 18 year old daughter, Kim, off at college. It was torture and I've been a mess all week! We said goodbye to her last Sunday morning at 7:45 AM in front of her new dorm. It was just the three of us; lots of tears. And as we drove out of the parking

lot, I watched in my rear view mirror as she walked back into her dorm alone. But then I thought I saw someone come out and meet her halfway—another woman. Later that day as we were driving home we spoke with her on our cell phone. She sounded good, and said that the Resident Director, who lived on the first floor of the dorm with her husband, had watched our tearful goodbye and remembered how her own parents had left her off just a few years earlier and how lonely she felt. She gave Kim a big hug and she invited her to church that morning. When I heard that I was so touched and so grateful. I couldn't look out for her, but her heavenly Father is looking out for her.

When you pray, the first word that should come to your lips is Father. That means you see yourself as his beloved child who he delights in and welcomes. That means you come to him with complete confidence and trust; absolute security. We're only able to do that because of Jesus. Because of Jesus and all that he did on our behalf we're assured of the Father's love. And when we trust in Christ the Spirit of God comes to dwell in our hearts and nurtures in us this tender spirit of sonship. In Galatians 4:6 Paul says, "**Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his own Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father.'**"

When you pray, come to him as your Father. You might not have had a father that you felt secure with. Maybe your father never told you how much he loved you. Maybe he never had time for you. Maybe your father abandoned you. But this father is different. He loves you. He'll never abandon you. He always has time for you. Don't measure your heavenly Father by your earthly father; measure your earthly father by your heavenly Father.

Larry Crabb writes of a friend who was raised in an angry family. Mealtimes were either silent or sarcastically noisy. Down the street was an old-fashioned house with a big porch where a happy family lived. When his friend was about ten, he began excusing himself from his dinner table as soon as he could without being yelled at, and walking to the old-fashioned house down the street. If he arrived at dinnertime, he would crawl under the porch and just sit there, listening to the sounds of laughter and love. When he told Crabb this story years later, he asked him to imagine what it would have been like if the father in the house somehow knew he was huddled beneath the porch and sent his son to invite him in. He asked him to envision what it would have meant to him to accept the invitation, to sit at the table, to enjoy the laughter and the love of that table.

In this prayer Jesus invites us to come from beneath the porch and sit at his table. When you come to God in prayer, come to him as Father.

### III. The pattern of prayer

As you talk to him, say, *“Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins. For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”*

This prayer divides into two parts. The first part focuses on the Father and the second part focuses on us. The order and logic of this is crucial to prayer. Jesus says that when we come to the Father in prayer, we should talk to him first about himself. “Hallowed be YOUR name. YOUR kingdom come.” Before anything is said about ME and MY needs, we’re told to pray about God—about HIS name and about HIS reign. This is against all of my own natural inclinations. When I come to God I want to just blurt out all of my needs and wants. It’s not natural for me to think of what God’s doing; of what his purposes are. Now I know there are times when all you can say is, “Lord save me!” But this is a reminder that when you come to God in prayer, you should remember who he is; remember that he knows your situation; he has a plan for your life and may have something higher and better for you than you think you need. Part of what prayer should do is reorient our perspective to what God is doing. Sometimes I think prayer is not so much about changing God; it’s about changing us and reorienting our perspective.

Let me give you an analogy that has helped me. When you pray, imagine three shelves. On the top shelf are only those things which have eternal significance. Things like salvation and living a life that glorifies God. It’s like when Paul prays in Ephesians that we would know the hope of his calling and the riches of his inheritance and the magnitude of his love—top shelf stuff. A little bit lower is the middle shelf. These are the really important things in life. Like when I pray for my kids I want them to marry well and find a calling in life that allows them to do meaningful work. I want them to learn to be a friend and have friends; things like that. But then a bit lower than that there is a third shelf. The third is all about circumstances. “Lord, I pray that I could get that job.” “Lord, I pray that guy would ask me out on a date.” Lord, I pray that maybe my wife could get a raise.” Not bad things, but not always eternal things.

Now it’s important to realize that there are fewer things on the higher shelves than there is on the bottom shelf. But we tend to put the more valuable things higher up, don’t we? It’s also important to realize that it’s harder to see the things on the top shelf and it’s even harder to reach them. You have to stand on your tip toes. The stuff on the bottom shelf is right in your face all of the time. In prayer, the temptation is to focus on what we can see and reach-

those things on the bottom shelf. But God wants us to reach up for the middle shelf and even for the top shelf. It’s harder because we can’t see those things and they’re not as immediate. We have to work at it. But it’s worth it because what’s on those upper shelves are really the best things. They last the longest and they satisfy the most.

I also think that this might be the secret of unanswered prayer. Sometimes we wonder why our bottom shelf requests are not granted. Remember how the apostle Paul asked God to take away his thorn in the flesh? We don’t know what it was, but three times he begged God to remove it. That was a bottom shelf issue. God said, “No, my grace is sufficient for you. For my strength is made perfect in weakness.” That’s a top shelf issue. And God says no to this so he can accomplish something greater. That’s why in this prayer Jesus starts by having us reaching to the top shelf.

### IV. The substance of prayer

**a. His name:** First, he says *“Hallowed be your name.”* How many people have said that and have no idea what it means? In Jesus’ day, names had a great deal of significance. They didn’t choose to name a child after a rich uncle, or because the monogram would look good on a shirt or a blouse, or because it sounded good with the last name. In those days a person’s name had something to do with their character. Today we talk about someone who has a “good name” in the community and we’re talking about their character and their reputation. When we pray “hallowed be your name” we’re praying that God’s person, his character, his reputation, would be seen for what it is. To be “hallowed” means to be revered; to be honored; to be set apart as holy. So we’re praying that in everything God would be revered and honored for who he is; that we wouldn’t whittle him down to size.

A young boy went to the local store with his mother. The shop owner, a kind man, passed him a large jar of suckers and invited him to help himself to a handful. Uncharacteristically, the boy held back. So the shop owner pulled out a handful for him. When outside, the boy’s mother asked why he had suddenly been so shy and wouldn’t take a handful of suckers when offered. The boy replied, “Because his hand is much bigger than mine!”

When we come to God in prayer we need to ask him that in our lives and in our prayers we would see that he’s much bigger than we are. God is our “Dear Father” but he’s not our “Old Buddy.” Sometimes when we pray, we say things and think things that whittle him

down. We can pray as though God were deaf. We think if we pray the same thing over and over again he'll finally hear us. Or we pray as if we're informing God of things that he might have overlooked. "God, I just want to let you know about Fred." Sometimes when we pray it seems there are other names which we hallow more than God's name; names of family or friends or bosses or political leaders.

Sometimes we pray to God with no intention or thought at all of what it means to honor his name in the way we live. In 1531 Martin Luther wrote a booklet on for children that was intended to teach them the content and meaning of the Lord's Prayer. It's called the Small Catechism. In it he asks, "What does this first petition mean? He answers, "God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we ask this in prayer that we might keep it holy." Then he asks, "When does this happen?" And he answers, "God's name is hallowed whenever his Word is taught in its truth and purity and we as his children live in harmony with it."

**b. His reign:** You have to wonder what this world would be like if everyone truly hallowed the name of God. Perhaps that's why the next request is, "*Your kingdom come.*" What is God's kingdom? It's not a place, but a state of affairs. It's a state of affairs where he reigns. The kingdom is where the king is.

The kingdom has a future dimension to it. When we pray for God's kingdom to come we're acknowledging that God has a plan. We're affirming that history is headed somewhere; history is His-story. History is moving towards a climactic event when Christ will return and reign on earth. His kingdom will be established and in his kingdom his name will be hallowed by every creature on earth and in heaven. There will be no more hospitals and no more prisons and no more guns. At that time all men and angels will join to sing his praises, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That's where history is going. When we pray for God's kingdom to come we're expressing our longing for that state of affairs. We're saying to the King, come and take over this place where sin and darkness seem to have the upper hand.

The kingdom is where the King is and when we pray that prayer it stands to reason that we will let him reign in our life today. What use is it to pray that for all people if today, in the small two feet of earth I occupy, Jesus Christ does not rule in my life? If the King dwells in your life then his kingdom is established in your heart. The choices you make, the words you speak, the money you spend, the thoughts you cultivate will all come under his rule. The kingdom is where the King is.

## CONCLUSION

We're going to just stop here this morning and pick up where we left off next time. And I think that's appropriate because that's how it is sometimes. Sometimes when we start with the top shelf we get so wrapped up in it we never even get down to the bottom shelf. But when you think about it, if we lived in a world where God's name was hallowed and his kingdom had come, what more could we need or want? It's like when a child wants something from her father and she runs up to him and he sweeps her up in his arms and somehow in the process she forgets what she wants, because in his arms she finds what she really needs. When you come to the Lord in prayer, come to him as your Father, and first talk to the Father about the Father. Talk to him about his name and talk to him about his reign.