

Enjoying God // Our Father

Every religion teaches us that there is some means and method of prayer.

Some religions teach that prayer is formalized, ritualistic, and religious. Even if you do everything perfectly, there is still no guarantee or assurance that God will love you or accept you. It turns prayer into a self-preservation exercise that is driven by fear. There is no love, warmth, or relationship at all.

Other religions teach that prayer is the way that you truly get in tune with your inner self and unlock the potential that lies dormant within you.

Christianity teaches us something entirely different from everything else out there. It is radical. There is nothing in the world like this. Because of what Jesus has done for us, prayer is simply how we enjoy God and are enjoyed by him.

The purpose of prayer, according to Christianity, is **not** to get some genie in the sky to grant your three wishes. The purpose of prayer is **not** to attain God's acceptance or forgiveness through fulfilling your religious obligation and duty. The purpose of prayer is **not** to become more in tune with your inner greatness.

Christianity teaches us and Jesus shows us that...

The purpose of prayer is to enjoy God and to be enjoyed by God.

To delight in Him and be delighted in by Him. If that's how you begin and end your day—if that's what you come back to throughout your day—not only will you be changed, but you'll become unshakable. Nothing this world throws at you will be able to move you from your footing.

Many Christians don't have a category for this. In fact, this aspect of prayer was largely absent from much of my spiritual life. Of course, I believed that prayer was about relationship with God, but in practice, I treated it as if prayer was only about getting something from God - a change in circumstances, special provision, miraculous healing.

While those things are not bad or wrong to ask for, those eventually became the sole focus of my prayer life, and over time, my relationship with the Father began to grow cold. So, my hope throughout this series is that God will change our wrong or incomplete understandings of prayer so that our relationship with Him is vibrant and full.

Matthew 6:7-13, "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (ESV)

Jesus says that our approaches to prayer boil down to two extremes. He differentiates between the Pagan way and the Christian way.

When we think of Pagan, we immediately assume that means an irreligious person, but that's not what Jesus is referring to. Jesus is referring to people that pray all the time. They pray maybe more than anyone else at that time in history.

Jesus is saying the difference regarding prayer is not irreligious from religious but the religious from Christian.

Jesus says, "they think they'll be heard because of their many words..."

In other words, they think God hears them because they pray eloquent prayers. Or because they use a lot of religious language, or they repeat the same phrase 15 different ways, or they get really loud, or declarative in their prayers and they think if they do those things, THEN God will answer them.

Christians pray just like this all the time because we think we'll be heard if we do or say the right things! Don't pray like the pagans do, they have a wrong understanding of God and a wrong understanding of prayer.

Matthew 6:9, "Pray then like this: Our Father..."

Christians are invited to address God as their Father.

**Our prayers aren't heard because of rhetoric, ritual, or religion.
Our prayers are heard because of relationship.**

Q: What is the cause for which you will be heard? Ask yourself, why do I think I'm heard by God when I pray?

Your activity for God does not grant you access to God.

If you approach God religiously, like the Gentiles or pagans in this passage, you're essentially approaching God like you're in some kind of contractual agreement. There's relationship but it's cold. It's obligatory. It's "have to" not "get to."

In the book "Praying like Monks, Living like Fools," the author notes that in Genesis 2, God is repeatedly called, "**Yahweh Elohim**" which is Lord God in English, but really it's God's personal name and then His title, Yahweh (name) Elohim (title).

Every time the serpent refers to God, he only refers to him as "Elohim." He only refers to God by His title and never says God's name.

Q: What does that mean?

A: It means that one of the devil's primary tactics is to get people to "depersonalize" God.

It would be like me demanding that my children start referring to me as "Pastor." I'd be putting so much distance in our relationship just by changing what they call me. But when they call me "Daddy," it communicates a level of trust, of access, of warmth, of depth, of loving relationship that no one else has with me.

The serpent takes this and very subtly "demotes" God from a loving Father to a stingy dictator.

CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

In a business relationship, there are expectations of you in regard to your performance. A contract is based on conditions.

- If you're good enough, you get the rewards of the agreement.
- If you perform well enough, you stay hired and maybe get accepted on a longer-term basis, but that always subject to change.
- If you do what's required of you, you get paid.
- If you perform better than expected, you might get a raise or promotion, and then more is required of you and expectations increase.
- In a contract, if you hold up your end of the deal, you can expect the other party hold up their end of the deal. You both contribute with some level of equity.

However, if God is your Father, you're not an employee, you're family.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- Contractual relationships are conditional, family relationships are unconditional.
- In a business relationship, if you contribute, you'll be accepted. In a family relationship, you're already accepted, and therefore, you should contribute.
- Even if you don't contribute, the nature of your relationship doesn't change. You're still family, but someone has to pick up your slack.

In a sense, this is what Jesus has done for us. He's picked up the slack for the entire human race!

See, a contract is based on *what I do*. A family relationship is based on *who I am*.

**A business relationship is based on DOING,
a family relationship is based on BEING.**

Someone that approaches God in the first paradigm says, *“God, come into my life, let’s make a deal – I’ll do my part, you do your part.”*

In the 2nd paradigm, it’s this, *“God, come into my life, be my Father. I’m incapable of doing my part, but Jesus has pulled my weight for me. He lived a perfect life and died a sinner’s death in my place, and on that basis alone, and all the He has done, God be my Father.”*

Q: Do you see why the first two words of the Lord’s Prayer are so critical? “Our Father” changes everything!

Not only does “Our Father” change how we think of God, but it also radically changes how we think of ourselves. It’s not only a reminder of who God is, it reminds us of who we are!

Why does Jesus start with “Our Father?” The Fatherhood of God cuts to the very center and essence of what it means to be a Christian.

John 1:12, *“But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God...”* (ESV)

When Jesus invites you to call God “Father,” He’s setting up an intentional reminder for your own heart that you are totally, uniquely, and completely loved.

A few weeks back I was meeting with a counselor in Tampa, and at one point in the session he said this phrase,

“You can only be loved to the degree that you allow yourself to be known.”

So many of us walk through life with our guard up because we were hurt, and we don’t want to be hurt again. We become so guarded that no one really knows us. Not even the people closest to us. There’s no one that knows our struggles, fears, or our insecurities. We have no one to help us through those things.

What’s so unbelievably good about God is He already knows it all and loves you more than you can possibly imagine.

*The greatest human need is to be fully known and fully loved.
But our greatest fear is that if we’re fully known, we won’t be loved.*

In these two words, “Our Father,” we’re invited into a relationship where we are both fully known and fully loved.

There’s one more enormous reality that Jesus reveals in “Our Father.” Because Jesus does not teach us to pray, “My Father,” He teaches us to pray, “Our Father,” which means, not only is

Jesus reordering our view of God, not only is He giving us a reminder of who we really are as God's Children, but Jesus is completely reforming our view of one another.

If God is "Our Father," then we're all siblings in one gigantic family. In the busyness of life, it's so easy for us to forget the sacredness of the people around us.

If we lose sight of our relationship with the Father, who He is, and how loved we are in Him, we will be incapable of seeing the beauty of God in one another.

Brennan Manning said, *"If I am not in touch with my own belovedness, then I cannot touch the sacredness of others."*

If we forget who God is to us, and who we are to Him, we will forget who we are to one another.

Just in those first two words, Jesus is teaching us to remember who God is, who we are, and who we are to each other.

1 John 3:1, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (ESV)

Today, do you know God as your Father? Do you know who you are really are, as His child? Do you recognize the sacredness, the image of God in your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Or maybe you'd say, *I don't know what that's like but I'd like to know God as my Father.* There's one way to know God as your Father, and that's to place your whole life in the hands of Jesus, to surrender everything to Him and invite Him to rescue you from all of your vain, empty attempts of saving yourself.

Because until you know that you are loved by God, everything else in life is dull. A shadow of what God made it to be. But when you that you are fully known, and completely loved by God, your whole world comes to life on the deepest level.

A Christian is someone that finds the love of the Father miraculous. There is a spirit of wonder about that person. But if you're just under a contract, and God is the enforcer of the contract, there's no wonder about your life. There's no deep satisfaction or joy about your life.

If it's contractual, and God ever does something good for you, you'll just think that God is giving you what you deserve—what you've earned from Him.

You won't view Him as a loving Father that has pursued you to the ends of the earth. You see yourself as someone that deserves to be accepted by God, that God is lucky to have you on His

team. And if that's what you think, you my friend, have yet to face the depth of your own selfishness, self-serving motivations and sin, and you have not seen God as He is.

Because for a Christian, everything is a gift. And the greatest gift we've ever been given is the invitation to relate to God as "our Father."

Without "Our Father," there is no "hallowed be your name." Without "Our Father," there is no "kingdom come," or "daily bread," or "forgive us our debts," or "protect us from the evil one."

None of that exists without "Our Father." Our Father makes all of that possible. "Our Father" means absolute trust. Our Father means, fully known and fully loved as God's children, and that we're all one gigantic dysfunctional family that will one day be fully redeemed. There's nothing in this world that can shake us from that reality.

Go to God as your Father and be His child. Remember who He is, who you are, and who we are to one another as you pray these two earthshaking words, "Our Father."

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