

# How to Pray (the Holy Name)

Matthew 6:5-13

*The Living Law (no. 12 in the series)*

May 24, 2020

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*Video and audio versions available online:*

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/how-to-pray-the-holy-name/>

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*This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!*

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## Prayer

And so, Lord God, I thank you that you are Holy. I remember in seminary a professor explaining that the word “holy” meant “strange/different from us.” So, God, I pray that you would help us to understand how it is that you’re are holy, and that you would help us understand what it means to “hallow your name,” the name of the Holy One of Israel. Lord God, I pray that you would help us to preach. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

## Message

### **Matthew 6:5 · “And when you pray...”**

Now let me remind you that this is the middle of the Sermon on the Mount—in particular, this Mount.



I took this picture on the Sea of Galilee about fourteen years ago.

Hopefully, you remember that in Matthew 4, Jesus was being followed by great crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. In other words, great crowds of every kind of people were following him, and:

Matthew 5:1· *“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and...his disciples came to him.”*

Now, these aren’t the twelve disciples; Jesus hasn’t even met all twelve at this point. *“Disciple”* simply means “learner;” they wanted to hear what Jesus had to say. They just followed him up this little hill—not what we’d call “a mountain.”



This is the view from the *“mountain”* looking down at Capernaum where Jesus lived with Peter for a time.

At the end of the sermon in Matt. 7:28, Matthew comments that *“the crowds were astonished”* at what Jesus said... which means, Jesus spoke all of this to the crowds who apparently followed him up this little hill.



This is a picture of me preaching to “the crowd” on that same mount. (You can see Jolene Miller listening in rapt attention—she’s a *disciple*.) So, yes sir—this is where Jesus and I preached the Sermon on the Mount.

**Matthew 6:5 · “And when you (y’all) pray....”**

It’s important to note that some of that “y’all” was pagan, and when they prayed, all sorts of bizarre stuff may have been said to Artemis, Asherah, Zeus, Apollo, or even Hades. Others were good Jews, and we know that every day they practiced a pretty impressive regiment of prayer:

- Twice a day, they were to recite “the Shema”—three beautiful passages of Scripture.
- Three times a day, they were to pray “The Eighteen Benedictions”—a beautiful prayer, but five pages long when you download it from the Internet.
- In addition, there were prayers prescribed for everything, from seeing a lake to the use of new furniture; they prayed a lot.

And, of course, the Scribes and Pharisees were like Olympic athletes of prayer. They were considered to be world champions of religious discipline.

Remember that Jesus is talking here about the three cardinal disciplines of Jewish life: Giving, Prayer, and Fasting. He just said that when you give, your right hand shouldn’t even know what your left hand is doing; the movement should be unconsciously perfect. And last time, we surmised that the only conceivable way that could happen was if our discipline were transformed into a dance, such that logic bypassed our conscious deliberation and animated all the members of the body—like music animates all the members of a body and makes that body dance. We called the sermon, Discipline to Dance.

Well, have you ever been to a church function—a potluck, small group, or youth group—where everyone’s having fun, and then someone says, “*Let’s pray.*” And immediately, all the dancing turns into discipline? And you have to get in a circle, hold hands, and listen to people *complain* to God, or try to *manipulate* God, or try to *impress each other* with their knowledge of God, or maybe *inform* God of a million little details that he apparently didn’t already know? ... Dance to Discipline...

I've spent much of my life confused by prayer, feeling guilty about prayer, making myself engage in prayer, not knowing what to say in prayer, totally bored by prayer, and wondering how to make my prayer work...wondering how to pray.

**Matthew 6:5** · “**And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites** [*hypocritos*: actors]. **For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.** <sup>6</sup> **But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

<sup>7</sup> **“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases** [*battologeo*: repetitive, meaningless words] **as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words** [*polylogia*: many words]. <sup>8</sup> **Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

Jesus tells us how *not* to pray:

Don't act; don't try to use impressive words.

It's obviously just fine to pray beautifully written prayers. Jesus prayed written prayers; they're called the Psalms. And it's good to pray publicly...but not in order to impress the public. If you feel like crap and don't know what to say, pray, “*I feel like crap and don't know what to say.*”

It's not about impressive words or repetitive words (*battologeo*). *Logos* or *logeos* means: “word,” and Strong's Lexicon suggests that *batta* may refer to a particular ancient author of “tedious and wordy poems.”<sup>ii</sup>

Well, Jesus says you won't be heard for your impressive, babbling, abundance of words—*polylogia*: “many words.”<sup>iii</sup> I'm not a Roman Catholic, so I don't understand the “Hail Mary” thing all that well, but it appears that God is not into counting the number of times you say, “Hail Mary,” even if it's a perfectly good prayer. I'm not a Roman Catholic, but I am an Evangelical Protestant, and we seem to be convinced that God is impressed with Internet prayers that you forward to all your friends and big conventions, where if we just get enough people together saying the right thing, God might listen and heal our land. And we certainly believe that even if God doesn't count our “Hail Marys,” he does count the number of minutes we pray during our quiet times.

We advertise 24-hour prayer ministries and continuous houses of prayer. St. Paul said, “*Pray constantly.*” So, I'm sure constant prayer is good.<sup>iv</sup>

But Jesus says that you won't be heard for your abundance of words... In fact, God, your Father, doesn't need to be informed at all... He already knows.

My daughter, Elizabeth used to pray and pray—she loved to talk—but then she'd end her prayers by saying, “*But you already know that, 'cause you can read my brain,*” and then she'd giggle. I think God liked her prayers but not because he learned something new; he just liked to hear her talk.

Jesus says, “Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him.” Which makes us wonder: *Well, then why ask him?*<sup>v</sup> When my kids were little, I almost always knew what they wanted before they asked me for what they wanted... but I still wanted to hear them talk.

I knew what they wanted, but I'm not sure *they* knew what they wanted. Elizabeth wanted a pet buffalo. I'm happy she asked, but I had to convince her that once the buffalo was in the back yard, she might not want to keep that buffalo.<sup>vi</sup>

"The earthly-minded person thinks . . . that when he prays, the important thing . . . is that God should hear what he is praying for," wrote Soren Kierkegaard. "And yet in the true, eternal sense, it is just the reverse: the true relation in prayer is not when God hears what is prayed for, but when the person praying continues to pray until he is the one who hears, who hears what God is asking for."<sup>vii</sup>

In the words of Madeleine L'Engle: "Until I tell God what I want, I have no way of knowing whether or not I truly want it."<sup>viii</sup>

Jesus says, it's not about impressive words or many words; it's not about magic words.

In Scripture, magic, witchcraft, or sorcery is all about finding ways to manipulate deities into performing your will. But faith is all about surrendering your will to the Deity, that you might perform His will—the Good Will—the Good Free Will.

Magic is all about using God to obtain things that aren't God. That means, it's all about using Love to obtain things other than Love. But like we said last time: "Love is not a means to obtain rewards. Love is the reward. God is Love."

So, to take the name of the Lord in vain is to try to manipulate Love for your own unloving and vain purposes—it's magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. Which gives me pause when I think about things like "The Jabez Prayer." Remember that? "*Pray this obscure prayer in 1 Chronicles, and it will work!*" That book sold a gazillion copies.

It's a fine little prayer that Jabez prayed in 1 Chronicles, chapter four. But imagine if I overheard my children speaking and one said to the other:

*"Does talking to Dad work for you?"*

And the other said, "Yes! And I'll tell you how to make it work for you; I'll tell you how to make Dad work for you (for just \$14.95 plus shipping and handling).

I'm absolutely convinced God raises the dead, heals the sick, drives out demons, grants visions, and causes people to speak in tongues. But I'm unaware of anything like a "how-to" section in Scripture—that is, a recipe describing "How to get what you want from God" —not in the New Testament anyway.

In junior high, I learned that I was supposed to pray in the name of Jesus. So, I ended every prayer "in the name of Jesus..." and I still often do.

*"Lord God, give me a buffalo... in Jesus's name."*

And then I think: *Prayer doesn't work... And since there's no Buffalo in my yard, there's no Father in Heaven... I have scientific proof that God does not exist.*

The Lord says, "You will not take my name in vain."

At the Burning Bush, he revealed that his name is *Yahweh*, but in fear of taking that name in vain, Jews stopped taking it at all. That's why, to this day, most Jews will not speak the name. And we're not entirely sure what it is, for ancient Hebrew writing only included consonants, and the vowels were remembered from recitation of the words. But after the time of Christ, recitation of that word became illegal...which is ironic, for the Prophet Joel writes:

*"Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

We think the name is *Yahweh*, but some have thought *Yehovah* or *Jehovah*. Whatever the case, it is the first part of *Yeshua* (which is "Jesus" in English), meaning "*Yahweh is Salvation*," or "*Yahweh Save*." The name "Jesus" is a prayer: "*Yahweh, help!*"

Still to this day, occult practitioners will use the tetragrammaton—that is the four consonants in God's name, YHWH—for incantations and spells. According to Jewish legend, this was how rabbis would make monsters—that is, make "the golem," in ancient times. They would make a figure out of clay and then use *ha shem*, "the Holy Name," to animate the clay.

Just last week on Netflix, I was watching a show in which a kid was being chased by a golem. He finally killed it when he was able to wipe the name of God from the forehead of that mud monster.

See? We'd all like access to a word or a name so powerful that it would immediately grant access to the Holy, transform reality, make a Way where there is no way, and fill all our enemies with abject terror. And yet, a name with such power would surely be dangerous.

In Leviticus 24, a man uses the name of God to curse someone with whom he was fighting. And so, Israel was commanded to stone that man to death.

It's no wonder the Jews were terrified to even speak the name of the one whose presence would manifest in the Holy of Holies, in the heart of the temple behind the curtain—the Holy One of Israel.

So anyway, Jesus tells these folks on the mountain "How Not to Pray." And now, he will tell them, "How to Pray," ...And what he says is hilarious, shocking, and absolutely revolutionary. He says it here on the mountain, but he appears to have also said it on several other occasions.

In Luke, one of the disciples says to Jesus later in his ministry, "*Sir, teach us how to pray as John taught his disciples to pray... They had classes, seminars, a workbook, and a video series.*" He didn't actually say that last part, but I'm sure he meant it.

*"Lord, teach us how to pray, like my Spanish teacher taught me to speak Spanish; teach us how to make it work... so I can go to Mexico and order a margarita... teach us how to talk to God."*

And Jesus says, "OK... say this:"

Luke 11:2 · "When you pray, say this..."

What follows are just four sentences and, apparently, no magic words. It's hilarious, in light of all the Shema, the Eighteen Benedictions, the Psalms, the liturgy in the temple, and all our books and classes on prayer....

*"OK sure, I'll teach ya; say this..."*

It's basically what he says here to this crowd on the mountain; he says: *It's not about twisting God's arms... You won't be heard for your many impressive words... Your Father already knows what you need...*

**V. 9 Pray then like this:**

**"Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.**

**<sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come.**

**Thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.**

**<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread;**

**<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts,**

**As we also have forgiven our debtors.**

**<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. " [Period.]<sup>ix</sup>**

- It's *hilarious* because it's so simple.
- It's *shocking* because of the Holy Name, and who is commanded to say it.
- It's *revolutionary* because it's the door to a kingdom that is an entire new creation.

**"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..."**

So, what is "the Holy Name?" Maybe, the name is *Yahweh*, but maybe it's something else.

What is the name that gives you access to the throne of God, makes a way where there is no way, transforms reality, and fills your enemies with terror?

Imagine you're driving alone in downtown Denver at night. You're already in a foul mood when in your rearview mirror you see a car swerving through traffic, and you notice that it's packed with a bunch of teenagers who look like they're partying.

Up ahead, the light turns red; other cars begin to pass and cross the intersection, but to your horror, the car behind you doesn't stop. It slams into the back of your brand new Acura at about 25 mph. After you compose yourself, you get angry.

You jump out of the car screaming and yelling. Young kids scatter in every direction, but you hone in on the driver and start chasing him on foot. You chase him down a dark alley that empties onto the 16th Street Mall. Just as the boy runs from the alley into the Mall, as you're screaming invectives—"I'm gonna tear you up, you little..."—the boy runs smack dab into a policeman.

He would have knocked this policeman over, except he's huge. He's wearing a big badge that says, "Chief of Police." He carries two guns, a nightstick, and he has to roll up his sleeves to make room for his muscles. He looks at the boy. He looks at you. He looks back at the boy, and the boy speaks—What is the most terrifying thing the boy could say in that moment?

How about: "*Dad?*"

There's just something about that name...

Think about speaking that name...

Greg O'leary writes:

I was walking down a dimly lit street late one evening when I heard muffled screams coming from behind a clump of bushes. I panicked when I realized that what I was hearing were the unmistakable sounds of a struggle: heavy grunting, frantic scuffling, the tearing of fabric. Only yards from where I stood, a woman was being attacked.

*Should I get involved?* I was frightened for my own safety and cursed myself for having suddenly decided to take a new route home that night. ...*Shouldn't I just run to the nearest phone and call the police?*

Although it seemed like an eternity, the deliberation in my head had taken only seconds. I knew I had to act fast. I could not turn my back on the fate of this unknown woman, even if it meant risking my own life.

I am not a brave man, nor am I athletic. I don't know where I found the... strength – but... I ran behind the bushes and pulled the assailant off the woman. Grappling, we fell to the ground, where we wrestled for a few minutes until the attacker jumped up and escaped. Panting hard, I scrambled upright and approached the girl who was crouched behind a tree, sobbing in the darkness.

Not wanting to frighten her further, I at first spoke to her from a distance. "It's OK," I said soothingly. "The man ran away. You're safe now."

There was a long pause, and then I heard her words uttered in wonder: "Dad... is that you?"

Think about hearing that name...

I've told you about the box of home movies in our hall closet and how I can barely bring myself to watch them. Well, looking for my video of the kids' worship service that I used last time, I watched part of another video I had filmed in my father's back yard, as I showed my children where I grew up.

Everywhere I go in the video, following my dad or my three oldest children, you can hear another voice behind me, speaking a word.

When I first heard it in the video after all those years, it was like someone reached into my chest, grabbed my heart and just began to squeeze; the voice just said "*Daddy... Daddy... Daddy.*"

I would stop and say, "*Yes, what is it, Coleman?*"

And he would say, "*Daddy... um Daddy, Daddy?*" He didn't know what he wanted except "*Daddy.*" It was like sonar for him, so he would follow me wherever I went, saying "*Daddy, Daddy, Daddy...*"

He's married now and working on a PhD in Geotectonics at Utah State. We're planning to go see him in a couple of weeks. And when I do, he'll say: "*Hey, Dad.*"



And that same hand will reach into my chest and begin to squeeze, because Coleman has the power to hallow my name.

You don't have that power; if you call me *"Dad,"* I'll laugh and say, *"I'm not your dad, and I'm not gonna help you pay off your student loan."*



*But,* one of these four people can say the name, and make it Holy. They can say the name, because I gave them the name, to say.

Before each of them were born, they would listen to my voice in their mother's womb. They were in their mother's womb because I put them in their mother's womb, which wasn't a sad day but a very glad day.

They were a piece of me in her, and they would listen to my voice; but they didn't know my name and hadn't said my name. But once they left that womb... Well, I'd hold each of them in my arms for hours.

At first, they'd just mutter and babble and coo, but I'd say:

*"Say 'Da-da.' Say 'Daddy'; say 'Dada...'"*

I'd speak the word into them in the hope it would return to me.

And the moment one of them said anything remotely close to *"Da-da,"* I'd yell:

*"Susan! Jon said my name!"*

*"Elizabeth knows me!"*

*"Becky just talked to me!"*

*"Coleman said the word... ha shem... He said the name!"*

And then, we started talking and haven't stopped.

When I see Coleman, we'll talk about flat plate subduction, geomorphology, and maybe a little theology...but it all began with *"Da-da."*

He's never taken a class or watched a video on "How to Talk to Dad." He may have listened to his brother or sisters on how to get stuff from Dad, but I made sure that never really worked in his favor.

Each of my children knows how to talk to me—they learned to talk to me by talking to me. And with each of my children, it's a little bit different. We each have our own particular language. I don't speak to any of them exactly the same as I do to the others. But with all of my children, it began with: *"Say Da-da."*

It wasn't like learning a foreign language for them; talking to me is their native tongue.

So, when the disciples ask Jesus how to pray in Luke, he says, *"Say Daddy."* And now to the crowd, he says, *"Pray 'Our Daddy.'"*

Most versions translate his statement as: "Our Father." Matthew writes in Greek, and the Greek word translated "Father" is *pater*. And that's a good translation of the Greek, but we're pretty sure that Jesus normally spoke Aramaic.

Greek was the trade language spoken since Alexander had conquered Palestine, but the common people spoke an old Semitic language that had been melded with Hebrew since the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

In Hebrew, "father" is the word *ab* or *abi*. In Aramaic, "father" is the word *abba*, and like "papa" or "dada"; it's a child's word, but one that's been appropriated by adults, like our word "Dad."<sup>x</sup>

Most Bible scholars I've read think it is the word Jesus would've spoken because of the way "pater" appears in sentence structure as a familiar word of address. And because the original Aramaic is preserved in three places by Mark and Paul, along with the Greek, "pater," as if to say, *"This is what we mean when we say 'father.' We mean 'Dad.'"*

We might say that Henry Ford is the father of the American motor car. But we wouldn't say he's the dad of your Ford Taurus.

It was common to refer to God as "the Father of Israel," but the way Jesus said *"Father"* got him crucified.

John 5:17 · “My Father is working until now, and I am working,” says Jesus.

Next verse: “<sup>18</sup>This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him,... because he was even calling God his own Father, (See? That’s a dad), making himself equal with God.”

If you say George Washington is the father of your country, that’s different than saying George Washington is your dad. “*God is my Dad,*” means that I am of the same substance; his life is in my veins; his breath is in my lungs; his DNA is in every cell; I am literally the fruition of his seed. (*Sperma* in Greek, in case you’re slow to get my meaning.)

Jesus says, “*Pray, ‘Our Dad.’*”

Now, it was absolutely scandalous that Jesus would refer to *Yahweh* as “Dad.” And it still is absolutely scandalous that Jesus would say to a crowd of unbaptized Jews and pagans, “*Pray, ‘Our Dad.’*”

I used to be surrounded by folks, and ordained by folks, that loved to point out that God is not the Father of *all*. Even though:

Ephesians 4:6, Paul clearly says, “There is... one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

In the book of Acts, chapter 17, speaking to pagan philosophers in Athens, Paul quotes a Greek philosopher, saying, “[God] himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything... We are indeed his offspring (*genos*, from *ginomai*, where we get our words “genetics” and “genesis”).

My old crowd would say, “‘Offspring’ doesn’t mean God is their own Father.”

They’d point to John 8, where Jesus says to some Jews (who “had believed in him”): “You are of your father the Devil.”<sup>xi</sup>

My old crowd would say, “See? Some are not children of God.”

Then they’d point to John 1:12 · “[God] gave the right to become (*ginomai*) sons of God.”  
Then they’d point to John 1:18 where John refers to Jesus as the *monogenes*, (from *monos*, “only,” and *ginomai*, “become”)—“The Only Begotten Son of God.”

But they’d fail to notice that Jesus says to Nicodemus in John 3:7: “You must be begotten (*gennaō*, from *ginomai*), from above.”

Well, if Jesus is the “*only begotten*” and Nicodemus is to “*be begotten*,” that can only mean that Jesus will be begotten in Nicodemus, or Nicodemus in Jesus—that somehow they’re begotten together.

In Acts 17, Paul says to pagans, “We are indeed his *genos*, (his begotten), his offspring.” Which means, he’s trying to get them all to say: “*Abba, Daddy.*”

Romans 8:15 · “...you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of sonship [Some translate this word as adoption, and it meant that but also more; it’s literally “sonship”], by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”<sup>16</sup> it is the Spirit [What Spirit? The

Spirit of God the Father and God the Only Begotten Son]... it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God..."<sup>xii</sup>

Galatians 4:6 · (Listen closely.) "And because you are sons"—[not because you "*could be sons*"]—"because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

When did he do that?

- In the garden on Mt. Calvary where he delivered up his Spirit on the tree...
- Or was it in the Garden of Eden when he breathed his Spirit into the clay...
- Or is it *both*, for that Garden stands at the edge of time and eternity and can be found even in the depths of your own soul?

And yet, in John 8, Jesus does say to some Jews, "*You are of your father the devil.*" But don't you see? The devil cannot father people, only lies about people. That's the next thing Jesus says, "*The devil is the father of lies.*"<sup>xiii</sup>

Who is it that Jesus does not know on that day?<sup>xiv</sup>

- He does not know your ego, which is the lie that you have made yourself in the image of God with knowledge taken from the tree.
- He does not know the lie that you are *not* a little child of God.

He is utterly unimpressed with your resume, but he died so you would say "*Abba... my Abba... our Abba.*"

In John 8, Jesus says the thing about the devil to some Jews.

In John 10, Jews have picked up stones in order to stone him for claiming that God is his Dad, and thus making himself equal to God.

And Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6 · "I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.'"

Do you hear what Jesus is saying?

*My Daddy is your Daddy, which means you all are children of God.*

*But you all are trapped in a lie that you are not a little child of God. You're all trapped in the illusion that you're a self-made man or woman. You're all trapped in a lie that you've got no daddy—And so, my little brothers and sisters, say "Abba," say "Our Abba, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..."*

*Everything has been arranged, every star in the heavens, every wound in your body, and every longing in your soul. With all creation, our Father holds you, and has been holding you, in his arms. And soon he will send me, from the tree in the garden, to die and rise as this Word ascending from behind the torn curtain in the depths of your soul, as together we cry "Abba" ... Say "Abba."*

The name Jesus, *Yeshua*, literally means "*Yahweh Saves, Yahweh Help.*"

You can only say "Abba" to Yahweh, by the power of Jesus and in his name: *God help!* And if you say "Abba" to Yahweh, you have been begotten from above—you are his son, his daughter, you are the very Body of The Only Begotten.

Now... you may not have understood all of that theology. And I'm sure you didn't understand the interface of time and eternity in the Garden of Eden and Calvary. But you did understand what Jesus said: "Pray," (imperative tense; this is a command) "Pray, 'Our Father.'"

Now, would Jesus, the Truth, command you to lie about God...to God?  
I'm thinking "No."

So, if God is your *Abba*...you are his child.

And now, would Jesus, the Truth, command you to lie about your neighbor?  
I'm guessing "No."

So, if God is *our Abba*, your neighbor is also his child... and that changes absolutely everything.

Imagine if that kid you chased from the scene of the accident, that ran into the chief of police, said, "Dad?"

And then... you looked again and also said, "Dad? You've been working out?" And then said, "Brother, is that you? I didn't know it was you."

Imagine if you were Greg O'Leary, and the young woman looked up through her tears and said, "Dad?"

Then you turned around, saw the assailant, and he also said, "Dad?"

You know, something like that actually happened to King David and Tamar and Amnon and Absalom... and David is called "*the man after God's own heart.*" For something like that happens to God, our Father, every minute of every day... and that's where the story really gets astonishing.

We'll talk about this next week, but all Christian ethics can be reduced to three words: "*Pray, 'Our Dad.'*"

The Sanctuary exists because we feel called to say to anyone and everyone, "*When you pray, pray as Jesus taught us: Pray: 'Our Dad.'*"

But now, you can't say "*Our Dad,*" if you can't say "*My Dad,*" and some of you have had some pretty bad dads... And yet, even your bad dads created a longing in you for the Good Dad. And Jesus was just telling us that his Dad is the Very, Very, Best Dad.

I had a great earthly dad, but for some reason, I've prayed for some folks with terrible dads; and about four of those dads were involved in the occult—magic, witchcraft, and sorcery.

It was over twenty years ago now, and I don't think any of you know this person—she had a dissociative disorder such that different parts of her would speak at different times. And sometimes they weren't parts of her that were speaking, but demons—and they were *not* subtle.

One night in our old prayer room, Aram Haroutunian and I helped her pray through an absolutely horrifying memory. I won't recount it here and now, for it's just too intense for this setting. But the memory was so very real for her ...and then the memory became a vision.<sup>xv</sup>

If you've ever witnessed something like this, you begin to realize that the vision is more real than the memory, and even more real than the room that you happen to be sitting in at the time—it's eternal. Suffice it to say, that in this vision, Jesus appeared in her memory and rescued her from the death and hell in which she had been trapped.

He held her and told her how he hurt for her, hurt with her, and hurt in her, for he would not leave her nor forsake her.

She was describing this amazing vision and the things Jesus was saying. Her eyes were closed, when all of a sudden, she jumped up and she just started screaming: *"Did you hear that? You had to have heard that!"* Eyes wide open, she said: *"Jesus just said, 'Don't you know that your Daddy is my Daddy? We have the same Daddy, my little sister.'"*

So, in the name of Jesus, say "Our Abba who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." When you say "Our Abba," Jesus destroys the work of the devil and releases the son or daughter of God that you truly are.

## Communion

And how can you say "Abba?"

Well, on that night he was betrayed, our Big Brother, the Word of God, the Promised Seed, the Only Begotten, took bread and broke it, saying: "This is my body given to you. Take and eat."

And he took the cup, saying: "This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Take and drink, all of you."

Now say, "Our Abba..."

Understand? You have the power to hallow God's name.

You have the power to reach into his chest and squeeze his heart.  
[Peter picks up the broken communion bread and squeezes it]

You know why?

He's your Dad. Amen.

## Benediction

So let's talk to him:

Say: Our Dad who art in heaven, we hallow your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts/ our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not unto temptation but deliver us from evil. (And God I know this part is not in all the ancient manuscripts, but I think we can still say it.)For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. And that's good news.

Now, I think by Jesus saying this that it's not *all* you can say—it's just like getting started. So I hope that you do pray constantly. I think that's just that you're aware of your Father's presence with you. I know we joke about how he knows our every thought. But he's a good dad.

So think about him being with you all the time. Be aware that he's with you. And then talk to him.

You're talking to Dad.  
And that's Good News.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Of Course this was actually how we would get the kids to quite down at youth group when I was a youth pastor—I'd just yell, "Let's pray!"

It was the Holy way to say "Shut up or else."

<sup>ii</sup> I read of a disciple who once prayed to the Lord saying, "You are the eschatological manifestation of the ground of our being, in whom we find the ultimate fulfillment of our personal relationships..." And the Lord said unto that disciple... "What?"

<sup>iii</sup> The gentile delusion [is] that prayer meant making both God and oneself tired with yelling and murmuring. . . . But the Christian's prayer is easy, and it does not cause hard work. . . . It presents its need from the heart. Faith quickly gets through telling what it wants. . . . And because He [the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:26] knows that God is listening to Him, He has no need of such everlasting twaddle. . . . Therefore the ancient fathers have said correctly that many long prayers are not the way. They recommend short, fervent prayers, where one sighs toward heaven with a word or two, as is often quite possible in the midst of reading, writing, or doing some other task. But the others, who make it nothing but a work of drudgery, can never pray with gladness or devotion. . . .

- Martin Luther

<sup>iv</sup> Augustine wrote, "*Remove from prayers much speaking but not much praying.*"

<sup>v</sup> What if he knows prayer to be the thing we need first and most? What if the main object in God's idea of prayer be the supplying of our great, our endless need – the need of himself? What if the good of all our smaller and lower needs lies in this, that they help drive us to God? Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond all other needs; prayer is the beginning of that communion.

George MacDonald

I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice? Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words.

C. S. Lewis, [Till We Have Faces](#)

<sup>vi</sup> Our Lord brought all this suddenly to my mind and revealed these words to me: "I am the ground of your praying. First, it is my will that you have something, then I make you want, then I make you actually pray for it, and you do so. How then should you not get what you have been praying for?"

Julian of Norwich

vii Kierkegaard, *Provocations* (Farmington, PA: The Plough Publishing House, 1999), p. 345

viii When the work takes over, then the artist is enabled to get out of the way, not to interfere. When the work takes over, then the artist listens.

But before he can listen, paradoxically, he must work. Getting out of the way and listening is not something that comes easily, either in art or in prayer.

Before I can listen to God in prayer, I must fumble through the prayers of words, of willful demands, the prayers of childish "Gimmes," of "Help mes," of "I want . . ." Until I tell God what I want, I have no way of knowing whether or not I truly want it. Unless I ask God for something, I do not know whether or not it is something for which I ought to ask, and I cannot add, "But if this is not your will for me, then your will is what I want, not mine." The prayers of words cannot be eliminated. And I must pray them daily, whether I feel like praying or not. Otherwise, when God has something to say to me, I will not know how to listen. Until I have worked through self, I will not be enabled to get out of the way.

Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1980), p. 24

ix RSV

xx . . . The great liturgical feasts, pesach, weeks, succoth, Rosh Hosannah, Yom Kippur, the whole ambience of Jewish prayer stamped [Jesus'] spirituality. Yet, there came a point in the evolution of his own religious development when he could no longer call upon God simply by the traditional Hebrew invocations-Adonai, Elohim, El Shaddai, but had to call him "Abba"-the very name implying tenderness. In his landmark book, *On Being a Christian* Hans Kung writes: ". . . in all the extensive literature of prayer-both liturgical and personal-in Judaism from ancient times up to the Middle Ages there is not a single example of the use of Abba as a form of addressing God. How is this to be explained? Hitherto only one explanation has been found: abba-like our 'Daddy'-is originally a child's word, used however in Jesus' time also as a form of address to their father by grown-up sons and daughters and as an expression of politeness, generally to an older person deserving of respect. But to use this not particularly manly expression of *tenderness* (italics mine), drawn from the child's vocabulary, this commonplace term of politeness, to use this as a form of addressing God, must have struck Jesus' contemporaries as irreverent and offensively familiar, very much as if we were to address God today as 'Dad.'

Brennan Manning, *The Wisdom of Accepted Tenderness*, p. 14.

xi John 8:31, 44

xii RSV

xiii John 8:44

xiv Matthew 25:12, Luke 13:27

xv Don't read this endnote if you're easily triggered, but my friends Father had been very involved in the Masons. In one of their rituals they put my friend in a coffin with a corpse. In the vision Jesus appeared and took her out of that coffin. When she protested the blood on his white robes, he said "But, I was bloody as you..." And then he began to tell her of his presence and his unfailing love.

My friend and other's like her know depths of God's Love in Christ Jesus that few of us can fathom. They've died with him and risen with him. There is no Hell deeper than the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. This isn't just a "theological proposition." It is an existential reality which is being revealed to you every time you experience suffering, pain, loss and shame.