

The Teachings of Jesus: When you pray Matthew 6 5-15

Disclaimer: Material for this message was adapted in part from sermons found on the Sermon Central website.

In Greek mythology Narcissus was the son of a river god and a nymph. He was renowned for his exceptional beauty, but he was also very arrogant, rejecting the love of all others. Out of revenge the god Nemesis lured Narcissus to a pool of water where for the first time he saw and fell in love with his own reflection. Unable to leave the beauty of his reflection, Narcissus pined away and died there beside the pool staring at himself. From this story, comes the modern term "narcissism," a fixation with oneself.

According to Sociologists, American culture has increasingly encouraged narcissism, self-centeredness, focusing on our own desires and comforts instead of being aware of the needs of others. Workers are now more interested in what the company can do for them than what they can do for the company, probably because companies have also begun to reflect the same narcissism. The world has changed from "*One for all and all for one,*" to "*every person and every company for themselves.*"

There has rarely been a time when culture has been more at odds with the teachings of Jesus Christ. But, this is the world in which we Christians find ourselves; being challenged to live out our faith as people who are marching to the beat of a different drummer. How do we do that?

First, we need to recognize that such narcissistic tendencies have always been a part of our human nature; we are not the first society whose people sought to call attention to themselves. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus singled out those who made a public display of their gift giving, their prayers, and their fasting. He summarized their efforts in a single sentence; *they have received their reward*. Our walk of faith is not intended to call attention to ourselves.

In the prayer that He taught His disciples, which we have come to call "The Lord's Prayer," Jesus proposed an alternative lifestyle. Notice that this prayer uses the first person plural; it begins "***Our Father,***" and goes on to say "***Lead us not into temptation.***" So, the first way to combat this tendency towards individualism in our lives is to understand that we are part of a community.

We talk about our need as disciples of Jesus Christ to love the *Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves*. If we are to do this, it is important that our spirituality moves from merely external actions, to a living and personal relationship with God. We need to do more than simply go through a series of religious motions and one of the main ways that we nurture our relationship with God is through prayer. Whether we pray silently, verbally, or simply sit quietly in God's presence, prayer enables us to draw closer to God. Prayer gets our focus off ourselves and turns it toward God. In just a few sentences, the Lord's Prayer demonstrates what the priority of our lives as individuals and as a community of believers should be.

Have you also noticed, that this prayer is divided in two equal parts: First, there is the "Your" part related to what God desires, followed by the "us" part directed towards our needs. Thus, we first pray that God's name would be kept holy, that God's kingdom would come on earth and that God's will would be done.

Our first priority as disciples of Jesus Christ is to be a part of God's will and to honor God in our lives. This should supersede our individual desires for success, recognition, comfort, or security. It is only later in the prayer that we pray for our daily bread, for the forgiveness of our sins, and that God would not allow us to be led into temptation.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should live and breathe our desire to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. We are on a difficult journey, but perhaps no more difficult than this journey has ever been; just different with each culture providing its own unique version of Vanity Fair through which we must pass. And we are expected to stand out, not in our efforts to call attention to ourselves but to God's kingdom. As Jesus said, *let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.* Mt. 5:16

As Children of God, we should be living intentionally countercultural lives. While our family, friends, neighbors and coworkers are busy doing their own thing and reaching their true potential, we are focused on being God's servants and one of the ways that God is present in the world today. So with this thought in mind let us take a closer look at just the opening line from this prayer: *Our Father, Who art in heaven...*

If somebody were to ask you "What do you need most these days?" How would you answer? Some might say, I need more money, I need more time, I need.....

- But, what are the needs in my life that God has promised to meet?
- And how does He do it?

Why would God even be interested in meeting my needs, obviously He doesn't need me. So why would God be interested? Because He is Our Father.

Thus, The very first thing we learn about God from this prayer is that He is not some kind of impersonal force. Nor is God the angry tyrant of the Old Testament as some have tried to depict Him; just waiting to deal you a bumner in life. Nor is God the very opposite – as others have tried to describe Him – an apathetic creator that really doesn't care about what's going on here. Jesus defined God in two words, when He said, "*Pray then in this way, `Our Father...`"*

In the Old Testament, God was only called "Father" seven times. In this chapter alone, Jesus calls Him "Father" over ten times; furthermore, Jesus would go on both to name and pray to God as "Father," telling us to do the same, over seventy times in the Gospels.

The point is simply this: **God is a Person not a power.** He wants to be our Father I like that because...

- I can relate to a person.
- I can get to know a person.
- I can have a relationship with a person, especially with my father.

The problem is that for some people the idea of "father" may bring up a negative image, a bad experience, not so good childhood memories, arousing resentment, anger, fear, frustration, guilt. Some just don't have good memories of their own father.

So Jesus qualified the term by saying, "*Our Father, in heaven...*" He's not referring to a location because God is everywhere, He's talking about how Heaven is a place of perfection and God is a perfect Father in contrast to all of us who are human and very imperfect. God is our perfect Father.

The Bible teaches four characteristics about how God relates to us as *Our Father*.

1. GOD IS A CARING FATHER. He wants you to know that you are loved and cared for. If you don't get anything else this morning, get this: **You matter to God. God cares about you. He loves you. He's interested in you.** The Psalms tell us,

*"As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who honor Him..."*
Psalm 103:13

This is God's most outstanding characteristic. He's caring, loving, and compassionate.

One time the disciples were out in a boat on the Sea of Galilee and a storm came up. They started taking on water and started to sink. As they were being tossed back and forth, they asked Jesus the most important question, the ultimate question: "*Lord, don't you care? We're drowning!*"

Have you ever felt like that? *I'm going under Lord! Don't you care?* The answer is, Yes. Yes, God cares a lot. You have a heavenly Father who cares. The apostle Peter wrote

Cast all your anxiety on Him,
because He cares for you!
1 Peter 5:7

He cares!

- Does God care about your health? Yes.
- Does He care about your house payment? Yes.
- Does He care about your grades at school?
- Does He care about how you get along in your family?

- Does He care about whether you're a success or failure in life?
- Does any of this even matter to Him? The answer is, "Yes, all of it!"

As another Psalm declares, *Great is the Lord, who delights in the welfare of his servants.* ^{35:27} Just like, I love to see my own children succeed. Your heavenly Father cares about you; He wants you to succeed.

2. GOD IS A CONSISTENT FATHER. He's reliable. He can be counted upon. He's worthy of trust. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote...

"Every good and perfect gift is from the Father who does not change like shifting shadows."

James 1:17

Who does not change. Some people are unpredictable, but God is a consistent father. He's not moody. He never has a bad day. He never wakes up grouchy. He loves you just as much on your good days as He does on your bad days. It's not based on who you are, but who He is. As Paul described Him to Timothy, "*Even if we are faithless, [God] remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.*" ^{2 Timothy 2:13} That verse says even when I'm unfaithful and inconsistent, God can be counted on to remain faithful in His love for me.

In a world where everything is changing, in a world where everything is falling apart, if there's one thing I know, if there's one thing I can always count on, I can always count on God to always act the same way toward me no matter how I feel.

He is always caring and He is always consistent, no matter what I think, no matter what I feel, no matter what I do, He is caring and He is consistent.

I the Lord, do not change.

Malachi 3:6

God is immutable, unchanging. Everything else shifts and changes but God is our rock. Nothing changes with Him. He is caring and He is consistent. That's the kind of God who wants to meet your needs.

3. HE IS A CLOSE FATHER The Bible makes it very clear that He's nearby when you need Him. To me, one of the most hope filled lines from Paul's sermon on Mars Hill says that God put each of us where are and when we are in this world, so that we *would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us.* ^{Acts 17:27}

God is not a million miles away; concerned only with the big picture. He's right here. He's here with you. And if you have opened your life to Him, He's in you; in your life. God dwells within us to bring about good in our lives and from our lives.

Today, many children grow up with absentee parents who are never around, never at home. But that's not the way your heavenly Father is. God is not detached. He is a friend that sticks closer than a brother. He is a close God.

1. God is never too busy for me. Psalm 145:18 says, "*The Lord is near to all who call on Him.*" When you pray you don't get a busy signal. Whenever you say, "I've got a burden, a need I've got to talk with You about....." God doesn't say, "Not now. I'm busy." He's never too busy for you. You can talk to Him at any time.
2. God loves to meet my needs. Jesus told His disciples, "*If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him.*" Matthew 7:11 The point is that good fathers take care of their children. You can count on your heavenly Father to meet your needs because He has unlimited resources to do it.
3. God is sympathetic to my hurts. You say, "I'm feeling low today." God knows and He does understand completely. Psalm 34:18 says "*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*" You've had a tough week? God understands. You've had a tough day yesterday, this month, this year, this life?? God understands.

God is not just my creator. He loves me. He makes a difference in my life. He made you and me for a purpose. That's how God wants us to relate to Him. Because He is a caring Father, a consistent Father and a close Father.

4. GOD IS A CAPABLE FATHER. Nothing is beyond His ability, nothing is beyond His resources, nothing is beyond His power. Whatever problem you've got -- at home, at work, at school -- God can handle it. He is a capable Father.

For nothing is impossible with God.

Luke 1:37

This is how the Living Bible, describes Him, "*God is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes!*" Ephesians 3:20

God wants to meet your needs. He wants you to stop looking everywhere else to have those needs met. He wants you to look to Him.

And my God will fully satisfy
every need of yours according
to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19

That means everything, even finances; all your needs. God takes care of His children.

The logical question then is, Is everybody God's child?

Is God the Father of everybody?

If He takes care of everybody's needs, is God the Father of everybody?"

Well yes and no. Yes, every human being is a child of God in the sense that we're all created by God. But not everybody has a relationship with God. Not everybody is able to call Him Father. That's why they don't have all their needs met.

So how do I establish this relationship with God?

We are children of God
through faith in Jesus Christ."

Galatians 3:26

It's that simple? We're not children of God by getting baptized, or tithing, or promising to go to church, or trying to be perfect. If you had to be perfect to be a child of God, no one would be a child of God.

God made it so simple, nobody could say it was too hard to understand. He just said, "*Put your trust in My Son. Believe in Him*". Jesus Christ is the way, He is the door. Our only way into God's family is through Jesus. As He said, "*no one comes to the Father except through Me.*"

God says if you want to be a part of My family, if you want to establish that relationship, if you want to feel My caring, consistent love, put your trust in My Son Jesus. The Bible says,

But to all who received him,
who believed in his name,
[Jesus] gave power to become children of God,

John 1:12

Believe and receive. We believe and we receive.

You were physically born into the human family, but you must choose to be spiritually born into God's family. How do you get spiritually born? *We become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.*

God wants you to have a close relationship with Him.
He is caring, He is consistent, He is competent, He is close.
He wants to provide for your needs. And your greatest need is to first start trusting Him, by coming and saying, "Jesus Christ, I want to put my trust in You" "Please save me, a sinner"

If you have done this, then when you begin the Lord's Prayer, saying "*Our Father, who art in Heaven ...*" that is exactly who you are talking to.

Let's pray about this.