

Good morning everyone...I hope you've had a good a week. For some of us, September is the month where we get back into familiar routines of school, work, volunteering, or sports. For some of us, September is the month we begin new routines in the hopes that our year will turn out very different than the one before. For all of us, September is a month filled with decisions...and may God by His Spirit grant us His wisdom and insight so that we may each choose well.

I want to start by saying that I'm glad you're here this morning...I would say you've chosen well by gathering with God's people. All across the North Shore right now, different expressions of God's people are gathering to remember Jesus, to reorient their lives around Him, to ask Him for strength, for love, for wisdom, for direction...they've chosen well...who better to turn to than to Jesus, the Author of Life?

This morning, I'm going to pick up where I left off last week in talking about the Lord's Prayer. Over the next 8 weeks we are going to be looking to the Lord's Prayer to serve as a guide for our own praying. And for those of you who were away last week, getting in the last bit of vacationing before the Fall, let me offer a brief recap.

As I said last week, *Jesus didn't have a prayer life...He lived a prayed life.* For Jesus, prayer was never hived off from the rest of His living. Prayer wasn't the separate, sacred action in an otherwise secular day...*Jesus lived a prayed life.* Praying and living, living and

praying...everywhere Jesus went (in His working, His resting, His eating, and playing) He lived a prayed life...a life marked by peace, by power, and by God's Divine Presence. Clement of Alexandria rightly defines prayer as "keeping company with God".

So why this prayer? Where did the Lord's Prayer come from? Well, one day, after Jesus had finished praying, His disciples approached Him saying, *Lord, teach us to pray.* In essence: *Teach us to listen to God, teach us to speak to Him about what is on His heart. Jesus...we want to relate to God the way you do...Teach us pray.*

The Lord's Prayer begins with an opening ascription, it concludes with a final declaration, and in between we have six petitions. The 1st three petitions have to do with God: Your **Name**, Your **Kingdom**, Your **Will**. The 2nd three petitions have to do with us: our **bread**, our **forgiveness**, our **deliverance**. Your, Your, Your, our, our, our.

When we pray this prayer, to quote Darrell Johnson, "we participate in heaven's invasion of earth."¹ We join God in bringing His plans and purposes into being, here and now.

Walter Wink, once wrote, "Intercessors have an essential role to play in creating a better future for our world because intercession is spiritual defiance of **what is** in the name of what God has promised. The shape of the future will be determined by those who can survey all its various possibilities and who by faith latch on to One as

¹ Darrell Johnson, *Fifty Seven Words That Change The World*, 19.

inevitable. History belongs to the intercessors who thus believe the future into being.”²

Maybe in your life, prayer is confined to the words of thanks you offer God before you eat a meal. And that's a great place to start, but as we begin to pray like Jesus did, a whole new realm a possibility opens to us...a prayed life is possible, and more, this is what we've been made for.

Last week we handed out prayer cards...we've broken up the Lord's Prayer into seven segments, one for every day of the week. And every day for the next 8 weeks I want to encourage you to use these words to kick start your own praying. You can pick up a prayer card at the information desk after the service.

And for the readers among us, we purchased a number of copies of Darrell Johnson's book on the Lord's Prayer...it's a fantastic read. Last week we sold every copy we had, but, we have a wait list you can sign your name to, and I'm told we will have more copies available for us soon. The cost is \$11 and you can put your name on the list at the info desk following the service.

Now before we go any further, I want to pause and pray the Lord's Prayer over us. Let me invite you to listen and to align your heart with this prayer as I pray it.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our

debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

So let's begin where Jesus did: *Our Father in heaven*...this is how Jesus launches His disciples (past, present, and future) into His way of praying...*Our Father in heaven*.

1. *Our Father*...this is more than just a way to address God, it's more than a title...with these words we are thrust into a relational reality at the heart of prayer. When we pray, we are not addressing a foreign dignitary, a busy CEO, or a tyrant...we are speaking with One to whom we are intimately related...*Our Father*.

So many of the fears that keep us from praying would be eliminated from the start if we were to take to heart these words of Jesus.

Now Jesus was not teaching about prayer in a vacuum. He grew up in a nation where prayer was firmly embedded in the culture. And so, in some senses, the prayer Jesus offers is not a radical departure from the prayers He grew up praying in the synagogue, or at the temple. Jesus names God as "Father," but He's not the first to recognize this; the Old Testament uses this title for God on 14 different occasions. But while God is named as "Father" in the Scriptures, few addressed Him as such...it was too familiar, too intimate.

Listen to some of the prayers Jesus would have grown up praying; listen specifically for how God is addressed. Here's the Amidah: *Blessed are you, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, the God of*

² Walter Wink, *Sojourner's Magazine*.

Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the great, mighty and revered God, the Most High God who bestows loving-kindnesses, the creator of all things, who remembers the good deeds of the patriarchs and in love will bring a redeemer to their children's children for his name's sake. O king, helper, savior and shield. Blessed are you, O Lord, the shield of Abraham.

Many other Jewish prayers, begin in the following way: *Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the universe.* Now, there is much to be commended in addressing God this way, all of it is true...He is great, mighty, sovereign, and holy. But, brothers and sisters, if you want to know God the way Jesus did, if you want to experience Him in the same manner, you will not get there until you discover Him as a Father who is for you, not against you.

So many fears keep us from praying...*what if I don't matter to God?, what if God is too busy to listen? what if I pray the wrong way?, what if...*so many of the fears that keep us from praying would be eliminated from the start if we were to take to heart these words...God is our Father.

Now I want to stop there and recognize publicly that for some it is this very word, "Father," that causes fear rather than taking it away. Martin Luther once wrote, "I have difficulty praying the Lord's Prayer because whenever I say 'Our Father,' I think of my own father who was hard, unyielding, and relentless. I cannot help but think of God in that way."

This isn't about father bashing, as though every ill and evil we experience in the world, or in our lives, is a result of less than perfect fathers. All of us are subject to weakness and frailty; each of us has caused pain in others.

But for some, naming anyone as "father" brings with it a multitude of pain and disappointment...and naming God as Father makes matters worse. If my earthly version of a father wasn't too hot, how can I trust the heavenly version?

Now, in the context of our conversation, I want to give you some loving instruction about how to read the Scriptures, instead of reading into the Scriptures our own assumptions and culture. Take this word "Father" for instance. If we take our cues from the recent decade of television, we would have to conclude that "fathers" by definition fall into one of two primary categories: the deadbeat, or the dufus. Held out before us, under the banner of "father," we've been inspired by such greats as Homer Simpson, and George Constanza's dad.

This is not the world that Jesus spoke into...the word father communicated awe and affection, a father was a protector and a teacher, someone to love and respect, someone worth following...this is still what God calls fathers to.

But like Eugene Peterson says, "if we want to understand this word "Father" in the way Jesus intended it, a definition will almost never gets us there...we need a story"³, we need a picture. And the premier description Jesus gives us is found in the story of the prodigal son.

³ Eugene Peterson, *Jesus and Prayer Lectures*, mp3 #F.

This a scandalous story about a father who loves His two sons without measure. The younger one rejects the father outright, he wishes the father dead so that he could get his hands on his inheritance. The father gives the inheritance willingly and the son marches off.

The younger son squanders his father's money in wild living and comes back with nothing...just hoping to be shown some mercy, hoping to work on the family estate as a servant. But when the father sees him coming, he runs to embrace his son...the father puts his own ring on the son's finger, he calls for new clothes, and he calls for a party to be thrown in his son's honour.

Brothers and sisters, this is Father Jesus invites us to name. When we pray, "*Our Father,*" we need to remember that the next two words inform the first two...*Our Father in heaven*. He is more than, better than, greater than any earthly father could ever be.

And if you still find it difficult to pray this word, "*Father,*" Darrell Johnson reminds us that if we want to know what God the Father is really like, we need only look at Jesus. John 14:9 says, *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*.

Before we move on, I want to press into something I said a few minutes ago. I said that in naming God "*Our Father,*" we are thrust into a relational reality at the heart of prayer. Prayer ushers us into the world of listening to and speaking with God, our Father.

Helmut Thielicke (thee-lick-a) writes, "we really can say, 'Our Father,' and there actually is a Voice that will answer us. But the truth is that I have reversed the proper order by speaking of *our* voice and the answering voice of the *Father*; for the Father's voice was there long before ours."⁴

Prayer becomes so much more engaging when we begin to experience it as dialogue instead of monologue. And when we begin to practice living a prayed life, we find that God takes great pleasure in interrupting us in the middle of our living to speak a word into the moment we find ourselves in.

illus: one of the things I admire about my wife Naomi is the way she can draw me out of whatever zone I am locked into and back into the vast expanse of love. Sometime by mid-morning, my mind is scattered in a thousand different directions, and she'll call...she'll tell me that she was thinking about me, wondering how I was doing, looking forward to seeing me later that night.

Other times she will send me a quick email to tell me about her day, to let me know that I was on her mind, that she had been praying for me...I love all her non-interruptions. Nearly every time she does it I'm like a submarine that is brought back up to the surface...where the air is fresh, the horizon becomes clear.

When we begin to listen to God, we begin to experience His whisper. We begin to listen, we hear God speak words of affirmation and delight over us. Most of us have no problem believing that God speaks to us in order to convict of us sin. As a loving Father, doesn't

⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *Our Father In Heaven*, 19.

it make sense that He wants to speak words of affirmation and delight even more? *Mark I'm thinking about you...I'm proud of you...I love you.*

illus: I was blessed to have a dad that was present and engaged in my life as I grew up. My dad was, and is, a person who was quick to affirm and encourage. I played soccer for years and years and nearly every game my dad was on the sidelines, running up and down shouting at me...more like shouting to me: *Way go Mark! You can do it! Beat him to the corner! Shoot it! Great goal! Great game! I'm proud of you son.*

Every human being alive wants to know that she matters, that he is special, that she is loved, that he is trusted and delighted in. There is nothing wrong with desiring affirmation, we were created to receive it, and *Our Father in heaven* is best able to give us the affirmation we desire.

In John 17 we see another one of Jesus' prayers; in it He is praying for us. Jesus said, "*21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.*"⁵ Did you catch that? It's worth repeating...**You love them as much as you love me.**

That's quite a statement...it's staggering really. Did the Father love Jesus? Oh Yes. And Jesus tells us that when we align ourselves with Him, the Father loves us just as much.

Seeing that we are teaching our way through a series on prayer, it's probably fitting that from time to time we stop and pray. In these next moments I want to invite you to listen for the voice of our Father. And so if it is easier for you to listen by closing your eyes, by all means go ahead. But before I give you the gift of silence, I want to read to you a few words that express the Father's joy and delight in you:

You are the apple of my eye and I hide you in the shelter of my wings (Ps 17:8). I have engraved your name on the palms of my hands... though a mother may forget the baby at her breast, I will not forget you (Is 49:15-16).

If I am for you, who can be against you? Who or what can separate you from my love? Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither your fears for today nor your worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate you from my love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate you from my love that has been revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:31, 38-39).

I am the Lord your God, I live among you and I am mighty to save you. I will delight in you with gladness...with my love I will calm all your fears. I will rejoice over you with joyful songs (Zeph 3:17)."

Now take a few moments and ask the Father to speak to you...He might put a thought on your mind, or reveal some kind of a picture, maybe He will bring a Scripture to mind, or you might feel

⁵ John 17:21, 23, NLT.

something emotionally or physically...just ask Him to speak and I'll give us a few moments in silent listening.

Amen.

George MacDonald once wrote, "This is and has been the Father's work from the beginning--to bring us into the home of his heart. This is our destiny." Don't worry about whether or not you are well practiced when it comes to hearing the voice of the Father...it's like physical training...you will build your listening muscles over time.

Now I want to take a few moments to highlight the second two words of Jesus' address...

2. *Our Father in heaven*

In his book, Darrell Johnson writes that when he was a small boy, he did like praying "*Our Father in heaven*...it felt to him like he was praying "Father, far away...can you hear me?"⁶ But a 1st century Jew would have heard these words very differently. To pray to the One in heaven is to pray to the One all around us.⁷

To quote Darrell, "We live in a multi-dimensional universe. Heaven is one of those dimensions, very close at hand."⁸ Jesus is teaching us to pray: "Our Father, all around us...our Father, very close at hand."

⁶ Darrell W. Johnson, *Fifty-Seven Words That Change The World*, 21.

⁷ Johnson, 22.

⁸ Johnson, 22.

⁹ Johnson 24.

This is why we do not shout our prayers as though the Lord is too far away to hear us...Acts 17:27 that God is not far from any of us.

But there are more to these words: "*Our Father, in heaven*". At present, heaven is the one place where God's Kingship is universally accepted. There is a throne in heaven, and Our Father sits on it. When we pray, "Our Father *in heaven*," we pray to the One who holds all things, all of creation, all nations, all powers in His hand. He is close yes, but more, He is Almighty...He is able to do abundantly more than we ask or imagine (Eph 3:20).

Darrell writes, "The Father Jesus knows, the Father Jesus loves, the Father Jesus trusts, is the Father who sits on the throne."⁹ And this same Father loves us every bit as much as He loves Jesus. Our Father in Heaven, knows what what need, and it turns out that what we need more than anything else is a Father in Heaven.

And just one final thought...

3. *Our Father in heaven*...

You'll notice in the opening line of Jesus' prayer, there is one little word that precedes *Father*...it's the word "**Our**"...not my, not yours, but **Our Father**. And this is a crucial word in our me-centered-world.

Have you ever tried getting a three year old to see that the world does not revolve around them? It takes a lot of convincing...a lot of training to get them to open their eyes and really see and care about the people all around them.

Jesus gave us this opening line, this word "*Our*," in part, to quell our 3-year-old tendencies. Prayer is not the one place where our needs reign supreme. Remember, in the first three petitions we are taught to pray for God's name to be honoured, for His kingdom to come, for His will to be done. What a shock it was to humanity, when scientists discovered that the earth was not the center of the universe. It can be equally shocking for us to realize that when it comes to the Father in heaven, we are not only children...we have other brothers and sisters who have needs and rights every bit as important as mine.

This one word, *Our*, changes the way we pray...we pray for ourselves, for our needs, asking for God's best, but always with an eye and an ear open to our brothers and sisters around us...what do they need? As individuals, we seek God's best for us, but never at the expense of others.

We have a common Father, and we are joined together in a common family. We become children of God individually, but we are grafted into a much larger family...together we are the body of Christ, together we are the family of God.

Our Father in heaven...it's a great way to start praying. We pray as a part of a larger family, we pray to the One who is near, to the One

who sits on His throne, we pray to Our Father who loves us every bit as much as He loves Jesus.

Communion: This morning we will be celebrating The Lord's Supper...it's a very simple meal of bread and grape juice...the bread symbolizing the broken body of Jesus, and the grape juice symbolizing His blood that was shed for us on the cross. We eat, we drink, and we remember that Jesus died in order for us to make a way to God.

Helmut Thielicke has observed that the Lord's Prayer does not mention Jesus at all, and yet, this entire prayer is centered around Him...we cannot pray this prayer without Jesus being central.¹⁰

For without Jesus, how can we even name God as our Father? It's popular among some to speak of the universal fatherhood of God. And yet the Bible makes a distinction between God as Creator and God as Father. God is Creator of all, but He is only Father to those who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as **the way** into the Father's family.

John 1:12 says, "*Yet to all who received Him (Jesus), to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God*". Jesus is our brother and our entrance into the Father's family came at the cost of His life. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we are adopted into God's family...apart from Jesus, apart from His invitation, no one can claim to call God Father.

¹⁰ Thielicke, 29.

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in Heaven*

September 12, 2010

Maybe you're here this morning and you've lived your life as far from God as possible. It might be startling for you to hear that God has never been far from you. In the greatest moments of your life and in the darkest moments, God has been near, waiting for you to turn and experience Him as Father.

Joining God's family begins with a simple admission that I have rebelled against God and have lived life apart from His design. Joining His family means putting my trust in Jesus, believing that He died in my place to pay the penalty for my sins. This morning, I want to invite you to do that...to pray and receive the forgiveness Jesus offers so that you can join God's family and come to know Him as Father. **Pray.**

At this point I want to invite Bart and the team to come and join me on the platform, and I want to invite those who are serving communion to come and take your places. Bart is going to sing a song over us as we come to receive the bread and the cup. If you have received the forgiveness Jesus offers, and are apart of God's family then this simple meal is for you. As Bart plays, when you are ready, please make your way to on of the stations, tear a piece from the bread and dip it in the cup. And as you come and receive, let these words encourage your hearts...because of what Jesus has done, we can call God, *Our Father*

Baptism (Shane)

Benediction (Shane)