

Wellspring – Life & Teaching of Jesus **(37) Sermon on the Mount – Our Father (Matt 6:5-9)**

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name." (Matt 6:5-9 NKJV)

The Power of Prayer is the Power of Relationship

We are looking at three spiritual disciplines – giving, prayer, and fasting – that Jesus covers in this passage – disciplines that will position us to experience God's presence and power in our lives and to live under his blessing. Last time we saw that the place of prayer is the "secret place" and that the motivation of prayer is not to be seen by men but to communicate with God. We also saw that prayer is not about vain repetition, but about communicating with God from our heart.

Today we are starting to look at the Lord's prayer by focusing on the first line of it – **"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."** Prayer is not about method or technique, but it is first and foremost about a relationship with our heavenly Father – and the power of prayer lies in the power of that relationship.

A good father-son relationship is one of the most powerful bonds you can find. Sadly for many people in our world, this relationship has not been good and may have been very destructive. It is a huge issue for many – including many Christians.

There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father." On Saturday 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

This is a huge issue and one that I believe God is deeply concerned about. In fact the Old Testament finishes with a picture of a powerful end-time prophetic ministry that will focus on the restoration of this relationship.

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse. (Mal 4:5-6)

I believe this is happening in our day. A powerful prophetic voice has arisen in the church in recent years that is focusing on restoring the relationship of children to their fathers. There is a human aspect to this – God promises blessing to those who honour their father and mother – as Paul points out in Eph 6 this is the only commandment out of the 10 that carries a promise of blessing with it... *that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. (Exod 20:12, Eph 6:3)*

But perhaps an even more fundamental aspect of this ministry is the restoration of our relationship with our Heavenly Father... and it is this relationship which lies at the heart of Jesus' teaching on prayer. Often there are issues arising out of our relationship (or lack thereof) with our earthly father than can seriously impact our relationship with our Heavenly Father. It is vital that we deal with these things thoroughly – and forgiveness is an incredibly powerful and releasing force here – so that we can deepen our relationship with our Father.

Where is my Father?

"In heaven" is your likely response to that question. True. But read the passage again in the NKJV quoted above and see where else he is... **"in the secret place."** As you take the time to go into that secret place, the Father is waiting eagerly to meet you there. That's where you'll find him.

The Father is longing for relationship

In Luke 15:11-32 we find one of Jesus's most well-known parables. We refer to it as a parable about the prodigal son – and it is – but it's also, and maybe primarily, a parable about the father's love, and the sadness and longing of a father who has lost the depth and intimacy of relationship with BOTH his sons, and who longs for that relationship to be restored. Catch something of the father's heart in these verses:

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' (Luke 15:28-32)

The Father longs for a relationship of depth and intimacy with each of his children. Some, like the prodigal son, lose that relationship through running away in open rebellion. Others, like the elder brother, remain in the Father's house, but lose it through legalism and self-righteous pride. The Father longs for both to be restored.

We see in this story a wonderfully graphic picture of the Father's love. He *always* responds to humility and repentance. His heart leaps with delight whenever his children return to him. He runs to meet us. His nature is to be merciful and gracious. He simply loves to forgive.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

When you and I turn away from our sin and return to the Father, he does not accept us reluctantly but lavishes his love upon us. We fear rejection but the Father welcomes us with open arms. We expect reproof but the Father embraces us with a kiss. We think our sin has disqualified us, but the Father clothes us in the best robe and puts the ring of authority on our finger. We expect to be treated like a servant, but the Father welcomes us as a son. We expect to sneak home quietly, our tail between our legs, but the Father throws the mother of all parties!

True worship

The secret place is where we can worship the Father in spirit and in truth. There is no room for pretence there. I come simply into the Father's presence and offer to him all that I am and all that I have. My worship brings delight to his heart.

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23-24)

The Source of all Power

Do you long to see miracles in your life? Would you like God to use you to see the sick healed, and dead raised? It all starts here in the secret place with your relationship with your Father. Jesus only did what he saw his Father doing – they were THE FATHER'S works. See John 5:17-20 and John 14:8-12.

In John 17:20-23 Jesus prayed the most amazing prayer – declaring that it is God's purpose that we live in the same intimacy of relationship with God the Father that Jesus enjoyed while he was on earth.

That is the relationship that is being outworked when we come into the secret place and begin to address God as "Our Father" – as we do that we begin to tap into the power of God himself – we become his sons (*huios*) on earth and nothing is impossible to us!