

**April 7, 2024**

**Father, Hallowed Be Thy Name**

**Luke 11:1-4**

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One of the fun things for me in going to Red Sox Fantasy Camp several times is having the opportunity to spend time with and play for former Red Sox players like Butch Hobson, Trot Nixon, Brian Daubach, and Doug Mirabelli. Although I played baseball in high school and college and continue to do so, it's amazing how much you can still learn from someone who has played and coached professionally. Butch, Trot, and Brian would try to explain every aspect of swinging at a baseball including *"hitting the inside half of the ball,"* and *"keeping the ball on your bat as long as possible."* Guys would laugh at the idea that you could see a ball well enough and be coordinated enough to hit a particular part of a thrown and moving baseball or that you could focus and control how long you kept your bat on it. So, there were lots of laughs and comments about *"I'm just hoping I can see it and hit it at all."* That's why we were at Fantasy Camp and those guys played in the Majors. While I had more experience than most of the guys on my team, I still picked up things that helped me. The less people knew when they began, the greater opportunity they had to grow and improve.

If you want to get better at anything, spending time with someone who is far more advanced than you are, and being open to their wisdom, guidance, instruction, and teaching is a smart thing to do – whether it's a sport, a musical instrument, rebuilding an engine, knitting a sweater, painting, cooking, or even prayer. The first disciples of Jesus recognized that Jesus regularly spent time in prayer with God and that prayer helped Jesus feel close to God and it gave him wisdom, strength, and peace. That's why the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. They wanted to be like Jesus.

For the next six weeks we're going to be learning from the words of Jesus we call the Lord's Prayer. The disciples of Jesus were inspired by his close relationship with God, and they wanted Jesus to teach them to pray in a way that would enable them to experience God in a similar way. There are many different translations of the Lord's Prayer and there is not one single, proper, or correct version. Even in Matthew 6 and Luke 11 the two prayers are not the same. Because we say and hear this prayer so

frequently – we may recite it as a matter of routine and lose the depth of its meaning. My hope is that by trying to understand the Lord’s Prayer more deeply, we’ll infuse our spiritual lives with new health and strength.

Listen to the Lord’s Prayer from **Luke 11:1-4**,

**He was praying** in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “**Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.**”<sup>2</sup> He said to them, “When you pray, say: **Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.**<sup>3</sup> Give **us** each day **our** daily bread.<sup>4</sup> And forgive **us our** sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to **us**. And do not bring **us** to the time of trial.”

This important prayer, given by Jesus and repeated in various forms for centuries, is an example of the form our prayer or communication with God should take. It is:

**Brief** – Jesus spoke in Matthew 6 about the futility of vain repetition in our praying. Jesus knew the wisdom of **Ecclesiastes 5:2**, “*Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.*”

**Simple** – less than 75 words in the most familiar English translation and even less in the original Greek. A child can learn it easily.

**Comprehensive** – It sums up Jesus’ teaching in reflecting his attitude toward God and human life.

Let’s start with the first word; in most versions, although not in Luke, the prayer begins, “**Our**” *Father in heaven*. There are none that say, “my.” All the petitions and references in the Lord’s Prayer are communal, **our** Father, **our** daily bread, **our** sins, do not bring **us** to the time of trial. There is a communal nature to being a Christian that’s inescapable. God is not just mine or yours. Beginning with the word “Our” is a reminder that the universe is bigger than my life and my needs. Sometimes we need to be reminded that there aren’t any planets orbiting our heads. The universe does not revolve around us.

Jesus taught this prayer to a small group of his followers. We pray it as part of the communion of saints throughout the worldwide church and with the hosts of heaven. Richard Foster in his excellent book **Prayer** states, *“This prayer embraces the whole world, from the coming of the kingdom to daily bread. Large things and small things, spiritual things and material things, inward things and outward things nothing is beyond the scope of this prayer. It is lifted up to God in every conceivable setting. It rises from the altars of great cathedrals and from obscure shanties in unknown places. It is spoken by both children and kings. It is prayed at weddings and deathbeds alike. The rich and the poor, the intelligent and the illiterate, the simple and the wise – all pray this prayer.”*<sup>1</sup> The Lord’s Prayer is not only a private, personal prayer; it’s a prayer we do for one another and for the world.

That’s the first word, **“Our,”** let’s continue. An important aspect of any prayer is our **conception of the God** to whom we’re praying. Jesus prayed, *“Father.”* Why did Jesus use the word, “Father”? He could have referred to God as King, Judge, Lord of Hosts, or many other terms. Jesus doesn’t use “Father” because God is male; Jesus says in John 4 that God is Spirit and those who worship God must do so in spirit and truth. Perhaps Jesus chose father to reflect what should be a close, trusting, loving, supportive personal relationship. A good father nurtures, provides, guides, protects, and loves sacrificially. God is like a perfect father, demonstrating all those qualities as well as unconditional, self-giving love. Our picture of God is of primary importance in our praying. Stuart Briscoe, wrote through prayer, *“we come to know the God from whom we come, through whom we live, for whom we exist, and to whom we are accountable.”*

Referring to God as “Father” is a problem for some people for a few reasons. For individuals whose father was not loving or nurturing, referring to God in this way brings up painful memories. For others, the word “father” reflects our humanness more than it does the awesomeness and mystery of the God who created the universe. Fathers have an important role to play in the lives of their children, but for millions of children growing up in homes with no father or with a father who failed to love, care, and support

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Hearts True Home*, page 184-185.

them, or who abused their mother's or themselves; referring to God as Father in prayer may not be helpful or it may be difficult.

When Jesus uses the term Father to refer to God, he's pointing to One who does not abuse or abandon. **Psalm 103:13** reminds us, *"As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."* Unlike our earthly parents, God loves us in a perfect way so that **1 Peter 5:7** invites you to, *"Cast all your anxiety on him **because he cares for you.**"* Here are three things to remember about the image of God as Father. **God is the Father who never changes.** We don't have to worry about God being moody. When we turn to God, we know what we can expect. God's gracious, loving, just, and merciful nature is unchanging as **James 1:17** reminds us, *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from **the Father** of the heavenly lights, **who does not change** like shifting shadows."* God doesn't come home from a bad day of work in the universe and take it out on the family. Even when God's children are faithless, messed up or mixed up, God never gives up on us. **2 Timothy 2:13**, *"If we are faithless, **he will remain faithful**, for he cannot disown himself."*

**God is the Father who never leaves.** God is never too busy for us. Paul says in **Acts 17:27**, *"**Indeed he is not far from each one of us.**"* The Psalmist proclaims (**145:18**), *"**The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.**"* When we're feeling low, depressed, or discouraged, God is there for us. *"The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (**Psalm 34:18**)."*

**God is the Father who never changes, never leaves, and never fails.** Human fathers and mothers will fail us because they're imperfect and flawed as we are. We may not understand God or what God is doing, but as **Ecclesiastes 11:5** says, *"you do not know the work of God, who makes everything."* We pray to a God who will never stop working on our behalf. Like a heavenly, perfect Father, God loves all His children. The question we need to ask ourselves is, "Am I a child of God?" God called himself our Father before we referred to ourselves as God's daughter or son. God's commitment to us is always greater than our commitment to our Creator. Max Lucado wrote, *"Our God is no fair-weather Father. He's not into this love-'em and leave-'em stuff. I can count on him to be in my corner no matter how I perform. You can too."* I hope you can see why

how we picture God is of primary importance in our praying. Many people operate with images of God and God's character that are distorted, out of focus, or simply wrong.

At the same time, our image of God needs to be growing for we can never understand all of God. If the picture of God we have in our minds is unchanging, it can mean that our personal faith has become stagnant or worse. Our image and understanding of God has been changing since we were little children. Often, as we mature, our image of God becomes less physical and more spiritual. In the Bible we see a similar dynamic. God is portrayed in the early chapters of Genesis as strolling through the Garden of Eden and talking with Adam and Eve. Gradually as you move through the Old Testament, God becomes more mysterious and is pictured in less physical form. God dwells in the clouds that rest over Mount Sinai. Later, the prophets declare that God is not only the God of Israel, but the God of all nations and even the universe.

**“Our Father,”** that's two words, shall we press on? The phrase “Who art in heaven” isn't included in Luke's Gospel so we're not going to deal with it this morning. The next phrase is **hallowed be your name**. Holy be, praise be, revered be your name. If we come into the presence of a very important person like the President of the United States or the Prime Minister, or monarch of some country we might stand, bow, curtsy, or salute – depending on the custom of the nation and the circumstance; but when we come into the presence of God, we fall on our knees or our faces. We express respect to other people or the office they hold. We express adoration and worship to God alone.

**The first petition of the Lord's Prayer is an invitation to praise.** Jesus is teaching us that our prayers are to be made in the spirit of adoration. We pray to a God we love and adore. To pray that God's name might be hallowed, or held to be very special, takes us back to the Ten Commandments which warns us to treat God's name with the respect it deserves. **Exodus 20:7** says, ***“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.”*** We hallow God's name and adore God by giving of ourselves and by how we live our lives. The name of the Lord can either be enhanced or diminished by our conduct. Part of examining our lives is asking the question, “Are there any areas in

my life where I may be taking the Lord's name in vain, diminishing the reputation of God by my behavior? At home? School? Work? Church, When I watch TV or go online?"

**We hallow God's name by putting God first in our lives.** Our son Greg is graduating from seminary next month and his ordination council will be here at BBC in two weeks. When Greg and Nathan were little, we would all say the Lord's Prayer together before the boys went to sleep for the night. We also taught them actions that represented the words being said. One time Jill was putting Greg to sleep in his room after she had said the Lord's Prayer with both boys in Nathan's room. But Greg, who wasn't quite three years old, wanted to say it in his room – like he always did. Jill said the prayer a little quicker, without all the actions because it was getting late. Greg stopped her and said, "*We didn't do the hallowed part*" as he bent his head down. Greg's favorite part of the Lord's Prayer was the "*Hallowed be thy name*" when he'd get on his knees, close his eyes, and with outstretched arms, bend his head to the bed. We couldn't miss the Hallowed part. Jesus doesn't want us to miss it either.

Prayer, as Jesus taught it, is an act of communion with God. The object of prayer is not to obtain gifts from God like a cosmic vending machine, but to develop and deepen a relationship, to surrender to the presence of God; to learn the Lord's will and to bring our life into harmony with it. The difference in the approach to prayer that many people have versus the approach of adoration suggested by Jesus in the Lord's Prayer is simple to illustrate. Say a parent comes home from a trip and when he or she arrives at the door a child comes running and asks, "*What did you bring me?*" Then one day the same parent comes home from a trip, and the child comes running and say, "*I'm so glad to see you!*" These words uttered spontaneously from a child and without any prompting or planning, much to the surprise and delight of a parent, reveal the kind of spirit Jesus is advocating for in the Lord's Prayer. They express a genuine gladness at being together again. We don't come to God in prayer to see what God has brought us today, at least not at first. First, we express our simple delight in God's presence. Jesus was dedicated to the hallowing of God's name by doing God's will. It's good to hallow our Father's name in prayer, but even better to do so in our lives. Our lives are the truest expression of our prayer of adoration and gratitude.

**Let's Pray:** Our Father, hallowed be your name. Our Father, remind us of our connection to all your other children no matter how different we may be from each other. Our Father, we thank you for the love, nurture, protection, and care that you have for every single one of us, even before we acknowledge ourselves to be your children. Our Father, hallowed be your name in all times and places, in our hearts and minds, in our speech and actions, in how we treat our family, our friends, total strangers, even our enemies. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus who is our model and example in prayer and in all things. Amen.

### **Questions for Reflection or Discussion**

1. If you know the Lord's Prayer, when and where did you learn it or who taught it to you?
2. If you pray the Lord's Prayer, when do you usually pray it?
3. In no version of the Lord's Prayer is the singular used; there is no "my" or "mine;" it's all "our" and "us." What does that teach us about our faith and about our praying?
4. It is hard to overstate the importance in our prayers of our conception of the God to whom we're praying. What do you think is the significance of Jesus encouraging us to pray to God as Father?
5. Is there an image, term, or word for God (Father, Almighty, Merciful, Holy, etc.) that you find most helpful when you pray? Does the language you use for God in prayer vary depending on your situation and even the type of praying you're doing?
6. What does it mean to you to "hallow" God's name? How do you hallow God's name in your life?