

# Our Father in Heaven

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Date: 31 January 2016

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, Watermark. All right. I love you guys. Those are some of the university students. All right.

Yeah, if you don't know me, my name is Alfie, and I help out with the university ministry here at Watermark, reaching out to HKU. And today is actually quite an exciting Sunday for me, because I think for the first time in four or five years, my whole family is in a church service together.

And that's really exciting. So, please come and say hi and make them feel awkward.

You know, if you've heard stories about my dad, you can ask him if they really are true. My dad, my mom, my sister, we all live here in Hong Kong.

But I don't see my parents that often. Usually what happens is, after about the third week, my dad will send me a text message and say, you know, your mother misses you.

[ 1 : 04 ] And so I know it's time to muster up the effort to get on the bus and go out into the middle of nowhere to visit them. But thankfully, you know, I get to communicate with my parents in other ways.

You know, just with my telephone, you know, I can send text messages. I can call them. I can, you know, WhatsApp them. I can FaceTime them. If I'm really fancy, I can, like, find a website and order some flowers and send it to them.

There are many ways in which I can communicate with them. But not all of them are really quite, like, being there face-to-face and seeing them and touching them.

You know, I really wish I could do that more often. And I tell them, you know, if they ever move, you know, closer to the island, then maybe I'll consider living with them. That hasn't happened yet.

But I think many of us feel like that when it comes to relating with God. Because we know he's there, but he seems a bit far off.

[ 2 : 03 ] It's kind of hard to get to. And we know we're supposed to pray, but we've been taught about prayer, but our experience of it doesn't match up with what we've been taught, what we want to expect.

You know, we feel like we're sending an email that never leaves the computer. Or, you know, we're sending a text message, and, you know, we're waiting for a ply that's going to come, you know, floating in a bottle, and we have to be at the beach at the right time to find it.

And, you know, I think that even for people who have been Christians for a long time, the idea of what prayer is is a bit of a mystery.

And we have lots of questions about prayer, questions that we ask other people, questions that we ask God about prayer. You might ask God, are you there?

Do you hear me? Am I good enough? Have I done enough good things for you to answer my prayer? Am I saying the right words? Am I formal enough?

[ 3 : 03 ] Am I kneeling the right way? Do I keep my eyes closed or open? You might ask, God, I'm sorry that I keep falling asleep when I'm trying to pray.

You might ask, what's the formula? What's the series of words that I need to say to make sure that God hears me? Sometimes we're angry at God and we don't want to pray.

Is it okay to pray to God when we're angry? Can we express what's going on in our hearts to God? Even if it means using a few, you know, naughty words? How can we be expected to pray without ceasing?

Why do you tell us to do that? I think there's so many questions about prayer that I don't even know the answers to that many people ask each other, they ask of God about prayer.

What is prayer? What does it mean? How does it work? How can we talk to this amazing, huge God?

[ 4 : 14 ] You know, I think I could go on asking different questions about prayer. And, you know, a lot of them are usually along the theme of, you know, what is prayer? What am I doing while I'm praying? How does it work?

And the second part is, does God care? Does God love us? Today we're going to be starting a series for the next couple of weeks on prayer.

Myself and a couple of other preachers, we're going to be going through the Lord's Prayer one bit at a time. And we're going to try and talk and unwrap this idea of prayer. In fact, this is a focus that we'll be doing across Watermark for the next couple of weeks.

You'll see that even the prayer that we do before the service is a little bit different. So I encourage you to come early, come 1010, it starts at 1015, and get involved with that.

Also, we're going through other stuff in our community group. So if you're not in a community group, join a community group. You're not going to want to miss this journey that we're taking as a church in unwrapping prayer.

[ 5 : 19 ] Now, as we've been talking about why we want to do this focus, we've kind of come up with different goals of what we hope to achieve through this series in prayer.

There are three of them, and the first is that, it's right here, that we want to teach an attitude of prayer, not a form of prayer.

We don't want Watermark to end up two months from now with everyone praying the exact same way. But we do want Watermark to be a church where people are coming with the right attitude before God, before their Heavenly Father.

We want to, the second goal is we really want to encourage you guys to be praying out of a relationship with a loving Heavenly Father that is based in reality, that we're not, you know, praying into some, you know, unknown spiritual air, but that we have a relationship with a real Heavenly Father.

Lastly, we want Watermark to be a church that prays more expansively, not just praying at mealtimes and when we're in trouble, but to pray often, to pray all the time, not just to pray about ourselves, but about our community, to pray about God's kingdom.

[ 6 : 35 ] We want us to be a church that's praying about more than just asking, but also in thanksgiving and praise and a confession.

All right, we want Watermark, we want to teach you guys an attitude of prayer, not a form. We want to encourage you to pray because of a relationship with your Heavenly Father. and we want you to pray more and more expansively.

And so, even as you're in community groups and in this prayer time, as you're thinking about prayers, you're listening to these sermons, look out for some of these things. How is our relationship with God coming out? How are we encouraged to pray more expansively?

Now, before we start, really, we should have a definition for prayer. Now, as many people as you ask, you'll have a definition for prayer. At a community group yesterday, my community group was talking about this, and, you know, everyone has a slightly different idea of what prayer is.

And as many books as you read, you'll also find different definitions, except for one book that I read where he quoted another guy. So, two books, same definition. All right. But, I'm glad I get to go first because I get to pick the definition of prayer, and everyone else has to follow that.

[ 7 : 51 ] No, no, no, I'm joking. Oh, really, we sat down as a team and we talked and we prayed and we discussed. And we tried to figure out a good definition that would capture prayer.

All right. Even after we settled on this, there was still discussion about, ooh, should we change it? But we're going to go with this. And we hope that, at least for this time, that this definition will help us understand and begin thinking about what prayer is.

And so, we'll put it up here. And it says that prayer is a child calling out to their loving, heavenly father in response to him reaching down to them.

prayer is a child calling out to their loving, heavenly father in response to them, to him reaching down to them.

Today, I'm going to be focusing on our relationship with God as we look at the first couple of lines in the Lord's Prayer. prayer. In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus tells the people to pray like him.

[ 8 : 57 ] And Matthew chapter 6, you'll find is right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is here and he's gathered his disciples and his followers and he's telling them about how to live their lives.

And he makes some pretty big asks of them and he tells them that they need to turn the other cheek, they need to walk the extra mile, that they should love their enemies. He asks difficult things of them and at the end, he gets to the gist of it and he says that all of our lives we're living before God.

Everything that we do is before God and he wants us to live our lives in the presence of God. And so when we come to looking at the Lord's Prayer, we're trying to figure out how is it that as God's people in the presence of God do we talk to him?

How do we call out to our Heavenly Father if our lives are being lived in his presence? Now, Jesus uses the idea of Father.

God is our Heavenly Father to describe the way in which we address God. And, you know, I think everyone has a different idea of what a father is based on our experience with our own earthly fathers and those begin to shape the way that we look at God.

[10:20] Now, some of us have good experiences and some of us have bad experiences. And even in the course of our lives, our relationships with our fathers change. You know, if you're younger, then, you know, your fathers are paying the rent and they're giving you food and clothing and they're paying your school fees even though you'd wish they'd rather not.

all right? And maybe if you're a bit older, your parents are dependent on you and you are caring for them and you're providing and taking care of them.

You know, I think each of us has such different experiences. I was talking with my brother the other day about an experience that I had had with my dad and he looked at me with this blank expression because even though we lived in the same house, he was completely oblivious to my struggle with my dad at that point in time.

Even in the same household and experiences of fathers are different. You know, I think I had a fairly good relationship with my dad growing up except when I was 11, 13, 16, and 20.

All right? Everything else was great. Those were some rough years. But even as I talk with different people in this congregation, I realize that you guys have had many different experiences.

[11:37] many of you have had difficult experiences with abusive fathers or absent fathers, fathers who didn't love you or didn't know how to love you.

You know, I think, as I look out here, I know that, you know, some of you don't love your fathers and you find it hard to think about how do we love our Heavenly Father?

How do we love our God when our earthly father has disappointed us and failed us in so many ways?

You know, my hope, Watermark, is that as we're looking at these passages that we will get to see and we'll form a different picture of our father, that we will see our Heavenly Father as good and beautiful and amazing and loving and perfect, that even my good relationship with my father doesn't compare to the amazing Heavenly Father that we have in God.

So, how do we pray? Right at the beginning, Jesus says, you'll find it in verse 9, he says, pray then like this, our Father in heaven.

[13:08] Now, the Bible doesn't give us the reaction of his disciples, but I think that the disciples would have been surprised, would have been shocked that Jesus was calling God his Father.

And it's interesting because so much of Jewish life and culture was about God being with them. You know, when they were wandering in the wilderness, the tabernacle, the tent where God rested was right in the middle of their camp.

God was close to them. Even when their temple is in the middle of their city, their entire lives revolved around being close. But the Jewish people were hooked on this idea of a transcendent God, a holy God, a God that is big and marvelous and untouchable.

Not that God isn't those things, but God is also a God who is close. A God who is near. And I think for us, even that is a big shift.

Trying to think about God who is holy and amazing. A God who is our savior. A God who is the creator. But he is also our Father.

[14:20] Father. You know, I think the Bible tells us about the kind of father that God is. In Ephesians 3, it says that God is able to do far more than we ever imagined.

In Romans 8, it tells us that he adopts us as his children. And he gives us a spirit to remind us of that. In Matthew chapter 7, we have this interesting, it's right after the Lord's Prayer, he says that, you know, which of you, as a father, as an earthly father, gives your child a stone when he asks for

bread or a snake when he asks for fish?

He says, if it's earthly fathers, you know what is a good gift and what is a bad gift. How much more does our heavenly father know what is a good gift to give us?

If you look through the Bible, this is a story of God's amazing love. In its pages, you'll see the love of a father for his children.

You'll see how God loves Joseph in his prison cell and uses him not only to save Egypt, but to save his family.

[ 15 : 33 ] We see how God, as a father, loves his firstborn son, Israel, and calls him out of Egypt and out of slavery. The relationship of God to his children is one that is surrounded by this amazing, holy love.

But us, we have this poor, broken image of what a father is like. We have this incomplete picture of what a father ought to be.

And even if we try to imagine what our perfect father would be like, it wouldn't come close to what God, our father, is really like.

Imagine you're a villager. You're living in this island and there is no one else. There's no other island within a thousand miles.

And one day, as you're looking up at the sky, you see the moon. Yeah, there we go. You see the moon and you think, man, the moon is amazing because it's this little plate.

[ 16 : 45 ] It's this plate of ice cream in the sky. You know, how big is that? You know, maybe two feet wide and it's attached to this curtain that moves across the sky day and night.

And sometimes we see the moon, sometimes we see the sun, but on this curtain is attached this plate of ice cream. But these strange people come and they have these little, you know, devices with glass and metal and they're playing with them all the time and they come and they tell you, oh no, that's not ice cream up there.

But it's actually this huge rock. It's this huge rock in the sky. The moon isn't what you thought it was. It is something completely different.

It's not a two feet wide plate of ice cream. It is a giant million mile wide rock. I don't know if it's a million miles wide. But it's a huge rock.

That's the way that I think we, our view of our fathers and our view of our godly father is different like that. It's like comparing a plate of ice cream to the moon.

[ 17 : 52 ] They're not the same in any kind of way. The moon of the big rock is actually far more exciting than a plate of ice cream which is gone in a couple of minutes.

And that's what it's like. We have this flawed picture of God, of our father. You know, we have this father who is good, who is perfect, who is loving, who knows his children, who gives good gifts to his children.

We have this father that throughout the history of the Bible is calling and bringing his people towards him and inviting him into this relationship of love. And I think the love of a father is something very special, very unique.

I'm not a father, but I have some friends who are. And I was talking to some of them this week. And one of them was telling me that he started to love his child the moment he found out his wife was pregnant.

The moment he found out his wife was pregnant, he loved his child. They didn't have a name. They didn't know its gender yet. They didn't know what it would look like. But he loved his child.

[ 19 : 04 ] Right? And as his child grew and became cute, you know, he loved his child. He loved his child's poop. Right? But the child grew older and became whiny and moany and, you know, complaining.

And he still loves his child even though he was frustrated. And, you know, God loves us in that same way. Except, you know, God loves us from before eternity began.

The Bible says that he knew us. He knew his children from before creation. And before creation, he loved his children who are yet to be.

And I think a lot of us, we spent so much time and effort trying to please our Heavenly Father. You know, we relate to him like we do our earthly fathers.

We try to do good things so that we'll be rewarded for it. We try to avoid bad things so we don't get in trouble. You know, we're always worried about whether our Father really loves us.

[ 20 : 19 ] Imagine the love of our Heavenly Father not just while you're alive, but in all of eternity. we look at the story of the prodigal son where we see this picture of God's love for his children where this son insults his father, wishes him dead, and says, give me my inheritance.

And after squandering it back, he comes and he wants to earn his father's love. And he says, let me work as a slave, as a servant. I don't deserve to be your son. But the father says, no.

He says, you're my son. I love you. Come. We're going to kill the fattened calf. We're going to have a feast. Here's a ring. Here's a cloak. Here are sandals for your feet. I love you.

And the watermark, our Heavenly Father loves us. And it doesn't matter where you've been, what you've done, how far you've wandered, how deep you find yourself in sin.

Our Heavenly Father loves us. He wants to be close to us. So when we come and we see these words, our Father, I think we need to learn how to put aside our pictures of our broken, fallen, earthly fathers and look to this amazing Heavenly Father who loves and is calling and bringing us and inviting us into a relationship with Him.

[ 21 : 53 ] inviting us to call Him Father. You know, our childness, our sonship, our daughtership isn't something that we can break by sin or insult.

It's not something that death can even hurt. our relationship with our Father ought to be one where we know we can rely on Him and trust Him.

that we can call on Him because He is a Father who through Scripture and through our lives is calling to us, is reaching out to us and asking us to call Him our Father.

Father. Now, I guess the next question is how do we know that He is our Father? And Jesus says our Father in Heaven but Jesus is Jesus.

How can we know that God is our Father? In Romans, in Romans chapter 8, we learn about the spirit of adoption which God gives out.

[ 23 : 20 ] The Bible says that when we trust in Jesus to repair our relationship with God, when we trust in Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins, that we receive the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8, He calls it the spirit of adoption that witnesses to our hearts that we are children of God. If you have faith in Jesus, you are a child of God.

And sometimes people say that everything and everybody is a child of God but a tree is not a child of God. It is created by God but it's not His child. If you, if you're not a Christian believer then God isn't your Father.

But what the Bible says is that to become God's child is to accept Christ and His sacrifice for us.

And you know, that's what Franklin was talking about in communion. His body, His blood that repairs our broken relationship with our Heavenly Father and makes us His children.

[ 24 : 31 ] It says that the Spirit of God witnesses in our spirit and calls out Abba, Father. Abba, Father. that's our Father. Now, even our prayers however, as we relate to our Heavenly Father, as we come to Him and we have this picture of Him as our perfect Heavenly Father who is far away in His heavenly throne but is also close and here with us.

You know, sometimes these prayers get tangled up in sin when we don't approach our Father the right way. And we see that in verses 5-9 where God, Jesus, gives two examples of how not to pray.

He talks about Pharisees who are so excited about their supreme holiness that they can't wait to get to the synagogue, that they stop in the street corners to pray where everyone can see them.

And Jesus says don't pray like that because they're not praying for God, they're praying for themselves. They're praying for their approval from other people.

And He talks about the pagans who will repeat the same phrase and mantra over and over and over and over again in hopes that God would hear them. He says don't pray like that because God is your Father.

[ 25 : 55 ] He knows you. He loves you. Even before you ask what you need, He knows it. You know, I read these sometimes and I think, well, this doesn't really apply to me because I'm not really a hypocrite.

I'm not really a Pharisee. And then I stop and I think and I realize, oops, I am. Because I know that, you know, I think growing up in church, you get to hear some amazing prayers.

There's some people who pray and it's almost like poetry. There's one old man that I really love and to this day he prays in the King James Version and it's fantastic. But, you know, I like, every now and then I'll hear this phrase or this ending to a prayer and I think, ooh, that sounds really nice.

I'm going to start praying that and when people hear me praying they're going to say, oh, Alfie, thank you so much for praying. I was so blessed by it. And here I am thinking, yes, I am a good prayer. But no, I'm not.

I'm a terrible prayer because those prayers aren't for God. They're for me. They're for the approval that I want from other people. And then when I go, when I'm alone in my room, my prayers then turn into the prayers of a pagan because there's no one there to listen to me.

[ 27 : 11 ] There's no one there who's going to watch me. And so now all my insecurities I don't have to hide. And you know what? When I'm alone, I'm afraid because I don't trust that God really loves me.

I don't trust that God wants to provide for me. I don't trust that God cares for me. And so I'll pray and I'll start, you know, and I'll spend about 10 minutes telling God how amazing He is and how beautiful He is.

And then when it comes to asking about what is on my heart, you know, I only ask about 30% because I think if I ask too much, then God just won't give me anything. All right?

But I think that's praying like a pagan because I'm not seeing God as my Father. I'm seeing God as this miserly old gentleman who I'm trying to convince that I deserve something from Him.

The Bible says, no, the Bible says that He is our Father, that He loves us, that He has great gifts for us, and that when we pray, we don't have to repeat babbling phrases, that we can come to God and simply open our hearts and say, Father, I need help.

[ 28 : 25 ] Father, I need you. I think that one of the most difficult things, and I spent a week praying that I would kind of get this tension right, is that while God is our Heavenly Father, this Creator, this Rule of the Earth, He's also close like a Father.

You know, as humans, we're very good at extremes, and I think we can think of God as our earthly Father who is close by, and we can come to Him at any time, and it's like, hey, what's up?

I need this, thanks, and get on with our life. Or, we see God as this faraway, holy God who we can't reach and who we are afraid to come before.

The Bible says that God is both of these things. That's why when you're seeing the first two lines in the Lord's Prayer, it's our Father in Heaven, our Father who is close and loving.

Hallowed be your name. Let your name be made holy. Let me honor your name because you are a great and amazing God.

[ 29 : 52 ] How is it that we keep this tension? This Father that loves us and calls us His children is the same Father that tore down the walls of Jericho. The Father that tells us to call Him Child, to call Him Abba.

is the same Father that flooded the earth when Noah built the ark. I think that one of the most difficult things and something that I'm trying to learn is how do I pray keeping both of God's characteristics in mind?

This holy, amazing, huge God and this close Father. how do we hallow God's name?

How do we make God's name holy? How do we honor God's name? And I think when Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, that He teaches them to honor God's name in the way that they pray and in the way that reflects in our lives lived out.

God's God's name when we're concerned about His kingdom. When we say Your kingdom come, we're not just saying it, that our lives reflect that in the things that we do.

[ 31 : 15 ] That when we pray, we honor God's name when we confess our sins by striving to live holy, righteous lives. We honor our Father when we pray that we forgive the debts of others when we go out and we do forgive and love the people around us.

You know, I grew up with an African father and I think that taught me something a little bit about reverence because as a child, when we were playing, if my dad called for us, we turned up immediately.

None of this like, oh, I'll be there in a minute. You know, if dad called, you were there. It doesn't matter what level in the video game you were, it doesn't matter if you were texting your girlfriend, whatever. You were there.

And I think, you know, even today that still happens. Dad called, yes, I'm there. But that's the way we show reverence to our Father, that we do the things that he tells us, that we are loving to people as he asks us to be.

That we honor him when we follow through on the prayers that we're praying. Irreverence is not to do that. It's to come to God and expect him to give us things left, right, and center while we spend the rest of our lives ignoring his commands.

[ 32 : 49 ] You know, irreverence is throwing his name and reputation in the mud. Irreverence is treating God like a genie who is there at our beck and call to give us the things that we need.

Irreverence is having our holy time with God and living the rest of our lives in an unholy manner. prayer. The Sermon on the Mount, the Lord's Prayer, is not just about the holy moments in our lives.

We don't just come to God as our Father in community group and at church. But we come to him in all of our life, in our work, in our relationships, in our relaxation, with our money, in our faith, with our forgiveness.

all of these things. These are things that we honor our God with. We show our Heavenly Father that he is holy when we honor him in all of our lives.

[ 34 : 05 ] When we say, hallowed be your name, does that show up in our lives? When we say, our Father in Heaven, is that reflected in our prayers?

You know, this Lord's Prayer is more than just a script, something to say that will let us know this is the way to pray. Pray it and everything is great. But it's a call for us to live lives, to pray prayers that are different because of our relationship with God.

You know, for some of us today, we don't like to come before God. We don't like to call him Father because of the hurt we've experienced from our own fathers.

Look to God. See the kind of Father that he is. See the perfect, loving Father. that he is.

The great Father who brings his children close and says, you're my child.

[ 35 : 30 ] It doesn't matter how you are. I love you. I think for some of us today, we're not sure that God is our Father. And let me invite you to come and step into this journey and this family and this relationship with your Heavenly Father.

To call on him as a child. To trust in Jesus and become his heir, the heir to his kingdom with Jesus. others of us, I think we know we're God's child and we don't have that relational struggle.

But when we live our lives, we don't honor the God we claim to be praying to when we pray our Father in heaven. Amen. I want you guys, I want all of us, it doesn't matter where you are, to come and marvel at this.

That the God that created the heavens and the earth, the God that sent his own son to die for us, would call us his child and call us to call him Father.

[ 36 : 50 ] God I've gone on for a while and I think I could go for much longer. But there is so much in prayer.

There's so much in the Lord's prayer for us to learn. And we're not all going to do it today, but really let me encourage you one more time to join a community group this week and join the study in prayer.

Come to Watermark for the next couple of weeks and hear how prayer changes our lives. What does it mean for Christ's kingdom to come? What does it mean for us to have our daily bread? What does it mean for God to lead us out of temptation? Watermark, when we see our Father as heavenly and holy and also close and loving, when we pray in wanting his kingdom because it's his glory in our inheritance, when we pray trusting him because he is our Father, when we pray trusting his forgiveness, when we pray relying on his protection from evil, when we pray to our Father we can rest and be secure because nothing can separate us from his love.

Nothing on earth and in heaven can separate us from the love of our Father who is in heaven. Let's pray together.

[ 38 : 29 ] Dearest heavenly Father, you are amazing. You are amazing and great and holy and I'm amazed that you invite us to call you Father, to be a part of this close relationship with you and I confess that I don't always come with this attitude of awe and reverence and love and security.

I confess that I project broken images of my Father onto you. I confess that I ignore you as my perfect heavenly Father.

God, I thank you that you are loving and forgiving and I thank you for the comfort of knowing that you hear us, that you love us, that you see us, that you give us good and perfect gifts.

Help us Father to pray to you, to pray to you often, to pray to you earnestly. to pray plainly and simply because you are our Father in heaven, to pray in reverence and in confidence because your

name is holy.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 40 : 04 ] Amen. Amen. Amen.