

Introduction

Today and next week, I’m going to preach about the most celebrated prayer that has ever been uttered – one that people use on a wide range of occasions from worship services to weddings to funerals. I’m referring of course to The Disciple’s Prayer. It’s true that almost everyone knows it as The Lord’s Prayer but that isn’t precise. That designation goes to the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17. John 17 is The Lord’s Prayer. Matthew 6:9-13 is The Disciple’s Prayer.

Luke 11:1-4 explains why it is. His disciples, having observed Jesus pray, were so impressed that they asked Him, **“Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.”** They were asking him to induct them into the practice of powerful prayer. He did just that by teaching them and us the same prayer we have here in 6:9-13. That’s why, in reality, it’s more a disciple’s prayer than it is the Lord’s.

Because it is our prayer, we need to take it seriously. The only way we can progress in learning how to pray, in fact, is to understand and use it. Using it doesn’t mean simply repeating it. That’s the point of verses 7-8. Prayer isn’t a mechanism that’s made effective by saying the same words over and over again. Using The Disciple’s Prayer, therefore, doesn’t mean just repeating it. It means staying within its principles instead. That’s what it’s really all about – principles or guidelines of powerful and effective prayer. Those principles teach us how to talk lovingly and intelligently to God. So let’s learn them, this week and next, by examining each line in The Disciples Prayer.

“Our Father”

I start with its opening words in verse 9, **“Our Father.”** This is the address part of the prayer and it’s vital. We must not neglect it.

An analogy explains its function. You and I almost always address people when we speak to them. We call them by some name. Doing so indicates we wish to speak to them in particular. If I see Robert Vrabel

in the narthex and wish to speak to him, I don't say, "**Hey you.**" I let him know I wish to speak to him by addressing him. I say, "**Robert.**" Well, we should do the same with God. Every prayer we pray should begin with you and me addressing Him. Addressing Him is essential because it does two things.

First, it distinguishes praying from worrying. About a week before I took the bar exam, I was pondering the gravity of it all and said suddenly under my breath, "**I'm going to be humiliated and bankrupt if I fail this bar exam.**" My wife Jill, who was in another room, heard my mumbling and asked, "**Are you talking to yourself?**" "**No,**" I replied, "**I'm praying.**" But I wasn't. I wasn't praying. I was worrying out loud and there's a big difference between the two. Many people worry silently or out loud and confuse that with praying. Addressing God though clears up the confusion. We know we're praying, not worrying, when we do.

Addressing God does a second thing. It established the context in which we're relating to Him.

That's true in our human relationships isn't it? How we address people conditions what happens and is said after that. That's especially true if the relationship is an intimate one. My wife, for instance, can call me "**Sweetie**" or she can call me "**Bob,**" which I dislike. Which one she calls me conditions what happens and is said after that. I know by experience that what happens and is said after "**Sweetie**" is almost always a whole lot better than what happens and is said after "**Bob.**"

It's the same with God. How we address Him establishes the context and tone of our conversation with Him. If we're dying and afraid, we can address Him as "**My Good Shepherd.**" If things are going badly and we're frustrated, we can address Him as "**Daddy.**" If we want to be intimate with Him, we can address Him as "**my Everlasting Lover**" or "**My love, my honey, my harp.**" If we're overwhelmed by a sense of His greatness, we can address Him as "**Alpha and Omega, Almighty God.**" And so on. God has many titles and names you can use. You can learn them from the Bible, Christian literature, hymns, and a handout in the

narthex that Karen Coy compiled. However you do it, do it. Learn titles and names of God and use them to address Him in prayer.

“Who Is in the Heavens”

After The Disciple’s Prayer addresses God, it then locates Him, **“who is in the heavens.”** Almost all English versions of the Bible translate the Greek word as a singular, **“heaven,”** but it isn’t. It’s plural.

It’s important that we know that. Most people, including Christians, think of heaven as being way out there some place. Consequently, **“Our Father, who is in heaven”** means **“Our Father who is way out there some place.”** That point of view is problematic though because it makes God seem distant and impersonal to us. That in turn makes praying fervently and effectively psychologically impossible.

But again, the Greek word is plural not singular. It’s **“heavens”** not **“heaven.”** First century Jews believed that there are seven heavens, ranging all the way from the seventh, furthest from us, to the first, nearest to us. This first heaven, in fact, encompasses the space immediately surrounding our bodies. The message then is clear. God is in all of the heavens, including the first. **“Who is in the heavens,”** therefore, means **“who is right here with us.”** **“Our Father, the one who is face to face with us”** - that’s what Jesus is saying here.

Warm Up for Prayer

Now, grasp what we’re doing when we address and locate God. We’re properly orienting ourselves before Him and I can’t impress upon you enough the importance of that. The best prayers occur when we properly orient ourselves before God. Martin Luther called what I’m talking about **“warming up the heart”** for prayer. Just as we warm up our bodies to prepare them for exercising or playing, so we warm up our minds and hearts to prepare them for praying.

We warm up by doing two things. First, as addressing God implies, we fix our minds on Him. We bring aspects of His person and work

before our minds and ponder them. Second, as locating Him implies, we establish His gripping presence with us. We make ourselves aware that He isn't way out there some place but right here with us.

According to Martin Luther, the best way to do both of those things is by using Scripture. He suggested using Scripture **"as a lighter"** to warm up for prayer. What we do is choose a verse, a collection of verses, or a chapter about God's person, works, or presence. We then mull over or muse on the verse, verses, or chapter we've chosen. Doing that warms us up. It puts us in a frame of mind and heart that's conducive to praying. I would note that we can use the writings, hymns, and written prayers of God's familiar friends in the same way.

I can fix my mind on God, for instance, by choosing Colossians 1:15-17. I think about atoms. Each is comprised of a nucleus that contains protons and neutrons and that has electrons spinning around it. Atoms make up everything material in the universe including you and me. Well, Colossians 1:15-17 reveals the Jesus conceived the idea of atoms, created each and every one in the beginning, and keeps each and every one working the way it does. So I mull that over in my mind, which is soon boggled by the enormity of it all. I'm then ready to pray to the Master of Matter who has the power to do what I ask.

Or I can establish God's gripping presence with me by choosing Acts 17:28, **"in Him we live and move and exist."** I concentrate on the fact that God's presence fills the space around my body. Or more accurately, as verse 28 teaches, I'm literally immersed in His presence as a goldfish is immersed in water. It's an overwhelming reality that makes His presence vivid and real and I'm ready to pray.

You get the point. Prayer requires that we properly orient ourselves before God. We need to warm up for it by fixing our minds on Him and establish His gripping presence with us. It dramatically increases the fervency and effectiveness of our prayer life when we do.

"Hallowed Be Thy Name"

Having taught us to address and locate God, Jesus moves on to the substance of prayer. Five requests follow the address and location parts of The Disciple's Prayer and imply what that substance is. It's asking. The acclaimed British preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, "**Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the kingdom.**" These five requests confirm that he was right.

The first request (in verse 9) and the second (in verse 10) concern God's position in the human realm. I'm going to explain the first of those today and the second, along with the remaining three, next week.

The first request is "**Hallowed be Thy name.**" Names in the Bible are never just names. They're synonymous with the person's nature or character. They actually partake of the reality to which they refer. So, to ask that God's name will be hallowed is to ask that He Himself will be.

The Greek word translated "**hallowed**" is translated "**sanctified**" in other verses. It means to locate something in a separate and special kind of reality. To hallow God, therefore, means to esteem Him, to hold Him in high regard. It means to treasure and love Him. That's what we're asking here. It's that He will be esteemed (held in high regard) in the human realm. If we ourselves treasure and love our heavenly Father, we'll just naturally desire and ask Him that others will too.

Dallas Willard describes the first request well: "**It is the prayer of an adoring child, somewhat jealous for its parent.**" He goes on to explain it this way. The parents of children are the foundation of their existence. In a real sense, their parents are their world. They think they're the greatest and best as a result and jealously adore them. That posture is absolutely essential to their well-being in the early stages of their lives - which explains why children are so wounded when someone dishonors or attacks their parents. Why do you think we told our childhood enemies, "**Your mother wears combat boots.**" We knew how much it would hurt. I got into more than one fight over that phrase when I was growing up, on both the giving and receiving ends of it.

The dynamics are the same with God and us. He's our heavenly

Father and the very foundation of our existence. He is our world. We think He's the greatest and best as a result and jealously adore Him, which is why it hurts so much when others don't.

That's certainly the case isn't it? Most people think our heavenly Father isn't the greatest and best. We can hear it in the way they use His names. One of the most frequently used declarations in the English language, for instance, is "**Oh my God.**" It's a staple in human conversation. The problem is that the people using it aren't addressing God; they're denigrating Him. Remember the old child's prayer that begins, "**God is great, God is good.**" But it's obvious most people don't think that or they wouldn't be using His names the way they do.

And that wounds us doesn't it? Every time we hear people say, "**Oh my God,**" "**God damn,**" "**Jesus Christ,**" and so on, it's like them saying to us, "**Your mother wears combat boots.**"

That explains why this is the first request in The Disciple's Prayer. Because we think God's the greatest and best and adore Him, the thing we want most is for others to do the same. So that's exactly what we pray. I know I do. In fact, this request, and the next, are the ones I'm the most fervent about. I pray constantly and ask that God will be esteemed (highly regarded) in the human realm. That the world in general and individuals in particular will treasure and love Him. I know many secularists and backslidden Christians. So, I pray in detail and ask God to work in their minds, hearts, and circumstances in ways that will cause them to hold Him in higher regard than they do.

Conclusion

Those then are three principles of prayer. #1 – Address God before we pray. #2 – Locate God before we pray. And #3 – Ask first and foremost that God will be treasured and loved in the human realm. Charles Spurgeon once said, "**I'd rather teach one person to pray than ten people to preach.**" I think Jesus would too. So let's learn and use these and all principles of The Disciple's Prayer.