

Our Father

Series: Teach us to Pray

Date: 19 April 2020, 1st Sunday after Easter

Location: St George's Online

Texts: Luke 11:1-13; Galatians 3:26-4:7

On March 30, Jeanet Benzen, an academic from the university of Copenhagen published a paper called "In Crisis we pray." She showed that internet searches for prayer have skyrocketed. Her conclusion: we pray to cope with adversity.¹ I know I've been praying more in the last month or so! Coronavirus has thrown much of our world and our lives into chaos. So many of the things which we depended upon have been taken away. We're confronted with the reality of death. We're not in control. Life is fragile. And so we turn to God. This may be new for you. For others you've been coming to God for some time.

Our goal at this time as St George's has been to help people stay connected with God and with each other. Jesus' disciples asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray." He answered with what we call *The Lord's Prayer*, or the *Our Father*. We're going to learn from Jesus as we explore that prayer over the next 7 weeks. Prayer is the heartbeat of the Christian faith and experience. Prayer gives us a window into what Christianity is all about. I hope this series will help you grow if you're exploring the Christian faith or you've been a Christian for a long time.

Last year I was talking to some of guys attending Alpha. A couple of them compared prayer with meditation and mindfulness. I can see the similarities. Yes there is an inwardness, an attention, a calming of the mind. But there is a fundamental difference. For the Christian, prayer is about relationship. God has made us for relationship with him. He has created us to know him and to love him. The life blood of all relationships is communication. So when it comes to a relationship with God, he speaks to us primarily through his Word the Bible. And we speak to God through prayer.

If that's what prayer is, why do we find prayer so hard? Why don't we pray?

I suggest it's because we don't know or we forget who it is we're praying to. Who do we pray to? Jesus says we pray to *Our Father in heaven*. What does that mean?

There are 2 main ways in which we don't understand who it is who we're praying to.

First is that we only have a vague idea of who God is. We might think of God as some sort of cosmic spiritual force, or something that unites and pervades all things, or an ocean of being, or whatever. This is a very *impersonal* picture of God.

Second, we might picture God as a person, but see him as an infinitely bigger version of the bad authority figures we've experienced in our lives. The word Father itself may be unhelpful because of the failures of our own fathers. This is the picture of God as a cosmic tyrant and bully. He's certainly powerful, but is he good?

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<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/coronavirus-worry-sparks-searches-for-prayer-to-skyrocket-religious-coping>

https://www.dropbox.com/s/jc8vcx8qqdb84gn/Bentzen_religiosity_covid.pdf?dl=0

Jesus says when we pray we are to begin with the words *our Father in heaven*.

This tells us that the one we are praying to is not an impersonal force, but a person, *our Father in heaven*. John 1.18 says: *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*² This is why Jesus came: to make the Father known. He reveals the Father so that we might know him as *our Father*.

Jesus tells us what God is like.

“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Yes, our parents stuffed up. I have certainly stuffed up as a dad. But our Father in heaven is *good*. He loves us and he sent his Son to die for our sins so that we can be adopted as his children. John 1.12 says that when we believe in Christ we receive the right to become children of God. The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3.26: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*. And he goes on in 4.6

God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. 6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”

This is the incredible news at the heart of Christianity - that not only Jesus died for our sins, but that as we trust in him we're adopted as God's children. Now some people might ask “Why does Paul saying “sons” and not “children”? Is he being sexist? That question helps us see just how profound Paul's words are. Paul is saying that as we trust in Jesus, *we share in his very relationship with the Father as the divine Son*. *Abba* is the Aramaic word for *daddy* which is how Jesus himself speaks to his Father. And so God sends the Spirit of his Son, Jesus' very presence, into our hearts so that with Jesus we can call out *Abba, Father*.

And of course God is not just my Father, he is *our Father*. Jesus' draws us not only into a relationship with God, but also into a relationship with each other. This is why the church is God's family. We are sisters and brothers in Christ.

One of our favourite TV shows is *The Crown*. Season 1 is about the early life of queen Elizabeth II. Some of the most moving scenes are where the princesses Elizabeth and Margaret simply enjoy time with their father, King George VI. There's a whole lot of protocol and formality and distance that everyone has to go through to get an audience with the king. But they can just run past all of that into his arms - because they are his children. That's what being children of the king gets you - free access into his presence. And that's what you and I have in prayer. Free access to God's own throne room as his children. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians, *through [Jesus] we ... have access to the Father by one Spirit.*³ Will you come to him?

² John 1.18

³ Ephesians 2.18