

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Your Prayers Are Answered: Father in Heaven**  
Matthew 6: 9, Luke 11:2  
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*Pastor Mark Jeske*

You have a Father in heaven. Find out from Pastor Mike Novotny why that's such an awesome thing for you.

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One person called the Lord's Prayer the greatest martyr in Christian history because every Sunday it gets killed as people mumble and mindlessly rattle off the words.

But what if for you and for me, the Lord's Prayer was something much bigger and much better than that? What if it was the answer to so many of the cries of our heart; the longings that we feel in our soul? And what if the prayer was about your niece who just got her license and she's smiling for her picture but what she doesn't know is that there are millions of drivers that she's going to pass and they're all tempted to pull out their phones and check what the buzz means and just one accident could change her life forever. What if being delivered from evil and having daily bread was about stuff like that? And what if it was about the guy at work who just feels overwhelmed; like he's never good enough and his boss is mad and there's just pressure and expectations and some days it feels when he goes home like all he has is God and he prays, "God, hallowed be your name. Let your name and your presence and your approval of me be so big and so beautiful that even if it's all I have, that's enough for me to rejoice and have peace." What if it was about people's eternity and their present? What if it was about health and safety? What if it was about our kids and our best friends and our worst enemies? If that was the case, if that was on our heart, then we could never, ever, ever martyr the prayer. We'd have to pray it with passion. We'd have to stop for minutes after every phrase because so many things would come spilling out of our hearts.

And I think that's why Jesus taught it. When his disciples came to him and they said, "Jesus, teach us how to pray." He said, "Okay, I'll tell you how." And he gave them a prayer that survived 2,000 years of Christian history. Now, I wish I had time today to teach you every single line of that prayer. It's beautiful and it deserves hours of our attention but today, I just want to start with the very first words that Jesus taught; what some Christians call the "address" of the prayer. "Our Father in heaven." When we pray - either that prayer or any prayer - who are we talking with? Is it God, if you're out there? Is it some higher power? Is it a judge? Is it a king? No, no, no. Jesus said when we pray we should think, first of all, that the God is a father. Second, that God is our Father. And third, that God is our Father in heaven. Very creative, I know, but that's what we're going to cover today: A father who is our Father and our Father who is in heaven.

One quick disclaimer first: If you ever get mad at a pastor or a church for changing the Lord's Prayer - have you ever heard of these debates? "My church changed the Lord's Prayer." Do you

know who you really should be mad at? Jesus. Do you know he taught the Lord's Prayer in two different spots in the Bible, in Matthew 6 and in Luke 11, and guess what he did? He didn't use the same words. He said "debts" in one prayer and he said "sins" in another. He had extra lines in one version and he dropped them for another. So we're just going to avoid all the squabbles about the right way to pray the Lord's Prayer and we're going to focus on whether it's "Our Father who art in heaven," or "Our Father in heaven," on the meaning of those three words. Deal?

Alright, so let's start with that first idea; that God, the God that we pray to, is a father. Any parents here today? Yeah? Do you remember the first moment when you became a father or a mother? When you saw your child for the first time? I'll never forget it. The doctor said, "Grab a leg," and so I did. I learned that the days of, you know, the guys having cigars in the lobby, those were long gone. So I grabbed my wife's leg. I got to know her in a way that I've never quite known her before and minutes later, I was sobbing. I mean, we didn't know what we were going to have. I always thought I wanted sons until that moment when this little baby girl came into the world and I lost it and I had never cried like that before and I'm not sure if I had ever loved like that before

What did you think that God thought about you? That's crazy, huh? That to God, you're not just a servant. You're not just a citizen of his kingdom. You're not just a subject and he's the king sitting on the throne. Jesus said, "When you pray, I want you to remember that God is a father." And the way parents love their kids, the way that I love my daughters, that's just an earthly love; that is so small. Can you imagine the expression on God's face when you got up this morning? And there he was present in your room, watching over his child. What would happen to your relationship with God if you remembered he was not a king or a judge but a dad? A father?

And then I think about what fathers do. If I had to write a job description for a good dad, it would be this: Show up and sacrifice. If you're a parent or your brother or sister is a parent, you know that so much of parenting is showing up and sacrificing. You show up at the game, you show up the practice. It's not the best, you know, concert or recital that you've ever heard but you go because you love your kid. You show up. You go to the swimming lessons, you go to the school play; good parents show up. And then they sacrifice. I read a story on USA Today yesterday. Do you know how much it costs to raise the average kid in America these days? Close your ears if you're strapped for your budget. Over \$233,000 a kid. If I only would have known when I held that little girl, a quarter million dollars she was going to cost me! But I've learned, that's the small sacrifice. ESPN? Sacrifice. Disney Channel is what happens in the home. The convertible you wanted to get? Sacrifice. The Town and Country, the minivan you're probably going to be driving for the next decade plus? The free weekends you thought you had? Sacrifice, as you go and you give and you give and you give. Did you have a dad like that? Who showed up and he sacrificed?

I know not everyone does but my father was just like that. I played college soccer at this little school and we had fun but to be honest, the soccer wasn't that great. And we had this like epically brutal trip in northern Minnesota we had to take each year. And we always played the conference champs and they always murdered us and it wasn't even close and we'd drive up and try to sleep in the van and I remember one year, we get up there, far, far from school, far, far

from home, and it's raining and it's late fall and it's just miserable and it's cold. The home team has a smattering, maybe single digit fans, and I get out on the field and guess who's there? My dad. All by himself, standing in the corner of the field. He drives five hours to see some mediocre soccer, miserable weather, where his son will barely get a shot on goal, and he drives home. Because good dads show up and they sacrifice.

And what if you thought about God that way when you prayed? That he shows up? At your staff meeting, he shows up. On your morning commute, he shows up. When you're working through something tough in your family and your relationship but he's there at the table and he'll sacrifice, he'll give his time, he'll give his energy, he'll give his full attention when you pray, "In Jesus' name." How much would your love for God just explode in your heart if he wasn't just some distant higher power, he was a father who showed up and he sacrificed?

I love how the apostle John put it. He said, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us." And Paul kind of piggybacked on that; he said, "Through faith in Jesus, we may approach God with freedom and with confidence." You know, 500 years ago, Martin Luther loved that passage. When you pray to God, even though he's the God of heaven and earth and all the universe, you should run to him as shamelessly as a kid who's been loved by her dad runs into daddy's lap. You ever notice that? Like, if you had a great dad, I bet you asked him for the world and more. "Hey, dad, look at me. Look at me. Can we get this? Dad, can we buy that? Dad, can we get this?" again and again. I mean, it was shameless and it was unfair but you did because you knew you were loved. And Jesus said think of God like that. Nothing's too small for him. Your health, the tension you feel with someone at work, a bridge that's being burned in your family, the cancer that you're facing, the stress of being in a nursing home, of having a loved one lose their job and an uncertain future, God says, "It's nothing too big, nothing too small. I'm your dad. So pray." What a crazy thing Jesus said when he said this: "Pray our father."

The author J.I. Packer once said, "Drab thoughts of God make prayer dull." If God's just, you know, God, generic name, I'm not going to pray with passion. But if he's more than that, if he's a father, everything changes. Except, according to Jesus, God's not just a father, right? He is our father. You grammar lovers - there might be some of them here today - might know that "our" is a possessive pronoun. And it might not have meant much to you back in high school but when you pray, it should mean everything. I mean, if his father or her father or their father has the lake house, the generous pocketbook when he's buying ice cream, the timeshare down in Florida for spring break, well, good for them. But if our father has that - the generous heart, the blessing - then everything changes, right? Going back to John, he said, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God," and that is what we are. It's like John - who's what? A 90 year old man when he wrote that - he couldn't get over this. Like, "I'm a child of God! That's what I am." That's what we are as believers in Jesus. God is not just their father or his father or her father; he's our father.

And it just begs the question, how in the world did that happen? How did a guy like me get into a family like that? How did people like us end up in the royal family? And the Bible's answer to that is actually a really beautiful picture; it's the picture of adoption. You might think you know a bit about adoption. In our culture, we tend to adopt little children and, you know, sometimes a

man and his wife they can't have kids so they turn to adoption as another option. It happens in lots of different ways but that's normally our practice. But down in the ancient world, in ancient Roman culture, adoption didn't normally happen with babies but with adults. Not because a couple was infertile but because a man wanted to pass his inheritance and power to someone qualified. Ever heard of Caesar Augustus before? The guy who issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world? Did you know he was adopted? Julius Caesar was getting older, didn't have a person to pass his inheritance on to, so he adopted Caesar Augustus. He was looking for a man of strength and of power and of credibility; a man who had a great reputation. That's what adoption was. Which is crazy when you think that we were adopted into the family of God! And maybe you know the passages: When we came into this world, surely I was sinful from birth. I didn't come out bright and shiny and beautiful to God. Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh." There was something hostile in my heart to the Father and his rules. It wasn't impressive and it wasn't strong; it was weakness and it was sin and yet, what did God do? He adopted.

Galatians 4, this stunning verse, says, "But when a set time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship," because you are his sons, his children. God sent his spirit, the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." How do sinful people get adopted into the family of God? The simple answer is Jesus and grace. God sent his son into the world so that I can be a son of God. Jesus Christ was born of a woman so that women like many of you can be born again into God's family. So we wouldn't have to be outside this beautiful home and family of God, like peeking through the windows. We could have a seat at the side of God the Father himself. Because of spiritual adoption, God's not just a father, he's our father and he's yours.

I think the greatest proof of that is the fact that God is willing to get messy with us. I think that's really the key of knowing if like this parent is connected to this kid is when this kid makes a mess, who steps forward to clean it up? How many of you here have ever changed a diaper before in your life? Yeah, lots of you, most of you, all of you. How many of you have ever changed the diaper of a stranger? Yeah, me neither, right? I mean, you could hand me your kid and I would rock her and take care of her until like the bodily fluids came out and then I'd give that kid back and say, "No, no, no. I'm not that Christian." You know, I've actually never changed a diaper until I had kids and I was so clueless. Like, I was naïve of what could come out of those little, beautiful bodies. Have you seen this before? Forgive me if this is crass, but when the kids were little, I didn't know about the - I call it the bubble bottom. You know, there's so much in a diaper and they go scurrying through the kitchen and you think they're smuggling like a cantaloupe back to their bedroom like, how did that come out of you? And there's meconium. Do you know what that is? Don't google that. Like, you're so beautiful; how did that come out of your body? And then the blowout, which is the worst of all. Every parent knows about the blowout. You don't - how did that happen? You don't even know where to start. Get the hose and all the right angles and spray them off in the backyard but you do it, right? Maybe not for every kid but for your kid; you'll take care of the mess.

And I love that about Jesus' prayer. You know, sometimes I pray to God and it feels like I'm a mess; like I've been a Christian for so long and I know better than that but sometimes like, I don't

know, the way I use my words, it just feels like there's much of it - I was so, you know, quick to want an answer and so slow to show compassion. And man, when someone pushed me and poked me and came at me strong, like how quickly I forgot every passage I've memorized. There's just so much of it; who can clean up a mess like that? Or maybe for you it's just something that's just foul. Like if people knew it, they'd take a step back. Maybe it's an addiction that's gone to some pretty dark places. Maybe your relationship is falling apart and you know, you smile in church but what comes out in the heat of an argument is just - it's aggressive and it's bad. Or maybe like a blowout, there's just so much brokenness in your life you don't even know where to start to clean it up. You've been arguing with your sister or with your brother or with your parents for so long that a bridge has been burned, so many things have been said, and to fix it, to clean it up, you wouldn't even know where to begin.

But when you pray, who are you addressing? Our Father. That's what I love about him. I mean, if he could create the galaxies but he couldn't clean me up, I wouldn't love him, but he did! I love the picture of baptism, right? That God has washed us. He's cleansed us. We were like the kid who was a stinking mess and he washed us clean and then not just that, but he clothed us. Have you seen the pictures? That he gives us this robe of righteousness; like the beauty and the kindness and the love of Jesus is wrapped all around us and it's so beautiful, it's like God takes us to get the family pictures taken and he wants an eight by ten of you on his desk in heaven. You're not a mess to God, despite the mess. He's cleansed you and he's washed you and he's called you his own and I get John's heart, even as an old man, that he would say, "How crazy is this?" The love that God has lavished on us that we should be his kids and that's what we are. He's not just a father; he's our Father.

In heaven. That's the last thing Jesus said in those words, right? In heaven. You know the really bad part about dads like me? We're on earth. I googled this - the average father in America weighs 195.5 pounds. He can do about 25-ish pushups if you ask him. He can only be in one place at one time and he cannot make money grow on trees, alright? I love my kids but I'm here with you today and I'm not by their side. But God, he's everywhere at the same time. I can buy my kids gifts but eventually the bank account runs dry. I only have so much but God, he owns everything. My kids ask me for advice and wisdom but you know, my oldest is a fourth grader and some of her math, to be honest, I don't get. I say, "Ask your teacher." But God, he knows everything. He has all wisdom and all knowledge and he - you know, I'm going to fail them. I can be impatient and I can be unkind but God is holy and in him there is no darkness at all. Imagine that! If you had a good dad, God is not just like your dad; he's a father who is in heaven and that changes everything. He's omniscient; he knows everything. Omnipresent; present everywhere. Omnipotent; all powerful. He is holy and he is eternal and that's what makes that prayer so, so, so beautiful: Our Father in heaven.

I think that's why it takes me so long to pray it. You know, sometimes when I drive to work, I try to pray the Lord's Prayer but I rarely get through the first line. "Our Father in heaven," I say. And I think about the morning, when I kiss my little girls goodbye. I think about the affection that I feel for them. I think about how I would show up and sacrifice anything to make them feel loved and I say, "God, that's how you feel about me!" And it sparks my heart to such worship that I can't martyr this prayer; I can't mumble through it another word. It's worthy of all glory and honor and praise.

I don't know how your prayer life is. Maybe you want to cry out to Jesus today, "Hey Jesus, I don't know how to do this! It's not going well. I'm going through the motions. Teach me how to pray." He knows exactly what he would say: "Okay, okay. You want something to kick start your relationship with God? Do you want an explosion for your prayer life? Then pray like this: Our Father in heaven."

I say, "Amen," to that!

***Pastor Mark Jeske***

You know, I don't feel any particular obligation to give somebody money on the street. If they come up to me and ask me for \$1,000, I just keep moving. Why? Because we don't have a relationship; I feel no personal sense of obligation to do anything for a total stranger. But it's all different when, say, one of my children needs something and it's in my capacity to help them out. I am pre-inclined, predisposed, to help them.

You know, I think one of the things holding us back from praying with more joy and energy is we're a little insecure about the person to whom we're addressing our requests. And if we're feeling kind of distant from God, we kind of feel like, "Well, he doesn't owe me anything and so I can't bring him really anything serious because I don't know that he owes me; there's no relationship here." But through Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven and he has now taken on himself our - the Father, Jesus Father, our Father in heaven - has taken on himself the obligations of fatherhood towards me through faith. That means if I come to him, I can claim his fatherhood and he is now pre-inclined, predisposed, to want to say "yes" to me and I can simply dump the bag and let him know where I need his help and how he can help me.

Can I pray with you this morning? Let's ask our Lord for the things that we need and you can customize your particular prayer for what it is that you need from your God right now; trusting in the fact that we have a relationship.

Heavenly Father, we love to call you our Father for that is who you are. We didn't make you our Father; you chose it for yourself. And through the blood of your Son, we are now as clean and pure as he is and we may with all confidence step before you; asking you for help in our lives, knowing that you love us and are willing and eager and able to help us.

Lord, this day we bring to you all the things that we need in our lives. And we're asking you to use your wisdom, your mercy, and your power to make some things happen for us. We bring them to you now in the name of Jesus; trusting that you love to hear from us and love to help us. We love it when you help us and we love you, too, our Father. In Jesus' name, Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mark Jeske, celebrating God's amazing grace with you and it all starts now.