

Introduction:

How do we address a person when we are greeting/talking to them? In familiar situations, we would just use first names, Arlis, Marilyn, Alex. If we are just meeting a person for the first time, we might use “sir, m’am, or miss.” Sometime we may use an official title, like Dr., Coach, Chef, or pastor. If we are someone’s subordinate, we may need to use more official language. Within families, there can be loving nicknames, like grandpa, mom, or Mina.

At Adriel, as a way to teach the youth respect, adults are referred to as Mr. or Ms. Although as a way to keep things friendly, it’s Mr. or Ms. and then a first name, like Ms. Lara, Ms. Becca, Mr. Dusty, and Ms. Erin. It’s funny, though, because in most other situations when you say Mr. or Ms. you then say the persons’ last name. Now the Adriel kids know that Erin is Ms. Erin’s first name, but they always seem to get confused about me when they find out I’m her husband and oftentimes call me “Mr. Erin.”

It’s tricky, trying to figure out exactly how to address one another, especially when we try to consider family traditions and social and cultural realities. I believe that in some ways it can be just as tricky trying to figure out how we address God in prayer. Because the way in which we address God in prayer can speak volumes to our theology and beliefs about God and His nature, character, power, and relationship to us.

This is our first Sunday that we are diving into the Lord’s Prayer, or the prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples as a model of how to pray. Traditionally, when trying to break down and understand all of the nuances of Jesus’ teaching here, this prayer gets divided into two parts: first, our prayers and petitions to, and second, our prayers for/on behalf of others.

As the opening of the model prayer, as well as the first part of how we pray and petition to God, Jesus demonstrates how his followers should address God.

And in teaching us how to address God, we learn four important characteristics about the nature of God and His relationship with us.

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name”

1) COMMUNAL: “Our”

God is Communal. This means that He has called ALL people to Himself in order to form A people for Himself. Recognize that everyone, through Jesus Christ, has been given the opportunity to become children of the Father.

When we pray “Our Father,” we are doing several things.

First, we are acknowledging the communal nature of Faith, that Christianity is not a religion of individuals but a body of believers. Now the Jewish religion was and is largely communal; this aspect of community as integral to faith in God would not in the least surprise Jesus’ disciples. Today, however, our culture prizes individualism over collectivism, and unfortunately this has negatively influenced the

church. Because we are used to being able to customize our lives in the same way that we customize our cell phone cases, there is an expectation that the Church should also be customizable. Many demand the right to find the perfect church that fits all of their preferences and needs, and when it doesn't, we demand the right to leave without considering the consequences our absence has on the body. So rather than have a rag-tag team of people from different religious or non-religious backgrounds, different work, family, and cultural backgrounds, different interpretations of what it means to be a follower of God, and different religious practices, which would very much resemble what the early church looked like, the American Church often resembles groups of white-washed, like-minded people who don't know how to get along with others different from them. When we pray "our," we are acknowledging that it's really not about "me," it's about us! Pastors and Theologians William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas write in their commentary on the Lord's Prayer:

"There may be religions that come to you through quiet walks in the woods, or by sitting quietly in the library with a book, or rummaging around in the recesses of your psyche. Christianity is not one of them. Christianity is inherently communal, a matter of life in the body, the Church. Jesus did not call isolated individuals to follow Him. He called a group of disciples. He gathered a crowd."

Secondly, when we prayer "Our Father," we are acknowledging our responsibility as Christians towards one another. James Mullholland, in his commentary on the Lord's Prayer, writes:

"When we pray to "Our Father," we are inviting God to tell us how to love one another."

Willimon and Hauerwas also comment to this:

"Every time you say "Our Father," you are naming the way we are saved-as a group, praying together, correcting one another, forgiving one another, stumbling along after Jesus together, memorizing the moves until his way has become our way."

How does praying "our" strike you? Certainly we have to consider that simply by beginning with the plural pronoun "our" that we cannot just be considering ourselves. It should be impossible to pray "our" without thinking of others. When Jesus designates using this word, He is actually suggesting that this prayer properly prayed should be done in public with the community of believers. Memorized public prayers were very much a part of Jewish heritage, and the disciples were asking for a new kind of prayer reflecting their new faith in Jesus. Jesus begins by calling for them to remember the communal reality of their faith. When we pray **our**, we are claiming the importance of others in our relationship with God.

2) PARENTAL: "Father"

Jesus instructs his disciples to call God "Father," which gives God a parental attribute. When we start our prayers with "Our Father" we recognize first and foremost that we cannot do it on our own. That is why we are turning to prayers and petitions because what we have tried didn't work. Prayer is submitting to God that we are in need of a Father.

Now, calling God "Father" was not unusual at the time. We can see many places in the Old Testament where writers addressed God in this way.

In **Psalm 68:5**, David refers to God as “⁵ Father of the fatherless and protector of widows.” He continues speaking of God as Father in **Psalm 103:13**, saying:

¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

To David, God was a compassionate father who cared for those of whom nobody else cared for. The prophets also addressed God as Father. Jeremiah writes in **Jeremiah 31:9**

⁹ With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

In this image, we see God as a Father who punishes but also relents and as a God who desires to guide and lead His children to right and better paths.

We can see that addressing God as Father was not uncommon to the Jewish people, but I believe that there is something different and important in the way Jesus’ instructs His disciples, and us, to call God “Our Father.” When praying to God, Jesus nearly always called on Him as Father. The word that Jesus used “Abba,” would roughly translate into English as “Daddy.” “Daddy” implies intimacy, as well as dependence upon. Now, as we saw, the OT did use the term Father for God. But we also see many other awesome and holy names and titles for God. When Moses spoke with God at the burning bush and asked what to call Him, God told him YHWH, which means, “I Am that I Am.” YHWH established the absolute divinity and supremacy of God, which was demonstrated through the building of the tabernacle and the temple, which had a special room for God’s presence in which no one but the high priest could enter. God was still Father to the people, but because He needed to be kept holy in a culture surrounded by many other gods vying for the attention of the Israelites, he was also not accessible. Now Jesus is instructing us to call God “Father,” making him both parental and accessible, intimate.

In the Gospel of Luke, in the chapter where Jesus shares the Lord’s prayer, Jesus continues to expound upon what it means to call God “Father” and why we should be continually going to Him in prayer. In **Luke 11:7-13**

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”

Ask. Seek. Knock. We should be going to God as our “Father,” knowing that he cares for us and will give to us the things that we need. Now, unfortunately, not everyone has had a good experience with their own fathers, but certainly we should all be able to imagine what a good father, daddy, would do for his children, knowing that a true Father would never seek to harm his children, but only to give them the best.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we will always get what we want because sometimes what we want is not what we need. I can imagine that there were many things throughout my childhood that I really wanted, and thought that I needed, that I did not get from my dad. And it wasn't because he was trying to punish me that I didn't get to have or do these things, it was because he was my Father and was looking out for me. When we call God our Father, we acknowledge Him as our parent, that he desires to know us, to love us, and to take care of us, and although He may not always give us everything that we want, He certainly wants to give us what we need.

3) ROYAL: "In Heaven"

The third characteristic of God that we see through this prayer is almost paradoxical with the second characteristic, or at least it can be difficult to hold the two in tension. Jesus tells us to pray to "Our Father in heaven." When we pray "in heaven," we are recognizing God's royal character. That God is our Father is certain, but he is unlike any earthly Father in that He is God. He dwells in a place of perfection, completely different from this world. Yet we know he is there preparing a place for us. He is separate from us, and yet we know He sent the Holy Spirit as our go-between. He is somehow intimately our Father, and yet also the great creator of the Universe. Scot McKnight, in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, puts it like this:

"The term "Father" brings together at least two attributes of God: his intimate love for his children as well as his sovereign power, which is evoked with "in heaven." To call God "Father" in prayer is to receive that love, to know his power, and to seek to embody his will, which are expressed in the You petitions of the Lord's Prayer."

I like what he says at the end of the quote; when we call God our Father in Heaven, we are finding balance in the complex nature of God. That means that we "receive that love, know his power, and seek to embody his will."

4) Holy; Hallowed Be Your Name

The fourth characteristic of God that we see in this prayer is that God is Holy, and that He is to remain Holy. "Hallowed" a very Old-English sounding word, comes from the Greek word simply meaning "made holy." Some approach this part of the Scripture and put the focus on US; that our prayer is that we can maintain/promote God's name as Holy. Scot McKnight suggests that Jesus' prayer is not that we can keep God's name holy, but rather that God will make His holiness known. We see examples elsewhere in Scripture of God making his name holy.

John 12:27-28

²⁷ "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

The cry “hallowed be your name” could very well be a precursor to what we find later in this prayer “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God make your holiness known in this place!

However, I would also say that in praying to God our Father in Heaven, our prayer should also be that we keep His name Holy. Now God will be God regardless of what we do, but as Christians, we are reflecting God in the way we choose to live and act. So let’s appreciate the possible double meaning in “Hallowed be your name” and continue to show God’s holy name through our lives as He makes His holiness known to the world.

Conclusion:

So how do we address God? Jesus tells us, “like this.” **Our**, meaning that we are not in this faith journey alone, that God is the God of the entire universe which includes people like me and people very different from me. All who call on the name of the Lord can be saved. **Father**, meaning that God is parental, intimate, and that God desires to care for us, lead us, and guide us in the same way that a Father, or a Mother, would do for their children. **In Heaven**, meaning that though we have an intimacy with God as our Parent, He is still all powerful, all-knowing, everywhere and forever to be praised. We are to embrace His desire to have intimacy with us, while still remember his absolute awesome power. **Make your name Holy**, meaning that we as God’s children, want to see his name be praised all across the world, that His greatness might be known to all people, both through the work of God and through our own lives.

It’s amazing that so much can be packed into so little; when we are addressing “Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name,” we are proclaiming to God that he is communal, parental, royal, and utterly holy.

I want to close with an incredible statement on the Lord’s Prayer made in a sermon by German pastor Helmut Thielicke. In this sermon, he gives us the significance of and the hope found in the Lord’s Prayer. And it’s this hope that I want to leave you with today.

“For this is the way the Bible views the appearance of Jesus. The prophetic vision sees him appearing against the dark background of night: darkness covers the earth and thick darkness the peoples. It is a world of pitilessness, of persecution, of loneliness, of anxiety, a world in which God is far away. Not because this is the way God made the world, but rather because a rift runs right through it and the weight of guilt hangs heavy upon it. Over all the world there reigns a night so dark that hope seems quite impossible. This is the prophets’, the Bible’s picture of the world.

And here, against that background, we are given the news, no, not only the “news,” it is actually demonstrated to us in the fact of “Jesus,” that this hope nevertheless is there, miraculously and incomprehensibly there-**and that the heart of a Father is beating for us.**”

As Our Father’s heart beats for us, let us learn through this time exploring the Lord’s prayer, what it truly means to be His children.