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Sermon: January 3, 2010
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN”
Matthew 6:9

☑ Early in our marriage Beth and I vacationed in Colorado Springs. We rode the cog train up Pikes Peak, saw the Seven Sisters Waterfalls, hiked the Garden of the Gods, walked across the Royal Gorge, and drank in the magnificent landscapes.

We also visited Beth’s relatives, some of whom have dwelt in the shadow of the Front Range their entire lives. While we raved about the scenery our Colorado cousins politely nodded, “Yes, it *is* spectacular”; but, as one remarked, they are so used to the mountains they hardly ever notice them.

☹ The take away is that familiarity easily breeds disregard. The more familiar a thing is, the likelier we are to take it for granted.

The Lord’s Prayer is no exception. We pray it nearly every Sunday in worship. Some of us recite it at home. It is so familiar that most of us can reel it off without a second thought.

But do we receive the profound blessings of this prayer by mindlessly mumbling it? Is its life-transforming power unleashed in us when we thoughtlessly go through the motions? Do we really know what we are praying?

☐ From now until the beginning of Lent we are going to examine the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6.

● We begin in verse 9. These are the words with which we address the One to whom we pray ~ **“Our Father in heaven.”**

These four, simple words are packed with meaning and determine the application of every other line in the Lord’s Prayer.

☼ 1st) **“Our Father in heaven”** reveals a crucial facet of God’s identity. He is **“Our Father”** because:

☼ God is the giver of life.

■ {Acts 17:28} **“In him [all humanity] [lives] and [moves] and [has] being.”** In the sense of basic existence, everyone can claim God as their Father.

■ But spiritually, it is to those who **“receive [Jesus]...who [believe] in his name,”** that God gives **“the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13)**. On that level, God’s Fatherhood is reserved for those who come to him through Jesus.

☼ God is relational.

■ Psalm 139:1 says, **“You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.”** God knows us.

■ Not only so, in Revelation 3:20 the Lord says, **“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.”** God invites us to know him – and in Christ Jesus, we can!

☼ God loves us.

■ {1 Jn 3:1} **“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we”** – who were {Rom 8:7-8} **“hostile to God,” “controlled by the sinful nature,”**

unable to **“please God”** – **“should be called”** his **“children!”**

God loves us – not uncertainly, not conditionally, not defectively – his love is perfect.

The fatherhood of God deserves more time than we can give it, but chew on this: everything about our human fathers that is good, true, noble, right, pure, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy reflects the fatherhood of God, because that is the way God is. On the other hand, everything about them that is wrong or substandard obscures our knowledge of God’s fatherhood, because God is never that way.

Now, it has been said that Jesus was the first to call God **“Father.”** That is not true.

- The prophet Isaiah directly addresses God as Father more than once: **“you are our Fatheryou, LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old”** (Isaiah 63:16); **“You, LORD, are our Father”** (Isaiah 64:8).

- Seven centuries earlier (in about 1446 B.C.), the LORD tells Moses to warn the Pharaoh, **“Israel is my firstborn son ... Let my son go” (Ex 4:22-23)**. From then on, the Hebrews think of God as their Father.

Nevertheless, Jesus’ use of the title **“Father”** *is* notable, for at least two reasons.

① For one thing, there is the matter of frequency. The Old Testament authors and first century rabbis address God as **“Father”** only rarely, but Jesus calls him **“Father”** about 195 times {bible.org}. He opens up a new level of intimacy with God.

② Then there is his inclusivity. First century Jews do not consider Gentiles their spiritual siblings. Yet Jesus

begins with {Mt 6:9} **“Our Father”** – knowing full well that Gentiles will soon be praying this. With one word He starts to create a new kind of community.

“Our Father in heaven” reveals a crucial facet of God’s identity.

☉ 2nd) **“Our Father in heaven”** reveals the nature of our relationship with God in Christ.

☼ I’ll be brief here. If God gives biological life, then we are God’s creatures; and if God is our spiritual Father, then we are his children.

☑ I am reminded of a song by Steven Curtis Chapman {“Fingerprints of God”}:

**I can see the fingerprints of God
When I look at you
I can see the fingerprints of God
And I know it’s true
You’re a masterpiece that all creation
Quietly applauds
And you’re covered with the fingerprints
of God**

“Our Father in heaven” reveals a great deal about our relationship with God in Christ.

☉ 3rd) **“Our Father in heaven”** reveals our vocation as Christ-followers.

What was Jesus’ vocation prior to his baptism? He was a carpenter. Why? He was a carpenter because his adoptive father Joseph was a carpenter.

Among first century Jews a son is his father’s apprentice. As a toddler, he watches his father at work. Within a few years, his father begins actively teaching

him. In his teens he becomes a full partner in the work. Later, when his father is disabled or dies, he takes over the family business. With few exceptions, the son follows in the occupational footsteps of his father.

Joseph fills an essential role as Christ's adoptive dad; but the Lord's *true* father is the One **"in heaven."** So although Jesus begins as a carpenter, at the age of 30 He switches careers and becomes Kingdom Builder in Chief.

- {Lk 2:41-49} But his destiny is hinted at even before that. When Jesus is 12 years old his family goes to Jerusalem for the Passover. The Festival ends and his parents leave, but unbeknownst to them Jesus stays behind. A day out from the city they realize He is missing, and they turn back. **"After 3 days they [find] him in the temple ... sitting among the teachers, listening ...and asking ... questions."** Joseph and Mary could strangle the boy, but Jesus answers: **"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"** – or, as some translators put it, **"Didn't you know I had to be about my Father's business?"**

- Later, in John 4:34, He says: **"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."**

- And in John 9:4 Christ Jesus tells his disciples, **"We must do the work of him who sent me."**

☼ In teaching us to call his Father **"Our Father,"** Jesus is inviting us to share in his vocation: which is building God's kingdom.

Whether you earn a living in the trades, the health field, the education system, or what have you; whether you are male or female, young or old, black or white, rich or

poor; if you are a Christ Follower your highest call is to help embody and grow the Kingdom of God.

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"Our Father in heaven" reveals a crucial part of God's identity, the nature of our relationship with God in Christ, and our vocation as Christ-Followers.

Not only so, it prefigures every other line in the Lord's Prayer. In other words, the second phrase ({Mt 6.9} **"Hallowed be your name"**) also reveals God's identity, the nature of our relationship with him, and our calling as Christ-Followers – as does the third, the fourth, and so on.

The Lord's Prayer is not scenery to be disregarded and taken for granted, even though we know it front and back, up and down, side to side.

It is packed with profound blessings! Let's not mindlessly mumble it, week after week.

It explodes with life-transforming power! Let's not thoughtlessly go through the motions.

"Our Father in heaven" is the word of the Lord.