

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: January 2, 2011
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN”

Matthew 6:9

☑ One of my sweetest blessings is when our girls greet me with a heartfelt “*Dad!*” or “*Daddy!*” and in that single word express abundant joy, excitement, tenderness, or relief. It melts my heart. It binds me to them in ways I cannot explain.

Those words aren’t nearly so heart-warming when they convey frustration, anger, or disregard. Still, “*Dad!*” and “*Daddy!*” are potent even then: they can get on my nerves like nothing else; on the other hand, they can light a fire under me to deal with issues in our relationship.

“*Dad,*” “*Pa,*” and “*Pop*” can taste sweet or bitter, they can be a force for blessing or for harm. For good and (in our fallen world) for bad, these names are packed with power and meaning, so it is no small matter that when the Lord teaches us how to pray he begins with the salutation: “**Our Father in heaven.**”

☐ Please turn with me to Matthew 6:9: “**This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven.’**”

I will limit myself to two main observations. ☺

⊛ 1st, the Name “Our Father” is an invitation into, and a witness of, a particular kind of relationship with God and his people.

★ In John 14:7 Christ Jesus declares, “**If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.**” Through

him we can relate to God as revealed Deity, accessible Redeemer, and our own dear Father.

☑ In human life, the name “Father” draws its power from the unique relationship it describes. Biologically, a father is simply the male involved in the conception of a child – but he is meant to be much more than a sire. A father should also be his children’s masculine protector, provider, leader, guide and mentor. At his best a father shares a profound spiritual bond with his sons and daughters, and by his actions and words he wins their trust, confidence, respect, obedience and affection.

No mortal dad achieves this 100% of the time. We all falter and fail and fall. (Lord, have mercy!) And there are some bad dads, who never even come close to fulfilling the ideal.

But God never falters, never fails, and never falls. His love is perfect. His words and actions are always right. So when Jesus, who is God the Son, teaches us to call *his* “**Father in heaven**” “**Our Father in heaven**” it is an invitation to enter into a life-changing intimacy of trust, confidence, respect, obedience, and affection with him.

→ In Christ, we can address {Is 6:1} “**the LORD Almighty**” as “**Our Father**”! In Christ, we can speak to {Is 40:28} “**the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth**” as “**Our Father**”! In Christ, we can approach {Ps 24:10} “**the LORD of hosts**” (that is, the Commander of angel armies) and “**the King of glory**” as “**Our Father**”!

→ God is the giver of life. {Ac 17:28} **“In him [all humanity] [lives] and [moves] and [has] being.”** In terms of bodily existence, God is Father of our entire species.

→ Yet it is only to those who **“receive [Jesus]... who [believe] in his name,”** that God gives **“the right to become [spiritual] 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).

→ Jesus is the mediator through whom we enter into this father-child relationship with God. In John 14:6 he states without equivocation, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

Hence, the Name **“Our Father”** is an invitation into and a witness of an intimate connection with God.

★ But not him alone! As personal as this relationship is, it is in no sense private. The moment we enter into vertical union with our Creator, we also enter into horizontal kinship with his people.

☑ Natural experience reflects this spiritual reality. For example, AmyLynn, Hannah and Emily each have only one father (me); but since I have three daughters, each girl also has two sisters. Their kinship is often a pleasure; sometimes, it is a struggle. Either way, because Beth and I are their parents they are always siblings. In our family daughterhood invariably involves sisterhood.

Likewise, to be God’s child is to be a brother or sister to all who call him **“Father”** in Jesus. It is a package deal. The Lord does not teach us to say **“My Father”** but **“Our Father”**.

Sometimes, spiritual kinship comes easily. Sometimes, it seems that it will wrench every last drop of blood, sweat and tears out of us to keep fellowship.

→ Regardless, we are brothers and sisters. The challenges of life together do not at all diminish God’s expectation that {Col 3:12-14} **“As [his] chosen people, holy and dearly loved, [we will] clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,”** we will **“Bear with each other and forgive one another ... as the Lord forgave [us]. And”** that **“over all these virtues”** we will **“put on love.”**

The words **“Our Father”** are an invitation and a witness. Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we are committing ourselves to relationship with God and his people – even when we do not realize it!

🌀 2nd, **“Our Father”** is an invitation into and witness of a specific vocation under God.

📖 We commonly use the word vocation to describe the job or career by which we earn a wage.

Along those lines, a first century Jewish toddler watched his dad at work. Within a few years his dad began teaching him the profession. In his teens the son was promoted to partner. Later, he inherited the business. With few exceptions, a son followed in the occupational footsteps of his father. Joseph was Jesus’ adoptive dad, and in keeping with tradition Jesus became a carpenter.

📖 But vocation is also the special calling, greater purpose, and profound life-goal for which God creates

and equips us. Sometimes, this overlaps with our paying jobs; frequently, it does not.

So it was with the Messiah. His Father “**in heaven**” had a different plan, and when Jesus was baptized he retired from carpentry to become Kingdom Builder-in-Chief.

→ {Lk 2:41-49} We see glimmers of his destiny early on. When Joseph and Mary were surprised to find 12-year-old Jesus at the temple, he said: “**Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?**” Or, as the Greek can also be translated, “**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.**”

➤ But not just Jesus! In John 9:4 the Lord extends his vocation to his disciples: “**We must do the work of him who sent me.**” And this also extends to us, and to all other Christ Followers in every time and place, with equal authority.

And what is that work?

✚ During the incarnation his work was to proclaim: “**The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!**” (Mark 1:13)

✚ His work was to “[teach]... **proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people**” (Matthew 4:23).

✚ His work was “**to proclaim good news to poor ...proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor**” (Luke 4:18-21). The active quality of God’s Word and the biblical record show that Gospel proclamation incorporates speech and deeds. To

announce the “**good news**” is to speak and to do. It requires us to take practical steps to exhibit this new reality as we announce it.

✚ And his work was to give his life: “**unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour**” (John 12:24, 27).

✚ In short, Christ’s earthly vocation was to establish his Father’s kingdom.

★ As those who {Lk 9:23} “**deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow**” him, it is our calling to manifest the kingdom of God in attitude, thought, word, deed and relationship.

☑ This is no casual matter or comfortable formality! It is a serious commitment: {N.T. Wright}

That’s why calling God ‘Father’ is the great act of faith, of holy boldness, of risk. Saying ‘our Father’ isn’t just the boldness, the sheer [audacity] of walking into the presence of the living and almighty God and saying ‘Hi, Dad.’ It is the boldness, the sheer total risk, of saying quietly, ‘Please may I, too, be considered an apprentice son [or daughter].’ It means signing on for the Kingdom of God.

The words “Our Father” are an invitation to and a witness of our vocation under God. Every time we

pray the Lord's Prayer, we are responding to his call and committing ourselves to do his work!

☑ How sweet it is when our girls greet me with a heartfelt "*Dad!*" I hope it is as sweet for them to say.

In light of eternity it is an even greater blessing for us to freely, honestly, legitimately call the LORD Almighty "Father." What other word is so packed with power and meaning?

What a privilege it is to enter into that special relationship with God and his people, and to give witness to it!

What a privilege it is to enter into that special vocation under God, and to give witness to it!

What a privilege it is to pray, "**Our Father in heaven.**"