

Steps to Successful Prayer, Part 3

Scripture: Luke 11:2–4

Code: B120507

Part 3: Submit to God's Paternity

How often do we actually think deeply about the words we say in prayer? These days certain names for God and phrases like *in Jesus' name* are thrown around so haphazardly you wonder if they still have any meaning at all.

If we're not careful, our prayer lives can easily and quickly fall into a rut—a meaningless recitation of the same words and phrases day after day, without any thought as to what we're saying, or whom we're saying it to.

The model prayer Christ gave His disciples stands in stark contrast to that kind of rambling repetition. Every word in the Lord's Prayer is deliberate, intentional, and loaded with spiritual significance—including the name Jesus used to address the Lord.

And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation'" (Luke 11:2-4).

The prayer starts with a reference to God's paternity. The first word—the address—is a reminder that God is our heavenly Father. We go to Him not only because He is a sovereign Monarch, a righteous Judge, and our Creator, but because He is a loving Father. That beautiful expression reminds us of the grace that gives us unlimited access to His throne (Hebrews 4:16)—and it encourages us to come boldly, just as a son or a daughter would come to a loving dad.

That familial connection, by the way, is the basis for our boldness in prayer. The point is not that our words have any kind of magical power; not that God is somehow obliged to give us whatever we ask for; and certainly not that our faith merits material rewards—but that God in His sovereignty invites us to come to Him as a gracious and loving Father. The intimacy of the Father-child relationship does not diminish the reverence we owe Him as our sovereign God. Far less does it give us any reason to exalt ourselves. Instead, it is a reminder that we should be childlike in our dependence on God's goodness and love. Ultimately, because He is our sovereign Lord, Creator, Judge, and Father, He is the only One we can rely on to supply all our needs and satisfy our deepest longings. If our prayers are truly worshipful, they will be permeated with recognition of that truth.

Take, for example, the prayer of Isaiah 64:8, "But now, O LORD, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand." That is the proper spirit of prayer: *Lord, You made us. You gave us life. You alone can supply the resources we need. We are united with Your beloved Son by faith, and therefore we are Your children in every sense—totally dependent on Your will, Your power, and Your blessings.*

That is very different from the prayer of a pagan who comes to a vengeful, violent, jealous, unjust, man-made god, believing some merit or sacrifice must be brought to the altar to appease that hostile deity. The biblical perspective we bring to prayer is that God Himself offered the ultimate sacrifice and supplies all the merit we need in the Person of His Son. All who by faith lay hold of Christ as Lord and Savior are “sons of God” (Galatians 3:26; cf. John 1:12-13; 2 Corinthians 6:8). “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are” (1 John 3:1).

In other words, the sacrifice of Christ was offered on our behalf, so we have already received the very best God has to give. And “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

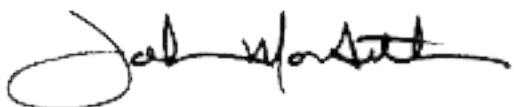
As if that weren’t enough, in Matthew 7:7-11, Jesus makes this promise:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

So when we pray, we are going to a God who is our loving heavenly Father. We can go with a sense of intimacy. We can go with confidence in the same tender, trusting way a little child would go to an earthly father. We can go boldly. We are approaching a loving deity who does not need to be appeased, but who embraces us as His own. In fact, because we are His true children, “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Galatians 4:6). “Abba” is a term of deep affection, a common term for “father” derived from the Chaldean dialect. Because it is easy to pronounce, it was how little children in New Testament times commonly addressed their fathers, like “Daddy” or “Papa” in today’s English.

But when we call God “Father,” or “Abba,” it is not a casual nod of crass or presumptuous familiarity. Used properly, “Abba”—“Father”—is an expression of profound worship filled with childlike trust: *“God, I recognize that I’m Your child. I know You love me and have given me intimate access to You. I recognize that You have absolutely unlimited resources, and that You will do what is best for me. I recognize that I need to obey You. And I recognize that whatever You do, You know best.”* All of that is implied in the truth that God is our Father, and that’s how Jesus taught us to begin our prayers.

Don’t miss the point. When we pray to God as our heavenly Father, we are not only acknowledging our responsibility to obey Him, we are also confessing that He has a right to give us what He knows is best. Above all, we are offering Him praise and thanks for His loving grace, while confessing our own complete trust and dependence. In short, we are coming to Him as worshiping children—and all of that is implicit in the very first word of Jesus’ model prayer.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John 1:12-13".

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