

Have you ever wanted to get closer to someone? Have you ever wished you had a better relationship with someone?

There is a great little story told by Milton Berle, a Jewish Comic from Vaudeville days. It seems a man called his mother in Florida, "Mom, how are you?"

"Not too good," said the mother. "I've been very weak."

The son said, "Why are you so weak?"

She said, "Because I haven't eaten in 38 days."

The son said, "That's terrible. Why haven't you eaten in 38 days?"

The mother answered, "Because; I didn't want my mouth to be filled with food if you should call."

Isn't that great? The mother was clearly letting her son know they weren't talking and connecting enough. Have you ever wanted to get closer to someone? Have you ever wished you had a better relationship with another person? Do you ever wish you had a better relationship with God?

Many of us have people we would like to be closer to. Many of us in this room would also like to develop a closer relationship with God. That is why today, we are beginning a sermon series called *Living the Lord's Prayer Today*. Throughout this sermon series we are going to take a closer look at these familiar words. It is our goal to try and help you understand them better, so that your relationship with God can grow richer and deeper.

John Wesley said that the words of this prayer actually point out to us the attitudes we should develop in our life, if we want to grow in our walk with God.

For this first sermon, we are looking at the beginning of the prayer, *Our Father, which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. . .*

It all begins with a name, *Our Father*. Sometimes even here, people get caught up and sidetracked. Some people insist that this is proof that God is

male. Others have a hard time praying this prayer, because they had a poor experience with a father. They have a hard time believing in God if God has to be male.

When Jesus is teaching us to pray in this way, and he uses the term *Our Father*, there is so much more going on that we need to hear about. The word Jesus used for Father was a child's term of endearment. What this means is that Jesus saw his relationship with God as an intimate, loving relationship. And when Jesus is teaching us to pray this way, he is inviting us to see our relationship to God as one that is personal, intimate, loving. It is a reminder to us that we matter to God.

For all those moments in life when the challenges of living overwhelm us and we wonder, does anyone see us? Does anyone care about us anymore? Jesus wants us to develop a habit of seeing that God does care, God does love us, and we do matter to God. And so Jesus builds that into this prayer, we are taught to pray.

Yet it is significant, especially in our culture where we are so prone to see ourselves in isolation, Jesus begins this prayer by helping us to pray, *Our Father*. He does not have us say, *My Father*. This is a communal prayer. This is our prayer. Even if we pray in alone, in the quiet of our home or whether we pray it in the midst of the sanctuary filled with others. God is our God. No one can monopolize God. God is the creator of all.

*Our Father, Which art in heaven.* When I grew up praying this prayer and hearing these words, I took them, mistakenly to think that meant God was somewhere up there, far away. Because in all honesty that is what I sometimes felt.

In reality, when Jesus and his contemporaries prayed that prayer, they understood it differently. To say God is in the heavens was meant to reassure us. It is meant to be a phrase of honor and respect. It is meant to remind us that God is creator of all, the source of life. It is meant to engender us to trust that God wants to hear us, to answer us, to meet our needs.

*Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.* This is simply a phrase that indicates God is to be honored as holy. It is also meant to help us

say we will pledge our allegiance to God, seeking to honor God with our lives and glorifying God among others.

The power of this prayer is not in the words, but in how the words can shape our view of God and the way in which we live. The power of this prayer is not in the words, but in the way in which they help us to see our self in a relationship with a God who loves us.

Don't get me wrong, I love the Lord's Prayer. But what I love about it is how it helps connect us with God and with the rest of the world. I love how it can help us see beyond ourselves.

Leo Tolstoy shared a fable that I have found to be moving. There was once a Bishop who was traveling by ship on a pilgrimage to a holy place. While on the ship he heard a story of three hermits who lived on an island, praying for their salvation. He heard stories of how they worked miracles and welcomed all who came to their small island. He heard of how they, on that very ship were going to pass by the island.

He inquired of the ships captain if he could stop and see the men. He was told that he could.

When the time came, the ship took the bishop to the island. The three hermits welcomed the Bishop. "I have heard that you, godly me, live here saving your own souls and praying to our Lord for the rest of humanity. I wished to see you, servants of God, and to do what I can to teach you."

They were surprised. They looked at each other smiling, not quite knowing what to say.

The Bishop said, "What are you doing to save your souls? How do you serve God on this island?"

The very ancient hermit smiled and said, "We do not know how to save our souls. We are not even sure how we serve God. We pray to God and we support each other and we help all who come our way."

Now the Bishop was perplexed. "But how do you pray?"

"We pray in this way," replied the hermit. "Three are ye, three are we, have mercy upon us."

The Bishop became alarmed and asked, "Is that really how you pray? You are not doing it right." And he painstakingly taught them to pray the Lord's Prayer. When he finally felt satisfied that they knew the Lord's Prayer, in the proper way, he went back to the boat and left the three old hermits.

The ship sailed away and continued on its journey. A day or so later, while the ship was continuing on, someone saw a strange sight coming toward the ship. Eventually it got so close that everyone on the ship recognized that what was coming were the three hermits, walking on the water.

When they got to the ship, the Bishop was shocked and said, "What do you want? What are you doing here?"

The three said, "We have forgotten your teaching, servant of God. As long as we kept repeating it, we remembered, but when we stopped saying it for a time, a word dropped out, and now it has all gone to pieces. We can remember nothing of it. Will you teach us again?"

The Bishop, by now was deeply humbled by the faith of these three. He leaned over the ship's side and said, "Your own prayer will reach the Lord, men of God. It is not for me to teach you how to pray. Please go on your way and pray for us."

Tolstoy told this story, because he knew there was a difference between living a prayer and reciting a prayer. We have come to know how to recite the Lord's Prayer. My hope is that we will learn how to live the Lord's Prayer in our lives as well.

In the hope Jesus offers us.

Amen