

This is a strange time in my life. I have experienced God's healing recently, and while I rejoice in this, a former colleague and good friend has just lost his dear wife to cancer, two friends are recovering from strokes which **could** have been debilitating but by the grace of God they are making a spectacular recovery, my mother is rapidly losing sight in one eye, and a 30-something young man, who while studying to become a medical doctor many years ago, started a dialogue with a friend on campus, with the aim of converting the friend to Islam, instead found himself faced with the power of God and became a follower of Christ, and rapidly became a world renowned Christian apologist, has had a very painful 13 months suffering from a virulent form of stomach cancer, has now been moved into palliative care, and we all know what that means.

The Christian community world-wide are praying for him and for his healing, but the Muslim community are convinced, this deadly form of cancer is God's condemnation for renouncing his faith in Islam. They wish him dead, in order to declare, anyone who converts away from Islam, will incur the same horrible fate.

I find myself in this emotional soup of many flavours, knowing how to pray, but not knowing what to pray for.

Prayer is very difficult and most elusive, and human traditions add to the confusion: which is right, or what is appropriate?

Last Sunday we proposed a framework on which to build a life of prayer:

1. Concede, God is not one of us; we are one with Him. He made us Holy as He is Holy.
2. By dwelling on our weaknesses and inabilities, we deprive the power, strength and wisdom of God to help us. Take the initiative Jesus said, to ask, seek, and knock on the door of Heaven. God will answer, and bless us to be a blessing.
3. Learn the language of prayer and make it your own. The Psalms are a great place to start to build and develop your own prayer vocabulary.
4. Finally, as you learn to pray, know you are appealing to the character of God, who is unchanging and therefore dependable.

These four footings offer a robust frame-work on which to develop a life of prayer.

The first, most logical place to start our journey into prayer would be the prayer which, many agree, is badly labelled as, **The Lord's Prayer**.

For many centuries prior to Jesus' ministry, Rabbis (teachers of the Law) taught their followers **a prayer** intended to uniquely identify their followers. If a person recited a prayer, people would know which Rabbi mentored them, which Rabbinic school they attended, or which Rabbi considered them their disciple. So it was not unusual for Jesus' disciples to ask Him, "**Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.**"

It is interesting to note, the disciples did not ask Jesus to teach them to heal, or to preach, to speak in different languages (who needs the Rosetta Stone!), or better still, "**teach us how to make money so that we don't burden people for funds to travel and spread the gospel**", or even better still, "**distribute the money to those in need**". Why then, did they ask Jesus to teach them to pray? The answer is found in the following. Jesus had a habit of going away to a lonely place to pray. People would approach the disciples looking for Jesus mostly for healing and sometimes for teaching, so the disciples would go looking for Him. On finding Him, they would see Him in prayer. Struck by the sincere intimacy with which He prayed, they wanted to pray as He did. **If there is one thing we need to learn from this our Great Teacher, is to pray as He does.**

The disciples did not ask Jesus, **Lord, teach us A PRAYER**; they asked Jesus, **Lord teach us TO pray?**

This is a major, big-time shift. The disciples did not want another set of rote prayers, similar to the ones heard in the Temple and on the streets; they wanted what they had seen: a meaningful, prayer-based personal relationship Jesus had with His Father. Jesus' response, therefore, was not, **Here, pray this prayer**. Jesus replied, **When you pray, pray like this...** in other words, **When you pray, here's a guide to help focus your thoughts and direct your prayer**. If Jesus said, here's a prayer, memorise it and recite it anytime and God will look upon you with favour, then He would have been like any other Rabbi who gave his disciples **a prayer** to pray and be identified as his follower.

Before teaching His disciples how to pray, Jesus said, **Don't pray the insincere prayers people pray in public, chanting and babbling words only to be seen, heard and applauded by others, but when YOU pray, go home, enter your room, shut the door behind you, and pray. Your Father in Heaven, who sees the unseen and knows the unknown, will hear and respond.**

So, who is this Father, to whom is Jesus directing us to pray?

Our Father! Two extremely important words, which establishes the context of prayer, and our relationship with God, and with Jesus. Note, Jesus did not suggest we pray, "**MY Father**" because, by personalising God, we make Him into a personal

charm, to place on our fireplace mantle, or to hang on our wall or door. To anyone who would admire our “idol” of God, we would only say, “Go get your own; the one is mine”. The disciple John grasped Jesus’ teaching on prayer and tells us, **God so loved THE WORLD...** God is God of all; when God acts for ALL, He is also acting for me!

Our Father! Jesus’ life, is defined by His relationship with His Father in Heaven: conceived by the Holy Spirit, affirmed by The Father as “**my Son in whom I well pleased**”, and finally Jesus, **Father, into your hands, I commend my Spirit**¹. The Father-Son relationship is well established.

This is how we should relate with God, Our Father: We are fearfully and wonderfully made, *knit* in our mother’s womb and brought to life into this world at God’s precise time. We should live our lives to hear the one accolade, “**This is my child in whom I am well pleased. Well done good and faithful servant**”, and when our are days on earth are done, we may boldly say, “**Into your hands Father, I commend my spirit**”.

Our lives are framed by this relationship with, **Our Father**.

In teaching us how to pray, Jesus invites us into this relationship - **OUR Father**. He is Jesus’ Father, and He is our Father too. Opening prayer with these two words, Jesus wants us to also remember, God is the author of life, who formed us and breathed His spirit into us; He *fathered* us. These two words, **OUR Father**, set up a parent-child relationship between God and us. He is Our Father and we are His children.

The idea of God as Father was not new to the Hebrew people. Moses told Pharaoh, **This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son**². Jeremiah quotes God saying, **I am Israel’s Father**³, and generations later, the final prophetic voice before the advent of Jesus, Malachi reminds the same people, **Don’t all of us have one Father? Didn’t one God create us?**⁴

“God as Father” was not new, but I have not been able to find in the Old Testament, references to God being **addressed** as “Father”. This is the major shift, which Jesus brings to us: He is your Father; call Him **Father**.

To make sure we we don’t belittle God by thinking He is one of us, Jesus adds, **Who Lives in Heaven, whose home is Heaven**. How many times have I heard people say,

¹ Luke 23:46

² Exodus 4:22

³ Jeremiah 31:9

⁴ Malachi 2:10

this world is in a mess because God has gone to sort out another world, which places in doubt, His commitment to us and this world. That is why this world in a such a mess - a circular argument which does not answer the question. Building on the first footing in our life of prayer, God is not one of us; we are one with Him. Heaven is His home, and all creation, including the earth, is under His control!

Our Father, whose home is Heaven. Hallowed be Your Name! Jesus then tells us of the spirit with which we should approach God in prayer: **first**, your desire should be to worship God who is Holy. God is the embodiment of Holiness, and we are to honour His Holiness. **Second**, the act of worship is the act of surrendering our will, making it subservient to God's will and His plans. This is what is meant when we pray the words, **May Your Kingdom come and be established on earth, exactly as it is in Heaven.** We must resist the temptation to want God to bless **our** plans. You must have, as I have, been approached by a child posing the question, **Dad, promise me you will do what I ask?** I have persisted wanting to know what I am expected to promise, while the question is repeated, **Dad, I asked you first, will you promise me....**

This is exactly how we pray. **Father, This is what I want.... promise me you will give it to me and I be faithful and loyal to you forever!**

God is Holy and He is perfect; it should be natural, we must want His Holiness and his perfect plans to take over this world, and in the process, our lives too.

We remind ourselves, Jesus is teaching us to how **TO** pray. To the disciples before Him, and to us His disciples *millennia* later, He reveals His identity, **I herald God's kingdom on earth. His Kingdom has come (it is here and now in My Person), exactly as it is in heaven. Therefore, God's Will is done on earth, as it being done in Heaven.**

The One standing before the disciples teaching them to pray, is the person who has brought God's Kingdom to us; He is doing God's will, He is achieving God's plan to restore this earth and all of us, back in Heaven, as it was in the beginning of time.

So, to whom do we pray?

Our Father, whose home is Heaven. ONLY you are Holy, and we worship ONLY you. This earth is an integral part of God's Kingdom; Our Father's will and plan is being done on earth, exactly as it being done in Heaven.

This is **Our Father**, whom we approach in prayer. Jesus cautions us, however, not to pray without understanding, because to pray without understanding, is no different than praying as the heathen do, mumbling words, without knowing its meaning.

Now, you cannot tell me that you do not memorise Scripture, because you have memorised the prayer Jesus taught His disciples, and recited it a short while ago in this worship service! The benefit of Scripture memory is not to be able to rattle off passages of Scripture for the sake of reciting it, or for others to marvel at at your memory skills. Scripture memory helps you use the vocabulary of the Bible, grow your own language of prayer, and build your own relationship with God.

Words by themselves have no magic. The magician would have us believe, the words ***abra-ca-dabra*** might make something happen, but these word are on a cue for someone to do something - pull a curtain, create a puff of smoke, or similar.

God knows when words spoken from the sincerity of your heart; He hears your petition and He responds with what is best for us.

A well known preacher told his congregation, "We already know enough about prayer. We just need to pray."⁵

So..., let's pray!

AMEN.

⁵ Veteran Navigator Ed Reis speaking to a group of pastors about the importance of prayer