

Matthew 6: 7-13 "Our Father in Heaven"

Read Matthew 6:7-13

1. Our prayers are shaped entirely by the character of the God that we pray to. What are some of the characteristics of God that you hold onto as you pray, and how does this impact the way in which you pray?
2. (vs. 7) Jesus opens the Lord's prayer by comparing the prayer life of the gentile pagan, to the prayer life of the Jesus follower. The prayer life of the gentile pagan was entirely transactional in nature. You had to wake the pagan gods up to your needs so that they would act favorably toward you or placate them so they wouldn't be ill tempered. Are there ways in which we approach God in a transactional manner (I do this, in order to get you to do that)? What thinking prompts this approach to God?
3. (vs. 8) How does knowing that God is a Father who knows our needs before we ask address our transactional thinking and approach to God?

Our Father.

In the sermon Tim mentioned the three ways in which the word Father would have been heard by his original listeners.

- i) Abba Father. Was an address made by young children as an expression of dependence, intimacy, and trust. To refer to God in this way would have been scandalous in its intimacy, in its familiarity, in it's boldness.
- ii) The first time God referred to himself as a parent was in Exodus four when through Moses to Pharoah he speaks of Israel being his son, his first born, longing for his people to be free. To call God father then was to locate yourself in the story of the new exodus – Jesus' rescuing us from slavery to sin and leading us to the promised land of God's kingdom present and future.
- iii) Fathers in Hebrew culture were those who passed on the family trade to typically their sons. To call God father is to invite him to apprentice us in the family trade, the way of the kingdom, the way of justice, love, freedom and peace.

4. Which of the three stood out to you the most, and how will seeing this shape your prayer life?

In Heaven

In the sermon Tim gave three ways that this expression would have been heard by the original listeners.

- i) He is holy. Wholly other. He is a holy Father. A Father that is wholly other than any other Father. He loves us with a holy love. A love that is wholly other than any other love we could imagine.
- ii) Heaven wasn't the spiritual domain of God. Heaven was the air, the domain of the birds, in flight. So we are not praying to a God up there far far away, we are praying to a God who is all around us, close at hand.
- iii) He is on his throne. He has the power, the rule, the authority to bring into being everything that is in keeping with his will.

5. Which of the three stood out to you the most, and how will seeing this shape your prayer life?

6. *The vitality of prayer lies largely in the vision of God that prompts it. Drab thoughts of God make prayer dull. J.I. Packer*

How has your vision of God been enlarged been electrified in your reflection on the first line of the Lord's prayer? How will this enlarging and electrifying impact your life of prayer?

Leaders – the questions this week are entirely inviting personal reflection and conversation amongst group members of how the opening line of the Lord's prayer expands our vision of God and changes the ways in which we pray. I didn't see a need then to give a leaders guide that would help navigate the questions and put all the background material needed within the questions themselves for all to read.