

Sermon 26, Pray Like This, Pt. 1: "Our Father," Matthew 6:9b

For who calls God Father, in that one title confesses at once the forgiveness of sins, the adoption, the heirship, the brotherhood, which he has with the Only-begotten, and the gift of the Spirit. For none can call God Father, but he who has obtained all these blessings.--Chrysostom

The Significance of the name "Father" (from Thomas Aquinas' commentary)

- I. It teaches Theology
 - A. The Need to Trust God
 - B. The Generosity of God, Mat. 7:11
 - C. The Need to Imitate God by Love, Eph. 5:1
 - D. The Need to Be Humble Before God, Mal. 1:6
 - E. The Need to Love our Neighbors, Mal. 2:10
- II. It Refutes Heresies
 - A. Deism
 - B. Fatalism
 - C. Open Theism

Proposition: True believers must call on God as their Father with faith, with hope, and with love.

Outline

- I. The Prayer of Faith: "Father"
 - A. God's Fatherhood as Creator, Mal. 2:10
 - B. God's Fatherhood as Redeemer, John 1:12
 - C. God's Fatherhood as the First Person of the Trinity, John 20:17, 1 John 2:23
 - D. Calling on God as Father
 1. Trust
 2. Reverence
 3. Confidence
 4. Closeness
- II. The Prayer of Hope: "Father in Heaven"
 - A. Heaven: God's Presence
 - B. Heaven: Our Bliss
 - C. Heaven: Our Hope
 - D. Calling on God in Heaven
 1. Contrast with God in the Temple
 2. Accessibility

3. Permanence
 4. Power
- III. The Prayer of Love: "Our Father"
- A. "Mine" and "Ours"
 - B. The Covenant God, Gen. 17:7
 1. Reconciliation and Communion With God
 - a) According to His Nature and Attributes, Pss. 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; Hos. 2:19-23; cf. Turretin, XII.2.20 (2:180)
 - b) According to the Persons and Personal Operations
 - (1) The Father is Our Father, 1 John 3:1
 - (2) Christ Is Our God, John 20:28
 - (3) The Spirit Has Been Given to Us, 1 John 3:24
 2. Communion of Goods, 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Ps. 84:11; Rev. 21:7
 3. Conformity to God, Matthew 13:43 compared with Ps. 84:11
 - a) In Holiness, Matthew 5:48
 - b) In Life and Happiness, Matthew 22:31-32 (cf. Turretin, XII.2.23)
 - (1) "God Living Forever Cannot Hold Communion with the Dead"
 - (2) The Covenant was Made with the Whole Man and Benefits the Whole Man
 4. Eternity of Good Things, Ps. 48:14
 - C. The God Who Claims Us, Heb. 11:16
 - D. Calling on God Together in Love
 1. Unity
 2. Joy
 3. Trinitarian Wholeness, Eph. 2:18

The Christian faith is dependent on a number of triads. We believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We confess one Lord, one faith, one baptism. We summarize Christianity under three headings: the doctrinal, the ethical, and the devotional — that is, the Creed (esp. the Nicene Creed), the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. All three of these are needed for Christianity; if you excise one, the remaining Christianity that results is so truncated as to be virtually worthless. What good is a correct creed if it's held by a wife-beating drunkard? What good is a person who obeys all the Ten Commandments but never prays? What kind of Christian is a person who prays but believes that God is a limited, finite being who has no ultimate power or control? In all of these ways, we see how necessary it is that the person professing to be a Christian keep up all three aspects of the Christian faith.

All of these triads are important. Indeed, we are going to talk about most of them today in terms of another triad, one that comes from the Apostle Paul's summary of the human condition

in 1 Corinthians 13. “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1Co 13:13 NKJ). Faith, hope, and love, like the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are indescribably important aspects of the Christian life. They can easily be correlated with the doctrinal, the ethical, and the devotional. Faith is the doctrinal content. What do you believe? The truths taught by the Christian faith. Love is the ethical content. How do you behave? In accordance with the Ten Commandments, which together define what love looks like. What practices do you engage in to nurture your spiritual life? Devotional practices — reading the Bible, praying to God, worshipping with God's people and partaking of His sacraments — all are ways of building your hope, of creating that future-oriented anticipation of dwelling with God in Heaven forever.

And so, today we are going to talk about the Trinity and about faith, hope, and love. All of these things are wrapped up in the first line of the package we call the “Lord's Prayer.” What we're going to see is this: Christians, we need to pray to our Father with faith, hope, and love.

I. The Prayer of Faith: “Father”

We begin with faith. Why is God's fatherhood part of “the faith,” the doctrinal content of Christianity? Why does it take faith to call on God as Father?

A. God's Fatherhood as Creator, Mal. 2:10

God's fatherhood is part of the content of the faith because it is clearly revealed in Scripture, and because it is such a comforting doctrine to us. Remember how Luke, tracing Jesus' genealogy, takes it all the way back to Adam, “the son of God”? Well, Luke didn't get that out of nowhere. By the very act of creating us, God became the Father of the human race. The prophet Malachi put the two ideas in parallel, indicating that they are linked: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?” (Mal 2:10 NKJ). If you are human being today, then God has created you. You didn't evolve from an ape. You didn't come from a fish a long time ago. You came from the hand of a good God who is a good creator. That means that you are related to God, that He is responsible for making you, that He is available to help you. Some fathers are proud of the fact that they have had a lot of one-night stands and left a lot of children they'll never know. But not God. He knows everyone whom He has created, and as the apocrypha says, He hates nothing He has made (Wisdom 11:24).

Do you believe that your existence right here, right now is due to the choices of a wise and loving Father, rather than to a blind fate or a cosmic karma or a random string of molecular collisions? Do you? God says to you, “Trust me.” He says, “I am your Father,” and He means it.

B. God's Fatherhood as Redeemer, John 1:12

But God's fatherhood as Creator is only a secondary and derived Fatherhood. We could say that God is a father by creation in a sense similar to that in which Thomas Edison is the father of the incandescent light bulb, or in which James Watt is the father of the steam engine. But God is truly a Father, in a much more perfect sense, to those who are united by faith to His perfect and only-begotten Son. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (Joh 1:12 NKJ). We heard this verse last week, but I

repeat it because it is so terribly important that you recognize that Christianity does not teach “the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man” — not in any absolute, unqualified sense. Rather, we believe that God is the Father of those who believe in His Son. We are the brothers and sisters of our fellow Christians much more than of the human race in general. Yes, in a vague sense we acknowledge the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man — but in a special, specific sense, we truly believe that God is the loving Father of all those who believe in Jesus Christ and that we are their brothers and sisters.

That's why this name “Father” is a name of faith. A great deal of Christian teaching exists on this topic, because it is so important. Do you rejoice in the fact that God is your Father? Do you believe that He is so?

C. God's Fatherhood as the First Person of the Trinity, John 20:17, 1 John 2:23

But not only is God our Father; in an ultimate sense, He is the Father of Jesus Christ. I've had multiple encounters with Jehovah's Witnesses since I arrived in Gillette, and every time I've come away thinking this: *you want to take away my heavenly Father*. Let me put it this way. Let's say that a young single man is going to father a child in 2024. But right now, he is a virgin and has no children. Is he a father? Of course not! Well, in the same way, if there was ever a time when God the Father did not have a Son, then there was a time when He was not God the Father. If you tell me that Jesus Christ is a created being, then you are denying the Fatherhood of God. You're saying that God became a Father at some point, but that essentially and eternally, He is not such a thing. But that's not how the Bible talks about Him. He is the person whose essence, whose distinguishing property, is Fatherhood. If you take that away, then whatever He is, He isn't the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ — not eternally. Not essentially. Not always and unchangeably.

As orthodox Christians we confess that Jesus Christ was begotten of His Father before all worlds, that He is God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one and the same substance with the Father. The Father has always been a Father; from eternity, He has begotten His Son. There never was a time when the Son was not. God is always a Father, and He has always had an eternal Son. That's why Jesus distinguishes the sense in which God is His Father from the sense in which He is our Father. That's why John says that whoever does not have the Son doesn't have the Father either. Of course not! If your God was at some point not a Father, then He's not the same God as my God.

D. Calling on God as Father

So how do you approach your Father? I hope you had a good earthly father who modeled for you what your Heavenly Father is like. But even if you didn't, God will be to you everything a Father should have been. If you were going to talk to the ideal Father, how would you do it?

1. Trust

You'd do it with trust. You know that your Father doesn't want to hurt you, doesn't want to be mean to you. You know that He passionately wants what's best for His child, and you trust Him to give it to you. In this church we have a number of children who implicitly trust their fathers. If

your father was untrustworthy, look at them. See how they love their daddy — how they climb on him, play with him, cuddle close to him. See the unbounded confidence they repose in their father — and then think about how much more trustworthy is your Heavenly Father.

2. Reverence

In our culture, fatherhood is not a place of majesty. I don't think anyone in this room was taught to address his father as "sir." In the culture of ancient Rome, fathers had power of life and death. If they thought someone in their household deserved it, they were authorized to inflict the death penalty, no questions asked. Well, obviously God too can inflict the death penalty, and sometimes does. When we think of God as a Heavenly Father, we should approach Him with reverence. We ought to keep His majesty in mind as we approach Him. It's clear that you can't interrupt God or intrude on Him — but you can behave in other ways inappropriate to His majestic presence. You can use demeaning titles. Don't call God "ol buddy" or "the man upstairs." You can use disrespectful postures. You can let your conversation with Him be interrupted on your end by pointless trivialities. Is checking your phone really more important than finishing your sentence when you're talking to God?

3. Confidence

But if you do approach God as a Father, then you can do it with confidence. You can be absolutely convinced that He wants to help you. You can be sure that your praying is not pointless. Why don't we pray? I think a big part of it is this lack of confidence. We don't really believe that God wants to hear us. And so we stop talking. But if you knew that He was really your Father, then you would know how much he wants to hear from you. Ask any man in this room whose children have moved away from home. How much does he want to talk to them? God loves us more than any human father could ever love his children.

4. Closeness

Furthermore, praying to God as Father reminds us that we can be close to God. There is no need for distance, for standoffishness. He doesn't hold us at arm's length. If you want an interview with the governor of Wyoming, you'd better have something very important to say. But if you want an interview with God, He will talk to you personally in His office for as long as you want. Just as your children have access to you, so you have access to God.

Do you pray in faith? Do you believe that your Father has become your Father through Jesus Christ, His perfect only-begotten Son?

II. The Prayer of Hope: "Father in Heaven"

But secondly, I ask, do you pray in hope? Do you look forward to heaven? Do you anticipate what it will be like? Do you think about it? Worldly people think about worldly things all day long. They think about their bank account. They think about their job. They think about their dinner plans and their upcoming vacation. But Christian people should think about heaven. We should think about what it will be like there. We should look forward to it in all kinds of spare moments and longing conversations.

A. Heaven: God's Presence

Why is Heaven so great? Because Jesus is there. Because God is there. Because the Holy Spirit is there. Do you know what it's like to be in God's presence? Those who have had mystical experiences of various types say that it is amazing, that it is blissful and transcendent. People who have been in prayer meetings where the Holy Spirit moved — i.e., gave a small taste of His presence — have prayed all night and hardly even noticed the passage of time. I can promise you that Heaven itself is far better than even the most real, continuous mystical experience on earth could ever possibly be! If you have any love for God, you will want to be with Him. If you have any appreciation of God as the ultimate good, you will long to be in His presence.

B. Heaven: Our Bliss

Why? Because wrongs are righted. Tears are wiped away. Injuries are healed. You can at last find rest, fulfillment, satisfaction, peace, and joy. You will be with all your believing loved ones, and meeting new and very interesting people all the time. You will have unfettered access to God Himself, the fountain of all that's meaningful and enjoyable. Some of you have been to Hawaii and loved it. Well, in Heaven you can talk to the architect who designed Hawaii, and probably see His latest project.

C. Heaven: Our Hope

The Bible contains very little about Heaven, but what there is is enough to tell us this: Heaven is our hope. Heaven is what we have to look forward to. As the old saying goes, being a Christian is hard. The hours are long and the pay is meagre. But the retirement benefits are out of this world!

Is your hope fixed on the weekend? On your next vacation? On your children turning out okay? On your grandchildren turning out okay? On the next restaurant you visit, the next toy you buy, the next pleasure you experience? The Bible says that you can set your hope much higher than that — that, if you choose to submit to God, you can set your hope on absolutely everything turning out right, on poetic justice being done to every last cop-killer and wife-beater, and on everyone who truly wants to be good being happy forever and ever, loving one another and praising God together. Is that your hope? Remember, Biblical hope is something much more like what motivates the farmer to keep planting seeds than it is like the little girl saying, "I hope it rains today." Hope is not a far-fetched wish for something relatively unimportant; hope is a motivating force, a conviction that certain things will turn out. Don't hope in your vacation. Hope in heaven.

D. Calling on God in Heaven

Well, with that understanding of hope, how does that affect how you pray? Pray in hope. Pray with conviction that God is working all things toward the goal of heaven.

1. Contrast with God in the Temple

In the Old Testament, people called on God in His temple. All over the place, whether with Solomon or Jonah or David or Daniel or other saints, you see them making reference to God being in His temple and calling on Him in His temple. But now, we don't have to turn our face to Jerusalem or think about God far away across the sea. God is in Heaven! David talks about how

the only thing he wanted from God was to be welcomed to live in the Temple forever and ever (Ps. 27:4). But the Temple wasn't that comfortable. It was small stone building. It actually wasn't much bigger than our church building here. It didn't have modern plumbing, and it probably smelled a lot like burnt hair and burnt beef. But David didn't care, because he wanted to be near God. If he could have that, he didn't care about the rest of it. But you don't have to want to live in a smelly temple anymore to be near God. You can find God anywhere precisely because He's in Heaven.

2. Accessibility

Indeed, the fact that God is in Heaven makes Him accessible. You can be prevented from going to Jerusalem. Daniel, for instance, wasn't allowed to go to the temple. In fact, it had been destroyed by the time he was the age I am now (26). When the way of access to God was through an earthly temple, that access could be cut off, either by blocking the way to the temple or just plain destroying the temple. But God is in Heaven now. His dwelling-place cannot be touched. You can speak to Him no matter where you are. You can get to Him from anywhere, because Heaven is like God Himself — immanent and transcendent. It's far away, and yet so close to any one of God's children that we simply have to whisper, or even think, and God can hear us.

3. Permanence

Well, again, unlike the Temple, Heaven is permanent. If you had your hope fixed on a building in Jerusalem, you've been pretty disappointed for the last 2,000 years. But if you had your hope fixed on Heaven, you will never be disappointed. Heaven lasts forever, just like God does. It cannot break or get old. We'll talk about that more in a few weeks. But for now, hope for heaven should motivate your prayers because heaven is always there.

4. Power

Finally, the fact that God is in Heaven points to His power. If He can create a perfectly blissful place and fill it with saints and angels who do nothing but praise Him, then He must be all-powerful. Indeed, everything you can possibly ask for (that's not metaphysically impossible) is something God can do.

If you could ask a genie for something, knowing that he had the power to give it to you, would you hang back? Would you say, "I don't want to ask. I don't really want a seaside mansion in Hawaii and enough frequent flyer miles to take all my friends there for free for the rest of my life"? Brothers and sisters, your Father is more powerful than any genie. He has promised you a hope better than any mansion in Hawaii could ever be. Do you want to talk to Him, telling Him what you need and what you want and what you hope for? Do you believe in Him and hope in Him? Every time you pray the Lord's Prayer, you say that you do. Every time you affirm that God is your Father in Heaven, you are saying that you believe God and you hope for heaven.

III. The Prayer of Love: "Our Father"

But there's more. Greater than faith, greater than hope, is the third element of the triad which we affirm. We show the Father our love whenever we call Him ours.

A. "Mine" and "Ours"

I can still remember the days when I had only three younger siblings. We were four in total, and we could all sit on Dad's lap at the same time, two of us straddling each leg. It was wonderful. It was amazing. I thought at the time that it was pretty much the best thing ever, the four of us sitting there on Dad's lap after breakfast every day, and as I think about it now I think I was right.

Well, usually not long into this communal event my two youngest (at the time) siblings, Seth and Evangeline, would start to argue.

"He's my daddy," Seth would say.

"No, he's my daddy," Evangeline shot back.

Soon — and this is the literal truth — they would almost come to blows over whose daddy he was! Annika and I were always amused, and I at least sometimes tried to provoke the blowups because they were so funny. From my big 8-year-old perspective, it was obvious that he was *all of ours*, both "my daddy" and "our daddy." Why couldn't three-year-old Seth and one-year-old Vangie see that? They do today, of course, but there were some years there where anyone else's claim to Dad set them off.

Brothers and sisters, I hope you're seeing the point of this story. Jesus tells us to call on God as *our* Father, not as "my" Father. The plural pronoun is extremely important here. The fact that God is someone else's Father is not a threat to you, anymore than Dad being Seth's father threatened his fatherhood toward Vangie. The fact that God is the Father of Chinese Christians and South African Christians and Peruvian Christians, that He is the Father of Christians from Sheridan and Rozet as well as Christians from Gillette, is not a threat to us. Rather, it is a blessing to us. Right now, we have brothers and sisters we've never met praising God in Peru. We have siblings all over the world, who together with us call upon our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours! He's *ours*. He belongs to all of us. This is the word of love. We love God and we love one another because of the mutuality in this plural first-person pronoun. God belongs to all of us. He's what brings us together. He is our point of unity. Because we all love Him, we all love each other. More than hoping in God, more than believing in God, you and I must love God. This commandment is all over the Bible. It's the greatest commandment — and it obligates us to love one another too.

B. The Covenant God, Gen. 17:7

Well, not only does God belong to all of us; this word "our" further teaches us that God is a God who has sworn a covenant with us. "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you" (Gen 17:7 NKJ). We are the heirs of this promise to Abraham. We are his descendants, and the promise to him comes to us as a promise too.

What does God mean when He says that He will be a God to us and to our children? This could easily be a whole sermon series. I can only read you the major headings now. For now, just remember that these four major benefits are promised to everyone with whom God is in covenant — that is, with everyone who has God for his Father.

- 1. Reconciliation and Communion With God**
 - a) **According to His Nature and Attributes, Pss. 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; Hos. 2:19-23; cf. Turretin, XII.2.20 (2:180)**
 - b) **According to the Persons and Personal Operations**
 - (1) **The Father is Our Father, 1 John 3:1**
 - (2) **Christ Is Our God, John 20:28**
 - (3) **The Spirit Has Been Given to Us, 1 John 3:24**
- 2. Communion of Goods, 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Ps. 84:11; Rev. 21:7**
- 3. Conformity to God, Matthew 13:43 compared with Ps. 84:11**
 - a) **In Holiness, Matthew 5:48**
 - b) **In Life and Happiness, Matthew 22:31-32 (cf. Turretin, XII.2.23)**
 - (1) **“God Living Forever Cannot Hold Communion with the Dead”**
 - (2) **The Covenant was Made with the Whole Man and Benefits the Whole Man**
- 4. Eternity of Good Things, Ps. 48:14**

Do you see all of these things? Communion with God, communication of goods from God, likeness to God, and the eternal duration of all three of these things — that's all that it means for God to be our God.

C. The God Who Claims Us, Heb. 11:16

Indeed, God is not ashamed to be called “ours.” We call Him “our Father,” and He delights in that name! Think of all the bad things that are hurled at the church. “I’m the pastor of We Hate Muslims Presbyterian Church.” “I go to God Hates Gays Presbyterian Church.” Ouch. I’m sure you’d be more than a little ashamed of saying something like that. But God knows how many awful things the church has done, and He is still not ashamed to be affiliated with us. He is happy to say, “Yes, they’re with me. Yep; they’re my people all right.” Not even the tiniest littlest bit ashamed of us, is God!

Do you love the God who is proud to be called your God? Do you love the God who wants you to address with a possessive pronoun? Some people call their pastor “pastor,” as though he doesn’t have a name. But I don’t know anyone who regularly addresses someone else with a possessive pronoun. You might call me “pastor,” but none of you has ever come up to me and said, “My pastor, I have a question for you.” But God tells us to address Him *possessively*. That’s how strong He wants the bond of love between us to be.

D. Calling on God Together in Love

So what does it look like to call on God together?

1. Unity

It looks like unity. We all agree in what we ask. At its best, our worship here in this room every Sunday morning and evening should show what unity really is. We should all be enthusiastically

united in agreement about what comes from the pulpit in prayers and sermons, what comes from the hymnbook in song, and what comes from the font and the table in sacrament. Our thoughts should go the same way and be agreed in the same things. That's why we should give a corporate "amen!" after every prayer — because God is *ours*, and we are worshipping Him together.

2. Joy

This togetherness in worship, in turn, should produce *joy*. If you love God, then you will want the people you love to love Him too. I can't tell you what joy it gives me to look out and see my biological parents, children, brothers, and sisters all sitting out there worshipping God together. But when we call on God together, we forge ourselves into a new church family. It should give us all joy to see our church family worshipping, just as it does to see our biological family worshipping. Add to the mix all your friends, everyone you went to college with, everyone you love — that's the kind of unity and joy that we seek just by praying "our Father."

Do you see it? Worship here, now, in this rickety old building, is supposed to be a foretaste of Heaven every week! You are supposed to taste the joy of being with those you love, praising God and fellowshiping with God. That's why we sing. That's why we pray. That's why we listen to God's word read and preached. We are seeking know God and praise God. And we are seeking to do it together. Ultimately, that's why you can't worship God in your boat on the lake on Sunday morning. It's why you can't commune with God at your favorite campsite the same way you can here. Here, you are united with other believers, your brothers and sisters, in communing with God and adoring God. There, you aren't. Not to the same degree. The point is not that the lake and the mountains are inappropriate for worship. Not at all. The point is that worship takes place in the gathering of God's people the way it never can apart from such a gathering. That's all. And that's what we admit whenever we say "OUR Father." Saying "He's *my* Daddy" cuts you off from so much. You have brothers and sisters. You were made to share your Daddy, your Heavenly Father. You were made to worship together.

3. Trinitarian Wholeness, Eph. 2:18

The apostle Paul summarized this reality with one of the most glorious verses in the New Testament. You see, MLK Jr. didn't invent racial reconciliation. Jesus did.

"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18 NKJ). Did you get that? We both, Jews and Gentiles, blacks and Chinese, whites and Asian Indians, Mexicans and Frenchmen, can all come together and worship God. Christ didn't die so that you could commune with Him alone in your boat on the lake. He did it to gather together the children of God who are scattered abroad. He did it so that, together, we could believe in faith, live in hope, and walk in love. We call upon *our* Father, but we can only do so because Jesus died and because the Holy Spirit carries our prayers. Do you see the triads? We have, right here in the Lord's Prayer, the doctrinal, the ethical, and the devotional. We have faith, hope, and love. Do you want to worship God, with everyone you love, in one big group forever and ever? Then pray this prayer. Call upon your Father in Heaven. Anticipate the day when all will hallow His name, when His kingdom has arrived and His will is perfectly done. And until then, keep asking for

your daily bread and deliverance from evil. The Father forgives sins — even the sin of neglecting and despising worship. Call upon Him in prayer today. Use the truths of theology and ethics to motivate you to call upon God the Father with faith, with hope, and with love. He will listen to your prayer. Amen.