



Weekly Devotion

Pray Like This: The adopted children & the loving Father

Ephesians 1:3-14.

What does the word father mean to you? Depending on your past, it might bring to mind images of care and protection. Conversely, it could bring up feelings of neglect and bitterness. Joy, anger, rejection, affection—all these emotions are packed into the single word father. This is the word Jesus used to begin the Model Prayer:

We should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven.

Matthew 6:9

The starting point for approaching God as Christ followers is summed up in this single word: Father. Because that word is loaded with preconceived notions for all of us, depending on our relationships with our earthly fathers, praying in this way can be either extraordinarily comforting or extraordinarily problematic. Part of our growth in Christ, as well as our growth in prayer, involves recovering the meaning of this word as it's applied to God.

What does it mean to call God Father? It means, first and foremost, recognizing that addressing God like this in prayer is a unique privilege for Christians. Because all of us have been born in sin, we're separated from our holy God. Far from being our Father, we're His enemies-opposed to Him—for in our sin we would much rather live under our own authority than His.

But when we believe the gospel, He who was once our enemy becomes our Father. We who were once orphans are brought into God's family. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus and our belief in Him, we have a place at God's table.

The astounding reality for Christians is that our adoption by God doesn't have an expiration date. Once adopted, we're forever His children,

and as Paul would say in Ephesians 1:3, God has given us "every spiritual blessing in the heavens." As our Father, God has held nothing back from us, because He has given us everything in Jesus Christ.

This is why Jesus wants us to begin our prayers with the word Father. When we do, we remind ourselves that God has made a way for us to be in His family.

1 John 3:1-2.

When Jesus told His first followers to address God as Father, it must have come as a shock. It wasn't the first shocking thing He had said to them, for this Model Prayer comes in the context of Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus had warmed up the crowd with controversial statements about what it really means to be called blessed and with the assertion that thinking badly of people is the same as killing them. But the introduction of the word Father took the sermon to another level.

Judaism strongly held to the established belief that God was absolutely unapproachable. Was He to be loved? Certainly. Respected? Absolutely. Feared? Without question. This was the culture that wouldn't even speak the revealed name of God, and when people had to write it in Scripture, they did so with great honor and respect. Some traditions say scribes broke the pens they had used to write the name of God after they had finished.

Enter Jesus, this strange rabbi who had no fear of or regard for the religious leaders of the time and who spoke with unmatched authority. There He was on a hillside talking about the revered God of Israel with an air of unmistakable familiarity: And that's just what God was going for.

God's purpose wasn't to be disrespected or approached casually—far from it. It was that God wanted to be in a relationship with His people that wasn't marked by fear but by love, not by apprehension but by an appreciation of His great grace and compassion. He wanted to be their dad.

That's where the love of God takes us. John described it like this: "See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children" (1 John 3:1). God's great love doesn't make us His servants. It doesn't make us the people He puts up with. God's great love makes us His sons and daughters. Father is the Christian name for God.

A real father cares. He protects. He encourages. He advises. But above all, a real father loves. Always and without condition. A real father waits on the porch to welcome home his children, regardless of where they've been or what they've done. A real father is proud of his children and takes no greater pleasure than giving them what they need.

Pray Like This by Steve Gaines



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