

The Lord's Prayer - Adult SS - Lesson 1: Our Father in Heaven

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[0:00] Welcome to Adult Sunday School, everyone. If you haven't been before, the aim of Adult Sunday School is to get a better understanding and a better appreciation of the doctrines, the topics, the different teachings of the Bible.

So how I like to think of Adult Sunday School, I've said this before, I like to think of Adult Sunday School as a zoo. So in learning the Bible, if that is like learning about animals, there are two ways you can learn about animals.

One way is to go on a safari and you go into the wild and you learn about the animals as they come.

So you go on a safari and you say, oh, there's a lion. You learn a bit about lions. Oh, there's elephants. Oh, there's a zebra. Oh, there's a lion again. Right.

So you learn as they as they as they come along on this journey. Well, preaching is a bit like a safari. OK, so you learn about God here. You journey through the wilderness of the Bible and you learn about the church there. Oh, there's the Holy Spirit or a bit more about God. Right.

So that's one way you can learn about the Bible or you can learn about animals in a zoo and you can gather together all the lions and gather together all the elephants and gather together all the zebras.

[1:22] And you can learn about them by gathering them together. Well, that's like Adult Sunday School. Right. So we gather all the things the Bible says about God, gather together all the things the Bible says about the church or the Holy Spirit.

Or we looked at the sovereignty of God last term and we gather all these topics together and we learn the Bible that way. Well, we are in a zoo this term. OK, welcome to the zoo. But this time we're going to do things slightly differently.

We are in a zoo. Don't worry. We're going to do things slightly differently. This term, we're going to look at the fundamentals of the Christian faith. So instead of just the lions or just the sovereignty of God, we're going to look at the essential things that make up the Christian life.

What are the things that really, really matter, the fundamentals of the Christian life? And throughout the ages, Christians have used basically three things to teach these essentials.

Christians have used the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments. And over the next two terms, we're going to look at those three things.

[2:33] So next half term, we're going to look at the Apostles' Creed. After Christmas, we're going to spend two half terms, a whole term on the Ten Commandments. But this half term, starting from today, we're going to be looking at the Lord's Prayer.

And you can think of the Lord's Prayer as kind of like a mini zoo in itself, which shows us all the essentials of the Christian life. So I've printed it at the top there for you.

So Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer twice in the Bible. There's a shorter version in Luke 11, and there's a fuller one in Matthew 6. And we're going to be focusing on the longer version, which is the one we say in church.

And so I want us to see this as kind of like a mini zoo showing us all the essentials of the Christian life. So to begin, I just want us to say it together.

So Jesus said, pray then like this. So do you see, just at first glance, this covers a lot, actually.

[4:06] There is, do you see, God, his name, his kingdom, his will, his providence, daily bread, his care for us, his forgiveness, their sin, temptation, God's glory.

This is Jesus telling us the essentials of the Christian life. And he's doing that by telling us what really matters when we pray.

And so just think about what prayer is. Prayer is us coming to God and bringing our needs and our desires and our praise to him.

So you can think about this. You can't have Sunday school with our diagrams. Think about this. So this is God. I'm not drawing a picture of God, just kind of representing him.

Prayer, and this is us in creation. There you go, actually. Prayer is us coming to God.

[5:09] So in creation and in confidence and all things, you could say the hour until it's down for all those things. But what's unique about prayer is we come to God in prayer.

So the hour is up. And what does that involve? It's in prayer. It's bringing our desires, our needs, and our praise.

Other things as well. You could create other categories as well. You could break it down a bit differently. But it's basically that. Desires, needs, and praise. But have a think about our desires. Our desires can be all over the place, can't they? We can want and praise all sorts of things. Our desires, they need to be shaped.

And we need to be taught what matters in the Christian life. Which is why Jesus says, pray then like this. It's like Jesus telling us, this is what matters in the Christian life.

[6:15] That this is how to shape and order your desires and bring them to God. And so you can think of the Lord's Prayer as a general pattern of how to order what matters.

How to order our desires in life. So that is to say, we don't only need to pray this prayer. In fact, we see in the New Testament, the apostles don't only pray this after Jesus teaches them.

They don't only pray this word for word. Although we can and we should pray this word for word.

We're going to do that later. But this is overall a model and a general structure for how we pray.

And how we are to order the essential things of the Christian life. So yes, Jesus is actually teaching us how to pray here. And my aim this half term is for us to learn how to pray through this.

But in doing so, Jesus is also teaching us these are the essentials of the Christian life. It's a mini zoo. And so over the next few weeks, we're going to look at just each part of the Lord's Prayer.

[7:23] We're going to really break it down. We're going to visit each part of this mini zoo. And I want us to see the essentials of the Christian faith. And I want us to just grow in our knowledge and our love for God through all of this.

And I hope we will also grow in our prayer life through this. And so today, we're going to look at the first line, that top one, our Father in heaven.

And I want us to look at these four words to see what it says about God, what it says about us as Christians, and what it says about how we should pray.

But let's just first think about the word Father. So we're looking at this first line, but we're going to break it down into bits, right? Just looking at the word Father. So the Lord's Prayer, it's split into three parts.

So just have a look at all of it. So there's the address, which is the first line, so addressing God. And then there are petitions about God.

[8:26] That's the next two lines. So asking things about God. And then the next three lines are petitions for us, asking things for us.

And instantly, with this address, Jesus teaches us something about God straight away. We are thrown into the mini zoo section of God.

And Jesus teaches us, God is our Father. Now, what does he mean by Father? Well, you can understand God is Father in three ways.

So God is Father eternally. So in the persons of the Trinity, God is Father to the Son eternally. So look at John 17.

Father, you loved me before the foundation of the world. God is Father eternally. But there's also a sense that God is Father as creator.

[9:30] So in the sense that he's given us all life. So look at Acts 17. In him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring.

Being then God's offspring, dot, dot, dot. Paul continues. However, Jesus isn't using Father in this sense. Because simply acknowledging God as creator isn't actually any comfort for us.

It's actually a reminder that we've fallen away from our creator. In this sense, we aren't his loved children. We are, by nature, children of wrath with God as Father as creator.

So it's not that. But instead, Jesus is using Father, meaning God is Father by redeeming and adopting us. This is what we mean when we say our Father in heaven.

To be saved by God is a lot of things. It is to be forgiven and guaranteed eternal life and for the power of sin to be broken in your life.

[10:40] And significantly, salvation means we are adopted into God's family and we can call him Father. So just look at John 1.

To all who did receive Jesus, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. So naturally, by nature, in our sin, we cannot call God Father in this comforting sense. But just as Jesus is God's true natural son, when we believe in him, we get brought into his sonship and we get to call God our Father.

Which means, although Jesus isn't mentioned here in the actual prayer, he is implied and necessary to pray this. So think of John 14.

No one comes to the Father except through me. To even say our Father means we must pray this through Jesus.

[11:52] And the Holy Spirit isn't mentioned in this prayer either, but look at Romans 8. You have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

This is what prayer is. We come to our Father through Jesus by the spirit of adoption. What Jesus is teaching us here is actually very Trinitarian.

And this is what is essential to the Christian life. What is essential to know about God and salvation. We are children of God and we come to God as children to their Father.

And we can ask him for help. And this is what makes the Lord's Prayer different to any other type of prayer. This is what makes it a Christian prayer.

So think about it. All sorts of people pray around the world, don't they? People pray in all sorts of ways, with all sorts of intentions. Prayer isn't exclusive to Christianity.

[12:56] But what is key about the Christian prayer is not where we pray or which way we face or our body position. No, what makes something a Christian prayer and true prayer is who we pray to.

We pray to our Father. Which means this is not something everyone can say. An unbeliever doesn't have the right to do this.

But as his church, Jesus is teaching us we exist in a very unique and special relationship to God. We can actually call him Father. Father. And I want us to see what this says about God's character. Because remember, we're in this mini part of the zoo of God. And Jesus is telling us something about how we should think about God. He wants us to think of God in a certain way.

And so I want us to break out into groups now. Break into twos or threes. You see in the dotted box you've got some questions. Read Matthew 7 to 11. 7 to 11.

[14:05] And just answer these two questions. What does Father teach us about God's character? And what does Father teach us about who we are as Christians? And how God treats us? The two are related.

But kind of think about both sides. Go for it. You've got two minutes. Go for it.

Go for it. Go for it. Go for it. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[16:36] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

He's responsive. Say again. Responsive. So he is. Like a father, when your children come to you asking for help, a good father doesn't just send them away.

If my little Lily runs up to me and says, Dad, I really need your help. I'm not going to ignore her. I'm not going to be unresponsive. If she runs up to me saying, Daddy, I need a wee. I'm going to be like, all right, everyone, get out of the way.

[18:37] So responsive. A father cares. All right, let's put that as well, actually. All right. A father cares. Anything else? Loving. Loving. Loving.

Exactly. All right. A father loves his children. Loving. Yeah. Oh, come on. There you go. Anything else? You can come to him any time.

Come to him any time. Yeah. Welcoming. Is that right? Welcoming. Yeah. Yeah. God is not this cold dictator that is just running the world in this, yeah, dictatorial fashion.

Right? No. He is a welcoming, heavenly father. Anything else? Generous. Generous. Yeah. Exactly. Yeah. What? What father?

Generous. Oh, you're testing. I'm just saying. Generous. There we go. What father, if you ask them for something that would give them a serpent or a stone? No, God is so generous.

[19:38] How much more will God give good things to his children who ask? Anything else? Something also to think about father.

Father. That's. That's your place. Father. So we know what we're doing with. Father is. It's all these warm, generous, loving things.

But there's also to it a reverence, right? He's not a roommate. He's not a buddy. There is a reverence you show your father as well. A good father is loving and caring and all these things. But there's also a reverence, right? You know, disrespect your father. And so there is. Let's put that there. There's also a reverence to it. Reverence to how we should think of God.

How about the next question? What does father teach us about who we are as Christians and how God treats us? I know it's related. They're kind of wrapped up. But what does this say we are as Christians?

[20:46] Children. Yeah. There you go. So he's our father. What does that mean? We are his children. Exactly.

Anything else? Some of them involves repeating some of these other things just from the different angle. Oh, dependent. Exactly. Yeah. Think of.

The little babies all born in this church. What are they to their parents, their father? They are dependent. They need everything from their father.

Anything else? Oh, right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So yeah. We live with the reference. That's under that. Under. The authority.

Right. I could also say, what else are we under? We're under his care. Right. And in love. Yeah.

[21:44] Also, another thing to think of. If we're his children, the whole aspect of being children, particularly sons, is being heirs.

If you are a child of God, you are an heir to the father's inheritance. It means we are. We come to God as father guaranteed salvation.

Right. Not in doubt about it. To be a child is to be guaranteed the inheritance of eternal life at the end. And so just in this one word, Jesus is teaching us about who God is and our status as children before God.

And this, this is the greatest privilege of the Christian life. Just listen to these quotes. J.I. Packer. Adoption is the highest privilege that the gospel offers.

Higher even than justification. To be right with God, the judge, is a great thing. But to be loved and cared for by God, the father is greater. John Murray.

[22:50] Adoption is the apex, the very peak of redemptive grace and privilege. She's what they're saying. It's one thing to be forgiven. It is another thing to call God our father.

And Jesus leads with this privilege. This is what we need to know first and foremost in the Christian life. We get to come to God boldly and confidently as his children.

And if adoption is the privilege, then prayer is, it's that privilege in action. Coming to God as father. But next, I want us to look at just a little word that comes before father.

Our. Right? That's the second thing I want to look at today. Our. Now notice, this doesn't say my father, does it? Although we can say that.

God is my father. He's your father. He, we can say that. But Jesus is teaching us something important here. The Christian faith isn't merely about me and God and just us in this kind of isolated relationship.

[24:01] Him being my father. No, the Christian life is fundamentally corporate. It is about God being our father.

And who is our referring to? It's everyone who's been adopted by God. It's the church. When we pray, we come to God, not just merely as individuals, but we come as one people of God.

And I just want to, I want us to have a think about what this means.

Okay. So this little breakout session, we'll do this together now. So if Jesus is ordering our desires and our priorities and he's showing us what really matters, what does our father teach us about?

Well, firstly, what does it teach us about what the church is? What does this say about the church? Oh, okay, great.

[25:16] Oh, where am I going to put this? Okay. We are. Oh, hold on. We'll deal with that in the third one. All right. I'm trying to fill this in. Okay. So what does it say about what the church is? That's absolutely right, Lorna.

We're a family. Exactly. We're a family. I mean, let's do church. Right. We are a family. There you go.

Yeah. Yeah. We're not just a gathering of individual believers who just have the same interest in God. No, no. We are a family, which means we are, we're united by something very deep, by spiritual bonds.

We're united by the blood of Christ. And so what does that say the church should be like, then? What should be the dynamic in the church?

What should a family be like? Go on. Go on. Yeah.

[26:23] Right. Yeah. There's a harmony. There's a love, a unity in a family that should be.

And so that is what the church is. And what does this say about the second thing, the importance of the church in the Christian life? How important is that then?

No trick answers. Central. Central. Yeah, absolutely. Central. Jesus says, this is how you should pray.

Our father. This is the priority. These are the things that matter in the Christian life. And Jesus leads with, it's our father. Not just my father, our father.

The church should be central, fundamental to the Christian life. In fact, if this is how Jesus is teaching us to pray, then we can't pray without the church.

[27:27] Now, I don't mean you can never pray individually, but I'm saying in the Christian life, to never have the church means you could never say our then, could you?

So we don't pray alone. And so we don't pray alone. Although you can pray alone. But we don't pray kind of stranded alone. No, we don't live alone. We are together God's family, church.

And Jesus thinks this is essential. It's one of the first things he says. Our, right. We lead off with our. And what does this say about how we should treat other believers?

Lorna, go on back to you. How should we treat other believers? What did you say, Lorna? Oh, sorry. We said that we should serve each other. Serve each other, right.

So how. Serving. Loving. Loving. Loving. Right. Exactly.

[28:27] So if Jesus is teaching us how to order our desires, how to prioritise the things that matter, prioritise our needs. This means he's saying our desires should be for each other.

And our prayers should be for each other. So all these petitions that we're going to look at, the things that we ask for in the Lord's Prayer. We are longing for all these things for each other.

Yes, for ourselves as well. We need our daily bread, but also for each other. So just in these three letters, Jesus is teaching in all that we ask for. We ask not just for ourselves, but for God's glory and for the church family around us.

But there's one last phrase I want us to look at. In heaven. In heaven. Again, Jesus is taking us to the doctrine of God, part of the zoo. And he's telling us more.

God is not only our father. He's our heavenly father. Now, what does Jesus mean by heaven here? Well, he's not necessarily focusing on heaven as the place where Jesus is now.

[29:40] Although God does dwell in heaven, his glory is going to manifest intensely in the place of heaven. That's the heaven in view when we pray your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But the focus here isn't necessarily the place of heaven, as if like Jesus is saying, you know, put the postcode of heaven. When you say our father, your prayers have got to be sent to the right place.

He's not saying it kind of with that focus. But when it says our father in heaven, it is emphasizing God's beyondness. It's not emphasizing a different place, but a different plane of existence that God lives in.

So we have an earthly existence, don't we? We live here on earth with our weaknesses and our limitations. But God has an existence beyond that, a heavenly existence beyond and exalted above creation.

Not bound by anything, but beyond everything. Or another word for this is God's transcendence. It's a big word. If you're going to come to adult Sunday school, you're going to learn some new words.

[30:57] God's transcendence. It means God is beyond us. He's exalted over creation. And so Jesus is teaching us something else about God's nature here.

We must recognize this about God when we pray. And I want us to think what exactly he is teaching us about God. So if God is transcendent, what is exactly he's saying about God here? And so break out again and think, what does praying to God in heaven say about God's nature? Why is it important to know this in prayer? And use these psalms to help you think about it. Go for it. Two more minutes. Two more minutes. Two more minutes. Two more minutes.

Thank you. Thank you.

[32:29] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

A few more seconds. Thank you.

Jesus is holy. Holy. Okay. Yeah. He's other. Well done. Someone was listening at camp. Well done.

[34:44] He's other. He's above all the nations. His glory above the heavens. He is greater than all that exists here on earth. What else?

What does being seated on high mean? Sovereign. Sovereign. Yeah. It's a picture of a king, right? He's the sovereign ruler over all things. He's in charge and he's in control. And so why is this important to know in prayer? Well, when our lives feel like they're unraveling and it feels like chaos and it feels like things are very, very powerful down here.

Well, we can come to him in prayer and know he is the heavenly one beyond who rules over all things. He's the king. How about some 115? What does this say about God?

He's in control, right? He does all that he pleases.

[35:50] Exactly. Not bound by anything. Another word for this, if you remember our doctrine of God, he's omnipotent, all powerful. He can do anything. No prayer is too big for God.

How about Psalm 33? The Lord looks down from heaven. He sees all the children of man. So he's omnipotent. What else is he?

We need Jasper Wilcox. Where's Jasper Wilcox? He's omniscient. Yeah. He sees all the children of man. It's this idea. He knows all human beings. He sees all that's going on, which is even implied in praying, right?

To be able to pray to God, that requires God to have omniscience, to know all things, to hear all things. And so this means God knows our needs.

He knows our futures. He knows our thoughts. He knows all the events of our lives that we pray about. Let's add some of these. Go on.

[36:56] He's faithful. Exactly. Omniscience. Faithful.

Sovereign. How do I put it out the window? So instantly, just in this first line, Jesus destroys a materialistic, materialist view of the world, doesn't he?

The Christian view of life is not that this is all that there is, and this is all just one big machine of atoms that ticks along. But no, Jesus is saying there is a ruler who intervenes and runs and controls all of this.

So a materialist would say, this is all that there is. A materialist would shut that out. But what Jesus is saying is, no, no, no. This is how life is.

In prayer, we are reminded this is the reality. Prayer immediately gets our minds off this earth and our worries and our weaknesses, and it turns our hearts to the transcendent, to God in heaven.

[38:12] And so even before we ask him for anything, even before we get to these petitions, these words are a powerful reminder that whatever we do ask for, he is able to help.

He knows he's above all of it, and he's in control. And this should make us pray big. Starting like this, Jesus is wanting us to pray big.

Look what J.I. Packer says. Dumb thoughts of God make prayers dull. When we forget God is heavenly, what do we do?

We ask small. We doubt he can do anything. And in fact, we probably don't come to him at all. But Jesus teaches us, no, your father is in heaven.

Transcendent. And so we need to hold these two things together. That he is our father and he's in heaven. He is near me and loves me and cares for me.

[39:14] And he is beyond and powerful and sovereign. And in the Christian life, we constantly need to hold these two things together. This should be like a pendulum in our hearts swinging between the two.

As soon as you remember God is father, the pendulum swings and you're reminded, and he's in heaven. And back. He's my father and he's in heaven. And having that pendulum swing in your heart, it helps us to recognize all that happens in our lives is not random.

It is not punishment. But everything we have is from our heavenly father's hand. And everything he takes away is by his fatherly hand.

Our father in heaven is the one who gives and takes away. And so this opening address, it teaches us to give thanks for all the good things God gives us.

But also to trust him in the troubles. In those times of waiting. In those times that he withholds things from us. And to trust that all this is part of his fatherly care for us.

[40 : 30] And not only looking, just looking at this prayer teaches us that, but actually praying teaches us that. The act of giving all our needs to God, to our father in heaven, into his care, into his hands, his power.

It keeps that pendulum swinging in our hearts, even through the troubles. And maybe let me just finish with this. Some people can find it difficult to see God as father because of bad experiences with our heavenly, with our earthly fathers.

Well, in this phrase, Jesus is teaching us God is far greater than even the best earthly father. He is your true father, the perfect father who never disappoints, never lets you down.

He is far better than any father on earth because he is our father in heaven. And so just in these four words that we've seen today, we actually have the first essentials of the Christian life.

We are children of God. We can confidently come to our father. And our father is heavenly. And he powerfully cares for each and every one of us.

[41 : 46] We've got two minutes for questions. Any questions?