

Matthew 6:7-15

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Preacher: Reuben Hunter

[0 : 00] I don't know who you are. I don't know what you want. If you're looking for ransom, I can tell you I don't have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills. Skills I have acquired over a very long career. Skills that make me a nightmare for people like you.

If you let my daughter go now, that'll be the end of it. I will not look for you. I will not pursue you. But if you don't, I will look for you. I will find you. And I will kill you.

Liam Neeson's character, Brian Mills, in the film Taken. He's on the phone to his daughter's abductor.

It's a scene that has spun off a thousand memes. And I thought I'd give you a bit of an authentic feel with it this evening. Now it happens very early in the film. And yet, from that very point, you know how the film's going to end.

You know that this is a father who will do whatever it takes to rescue his daughter from her slavery. And you know, we just know at this point in this scene that he will succeed.

[1 : 24] I think the film has become popular. It has spun out into a trilogy, actually. And I think in part, this moment, as it were, and the way that that all spins out in the film, has captivated us because our culture is crying out for someone who would care about us that much.

Someone who would give us that sense of security. Our experience in the world, we might pretend otherwise, but if we're honest with ourselves, when we look ourselves in the eye in the mirror in the morning, we know that our world is an intimidating place.

And it often makes us feel small and weak and insignificant. And so we're insecure. And we saw last week how so much of the insecurity that's all around us, the sort of insecurity that leads us to put on a mask every day and to live our lives for the opinions of others.

The mask of the hypocrite, if you remember, and living our lives for the opinion of the choir. How so much of that comes down to the fact that in our experience, we don't know what it means to have God as our Father.

I quoted Sinclair Ferguson saying that the person who puts on a mask in life says, quote, he says, is insecure before God and therefore seeks security in what his fellow men think about him.

[2 : 54] He is unreal in his activities before men. That is, he puts on a mask, he lives his life in a particular way that isn't really who he is, because he has no real relationship with God.

It's a very profound insight, I think. We are unreal in our activities before other people because there is a problem in our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

And the heart of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 is an emphasis on what it means for God to be a Father to his people. And it centers on this prayer, verses 9 to 13, the so-called Lord's Prayer.

We pray it as a church almost every Lord's Day. It's obvious that the prayer is a pattern for how we should pray, but it's also giving us a pattern for living.

The things that are to be our concern in prayer, it obviously follows from that, that they should be our concerns in life. So, when it comes to the Lord's Prayer, we're going to pause. We came across it last week, we're going to pause here this evening.

[3 : 58] Jesus is teaching us not just how to approach our Father, but what it means to live in his presence. What it means to live in his presence. And this life, life in relationship with the Father, is shaped by five qualities.

Five points this evening. The first, the Father's worship. The Father's worship. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Jesus brings together here two ideas.

Majesty and intimacy. Majesty and intimacy. When we talk about God's name, we're really at shorthand for who God is. So, our Father in heaven, God is in heaven, we are on earth.

He is our creator, we are created. He is eternally glorious. We are dependent creatures, dependent on him for everything we have.

And that is why we are to hallow his name. It's not that we can make God's name more holy than it is, but we need his help to recognize just how other, how different than us he is.

[5 : 01] He is. God is not like us. He's not a really awesome version of humans. And so, we are to approach God with a sense of awe and wonder at his majesty.

And yet, we dare to call him Father. We know that he is near us and he cares for us.

That's what Paul was saying to the children only a few moments ago. Yes, God is glorious and great and majestic and other, but he is also Father.

And in that word, he comes near. To get to call God Father, we lose it in the familiarity of our Christian faith. To get to call God Father is simply outrageous.

Sovereign ruler, majestic savior, powerful Lord of all, righteous judge, yes, our Father.

[6 : 00] The one who made and owns the universe has brought us right into the family. This is the privilege of a royal child. Only royalty can know this kind of access and closeness to majesty, to the great king.

And it's all ours in Christ. Our Father. Now, I know not everybody's experience of fathers is positive. Mike Wilkerson has written, quote, Tragically, for many of us, the father-child relationship is fraught with fear, shame, dread, disappointment, or absence.

For some of us, he says, the word Father has been darkened by the worst evils. And he's right. You might know that in your own experience. It is a sad reality of our world.

And Wilkerson asks, can you ever hope to know God as your Father if your view of Father is so broken? I want to acknowledge that.

[7 : 03] But imagine the Father you wanted. Imagine the Father that you wanted at his most generous, most caring, most compassionate, most attentive best.

The fatherhood of God goes way beyond that. Think of his kindness to us. Think of his kindness to us in bringing us into his family.

Has he not demonstrated his generosity such that we know that he wants to bless us? Think about your salvation. Think about the way or think about the story of the prodigal son.

We could go there for a moment. God is the one. God is the one. Our Father is the one who runs out to us despite our running from him. And through Christ, his empty cross and his empty tomb, he gives us a robe and he puts a ring on our finger and throws a banquet for us.

And despite our rebellion, despite all of our disobedience and running from him in the world that he created, taking all of his resources to do this running from him, he comes out and he meets us in our sin.

[8 : 16] And he clothes us in the righteousness of his son and he brings us in and he celebrates. What an astonishing privilege.

What an astonishing privilege. Knowing that our God is so great and at the same time so welcoming. That puts joy in our hearts. That puts resolve in our spirits to go and want to live for him. The Lord's Prayer starts with our Father's worship. We acknowledge him as the Holy One of Heaven who draws us into his royal family. The second element we need to see is the Father's mission.

The Father's mission. Jesus began his ministry announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God. And now that we know the one who rules this kingdom is our Father, out of love for our Father, and out of concern for the glory of our Father, whose name we want to hallow, we pray for his mission in the world.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So we now care that our Father's King would be worshipped.

[9 : 26] When Jesus cried out on the cross, those last words, it is finished. And then when he rose from the tomb three days later, he signaled his victorious triumph over Satan, sin, and death.

He signaled his victory as God's King. And now he is enthroned in heaven. We are gathered here. He is in the presence of the Father in heaven at his right hand. And he rose and he reigns his people through his word by his Spirit.

So, to pray your kingdom come is to ask God to make us worshippers of this King. That is what it is first of all. To change our hearts through the gospel that we would delight to do his will.

And it is also to ask him to bring more people into his kingdom, to gather more worshippers through the spread of the gospel. For the Lord's kingdom to come, the gospel needs to take root across cities and across communities.

So this becomes a prayer to revive our love for others to the degree that we tell them about the mercy of this King. We think about how difficult it is to share the gospel with other people.

[10:37] Often people say to me, I find it really difficult to talk to others about Jesus. And it is certainly the case that in our culture it is increasingly unpopular to do so. What will motivate us to share Christ with others?

It is our love for them because we want to get them onto the Father's mission. What we need is a greater love for others. What we need is to care less about the opinion of the choir, to put less of a mask on, and to love others enough to want to share Christ with them.

So we are praying that the Lord would make us those kinds of people. When we pray this prayer each Lord's Day, this is what we are asking. Give me a love for the lost that is expressed in me telling them about Christ.

But the mission doesn't stop there. Because we also desire to see the will of God lived out. It is not just that others become worshippers, but it is that worshippers live consistently with who we are as children of the Father in heaven.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Your will be done here in my life, lived out in the present, as it is up there. Now again, this pushes right into the human condition, doesn't it?

[11:53] Our instinct, what is our instinct? To do what we want. To do it the way we want to. As often as we want to do it.

But, the follower of Jesus. The one who is in relationship with the Father in heaven, the one who knows the Father's mission, is to see the worship of heaven, where the Father's name is perfectly honoured, his kingly rule is perfectly acknowledged, and his will is perfectly done, to see that reflected on earth.

Put simply, what this means is, we let the Bible set our course, however unpopular it may sound or look to the surrounding culture.

We go with what God says, not what anyone else says. The Father's mission is that he would have people for himself, living distinctive lives as citizens of his kingdom, doing his will on earth.

And the mention of heaven also means that these petitions come together to focus the Christian's eyes on the future. The followers of Jesus are defined by a future day when God will make all the realities of heaven a reality on earth, this earth.

[13:19] So, we're not ambivalent about the world, as if God's going to roll all of this up and one day throw it in the bin and pull kind of something new, completely new, out of a wrapper.

No, he is renewing this earth. So, if we know the mission of the Father as Creator and Redeemer, and if we know that his goal is to bring the vision of the prophets, Isaiah 9, Isaiah 40, all across the prophets and their promises for the future, if he's going to bring that to completion in the picture at the end of the book of Revelation, let me remind you what it says there.

John says, That's what we've got to look forward to. No more crying. No more dying.

And to pray in line with the Father's mission means to pray for this to become our experience on earth. As we pray, we submit our lives to his will in faith that this is the glorious future to which we are headed.

Now, if you think about it, if that's what lies ahead, if we're headed to glory, if we're headed to no more crying, no more pain, no more suffering, perfect satisfaction, total joy, absolute peace.

[15:16] If that's the future that we're headed to, it's a future that reaches back and changes how we live now, doesn't it? If that's what lies ahead, we don't need to live now for the praise of others.

We don't need to live now for the trinkets that our culture pursues and thinks is everything that matters. We can set light to those things. We can order our lives around the Father's mission.

Number two, the Father's mission. At this point, the prayer shifts focus to more personal concerns. Here we see number three, the Father's provision. The Father's provision, give us this day our daily bread.

The levels of consumption that mark everyday life in a city like London are almost unrivaled in the history of civilization.

And we have become so accustomed to the availability of everything that we could want or need that we have lost touch with the biblical view of life.

[16 : 24] So, Jesus wants us to remember our Father is always the provider. We depend wholly on our Father for everything. Without Him, there is nothing.

He stands behind every good thing that we enjoy. Martin Luther talked of the milkmaid and the baker as disguises for God. Commenting on this idea, Michael Horton says this, In every gift, God is ultimately the giver.

Yet tenderly, He hides His blinding majesty and otherwise terrifying sovereignty behind the creaturely means that are familiar to us. However, those of us in technologically developed cultures rarely encounter the milkmaids, the bakers, whose goods we purchase at the supermarket. Our piety, praying for our daily bread, often seems remote from our actual experience. It's right, isn't it? Give us this day our daily bread. When it's possible to buy things from the privacy of your home that arrive the next day or the same day or in an hour, and actually, if it's food, it better be a lot quicker than an hour.

It's really difficult to remember that it's God that provides. That we need to pray, give us today our daily bread. This convenience that we have, this distance from the source, if you like, can easily make us dependent on the providers.

[17 : 53] Tesco, or your supermarket of choice. Amazon, Deliveroo, whatever it is, such that we lose sight of the Lord. So we pray, give us this day our daily bread in order to train our hearts away from their instincts towards self-dependence, towards Tesco dependence, or Deliveroo dependence, or whoever it is, and to throw us back in dependence every day on our Father's provision.

Martin Luther puts it like this, Behold, thus God wishes to indicate to us how he cares for us in all our need, and faithfully provides also for our temporal support, day-to-day support.

And although he abundantly grants and preserves these things even to the wicked, yet he wishes that we pray for them in order that we may recognize that we receive them from his hand and may feel his paternal goodness to us therein.

That we may feel God's fatherly goodness to us in those things. In Christ we know a Father who provides for our every need.

Every material need is provided by him. Now this brings assurance. But it also brings liberty.

[19 : 14] A bit like what I was saying a moment ago, because it means that we don't actually need half the stuff that our culture tells us are, Oh, that's a must-have. The absolute must-have.

Now we don't need those things. We have a Father who provides. Oh, you really must get the such-and-such. No, I really mustn't.

We're going to say more on this next time, Lord willing, about laying up treasures in heaven. Come to that then. I'll leave that for then. Father's provision number three. It's then followed number four by the Father's grace.

The fourth aspect, the Father's grace. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Just because we know God as our Father, and just because we know our acceptance before him is not based on any merit in us, doesn't mean that we aren't aware of the reality of ongoing sin in our lives.

We know that conviction, that sense of conviction. We know that sense of guilt and shame because of things that we think or say or do. Even as those who have been redeemed, even as those who are in a relationship with our Father in heaven, our ongoing sin needs to be dealt with.

[20 : 30] But Jesus teaches here that when we confess, there is forgiveness. There really is forgiveness. I think lots of us live our Christian life understanding the theology, if you like, understanding the concept.

I keep sinning, even though I'm redeemed. I say sorry, and then I know it says that I'm forgiven. But I actually go on living like I'm not.

Like God's really cross with me. And he's kind of sucking his teeth when he thinks about me. Not great. Not great. Not great. Not great.

Not great. When we confess our sins from a sincere heart, we are forgiven. When we confess the debts that we have before God, when we are honest and we stop hiding them from him, when we repent, we experience our Father's grace.

Do you know that? Do you know that? Do you know that confession in the kingdom isn't becoming a Christian again? That idea, you know, oh, I fell out of salvation because of my sin and I need to confess and I've become a Christian again.

[21 : 47] It's not that we fall in and out of salvation, far from it. It is rather the unburdening that comes when a relationship has got twisted up and is straightened out again. That's why we confess.

We often talk, don't we, about the law court when we describe what it means to be justified before God. He is the judge who finds in our favor and he justifies us.

He says, not guilty, you are free to go. But we also need to extend that image to see the judge come down from his chair and say, I've passed my verdict, now I'm going to bring you home and adopt you into my family.

That's what happens when we're adopted by God, we're brought into his family, we can call him Father. And whilst we have been acquitted in the declaration of the judge, we've got to live in relationship with our new father for the rest of our lives.

And when you grieve him, you need forgiveness. When the relationship is out of sync, communion needs to be restored. Now, our instinct is to hide from God.

[22 : 52] Because of that, Jesus is helping us to see that we shouldn't hide from him, we should go to him. We should go to him because our father is a gracious father. Because we know that his hands are full of forgiveness.

And we can go back to him again and again, morning and evening, confessing our wrongdoing and finding grace. Confessed sin is forgiven sin in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when we receive that grace, it lifts our heads. It lifts our heads and it enables us and equips us to persevere. Keep short accounts with your father in heaven.

It's so much easier when we live like that. Jesus includes a qualification as well that provides something of a gauge for how we're doing on this.

Verse 14, For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses. Why does he add this in?

[23 : 59] Well, he's not saying, if you do this, then God will do that. That's not in keeping. It's not a trade. That's out of step with the rest of the New Testament. He is saying, the way that you will know that you have experienced the Father's grace in your life, is if you extend grace to others.

Can you say this yourself? Are you a forgiver of other people? Or, will you confess your sins to God and expect His forgiveness while holding on to resentment and bitterness towards others?

Here's Sinclair Ferguson again. If the words, as we also have forgiven our debtors, sticks in our throats, if they cannot be spoken without the names and faces of those we have refused to forgive coming into our minds, then the first part of our prayer, forgive us our debts, falls to the ground.

The two are inseparably linked. For the person who knows their debt before God and turns to Him for forgiveness is the recipient of such grace that they cannot but share it with others.

If you have received the Father's grace, you give grace to others. Life with the Father makes you a forgiver of others.

[25 : 39] I wonder, do you need to put that right in some relationships? Now, it might be complicated. I realize that. If it's complicated, get someone to help you.

But the desire to extend grace must be there. Those who are forgiven much, forgive much. And in the gospel, you have the resources to be able to do that.

Because of the Father's grace. And it is those who know our need of the Father's grace who then pray the final petition.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. This highlights the fifth element, and it is this, the Father's protection. The Father's protection.

When our indwelling sin is stirred up by the temptations that surround us, when the evil one prowls in our direction seeking to devour us, Jesus tells us to pray to be delivered.

[26 : 50] And the fact that He does this assures us that our Father is both willing and able to do so. When you can pray our Father in heaven, you know that you have one to whom you can go and ask for protection.

Father, I know the contrary nature of my heart. I know how fickle it is and how much I find that sin attractive.

Keep me from it. Lead me not into temptation. And in fact, deliver me from it completely. Take away the desire altogether.

The Father's protection brings us full circle. You see, we know that Brian Mills was willing and able to rescue his daughter, to say to her abductors, I will find you and I will kill you.

Now, we feel when you watch that scene or you hear those words, you viscerally feel the protective nature of his love for his child. So how much more can we speak of the protective love of our Father in heaven who loves perfectly with a holy love?

[28 : 17] The King of glory came from heaven to earth in the person of his Son to defeat Satan and deal with sin on our behalf so that we might know that love. And he will keep us to the end.

We can live in relationship with the Father because we know that we are secure. So in all our weakness, we know that he is strong. In all our need, he provides.

In all our sin, he forgives. That is what it means to live in the love of our Father. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.