

Read also Psalm 23, Interpretive. Check out the service, which is recorded on www.fpcd.org.

Let's say you are sitting down at the computer and you go on Facebook. Why do you do that? You want to communicate; to let someone know what you are doing; to see what they are doing. It seems the natural and convenient thing to do. Did you learn to do Facebook from someone? Or, did you just work it out by yourself?

Do you ever have sleepless hours during the night that you solve your sleeplessness by getting on Facebook? Reaching out to someone, even if you are not face-to-face fills a need.

When you think of prayer, does prayer come sort of naturally? Is it like reaching out to a friend? Or, are you of the opinion that it is a more formal endeavor and thus an effort. Perhaps you think that if you lived at the time of Jesus or before modern communications, prayer would have been easier.

Did you find it easier to pray when you came to the sanctuary on Holy Saturday? Maybe you were inspired by the Maundy Thursday or Good Friday services, and the huge cross that stood in the sanctuary. All that created a sense of closeness with God so you wanted to communicate with God. (READ some of their prayers.)

Jesus invites you to experience that closeness. For Jesus to say prayer is important means that **we are heard by God**. Prayer matters. Prayer brings God's power to your life.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus advises us about what to say to God. He took the way Jewish people were used to praying and He blew life into it – a fresh wind. Their prayers began formally and were followed by eighteen prayers, so they were long. Jesus made prayer much simpler. So let us read the passage together today. READ Matthew 6:9-15 NRS

That prayer is succinct and simple. A pre-school child can learn it quite easily. And yet it is packed with power, so we are going to divide it up into three sections and see what we can learn.

I'll call the first part, *Who are you talking to?*

Jesus begins with *Abba*. It's Aramaic for father, so His first change was to remove the formal Hebrew prayer language and address God in everyday language. You translators know how important it is for people to be able to speak to God and read the Bible in their heart language. Did you know Jesus started this? Jesus used heart language, "Abba," the first word a young child learns.

Each day in the morning on my way to work I call my dad on the phone. To no one else can I say, "Hi Dad!" That's the only way I address him, and there's something special about that intimate, personal greeting that we both enjoy.

Jesus could have chosen many words for God—Lord, Master, Eternal One, Creator—but He chose a loving, personal greeting. He then coupled that with "who is in heaven." So we have a paradox.

God is near, personal, in the house; and yet far, in the heavens. High above us and thus different from us.

So we are talking to Someone entirely unique.

He's Father but not like human fathers. Jesus described him in the Prodigal Son parable. Remember? One son asked for his inheritance and left home for greener pastures. The other one was ruthlessly mean to his father when his brother returned and his father forgave him. Yet the father was patient and longsuffering and gracious to both. God loves us even when we take off after our own will; even when we judge what He does, and though we reject Him, He takes us back.

God is not like human fathers, but might be a good example for us to follow.

God is also cosmic – king of all. And He is Our King. So we pray, "Hallowed be Thy name."

God is your king. You are part of the relationship, thus you are invested in making His name holy. You want "His kingdom to come here." It comes through you. You want "His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is done through you. You ask God to help you live as befits the king. The Psalm 23 Interpretive piece explains:

"He helps me when I stumble or fall and instructs me on behavior that would befit one who is with the King, for to do otherwise would reflect badly on Him."¹

If you were married but you lived as if you weren't, how would your family feel about that? What if you went around dating. Would that not bring shame on all your family, not just you? Do not all parties have a role in a relationship? As a Christian, your behavior affects the reputation of the Kingdom of God. If you are a passive and uncommitted Christian, you shed that light on your King. But if you are actively involved spreading His light on those around you, you increase His good name, for God's name means God's action. "Holy be thy name."

So you are talking to the King; our Father, the One who is cosmic, who rules in holiness.

Next in the prayer we turn to our own little corner of the world and ask for our own needs. These requests require the action of God. So what do we ask for?

"Give us this day our daily bread."

If you were a child, this is the most natural thing in the world to ask for and expect.

In my grandfather's house, no matter how much you ate, you were always offered more. Jesus seems to be encouraging that same thing here. Why does He say, give *this day* our *daily* bread?

¹Written by Dean Hertenstein, unpublished.

It gets more complicated than that. The word for “daily” is used nowhere else in the entire Greek language so we don't know what it really means. Does it refer to time?² *Give us this day bread today?* Or do we pray for an amount? *Give us today enough bread to keep us alive today.*

Just how generous is God anyway?

Do you wonder, will He or won't He deliver? Old worries pop up. I'm not worthy, or I shouldn't ask, or what if God doesn't provide enough? What if I lose my job? Or the economy crashes? My grandfather had lived through the great depression. He knew what it was to not have enough and that fear often drove him.

Maybe Jesus is dealing with some of those fears by putting this in our prayer.

An old man knocked on Mother Teresa's door one night in Calcutta to inform her, in hopes she would do something, that there was a family in the neighborhood with eight children and they had not eaten. So she went to them and took some rice. The mother took the rice and divided it in two. She then left. Upon her return she explained, “They are hungry also.” “They” were the family next door. Even though her own children had not eaten for quite some time, the mom knew that the neighbors were starving too, and shared what she had been given. *Give us this day OUR daily bread.* It's a community thing.

Do you see God as a God who will be there for you tomorrow, thus you are free to share today? We are in this together. Perhaps Jesus' prayer could be this: *Give us today the bread that doesn't run out.* Free us from the fear of not have enough to eat because we turn to you.

Let us have confidence that tomorrow we will have enough.

Next Jesus turns to our need for forgiveness. “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Debts are what we owe; unfulfilled obligations. Like your mortgage. It's your debt that you are obligated to make good on. Some use the word trespasses. Trespass is failing to do the right thing. Both are meant here.

Notice we can blatantly with no groveling; no explanation, no matter how bad your sin, you are invited to freely ask and freely receive forgiveness.

There's got to be a catch. There is. There's a condition. Receiving forgiveness is conditioned upon your aligning yourself with how God handles forgiveness. You must forgive.

It's important to realize the gravity that forgiveness often requires. Some have suffered a great deal. Why would God still tell us to forgive? When you are offended and you cling to the offense, it keeps hitting you over and over again. Its bondage is relentless. When you hold a grudge against someone, you are at war daily. You will pass on that rage to your children. God wants to free you.

²Kenneth Bailey's notes on this in, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, are very helpful.

You cannot receive forgiveness and then hold onto a grudge at the same time. You won't receive the forgiveness and be able to move forward.

Jesus also says, ask God to help you with temptation. Remember Peter? Jesus prayed for him because Satan had asked to "sift him like wheat." Expect temptation and trial, but God will help you. But you **MUST PRAY**.

Prayer is a huge gift. Are you taking advantage of it? You will not grow as a Christian without it. This is the connection we speak of. God is worthy of this prayer. For His is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever, **AMEN**.