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Scripture: Teach Us to Pray-Our Father, Hallowed be Your Name

About eleven years ago, back in 2008, then Ontario premier, Dalton McGuinty sparked a bit of a controversy when he publicly suggested that it was time to replace the Lord's Prayer as the only prayer that was used to open sessions in the Ontario Legislature. His reasoning? Prayers should be selected that better reflect the diversity of Ontario.

McGuinty set up an all-party committee to exam the issue and was soon inundated with phone calls, emails and petitions voicing individual opinion about this idea. The debate spilled over into talk radio, letters to the editor and received media coverage as far away as the southern US. Over 30 000 signatures were received on letters, petitions and emails asking McGuinty to keep the Lord's prayer as a part of the government's routine. In the end, the committee recommended keeping this Christian Prayer but also adding additional prayers from other religions or a moment of silence.

As you can imagine there was pressure from within the church to voice our displeasure with McGuinty's thoughts. As I pondered what my reaction should be at that time, I reminisced about my own experiences with the Lord's Prayer.

I like some of you, 35 years of age or older, remember that reciting the Lord's Prayer was the way we began each school day. In 1999, the Lord's Prayer was eliminated from the daily routine in the Ontario public school system. But I honestly can tell you that reciting it daily simply became routine for me, like going through the motions. Up until a few years ago, I never really stopped and pondered what the Lord's Prayer was actually all about.

So, as I tried to be disgusted at McGuinty for even suggesting that we remove the Lord's Prayer from Ontario Legislature, I became more convicted about how little, we in the Christian church, recited the

prayer or even had the foggiest idea what it was about. But we should take special notice of this prayer, shouldn't we? Why? Well, did you know that it is the only recorded discipline that Jesus' followers asked him to teach them?

They never asked Jesus to teach them how to care for people. They never asked him to teach them how to lead people. They never asked him to teach them how to run a Sunday school class or a youth program. No. The only recorded discipline that the followers of Jesus asked him to teach them, was how to pray.

Luke 11: 1

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

And so Jesus taught them this simple prayer recorded in both the gospel of Luke 11 and Matthew 6.

Matthew 6:9-13

*This, then, is how you should pray:
"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
10 your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us today our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.*

In his book, *Fifty-Seven Words That Changed The World* (the title comes from the fact that in the original language of this prayer, Greek, it was 57 words long), Christian author and pastor, Darrel

Johnson contends that this prayer was a brilliant gift from Jesus to his followers and he gives three reasons why. The first reason;

1. Jesus's gift of the Lord's Prayer to his followers frees us from the anxiety about whether or not we are praying in a way that pleases God.

I don't know about you, but I can put so much pressure on myself about whether I am praying the right way, for the right things, for the right amount of time. There seems to be a lot of tension in our culture around prayer. I hear it from you all the time. How should I pray? What should I pray about? How long should I pray? Is it okay to pray for good things to come to me? There is a lot of guilt associated with prayer in the church. Have you noticed? With the Lord's Prayer, Jesus the son of God, tells us how to get it right.

Matthew 6:9

"This, then, is how you should pray:

and he goes on to share the prayer.

Note that Jesus is not saying that it is the only way to do it or the only words you can use but he is giving us a model, a template or guide on how we can enter into authentic relationship through prayer with our heavenly Father. It is like Jesus is saying, this is what God likes to hear and I find that so incredibly helpful. Which leads to the second reason why Johnson contends that this prayer is a wonderful gift to us;

2. The Lord's Prayer reveals the heart of God.

In this prayer, Jesus shares what is truly important to God, what concerns Him in our world and our lives and we are invited to pray into that. In the weeks ahead, we will look at statements such as

Hallow be your name, which is declaring God's name holy.

Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, is about praying God's agenda and not our own.

Give us this day our daily bread, demonstrates God's concern for humanity.

Forgive us our debts, the heart of God is to reconcile us to each other and to him.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us, God is about guiding and protecting us.

This prayer reveals the priorities of God for our lives and the care and concern and love he has for his creation. This prayer covers it all. And the third reason why the Lord's prayer is such a wonderful gift to us is that...

3. God invites us into partnering with him in fulfilling his purposes on earth.

Isn't that amazing? As we pray the Lord's Prayer we are joining with the living God in bringing about his heart's desire for our world. Just think of the scope of the Lord's Prayer. Such a simple prayer inserted into a few short verses in two gospels of the New Testament. So easy to overlook, or skim by. So simple yet it is brilliant in its simplicity. The Lord's Prayer covers everything we could possibly need and imagine.

We are physical beings so Jesus teaches us to pray, give us this day our daily bread and he invites us to pray that for our brothers and sisters globally who are without.

We are relational beings. God created us to live in community with one another.

So in this prayer, Jesus gives us guidance on how to best do that, namely, we are to be quick to forgive. Just think about it. It is probably the most significant piece of relational advice that can be given. When you live together, you need to forgive.

Think right now of some of your greatest relationship tension with family and friends, or colleagues. It probably comes down to whether or not you or they, can forgive. Lack of forgiveness is the root of almost all relationship strains. That is why Jesus addresses it in this prayer.

We are also spiritual beings. So Jesus' teaches us in this prayer to hallow God's name. Make his name holy and lead us not into temptation and deliver us from the evil one.

I don't know how much you believe in the forces of the evil one, Satan. We tend to pass over it because it is a not a feel good topic but I think that any

church that believes in God the Father, the Son, Jesus and the Holy Spirit has to also believe that there are spiritual forces at work in our world that are contrary to God. It is the enemy. The evil one.

We are spiritual beings and Jesus teaches us to pray, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. I pray that every day in my life. Do you? The scope of this simple prayer is incredible for our lives. And just one more preliminary note before I jump into the first few lines of the prayer. The content of the Lord's Prayer is timeless. It covers the span of time. The Lord's Prayer looks to the past, remembers the present and longs for the future.

When we ask for forgiveness, we are remembering and looking back. One of our greatest needs from the past is to be forgiven.

The Lord's Prayer is also mindful of the present. What is our greatest present need?

We may not realize it in our culture of abundance but our greatest present "day to day" need is for sustenance. Bread and water, food. So Jesus teaches us to pray for daily bread.

And the Lord's Prayer looks to the future. What is our greatest future need? Isn't it for guidance, direction and protection from that which will threaten to throw us off course? Lead us not into temptation but deliver us, guide our future, Lord.

Think about it. Name any need, any longing, any concern you may have, right now. Jesus' prayer touches it all. Nothing is too big, and nothing is too small and that is why it is brilliant and it is a wonderful gift that he left for his followers 2000 years ago and it continues to be relevant and applicable for us today. Do you see that?

Okay, let's jump into the prayer and spend the rest of our time, looking at the first few lines. Think about when you pray. How do you usually open your prayers? I remember sitting at the dinner table of Carolyn's Oma and Opa. Her Opa was such a Godly man. He would say grace for the meal and his opening was always the same and so memorable. Our rich and gracious heavenly Father, we praise your name. I still remember it.

As you listen to me or Matt pray up here, you may have noticed a routine opening that we have when we pray. I looked back on some of my recent sermon videos on line and noticed that I often begin my prayers with "heavenly Father, God". We all have different ways we open our prayers. Sometimes it is very intentional and other times, it's out of habit or routine.

When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, he was very deliberate in the opening, Pray like this, he said;

Matthew 6:9
Our Father

Our Father. We may not realize it in our culture today but for those in the crowd that Jesus was addressing on this day, this was a radical opening. As soon as he gathered them around and said, hey guys, you should pray like this; Our Father. People who hadn't been paying attention before suddenly would have turned to him. What did you just say? This was a revolutionary opening. Why?

Jesus started with Our Father. Notice he doesn't say, pray Your Father, or My Father. Jesus says when you pray, start with Our Father. What does that convey to you in our increasingly isolated lives with more people plugged in to devices than ever before? I am almost hesitant to admit to you that my primary Christmas gift this season was wireless headphones. So that I could plug in and shut the rest of you, out.

But more and more our relationships in our culture are kept at an arms-length, have you noticed? Mostly through the safety of online social networking like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, even Tindr. We can choose when and where to be social. We can control what and to whom we communicate with. It is interesting the correlation between the use of social media and the rise in levels of depression and loneliness in our world.

Jesus teaches us how to pray by using the plural, Our. Right from the beginning of this prayer, Jesus is drawing his followers in his day and us today into community. Into the necessity of doing life with one another.

Here's the thing. In first century Israel, the context where Jesus first teaches this prayer, it was a culture not unlike today. Oh, they didn't have the technology to plug into but, independence and individuality were thought to be virtues. Look out for #1. Me. To be seen as needing anyone else was a sign of weakness. This word that Jesus chooses to open this prayer, Our Father, is immediately inviting people in the crowd to consider others when they pray. To seek the good of those who surround them, not just themselves. The Lord's Prayer drew people away from the mindset that they only consider their own needs, their own agenda but instead consider the greater good, the needs of those around them.

That would have rattled the people with Jesus. When you pray, take your eyes off yourself and consider others? Whoa, I never thought of it like that before. How does that sit with us? Take a moment and look around. All around you. Who do you see? Family? Friends? Strangers? Our commonality is that we all attend this church.

Each time we pray Our Father, we assert our commitment to God but also to each other. To stay together and unified. Our, is the language of inclusion. It breaks down those things that seek to divide us, like hostility, hurt, bitterness, and brings us together as one before God. That is so important not only in the church, but especially in our marriages, in our relationships with our children, parents, friends, neighbours and classmates. To pray, Our, is a commitment to work things out, not run away at the first sign of trouble or conflict. Our calls us back to each other and make no mistake about it, it is not always easy to pray Our.

When I think I am justified in my hurt feelings or I feel like my side of the story isn't being heard or validated, I don't always want to think about others. I want to go back to me, myself, and I. But, Jesus knew that it is only in praying Our, that the deepest level of relational acceptance, intimacy and authenticity can be experienced.

When Jesus taught his followers to pray, he said, start with Our. It was radical, even revolutionary for that day and it remains a challenge for us today but this may be the most amazing part. Jesus includes himself in the Our. In this prayer, he invites us, to join him in the same relationship that he has with

God. That is why the next word is so important. When you pray, start with Our (represents community) Father. Do you know what Jesus is doing there? He is inviting us to view God the same way as he does. As a Father. Jesus doesn't instruct us to pray, Dear God or Almighty God. It is Father. So what does this word Father, mean to you? I was fortunate enough to have wonderful parents. Loving, caring and supportive. To think of God as a father is easy from my perspective. What about you? Many people struggle with this idea of God as a Father. Mostly because their image of a dad/father is associated with feelings of disappointment, pain, anger and in some cases even abandonment. In their experiences with their earthly fathers, that is what was modeled for them.

I have sat with many people over the years discussing issues of faith but one young man stands out for me. He was struggling with the Christian concept of God as Father and when he told me his story, I understood. How he was adopted as a baby and even though they provided a loving home, he grew up with feelings of being abandoned by his birth parents. But then, his adopted parents divorced when he was in his early teens, deeply impressionable years. Oh, he still had his loving mom, but his dad drifted away and eventually out of his life and he was abandoned again. For this young man, in his short life time, two fathers had abandoned him. So to see God as Father as a good thing, that was a real stretch for him.

It stirred up those feelings of rejection and it was a real obstacle to any relationship he could have with God. Perhaps you have similar feelings. The way that we address and pray to God is shaped by how we understand him, do you agree? If the only experience that we have with the concept of a Father is the bad examples set by those who have the role in our lives, it shapes how we view God as a Father. But in this prayer, when Jesus teaches us to pray Our Father, he invites us to follow him in his understanding of what a Father should be.

Did you get that? His goal is to correct our misguided concept of father that has formed in us by our experiences with flawed earthly examples and replace it with the way Jesus experienced his Heavenly Father.

Father in Aramaic, one of the common languages of Jesus' day is the word Abba, not to be confused with the 70's music group, ABBA where we get the movie Momma Mia. Abba was a term for intimacy, and respectful familiarity, it was a feel good word. A word that brought to the mind of the listener images of belonging and connectedness. Abba/Father in this culture was like Dad or daddy to us today and there is something loving and intimate about that sentiment, dad or daddy isn't there?

I remember the stages in my own children's development when they went from calling me daddy to dad. Our relationship was moving to a different level. On occasion, one of them would slip up and call me daddy and when I heard that, I knew that something is going on. It is like they needed to draw close to get some security. Have you experienced this?

To these Jewish listeners in this day, Jesus teaches them that they can address God, the one whom they always felt was a little distant, in a very personal way. They could now address him the way that Jesus knew Him, by calling him Father, Abba. Daddy. That was a radical concept. Do you remember just before Jesus began his public ministry, he was baptized and in the gospel of Matthew, as Jesus was coming through the waters of baptism, it says,

Matthew 3:17

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"

God's metaphoric heart was bursting in this text. He was overcome by his son's act of obedience and faith and he just wants everyone to know, that's my boy! The one that whom I love and I am overcome with pleasure and joy. I have felt like that with my own children.

Jesus invites us into this relationship with the heavenly Father. Some of you don't know how to accept this because you just never had a father model that in your life. I just want to say this to you. If you are here and you have never had an earthly father say to you, I love you, son, daughter, I love you and I am so proud of you. Jesus wants us to know through this prayer that that is what Our Father is saying to you today.

He loves you and He is filled with pleasure over you and your desire to follow him and carry out your life purpose. Can you receive that today?

This is a challenge to those of us who are parents, specifically dads. If you are a dad that is seeking to follow Jesus and let him lead your life, then you are the earthly model of what the heavenly Father is all about. Are you loving your children through your words and actions? Are you supporting them, listening to them, encouraging them? Do you tell them you are proud of them often?

Dads, do not abandon your children, physically, emotionally or psychologically. I know that divorce and separation hits our community because we are fallen people but even if you are a dad and your children do not live with you most of the time, do not abandon them. Do whatever you can to be a model of love and support and encouragement to them. You say, but, Paul, they have turned their backs on me, I know that happens but with God's help, do not turn your backs on them. The same goes for those who are moms. God has given us the privilege of parenthood and he has modeled for us what that entails. We need to seek to follow his example, Amen?

Praying Our Father expresses an explicit truth that God loves us dearly and the Father's love is the foundation of the Kingdom of God. Do you understand how important this opening, Our Father is? Let's move to the first petition in this prayer.

Matthew 6:9

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

What's in a name? Many of you have names that were chosen for you by one or both of your parents for a particular reason. Perhaps they are sentimental. Named after a family member. Maybe you are a Junior, named after your dad. My name is Paul and I am told that I was named after one of mom's old boyfriends? I wonder where my dad was in this process! For our children, our oldest daughter is Leah. Carolyn and I have always loved that name and knew we would name our first daughter, Leah. Our son, Scotty was going to be Homer after Homer's Iliad that I read in university. Then it was Joey but when he was born he didn't look like a Homer or a Joey so we settle for Scott, my middle

name. Tess, was from a book Carolyn and I read in High School English class, Tess of the D'ubervilles. Our son, D. J. well we couldn't come up with a name we agreed on so he just gets initials. No, his name is David James but I use the short cut.

What about you? What is in a name? The very first petition of the Lord's Prayer, after the opening, Our Father in heaven is...

hallowed be your name.

This word, hallowed in the Greek language literally means to "holy-fy" or make holy. It is the same word as sanctify in the bible. Notice the word, be, in this phrase, hallowed be your name. The word be gives us a clue that this is actually a command. As we pray this prayer we are calling out to our heavenly Father, God, to do something that only you can do. Hallowed be your name. Make your name, holy, Lord. Right off the top, this is what we are petitioning God to do in this prayer. Now it is important to note here, that we are not asking or commanding God to be holy. God is already Holy,

In the Old Testament,

Leviticus 11:44

I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.

But in this prayer, Jesus is instructing us to call on the already Holy God, to make his holiness known more and more on earth just as his holiness is known in Heaven. Is that our heart's desire when we pray? Are we longing for the already holy, hallowed, sanctified God to make his name known in our world today? That is what we sing in many of our worship songs. Do we mean it? Make your name holy Lord.

Names were so important in biblical times. To speak of someone's name was to refer to their character, their personality, their reputation. To know the name of someone was to know some essential truth about their character. That is why the book of Proverbs tells us that,

Proverbs 22:1

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

To know or make known the name of God, to hallow his name on earth as it is in heaven is to ask God to reveal some essential truth about who He is, his character and the hope that He brings to the world. Would it surprise you if I told you that God is not God's real name? Just like Canadian Rapper, Drake is not his real name. His real name is Aubrey but I guess that does not sell so well in the world of rap music. God is not God's real name, it is a descriptive word, it is not a name.

The name above every name, God's covenant name with his people is actually Yahweh. (YHWH) and it is used almost 7 000 times in Old Testament alone. Take a moment to look in your bible, whenever you see Lord referred to as LORD all capital letters, this is referring to Yahweh, the proper name of God. There are other times in the bible, where God is referred to as a name that reveals his character. Elohim, God our creator. El Shaddai, God is all sufficient. Jehovah- Jireh, the Lord will provide, Jehovah- Shalom, the Lord is our peace. These are just some examples.

By praying hallowed be your name, we are petitioning, not inviting, not asking, not hoping, we are telling God, make your name known here on earth. We are longing for him to reveal himself to our broken world. To reveal his character and who he is to a world that desperately needs Him. Isn't that powerful. Our Father, hallowed be your name, and that is just the opening!! There is so much more I could say, but our time has run out. I hope this has just given you a taste of the richness of this prayer and leaves you anticipating what is to come in the weeks ahead as we move through each stanza, each line of the prayer.

As I close, I want to challenge you with something as we begin this New Year. I want to really invite you into this message series over the next several weeks. Not only to come and listen but also to begin to practice it. You may have noticed in your bulletin is an insert with the Lord's Prayer on it. It is a rendition that combines the NIV translation of Matthew 6:9-13 with the original Greek translation.

Could you commit to praying this prayer through once a day this week? Put it in your bible or post it on your fridge or somewhere else you will see it daily and each day, pray through it and invite God

to open your heart and your eyes in a new way to all that is encompassed in this beautiful prayer.

Are you up to that challenge? To pray this prayer with even an ounce of faith and seek to view our home, school, workplace, neighbourhood, city, country and global world through the lens of this prayer. You may want to journal or even jot down things that you are noticing, things that God is revealing to you as you pray. Just think, if we all prayed this prayer Jesus taught us every day, a faith community of 1500 people, joining together discerning the heart of God and seeking to partner in his agenda. Wow, there is nothing like that.

You may have noticed this hut we have on stage. For the next five weeks, we are going to think of it as our collective prayer room. During this series, before or after each sermon, we want to encourage you to write down any things God is challenging or teaching you and come and pin them on this prayer room. It will serve as a visible reminder of the way God worked in our community through this series. Over the next 5 weeks, we will explore deeper the elements of the Lord's Prayer. As we revisit the prayer, reading it, praying through it, centering our lives around it, our walk with Jesus will grow. It will nourish our Christian journey and ultimately we will see that the Lord's Prayer reveals as much about how to live as it does about how to pray.

Amen? Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**
A translation based on Matthew 6:9-13 and the original Greek text.

Points to Ponder

Teach Us to Pray

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name. Matthew 6:9*

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. What has been your experience with the Lord's Prayer? Do you remember reciting it regularly at school or in the church? Describe how meaningful it has been to you in your Christian journey.
2. Have you experienced some tension in your prayer life over the years? What are the things that cause you some stress when you go to pray? How do you think the Lord's Prayer helps with some of that uneasiness?
3. When Jesus taught us to pray, "Our", he invites us to take our eyes off of just our own needs and consider the community around us. Discuss your feelings around praying from a community perspective.
4. What does it mean to you to see God from Jesus' perspective, as a loving Father? Describe some of your feelings associated with praying to God as a Father.
5. Discuss the background of why your parents decided to name you as they did. What does it mean to pray that God's name is made holy on earth as it is in heaven? What role do we have in making God's name known in our community?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Commit to praying the Lord's Prayer together as a group every time you meet and then discuss the impact it is having on your lives.