

## Hope Church October 4<sup>th</sup> 2026

### Pray like Jesus #2: Our Father

#### Matthew 6:9a

Last week we started a new series called *Pray Like Jesus*. And what we're discovering is that Jesus wasn't simply giving his disciples **a prayer to memorize**.

- He was giving them a NEW WAY to see God.
- A NEW WAY to see themselves.
- A NEW WAY to see the world.
- And ultimately, a NEW WAY to live.

Last week we ended up in the pantry. NO **audience**. NO **performance**. NO **impressive words**. NO trying to **convince God to pay attention**. Just you and God. And we ended with this:

Prayer isn't getting God's attention. It's giving God mine.

But there's something about the world Jesus lived in that makes what comes next *even more interesting*. A few years before Jesus was born, the ROMAN SENATE **gave Caesar Augustus a title:**

Pater Patriae. Father of the Fatherland.

It wasn't just a sentimental title. ROME was telling the world where power lived. Where security came from. Who was ultimately in charge.

That **Caesar was their father**.

And into that world, Jesus TEACHES ordinary people living under Rome **to pray**:

This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven...

**Matthew 6:9a NIV**

Before Jesus tells us what to ask for, he reminds us of **who we're talking to**. Our Father in heaven. N.T. WRIGHT says:

This prayer starts by addressing God intimately and lovingly, as 'Father' – and by bowing before his greatness and majesty.

*Near enough to call Father.* BIG ENOUGH to **rule heaven and earth.**

And Jesus packs all of that into three words:

- FATHER.
- OUR.
- HEAVEN.

## **Father: Jesus invites us into the family.**

Jesus begins with ONE WORD: **Father**. The Greek word is **Πάτερ** (*pater*).

And this is an *important word* for Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount ALONE, Jesus speaks about God as Father 17 times.

Jesus didn't INVENT the idea of God as Father. We find it in the Old Testament. It's there. **But Jesus uses it differently.** The *idea of God as Father* MOVES from the edges of faith right into the center of it.

And that can be COMPLICATED. Because the word father is never just a word. **We bring our own story to it.**

- For some of us, Father is a beautiful word. Safe. Present. Encouraging. Somebody who showed up. Somebody you could call when life fell apart.

- But for some of us, Father is complicated. MAYBE absent or angry or distant. MAYBE someone impossible to please. MAYBE he was physically there but never really present. MAYBE he walked away. MAYBE there are memories that still hurt.

When Jesus teaches us to call God Father, he is NOT saying:

Take your earthly father, make him **bigger** and **stronger** and more **powerful**,  
and put him *somewhere in heaven*.

- God is not our dads on steroids. But for a long time, I think that's exactly how I pictured him.
- We don't START with **our dads** and **work our way up to God**.
- WE BEGIN WITH JESUS. Jesus shows us what the Father is actually like.

There's something else we NEED TO BE CLEAR ABOUT in a gender crazy world. When Jesus teaches us to call God Father, the Bible isn't saying God is male. In JOHN 4 **Jesus says God is spirit**.

In fact, the Bible is perfectly comfortable USING **mothering images** to help us understand *the love* and *compassion* of God.

- A MOTHER nursing her child.
- A MOTHER comforting her child.
- A HEN gathering her chicks.

When Jesus says FATHER, **let Jesus fill that word with meaning.**

- Strength and **tenderness.**
- Provision and **comfort.**
- Protection and **compassion.**

Don't start with your dad and try to imagine God. **START WITH JESUS.** Look at Jesus and you begin to see what the Father is like. The KIND OF LOVE that **holds onto you** and **refuses to let go.** That's the Father Jesus says we can talk to.

But Jesus is saying even more than that. Because KNOWING that someone is a father *doesn't make him MY father.* But Jesus ISN'T simply telling us about God.

- He's INVITING us into a **relationship.**
- He's INVITING us into **belonging.**
- He's INVITING us into the **family.**

When Jesus teaches us to pray FATHER, he isn't just telling us what God is like. He's telling us where we belong.

And that would have landed powerfully in the world of Jesus. **Family was everything.**

Your family wasn't simply the people who happened to live in your house.

- It was where you got your identity.
- It was where you *found security*.
- It was where you **learned who you were**.
- It told you where you belonged.

The father CARRIED **enormous responsibility** in that household. Providing and protecting and teaching and passing on the family story. *Even your name connected you to your father.*

BEFORE anybody knew **what you had accomplished**. BEFORE anybody knew **how successful you were**. They KNEW your name. They KNEW your family. They KNEW who you belonged to.

But for Israel, the word FATHER carried another story too. **A rescue story.**

- Israel had been slaves in Egypt.
- Pharaoh **owned them** and **controlled their lives** and **decided their future**.

And God steps into that story.

In EXODUS 4 God calls Israel my firstborn son. And then essentially says to PHARAOH:

**That is my child. Let him go.** For Israel, *Father wasn't only a word of affection.*

FATHER was a word of liberation.

- This is the God who *hears the cries of his children*.
- The God who *steps into slavery*.
- The God who *breaks chains*.
- The God who *brings his children home*.

There is an *entire story* PACKED into the word **FATHER**. Egypt and Passover and the Red Sea and freedom. Father didn't only MEAN the One who loves you. Father MEANT the **One who comes for you**.

And when you understand that story, what Jesus says next is incredible. He turns to ordinary and messy and complicated people like us and says:

When you pray you can say Father.

Jesus doesn't STAND inside the family and TELL **the outsiders** what he gets to call God.

*Jesus opens the door. He makes it possible for us to call God Father.* Through his life

and death and resurrection, we as *outsiders are brought in*. SINNERS are forgiven.

Jesus' Father becomes our Father.

But notice Jesus doesn't teach us to say: *My Father*. He says: *Our Father*.

And that one little word changes everything.

## **Our: there are other people at the table.**

The Greek is Πάτερ ἡμῶν (pater hēmōn). Literal translation is Father of us. And that tiny word *completely messes* with the way many of us think about Christianity.

- Because WE LIVE in an incredibly individualistic culture. My LIFE. My TRUTH. My HAPPINESS. My FUTURE. My RIGHTS.
- And without even realizing it, we bring the same thinking into Christianity. My **faith**. My **relationship with Jesus**. My **salvation**. My **prayer life**.

And none of those things are necessarily wrong. Faith is personal. But for Jesus **faith is**

**never private**. Because *the moment Jesus invites me* into the FATHER'S FAMILY, I discover

something pretty quickly: I'm not an only child. There are already **other people sitting around the table**.

And once you notice that little word **OUR**, *you start noticing something else*. **The entire prayer is PLURAL**.

- Give US today OUR daily bread.
- Forgive us OUR debts.
- As WE forgive.
- Lead US.
- Deliver US.

Even when I'm alone in that pantry with the door closed, Jesus won't let me pray as though I'm the only person in the family. I might be alone in the room. **But I never pray alone**. Jesus keeps bringing the rest of the family *into my prayers*.

- People who look like me. And people who don't.
- People from **different countries** and **cultures** and **generations**.
- People who grew up REFORMED and CATHOLIC and NON-DENOMINATIONAL and DIDN'T GROW UP in church at all.

- People I *naturally connect with* and people who can **drive me absolutely crazy**.

Because here's the uncomfortable truth about family: You don't get to choose your siblings. And we don't get to choose God's either.

When Jesus teaches us to pray OUR, he includes people that I probably wouldn't have invited myself. And Jesus says:

Pray with them. Pray for them. They're part of the OUR too.

And suddenly that *changes the rest of the prayer*.

- When I PRAY – *give us today our daily bread* – I **can't only care whether I have enough**. What about the poor and the vulnerable?
- When I PRAY – *forgive us our debts* – I'm admitting that the **person sitting across the room from me needs grace the same way that I do**.
- When I PRAY – *lead us not into temptation* – I'm saying I care whether the person sitting three rows behind **me makes it through their week**.

That little word OUR keeps pulling me out of a faith that is **only about me**. Because church ISN'T *simply a collection of people* who happen to show up at the same event on a

Sunday morning. **This is family**. And that means MY FAITH can never simply be about Jesus and me.

And maybe there's an **honest moment for us** here as a church.

- I've had several conversations lately about how we as HOPE CHURCH are experienced by people *outside the church*.
- And the words were hard to hear – **mean** and **judgmental** and **exclusive**.
- And our KNEE-JERK REACTION might be: But that's not *who we are*. That's not *what we meant*.
- And maybe we didn't mean it that way.

But when we pray OUR FATHER, the question isn't only what we intended. We also must ask: *what do people experience when they encounter us?* What do people experience when they encounter me?

- Do they EXPERIENCE **grace**?
- Do they EXPERIENCE **kindness**?

And maybe that's part of what this prayer is meant to do in us. Every time we pray it,

**Jesus slowly moves us from ME to US**. Because I *can't passionately pray* OUR FATHER while making someone else feel like they could **never belong in his family**.

And then Jesus gives us one more phrase.

In heaven.

## **Heaven: God's world is breaking into ours.**

In the Bible, heaven isn't simply some place incredibly far away. Heaven is God's space.

**Where God is** and where things are the way **God wants them to be.** And throughout the BIBLE, heaven and earth keep coming together.

- The **burning bush.** The **tabernacle.** The **temple.**
- Again and again, God comes near us.

And then in Jesus *God came to us in a person.* And wherever Jesus goes, you start getting glimpses of what happens when God's world breaks into ours.

- The SICK **is healed.**
- SINNERS **are forgiven.**
- HUNGRY PEOPLE **are fed.**
- ENEMIES **are loved.**
- BROKEN THINGS **start getting put back together.**
- DEBTS **are paid.**

The Gospels shows us what the world looks like when the Father breaks into it.

Notice the DIRECTION of the Lord's Prayer.

- Jesus begins: *Our Father in heaven*.
- And then: *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*.

We're going to dig much deeper into that next week.

But for now, just notice the movement.

The Christian story isn't simply about *how do we get from down here to up there*? Jesus teaches us to pray for the reality of heaven to break into life here on earth. The DIRECTION OF THE GOSPEL isn't simply *us trying to get to God*.

**In Jesus, God has come to us.**

And that changes the way we think about Christian hope.

Christian hope isn't simply escaping this broken world so that one day we can finally get to heaven. It's resurrection. It's new creation. It's God putting all things right.

And in Jesus, that NEW CREATION has already begun breaking into this one.

- Prayer isn't simply: **God, get me out of here.**
- Prayer becomes: **Father, bring your world into mine.**

Into my family. Into South Haven. Into my relationships. Into my anger and my fear and the places where things are broken.

Let your world reshape ours.

And maybe that is why these first three words matter so much. Because before Jesus gives us a single request, **he completely reorients us.**

- FATHER – I know who I'm talking to.
- OUR – I know it's not about me.
- HEAVEN – I know there is a bigger reality than the brokenness of this world we live in.

And all of that happens *before we ask God for anything.*

Here is our **MATTHEW 6 CHALLENGE** for this week.

⇒ Last week: Find your pantry. Find the place where the audience disappears.

⇒ This week, before you ask God for anything, *pray just these words*: **Our Father in heaven.**

⇒ And slow them down.

- **FATHER** – Remember who you're talking to. You're not trying to convince God to care. Through Jesus, you've been brought into the family.
- **OUR** – Remember who else is sitting at the table. Maybe say a name. Somebody you love. Somebody who is struggling. Maybe somebody you find difficult to love. And pray for them.
- **IN HEAVEN** – Remember that the brokenness you see isn't the only reality there is. God is not absent. He is restoring and renewing and remaking.

That's it.

FATHER.

OUR.

IN HEAVEN.

Before you ask for anything, **remember who you're talking to. Remember who is sitting at the table with you.** And **remember God is closer than you think.**