



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

## First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

### September 2, 2012

#### "Our Father" (Gospel of Luke Series)

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**W**e had a great worship service last week that was devoted to prayers for healing. More than 240 people came forward for prayer after the three services. We learned about healing prayer, and, hopefully, you saw it and experienced it.

Today I want to go a step further and talk about one of the greatest prayers of all—The Lord's Prayer.

Jesus tells us that there is a right way and a wrong way to pray. First, let me tell you about the wrong way to pray, according to our Lord. Turn to Matthew 6:1-8"

*Matt. 6:1 "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

*Matt. 6:5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.*

*Matt. 6:6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*Matt. 6:7 "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they*

*think that they will be heard because of their many words.*

*Matt. 6:8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

Jesus is not talking about non-believers but about religious people—Pharisees who prayed in public and gave money to the temple. What were they doing wrong?

According to Jesus, the wrong way to pray is praying for show, praying so that people will notice.

People who pray the wrong way pray in public places. They want to impress God and people with their audible prayers and eloquence. They heap up empty phrases, using many words.

Instead of the phrase "empty phrases," your Bible might translate the Greek word to "babbling." People babble when they say things that really mean nothing. Are our prayers like this?

This can scare some of us because according to the Matthew passage, God will NOT REWARD those prayers. That IS scary! All the time we could be praying that way and God isn't listening.

So how are we supposed to pray? That comes in the next part of our Scripture passage. In Luke's account of this story, the disciples actually ask Jesus, "Could you please teach us how to pray?" Smart request! Turn to Luke 11:1-4

*Luke 11:1 He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*

*Luke 11:2 He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.*

*Luke 11:3 Give us each day our daily bread.*

*Luke 11:4 And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."*

Jesus tells them how to pray what we know today as *The Lord's Prayer*. Jesus says to start off this way: "Father, hallowed be Thy name."

In the Matthew passage, we have the entire *Lord's Prayer* written out. And it begins with "Our Father." It's the balanced prayer that God wants us to learn when we talk to Him. But today, I am only going to talk about the very first phrase of the prayer because if we really understand this one line it might revolutionize our life.

**J**esus says the best way to understand our relationship with God is to know Him as our Father.

Jim Keller helped me understand that the dividing point between good prayers and bad prayers is this: God is not our boss; He is our Father.

Many people pray to God as if He were our boss, which is devastating to our spiritual life.

Think about our business relationship with our bosses. We work for them and get paid a salary. And if we do well, we might even get a bonus. It is very clear—we work hard, and we are rewarded. I earn a salary. I earn my bonus. Hence, my relationship with my boss is based on performance.

If we take that thinking into our relationship with God, then it's all wrong. If I don't perform according to what is expected by God, who is my Boss, He will not love me. He will not bless me. When things go wrong in our life, we get mad at God because we think, "After all I have done for you, after all of my hard work in life and in ministry, I deserve to have a good life. I deserve to have less pain. I deserve to be rewarded."

Do you see how this thinking starts seeping into our theology and thought process?

In a boss relationship, we believe God loves us because of what we have done for Him. We're focusing on our performance. And think about it—a boss relationship can be very short. If I don't like my boss or my working conditions, then I check out. I leave my boss and my job. They are disposable. My boss hasn't treated me well even after all that I have done for him or her and the company.

Some people leave God because of this boss relationship. We think that because of our work

for Him, He owes us less pain, He owes us less grief. We think that He owes us success because we have live a good life, a productive life so He has to bless us.

A prayer life with God as boss is so toxic because we will feel entitled. We will never be satisfied. We say, "It's not enough after all I have done for God."

It will also keep God as boss very distant. As a result, our prayers to the boss will be formal, and they may be infrequent. Those prayers certainly won't be with emotion or adoration because we don't talk to bosses that way. Are our prayers that way? Emotionless? Yet, adoration is very important to prayer. So much of prayer should be saying to God how much we love Him.

If God were the boss, then we will want talk to Him in a way that will impress Him and others, prayers that will make people go ooh and aahh. It will be a way of kissing up to the boss. We might also try to be more eloquent or articulate, or use lofty phrases that can lead to empty phrases, which then leads to babbling.

Thinking that God is boss might make our prayers so formal and short, like a memorandum to a supervisor: "Rub a dub dub, thanks for the grub. Yay, God. Amen." It's saying the same repeated prayer and never having spontaneous words that come from the heart. Even saying grace before meals may become repeated prayers.

But Jesus says that is the wrong way to pray. Instead, He gives us a model prayer in the

gospel of Luke that begins with, "Our Father, hallowed be Thy name."

Father. Father. This is earth shattering. This might shake us up. This might be revolutionary for us. For when we pray to a father instead of a boss, it is a whole different way of conversing. Praying to God with Him as father means He is accessible. It becomes a personal prayer.

Now I realize that for many here, having a father as a model is easy because you had a good father here on earth who was kind and gracious and merciful. But some may be thinking, "Gee, if God is like my father, then forget it. My father was distant, absent. He abandoned me (or maybe for some here, he abused me)."

But even if that is the horrible case, know that as a Christian, you have been adopted. Hear that? **ADOPTED**. You have been adopted into a new family with a new and different father, one who is perfect and loving and forgiving and understanding. God the Father, the Perfect Father, has adopted you into His family, and He is not like an unloving earthly father.

The Bible uses that word of *adoption* over and over. We have been adopted by the Heavenly Father.

*Eph. 1:5 God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,*

*Rom. 8:23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.*

**G**al. 4:5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

This is incredible! We are adopted by God the Heavenly Father.

Jesus didn't say, "Here is how you pray—Our King, who art in heaven." He didn't say, "Pray this way—Our Creator, who art in heaven." No, He said, "Pray like this—Our Father, who art in heaven."

If you think about it, family relationships are much tighter than friendships. A friend with whom you don't get along can be crossed off the list. You can choose to never see that friend again.

But with family, you can't do that. You are tethered to family. Yes, Uncle Harry might be crazy, or Grandma may be boring, but you will have to see them again at the family Thanksgiving and Christmas parties because they are family. You may not like your sister or brother, but if they are in trouble, you will help them because they are family.

Don't ever get in a conflict where you are pitted against a blood relative of a friend because your friend in the end will always support the relative. Blood is thicker than water. With God as our Father, we are family. He sticks with us. Great is HIS Faithfulness to us. He's the perfect loving Father we have always wanted.

If we really know God as the perfect Father, can you imagine the floodgates of emotion that might open? The flood of adoration and love that might have been suppressed in us because of a concept of a boss God that can now

be unleashed in worship and prayer to a loving, heavenly Father.

That means in my prayers, I can talk to God as a Father who would understand everything I am going through. My prayers don't have to be trite and formal.

It means that the love God shines on me is not based on performance. I don't have to prove my allegiance like I would to a boss. I am not worried about losing God's love because I have not done enough. I don't have to worry about God abandoning me because I have sinned. He loves me because I am His son or daughter. A good father might be disappointed, but He will not cut us loose. He is not worried about our imperfection like a boss might be. God wants us to have a personal relationship with Him, not a formal relationship.

When a five-year-old girl draws a picture for her father and that picture is distorted or has a bad color scheme, the father is still proud of that picture because he loves his daughter. He doesn't get mad because the picture isn't perfect. He is so delighted with the picture that he might even put it in his office or on the refrigerator because he is proud of it in spite of its imperfection. That's the heavenly Father's love; it is not based on performance. God adopted me by His choice. He chose me!

When we are adopted by, it is not because of our own doing. It is not because of all of our works and achievements. It's by grace that we are adopted, that we are saved. We just need to accept that fact that we are God's adopted children.

*John 1:12 But to all who received Him, who believed in His*

*name, He gave power to become children of God,*

You are adopted purely because a parent loves you. As a result, you have full rights as any other biological child in the family. That's right; parents love their adopted child just as much as they love their biological children. With God you will be loved as much as He loves His son Jesus. Let me say that again. God will love you like He loves Jesus.

But then you say, "Well, Dan, that is not fully true. God loves Jesus, His real son, a lot more than me."

Didn't I say that if you are adopted you have full inheritance, full rights as a biological sibling? So it is with Jesus. And we say "No way!" And I say, "Way!"

Turn to John 17:22. Hear Jesus' prayer to our Father about us, His disciples:

*John 17:22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one,*

*John 17:23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them EVEN AS you have loved me.*

Did you hear that? He prayed that the Father love them EVEN AS He have loved Jesus. EVEN AS—two incredibly important words. God will love us EVEN AS He has loved Jesus. He will love us fully as much as He loved Jesus, and you know God loves Jesus, and Jesus loves us for we have been adopted into His family.

Finally there can be true meaning in our life.

**G**od is a personal God and He has adopted us!

Jesus said that when we pray to God, we are to say "Our Father."

In fact, He called God *Abba*, the intimate Aramaic word for *daddy*. God is our Daddy.

*Rom. 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!"*

*Rom. 8:16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*

*Rom. 8:17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—*

Jesus did not say when you pray say, Our King, or Our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sustainer; no, He chose the personal Our Father.

Knowing that we were chosen by God to be joint heirs with Christ should be very liberating. We shouldn't be prideful. We were chosen not because of performance or because of how great we are. We, who are fully tainted with sin, were chosen in spite of our sins and were adopted into God's family. And if we follow Jesus and do His will, then He indeed is our brother, for did he not say:

*Mark 3:35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."*

And how were we even able to enter into the Holy Family with our sinful nature? To be an adopted sibling of Jesus Christ, our brother, our friend, the Son of God who died for us?

We became part of God's family when we said yes to follow Him. And it is the sacrament of Communion that signifies we are family.

*Luke 22:19 Then He took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

*Luke 22:20 And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

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