

“Hallowed”

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Luke 11:1-4

CHILDREN’S TIME

Do you ever have trouble thinking of something to say when you are praying? That happens to me sometimes. I start to pray and just can't think of anything to say.

Today, I want to show you something that will help when that happens. It's called the “Five Finger Prayer.”

First, I want you to put your hands together in front of you. Keep your eyes open so that you can see your hands. You'll notice that the closest finger to you is your thumb. Since it's the closest to you, the thumb reminds us to pray for those who are closest to us. You can pray for your parents and your brothers and sisters.

The next finger is called your index finger. It is used for pointing. This finger reminds us to pray for those who point you in the right direction. Pray for your teachers, or your Sunday School teacher.

The next finger is the tallest finger. This finger reminds us to pray for our leaders. Pray for the president of our country and other leaders in our government and those who are leaders in our town.

The fourth finger is the called the ring finger. Did you know that this is the weakest of all our fingers? Ask any one who plays the piano and they will tell you this is true. Let this finger remind you to pray for those who are sick.

The next finger is the smallest finger. Let the little finger remind us to pray for ourself.

So the next time you are talking to God, and you can't think of anything to say, let the “Five Finger Prayer” help you.

SERMON

Prayer is a mystery, and yet it shapes us.

What is it's purpose? What does it do?

Even the Apostle Paul recognized we often don't know how to pray or what to pray for. In those times, we rely on the Spirit of God to help us

to find the heart of God in the midst of the pain in the world.

This can be very humbling, but maybe it can also be encouraging that we are not left without resources in our time of emptiness.

When do we pray?

Often we pray when we find ourselves in a mess that we want to get out of. We are late to work and stuck in a snowstorm. Maybe we have said something that hurt a friend and now they are ignoring us and we feel sad and want God to fix it. We pray wanting life to be easier and more comfortable.

We also pray when we have a pressing need and we ask God to give to us what we want. We lost a job and want a new one, or we are running into our preset deadline to call a new Pastor or new Music Director and we are anxious.

In this way, we think of prayer as the way to get what we want. We think that if we pray long enough and hard enough that God will hear our commitment, and therefore give us what we want.

But maybe at times we feel as though we are praying into a void and not getting a response.

Do we conclude that God isn't listening, or perhaps isn't even there? Maybe we determine that we just are not doing it right.

Maybe we think certain other people, perhaps clergy, are on God's inner circle? We try to get those individuals to pray for what we want and then we have a better chance of getting it, right?

A man called the church two different times during the past couple of months asking for a pastor to pray with him. So, I had a conversation with him.

He went about telling me what he wanted me to pray, very specifically — that God would have certain people at work do certain things and not do other things.

I asked him some general questions about the situation, and asked if I could pray for him. He was not, however, interested in prayer for himself. Instead, he wanted me to pray certain words so that God would control these other people.

When he got the notion that I was not going to pray for God to control others, he very quickly hung up.

Do we sometimes think of God as the magician who makes stuff happen, or the puppet master who controls people and events at our request?

Or is prayer the time when we open ourselves for God to fill us with a God-like heart to nudge our actions and attitudes toward the betterment of others and the world?

However, if we are honest, probably most of the time our prayers are to get out of a mess or to have what we want.

Seeing these intentions, we might realize that we are approaching prayer with a self-centered worldview and focused mostly on what we want. We might also realize that we have made God quite small.

But God isn't only a spiritual cleaner-upper, a sorter-outer, or a genie wish-granter.

God is a living being who created and is sustaining all of life and the world around us, and actively bringing about a new kingdom in this world.

At the same time, God is somehow very personal and, like a parent, is infinitely more wise than us.

When we hang out with this bigger picture of God for a bit we will see that while the realities of our life are the same, our priorities have begun to shift.

This shift is:

- From small-minded thinking to expansive thinking.
- From a trapped and stress-filled life to a life of authentic faith.
- From isolated paranoia to relational prayer.

Living with the Lord's Prayer will help us make this shift and reorient our lives.

I was listening recently to a podcast interview with a noted social scientist named Brene Brown who was talking about true belonging.

Brown said that true belonging is something that we were built for, but we seldom experience. She said her research shows that true belonging only happens when we live authentically who we really are — no hiding, no walls, no pretending.

The other side of this is loneliness which is driven by inauthenticity. She said that the degree to which we are willing to be authentic is the degree to which we can truly belong.

The Lord's Prayer invites us into full authentic living where we truly belong and can be wholly real and vulnerable under the umbrella of God's presence and love.

Maybe we miss it, but we find this in the way that the prayer begins. It starts by addressing God, not as an entity way out beyond us, but as one who is close and personal, like a child would address a parent with an intimate connection of love.

At the same time we bow before God's majesty, greatness, and power with the utmost respect and honor.

"Hallowed" is the word the prayer uses for this way to approach God.

When we hold these two together: God's interest in a close, intimate relationship with us, which is truly possible, and a hallowing of God — then we begin to grasp the nature of Christianity and God's kingdom.

But when we pray "Our Father" we may also feel ashamed that we have not been relating with God in an intimate way. Maybe we can acknowledge the shame and also move through it to find an opportunity to grow.

When you were in elementary school, do you remember going clothes shopping with your mom, dad, or a grandparent. They recognized that you were growing so they bought you clothes that were just a bit too big for you. For a short while you had to wear oversized clothes as you were growing into them.

There is so much mystery in prayer anyway, maybe we can pray while holding space for growing into a more full understanding.

This will help us approach prayer with humility, wonder, and a curious beginner's heart. This allows us to approach prayer with grace for ourselves and an openness to God, who desires to meet us right where we are.

"Father" was used in reference to God in the ancient Hebrew scriptures too, most prominently by Moses when he went before Pharaoh to say on behalf of God:

"Israel is my son, my firstborn. Let them go that they may once again come to serve me."

God was making a claim on his children who someone else had enslaved — may they be restored

to their proper place to live in the way that they were born to live.

In the same way, we pray “Our Father” to acknowledge we might not be fully there yet, but we know that God is claiming us in the face of whatever else currently has our heart, our attention, or to which we are being held captive, and we can hear God say,

“Let my child be free — be free to be who she or he authentically is!”

When we pray “Our Father, hallowed be your name” we are affirming that above all else we are part of the family God loves, and God has declared us free!

At the end of the prayer a tag was added in Christian tradition that was not in scripture. It was added in the first couple of centuries after Jesus’ time to reflect the orientation of the prayer in the world.

The church added, “For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.”

In Jesus’ day there was one person in whose hands lay the greatest power, and who ruled the only kingdom people knew, the great Roman Empire. This was Augustus Caesar. This man demanded that

people attribute to him all of the glory due a king who was descended from the gods.

In fact, people called him the “Son of God.” People also called him the King of Kings, because no king in the past two hundred years was able to do what he had done. He brought peace to the vast territory as far as anyone could travel from east to west and north to south.

Well, Augustus offered peace — as long as it served the interests of Augustus’ empire. If someone didn’t serve his purposes then they were squashed and ridiculed. Augustus made sure that everyone knew what happened to those who challenged the empire, and it wasn’t pretty!

The Lord’s Prayer was crafted in that environment. The end of the prayer affirms that those following Jesus are not following the power structures or the status quo of Augustus Caesar or any other ruler. Instead, they were fully oriented around a different order, that of building of an alternative kingdom that was even greater than Augustus’.

This alternative kingdom vision is the heart of Jesus’ prayer, the heart of Jesus’ ministry, and the heart of

the Christian life. This is what it means to be fully human and to truly live!

insight and allow space for God to deepen your experience of the prayer.

Here are three concrete ways to use this prayer that it might shape you more fully as a human being and faithful follower of Jesus, building the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

1. Make the Lord's Prayer a pattern in your week by taking one phrase at a time and dwelling on it for a day — thinking on it, praying it, considering all of the concerns and whatever comes to mind inside that phrase.
2. Say the whole prayer repeatedly, slowly through the day to consider how it speaks to you and shapes you. Turn off the radio and repeat it in your car on the way to work and then on your way home. Pray it while you eat your lunch or shovel snow from your driveway. Make it your mantra.
3. Add the Lord's Prayer to your bedtime routine. They say that whatever you think about, do, or say right before falling asleep will shape what your mind and heart works on through the night. This can lead to greater

The Lord's Prayer

Our father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into a time of trial, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen!