



Growth Group Discussion Questions

13. Our Father in heaven

Read Matthew 6:7-13

1. In verse 7, Jesus describes 'pagan' prayer. ***On what basis do pagans think that God will hear them? What does 'pagan prayer' say about God? Discuss how we Christians can sometimes fall into the trap of praying like pagans?***
2. ***Discuss some of the ways in which Christian prayer is in contrast to pagan prayer according to Jesus in verse 8?***
3. In verse 8 Jesus says that your Father already knows what you need before you ask Him. ***What would you say to someone who says, 'well then, why bother praying?'***
4. OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN – these four words are probably one of the most profound phrases in the Bible. In the following three questions we will unpack those four words in three sections:
 - 4.1 'Father' – ***on what basis can we approach God as our FATHER? What comfort does it give us that according to Jesus God really is our Father? (Hint: see John 1:11-13 and 1 John 3:1)***
 - 4.2 'Our' – ***on what basis can we approach God as OUR Father? What comfort does it give us that according to Jesus God really is OUR Father? (Hint: see John 11:41-42)***
 - 4.3 'in heaven' – ***what does the phrase 'in heaven' teach us about prayer? What comfort is there in keeping this perspective in prayer? (Hint: Psalm 115:3)***
5. ***Practically, spend some time discussing how Christians can make better use of the Lord's prayer as an outline or structure to help us pray better?***
6. ***As a group, pray the Lord's prayer together.***

Leaders Notes

1. Pagans pray on the basis of ‘heaping up empty phrases’ and ‘many words’. In other words, their prayers are repetitive, mechanistic and formulaic. This kind of prayer sees God as someone (if He is even a person) who has to be ‘manipulated’. We have to use the right ‘method’ in order to *get* Him to hear our prayers – as if He wasn’t that keen anyway. Christians sometimes think they need to manipulate God by ‘having enough faith’ or ‘praying a certain way’ or ‘praying this or that prayer’. (A few years ago the ‘Prayer of Jabez’ was an example of a pagan view of prayer creeping into the church.)
2. Firstly, Jesus says ‘do not be like them’ which means, don’t pray like the pagans. Do not pray using empty phrases or endless repetition. In other words, don’t rely on the shape or form or format of your prayer to exert influence over God. Don’t pray as if you need to convince God to hear you. Secondly, don’t pray as if God is a stranger. ‘Your Father already knows what you need’... means that you must pray truly knowing God, in a relationship with God, a very close relationship with God – as close as a Father to a child.
3. The Christian basis of prayer is a close relationship with God as Father and we as His children. If He was any kind of Father He would know what we need. If we had to tell God what we needed because He didn’t know, He would be a weak, ignorant Father and therefore it wouldn’t be worth asking Him for help anyway. But the main reason is that it is about relationship. If we as human parents know that our children need food, why bother to teach them to say, ‘Daddy, please can I have pizza for dinner’? We want them to ask us because we want them to come to us because we want their relationship. And if they have any kind of love for us, they would want us more than pizza. We ought to ask God for the things He already knows we need, e.g. ‘give us today our daily bread’, because it is about relationship. By the way, this is why if He doesn’t give us the pizza we ask for, because He knows what we need. He always gives us only what is good for us because as a Father, He already knows what we need – NOT what we want.
4. 4.1 Father is not just a descriptive title of God, as if we could just as easily call Him ‘mother’. The Bible teaches in many places (John 1:11-13, 1 John 3:1) that God is *actually* our Father because He has adopted us. The basis of ‘Father’ is adoption. This has come about because we have faith in His true Son, Jesus. The comfort is simply staggering. Just like a good earthly father owns his children, cares for them, provides for them, never forgets them, does everything in his limited power to look after them – imagine what the Infinite God of the Universe with Perfect Love does for His children. And here’s the amazing thing: none of us chose our children. God actually chose us because He adopted us. There is no blemish or defect in us that will take God by surprise. He knew us perfectly and adopted us anyway i.e. we can never put God off us. How comforting is this. Bottom line: God is infinitely more keen to do us good than we are even to ask for it. (all this is why trying to manipulate Him is so wrong and insulting)
- 4.2 We tend to think of ‘our’ as first and foremost about us – all of us Christians together, and this is true. But actually, it is first and foremost about Christ and us. We are united to Christ. His Father becomes our Father. This is the basis on which we can say ‘our’. *Our* is the astonishing teaching that the Spirit unites us to Christ. This is why the Bible calls Jesus ‘our Brother’ and Hebrews 2 tells us that Jesus had to ‘be made like His brothers in every way’ – except without sin. How comforting is this! Do you suppose that God ever said ‘no’ to Jesus? Other than when Jesus the Son of God asked His Father if there was another way for us to be saved without Him being crucified, and God said ‘no’, other than that, God always, always says ‘yes’ to Jesus. (See John 11:41-42.) God always answers Jesus’ prayers. (Obviously, because He always prays in accordance with God’s will.) Now, because Jesus’ God is *our* God and because Jesus’ Father is *our* Father, we are so encouraged when we approach God in Jesus. He will give us what is good for us. Guaranteed. As surely as He always says ‘yes’ to His Perfect Son, Jesus.

- 4.3 'in heaven' teaches us that prayer is upward looking. It reminds us that our God who is also our Father and so very close to us, is also the Emperor who rules the Universe. Yes, He is close. But He is also far above us. He is sovereign. This is the comfort of all prayer. What is the point of praying to a God who can't actually do stuff? Our God is in the heavens and He does as He pleases – Psalm 115:3. It also reminds us that ultimately, we will see the happy solution to all our prayers in heaven – forever. No wonder the book of Revelation pictures the prayers of the saints as gathered in a bowl kept under God's throne – in heaven!
5. No need to give an answer here because it might look different for each person, but it would be helpful for mature Christians to share how the Lord's prayer helps us and structures our prayers. We'll see more of this in the sermons to come.