

The Lord's Prayer: Father
Matthew 6:9-13 (NRSV)
September 6, 2026

Who's your hero? When you have a difficult decision to make, or a difficult task to accomplish, who is it you think of to ask, "what would they do?"

Like many of y'all, my hero is my dad. He was an amazing guy. Another one of my heroes is Kirsten's dad, Larry. Both of them provided wonderful, but quite different, examples of what it looks like to be a good man, a good father, and a good person.

But I've also got some other heroes. For whatever reason, over the last few years I've gotten interested in US history. So, several years ago I read the book "Team of Rivals" by Doris Kearns Goodwin. It's a biography of Abraham Lincoln. In reading that book, I was reminded that it's because of his wisdom, character, and integrity that this country still exists. And then, the other day, I watched a History Channel series on George Washington. I was reminded that it's because of *his* wisdom, character, and integrity that this country didn't become a monarchy before it even started. These two men, along with my dad and Big Larry, are great examples of how I would like to live my life.

But, of course, I have one hero that surpasses them all; even my dad, even Abraham Lincoln. And that's Jesus. Frankly, I don't think you have to be a Christian for Jesus to be your hero. The Gospels tell us about his incredible teaching, about his character and integrity and honesty; how what we did always matched up with what he said. Even non-Christians have to acknowledge that Jesus was an amazing guy.

But if you're a Christian, Jesus has *got* to be at the top of your list of heroes. Because we believe he was divine, the embodiment of the second person of the Holy Trinity. As such, his teaching wasn't just wise, it was the word of God. As God made flesh, Jesus was the smartest and most fully integrated human being ever to live. He was God made real. So, of all my heroes, he is the one I most want to be like. I want to learn from and follow him and his example.

And in today's scripture, Jesus gives us one very important way to do that: prayer.

Here's the context: Jesus is in the middle of his Sermon on the Mount, the most comprehensive summary of his teaching in the Bible. And in the middle of that extended sermon, Jesus very methodically explains to his listeners how to pray. He tells them not to pray like the scribes and the Pharisees, who make a big deal about it and want everyone to know just how holy they are. He also says not to pray like the Gentiles, who pile words on top of one another in hopes of getting just the right combination of words so they can get what they want.

Instead, Jesus gives them this simple prayer to pray. And he doesn't start it out with something like, "Almighty, most-high, all-knowing, eternal, creator and sustainer God." He doesn't pull out the thesaurus and include every adjective that might apply to God. He starts it out simply, "Our Father."

Now, one of the reasons we prayed that paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer a few minutes ago is to give us some sense of the novelty Jesus' hearers might have experienced when they heard this simple beginning. It wasn't what they were used to. Not only in its simplicity, but even more so in its intimacy. Although Matthew's Gospel was written in Greek, the Aramaic

word Jesus likely used here was “Abba,” which we might translate as “Daddy” or “Papa”. In fact, another version of the Lord’s Prayer starts out, “God in heaven, you’re our dad.”

Jesus doesn’t start out describing God in cosmic terms. He doesn’t emphasize God’s power, God’s kingship, God’s creation and control over the universe. Of course, those are all aspects of who God is, but Jesus cuts to the core—God’s basic essence. God is love, so Jesus depicts God as our daddy, as the one who loves us utterly and completely and who is worthy of our love in return.

And at the same time, Jesus emphasizes God’s closeness. One of the reasons I like the paraphrase we read just a minute ago so much is because in it, Dallas Willard emphasizes God’s closeness to us.

Now, the way we say it is, “Our Father who art in heaven.” There are a couple of problems with this version. First is the “art,” which isn’t even a verb anymore. When you think about it, it’s just weird we wouldn’t just say God “is” in heaven. The “art” just sort of naturally separates us from God.

But even worse, when we say the prayer this way, it suggests we’re here on earth, and God is way up in heaven, a totally different place. Which is why I like Dallas Willard’s version, because he gives effect to the actual Greek word that we translate as “heaven.” It’s “Ouranos.” And as it’s used here, it’s plural. “Our Father *in the heavens*.” And the Greek and Hebrew understanding of “the heavens,” or “Ouranos,” was that the heavens are all around us. They permeate us and the physical reality we inhabit. God is not remote. God does not live exclusively in some faraway place called heaven. God is always with us and will never leave us.

God is as close to us as the air we walk around in. God inhabits the place between skin and senses.

But the beauty of this simple prayer is that it doesn't just describe who God the Father is, it also describes the nature of the relationship Jesus has with the Father. Jesus gives his followers this prayer because it is *his* prayer. He considers God his perfectly loving, always-there father, and himself as God's loving, obedient child.

Now, in that culture, children were more or less powerless. They were almost completely dependent on the head of the family—the father—for food, shelter ... life. The father was the ultimate provider. The children were utterly dependent on the father.

And that's the nature of Jesus' relationship to God the Father. Utter dependence and love. Jesus says repeatedly in the Gospels that he can do nothing apart from the Father. Jesus holds the Father in such reverence and love that he follows Him completely. This utter devotion and surrender is so complete that Jesus tells his disciple Philip in ch 14 of John's Gospel, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

And by giving his disciples this prayer, Jesus is inviting those disciples, including us, into that same sort of relationship. We are invited into a relationship of utter and complete surrender to and dependence on God. We are invited to view God, and his incarnation Jesus, as our ultimate hero. We are invited to experience the same sort of solidarity with God the Father that Jesus did. And we are invited to become more like God, as revealed to us in His Son Jesus; to begin to think and act and speak as our hero, our example Jesus did. That's what we mean when we pray, "our Father."

Now, you might be thinking, “OK, I get it. We need to make Jesus our hero and be like him. So, why do we have to keep praying this prayer? Why can’t we just decide to be like him and leave it at that?”

Well, the reason is simple. We’re fallen. We’re broken. We, as the human race were created in the image of God’s love. But we have chosen to live instead for ourselves. We were created to live in dependence on God, but have instead chosen to depend on ourselves. Without God’s help, we can’t approach God.

And so, when we pray this prayer, we aren’t just acknowledging that God is our Father, we are also imploring God to help us *really* experience God as our Father. We are asking God, through the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, to change us, to make us different, to transform us. In the words of Paul to the Philippians, we are asking God to give us the mind of Christ so that we can live like Christ, in love with, and dependent on our heavenly Father. And, as we frequently discuss, that isn’t something that happens all at once. Learning to follow Jesus and live lives entirely dependent on God isn’t the work of one prayer. It’s the work of a lifetime.

So, I’ll ask again, Who’s your hero? And maybe more importantly. Will you follow him?