

Our Relationships with God: Matthew 6:9-13

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

Relationships are fundamentally important. In fact, I would suggest, the first things we ever learn are about relationships. Who knows how much time I have already spent trying to teach relationships to Trina. How many times have I pointed to myself while holding her and said, “Daddy”? How many times have I encouraged her to say, “I love Daddy”? I have pointed at Marita and said, “Mommy.” I have pointed at the other children and said, “Do you love Tessa? Do you love Ethan? Do you love Ryan?” All of this has to do with relationships. While these relationships are important, I hope I can exemplify and teach my children to have the most important relationship ever: a relationship with God. Recently, I had the privilege to peruse some material by Ken Weliever, gospel preacher for the North Boulevard church in Tampa, FL, for new Christians. I wanted to share with you some points he made to me about our relationship with God demonstrated by Jesus’ model prayer in **Matthew 6:9-13**. The reality is, if we want to improve our discipleship, our prayer lives and our service, we will need to focus on these relationships with God, recognizing them and improving them.

Discussion:

- I. “Our Father in heaven”—Father and child
 - A. There are many aspects of the Father/child relationship that overlap with some of the other relationships we will note in this prayer. We could talk about authority and submission. We could talk about obedience and service. We could talk about provision and dependence. But there are two aspects of this relationship that stand out and make this relationship distinct from the others we will note. Those two aspects are origin and love.
 1. When we say God is our Father, we mean we are His offspring. Without Him, there would be no us. This is more than creator. God was not some mad scientist putting pieces together and zapping them to life. As our procreation means there is some of our parents in us, this means there is some of God in us. We are made in His image (**Genesis 1:26-27**). I believe that has to do with the spiritual aspects of our existence and our ability to be rulers over the rest of the creation. But we must never take our own place in creation for granted. We are only in that place because our Father has granted us authority (cf. **Psalms 8**).
 2. When we say God is our Father, we see images of love and tenderness. As a Father gently holds his newborn baby, smiling, caressing, rocking, loving. Picture Dan Allen holding little Luke. That is our heavenly Father. He loves us, is concerned for us, is holding us up, protecting us. Though He is ruling the universe, He has time for us. He cares for us. He listens to us because we are His children (cf. **I Peter 5:7**). We cannot pray to Him because He is our King, our Master or our God. We should pray to Him because of those relationships, but we can pray to Him because He is our Father.
 - B. We improve this relationship by acting the child. I do not mean by acting childish. We must recognize who our Father is and walk in His footsteps. Wasn’t this Jesus’ point in **Matthew 5:44-45**? The more we act like God, the more we demonstrate He is our Father. The less we act like Him, the more we demonstrate we have opted for a different father (cf. **John 8:44**). We build this relationship as we follow Jesus’ advice to the men asking about the poll tax in **Matthew 22:21**. The denarius was Caesar’s because it had Caesar’s image. We are God’s because we bear our Father’s image. We improve our relationship with Him by giving ourselves to Him.
- II. “Hallowed be your name”—God and worshipper
 - A. As we enter God’s presence in prayer, we must recognize the amazing privilege we have. This is God, the sovereign ruler of the universe. His very name is holy. He is worthy and we are not. As we come into His presence, we bow before His greatness. We are like the creatures and elders in **Revelation 4:9-11**. We cast down our golden crowns, that is we cast down anything that we may feel gives us some claim to worthiness in order to honor His absolute worthiness. He is God; we are the worshippers. We are not God. We do not make the mistake of the Pharisee in **Luke 18:11-12**, acting as if somehow God should be thankful that He has such great servants as us. Rather, we humble ourselves under His awesome and powerful hand (**I Peter 5:6**).

- B. God is seeking worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and truth (**John 4:23-24**). If we want to improve our worship relationship with Him, we have to pursue these two aspects. We must work on our spirit. Honoring God is not a matter of what is on the lips, but what is in the heart. Worship is not about going through the motions, but about truly humbling ourselves before Him. As we praise God, petition God, confess to God or in some other way worship Him, we must do it with our whole being, loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. But we must also follow our God in truth. This reflects our own sincerity as we do not worship God hypocritically but truly. It also reflects our desire to worship Him His way, following His word, which He has established as the truth (**John 17:17**).
- III. “Your kingdom come, your will be done”—King and subject
- A. God is our king and we are the subjects. He is the master and we are the servants. He is the ruler and we are the ruled. This is tough for us as Americans. We fought a war that threw off the kings. We want a government that is by the people, of the people and for the people. We don’t like anyone doing anything without the consent of the governed. That, however, is not our relationship with God. He is our King. He is our Ruler. He is our Master. He gets to make the rules without our consent. He does get to tell us what to do, when to do it and where to do it. Gratefully, this King is our Father; we are aware His rule is what is best for us (cf. **Matthew 7:7-11**). However, we still sometimes struggle with being told what to do. Yet, that is exactly what we agree to when we come into Christ. It is His kingdom and we are the subjects. It is His will that is to be done, not our own.
- B. Improving this relationship is simple in concept but not always easily accomplished. We improve this part of our relationship with God by obeying Him. No matter what He has asked, we obey and submit. This is made easier however, as we increase our faith. When we increase our faith that God is our loving Father King and not a capricious ruler whose rules are simply subject to His own fancy and whim, we will be able to obey with greater peace. Then we will be able to see God’s care for us. The best way to start in this process of faith is to be in the Word (**Romans 10:17**). Faith comes by hearing God’s word. The more we read and study, the more we will see our loving Father King in action, the more we will trust Him and take Him at His word.
- IV. “Give us this day our daily bread”—Provider and dependent
- A. This is such an important part of our prayer lives. We must constantly remind ourselves that apart from God’s grace we accomplish nothing. He gives life and breath to all of us (**Acts 17:25**). We often think we are the ones getting all this accomplished. “Look at this car I drive. Look at this house I own. Look at these clothes I wear. Look at these gadgets I have. Look at this prize I won. Look at this mountain I climbed. Look at this obstacle I overcame. Look at this enemy I beat.” We have to step back and recognize without our great provider, we could do none of those things. What would happen if God decided to take your oxygen away? What if He took away your muscle strength? What if He let your body become wracked with pain? If not for Him, we don’t get our daily bread. If not for Him, we get nothing, we do nothing, we are nothing. Because of Him and through His grace, we do eat, act, accomplish and overcome.
- B. We can improve this relationship by making an inventory of what we can really accomplish on our own and what we can only accomplish through God. Be honest. It reminds me of the well-worn story of the scientists who decided to compete with God about who could make the best human out of the dust of the earth. When the scientist reached down to grab a handful, God said, “Wait a minute. Get your own dirt.” Consider Paul’s assessment in **II Corinthians 12:7-10**. He was able to access the strength of God because He honestly faced His own weakness. If we want to improve this aspect of our relationship with God, we must assess how truly weak, needy and dependent we really are. Then we must remember how strong, mighty and powerful God is. Finally, we must recognize the work God has accomplished through us (**Ephesians 3:20**).
- V. “Forgive us our debts”—Creditor and debtor
- A. We all know we are sinners. **Romans 3:23** is our constant reminder that we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. However, this statement in the model prayer explains something about our sin. Sin is not just a transgression of the law as some translations put it. It is a debt.

Because we have sinned, we owe God. What do we owe Him? Our lives. God told Adam and Eve in the very beginning if they sinned, they would surely die (**Genesis 2:17**). **Ezekiel 18:20** says the soul who sins shall die. **Romans 6:23** explains the wages of sin is death. When we sin, we owe God our lives. We must pay for our sins through our eternal death—that is separation from God. However, He has paid our debt through Jesus. **II Corinthians 5:14-15** says Jesus died and therefore we died through Him. He died, so we wouldn't have to. Jesus paid our debt.

- B. This relationship may seem a bit paradoxical. On the surface, we might think we improve this relationship by increasing our debt and showing what a wonderful benefactor and creditor our God is. Paul, however, in **Romans 6:1-3** said we do not continue in sin so God's grace may increase. On the contrary, we improve our relationship not by increasing our debt, but by using the righteousness God has credited to us to pursue more righteousness. **Titus 2:11-14** explains God redeemed us, bought us back from our sins, so we could pursue good deeds. **Ephesians 2:10** makes this same point. We have been recreated in Christ so we can walk in good works. If we want to improve our relationship with God our great benefactor and creditor, we do it by pursuing the good works He redeemed us to perform.

VI. "As we also have forgiven our debtors"—Example and adherent

- A. If we wish to be forgiven, we have to be willing to adhere to the example of God in forgiving us. Jesus told the story of a forgiving king who settles accounts with his servants (**Matthew 18:23-35**). One servant owed 10,000 talents, an impossible sum to repay, but he begged for mercy and the king granted it. The forgiven servant immediately went out and found another servant who owed him 100 denarii. He began to choke the man, demanding payment. He would not be merciful as the king had been with him. When the fellow servants saw this, they reported it to the king. The king removed his own mercy and the first servant was cast into debtor's prison. The servant should have followed the example of his king. We are to follow the example of our God, especially following the example our God established for us through God, the Son, Jesus Christ. In **John 13:15**, Jesus explained that as He was a servant, we ought to serve as well. We should adhere to His example.
- B. Improving this aspect of our relationship is a no-brainer. As we get to know the Father, Son and Spirit better through the Word, we must follow God's example. Would God forgive? We must forgive. Would God serve? We must serve. Did God rebuke? We must rebuke. Was God love? We must be love. **Galatians 2:20** puts it in good perspective explaining that we are putting ourselves on the cross and letting Jesus run our life. He is the example and we are the adherents.

VII. "Lead us not into temptation"—Guide and follower

- A. For the purpose of this lesson, don't get bogged down with this sentence wondering why God might ever lead us into temptation. Instead, simply notice what this request says of God. He is our leader. He is our guide. We are like men on a safari in wilderness we do not know. We need someone who has been there before us to lead the way. That is God. He will lead us away from temptation and in paths of His righteousness if we will only follow Him (**Psalms 23:3**). We are the sheep and He is the Shepherd. The problem, of course, is sheep are dumb animals. Sheep rarely know what is best for themselves and therefore get themselves messed up in all kinds of problems. We, as sheep, must not lean on our own understanding, but trust God's shepherding (**Proverbs 3:5**). He is the guide and we are the followers.
- B. If we wish to improve this relationship, we must learn to trust God. Ethan is now in baseball. In order to help improve his hitting game, I purchased a piece of equipment called the "Hit-a-way". It is a pole with a baseball attached by a cord. The cord wraps around the pole and then unwraps allowing him to hit the ball. Every time we get started, I show Ethan where the ball can go on the cord. I show him that when I throw the ball around the pole it can't possibly hit him where he is standing. However, every time I throw the ball, it looks like it is coming right for him and he jumps. Ethan doesn't trust the cord holding the ball (or maybe he doesn't trust me). That is sometimes how we are with God. We have read the Word, studied the Word, we know God's promised blessings, but sometimes we are just convinced God's way isn't the right way. He says when someone has offended us we should go talk to them, do we do it? Or do we think we are an exception and we don't want to rock the boat? He says if we seek first His kingdom and

righteousness, He will provide our needs? Do we do that or do we pursue our needs first and then His righteousness if we have time left over? Do we really trust God? Or do we think He is going to throw the baseball and smash us square in the face? Trusting God is far more than just believing in Him; it means accepting His word, believing His promises and living accordingly. If we will improve our relationship with Him as our guide, we will follow what He has said even when we don't understand it.

VIII. "But deliver us from evil"—Deliverer and captive

- A. The heart of the prayer brings us to the great climax of our spiritual lives. Evil wants to hold us captive. As God told Cain near the beginning, "If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (**Genesis 4:7**, ESV). That is, sin wants to be the master over us, but we must overcome. **II Timothy 2:24-26** explains that those who are sinning are not simply evil people or perverts. They are folks being held captive by the evil one in order to do his will. Yes, I recognize our own choices and responsibility with our sins. However, this passage and **Romans 6:16** demonstrates sin will make us its slave. We have all been held captive by sin and Satan. Our deliverer is God. He is the one who will deliver us from evil and from the evil one. He is the one who has broken the chains of our bondage. He is the one who has set us free. He is the one who has released us from the prison we have built for ourselves.
- B. If we wish to improve this relationship, we need to follow the teaching of **Romans 8:2-11**. We must set our minds on the things of the Spirit. We must pursue the course of life outlined by the Spirit in His Word. Christ has set us free, but we must not use that freedom as an opportunity for the flesh (**Galatians 5:13**). As we do this, we will bear the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**). We must sow to the Spirit so that we may reap life and quit sowing to the flesh, which will only cause destruction (**Galatians 6:7-8**). If we wish to improve our relationship with God as deliverer, we must refrain from the works that put us in captivity in the first place and pursue the work the Spirit has outlined for us.

Conclusion:

What an amazing God we serve. The more I study the Bible and the more I learn about our relationship with God, the more I am convinced He is in heaven holding us in His hands the same way I hold Trina. He is constantly saying to us as He points to Himself, "Father, Father." As we do with our own babies, He knows we don't really get it. But we will. In time, we will understand more and more. He is patient with us as a Father with His child should be. Let us grow in these relationships, allowing them to affect our lives every day.