

Prayer: Working with God

Discussion Guide for Matthew 6:9-10

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven."

Discussion Guide

A recent survey of Americans' religious beliefs reflected a continuing high level of some sort of belief in the existence of God (89%). This is in spite of the fact that Americans' identification with formal religion is rapidly declining. 23% and growing identify as "no religious preference."

The vast majority of Americans likewise indicate that they pray, but there is a great level of disagreement as to what or whom they are actually praying.

Data on folks' religious beliefs is fascinating to me. I recommend looking into this study at the Pew Research Center. One takeaway is that we absolutely must look somewhere other than our neighbors to gain any certainty about the nature of God and prayer.

The defining Christian belief about God is that He is a personal God.

These are understood presumptions from Genesis to Revelation: that God has a name, that he knows people, that people can know Him, and that he saves people so that they can belong to Him. You will not find these beliefs about God in any other religion or faith system in the world. When Jesus teaches about prayer, these bedrock principles allow us to pray His way.

One of the great reflections on the Sermon on the Mount written in our day is Dallas Willard's magnum opus, *The Divine Conspiracy*¹. Willard was a philosophy professor at the University of Southern California. In this book he examines each section of the Sermon as it relates to being in an apprentice to Master Jesus. You cannot read it without being challenged at every turn of the page.

Willard says that prayer is a method of theological research, or a method of knowing what and who God is (p.194). He also says that prayer is basically requesting things from God (p. 242).

We always pray for the things in which we are genuinely interested, otherwise we would give up on praying. The interesting thing about true prayer, however, is that it has a way of expanding the circle of things in which we are interested to more closely align with the things that interest

God.

Willard's best definition of prayer, then, is "talking to God about what we are doing together" (p. 243).

This is why the Disciples' Prayer (also known as the Lord's Prayer) begins by focusing our attention on our relationship with God, his name, his reign, and his will. God is about the business of establishing his kingdom on earth and he is calling his children to be a part of it!

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– Matthew 6:9-10

Take some time to think about and discuss the significance of the following phrases:

- Our father
- In heaven
- Hallowed
- Your kingdom
- Your will
- On earth

Discussion Questions

- Why is important that God is our father?
- How do our prayers reflect our belief in God's sovereignty?
- How do our prayers reflect a belief in God's holy nature?
- How do you pray differently when you know that God has a personal name?
- What is the difference between a me-focused prayer and a kingdom-focused prayer?
- Why do you think Jesus commands us to seek God's will instead of our own?
- Talk about a time when you prayed for your will, but God used that prayer to show you that His will is better.
- Why is it important for us to focus our attention on God's reign extending to the earth?