

This week we begin a new series that will take us through Lent, The Lord's Prayer. For the next six weeks we'll look at this prayer I think of as the Path to Inner Peace.

We all have plenty of stress in our lives, and Lent is a great time to de-stress your life. And it's a great time to work on gaining inner peace, something everybody would like to have. In fact, all of us would like to feel at peace with ourselves on the inside. We often go to great lengths to try to find what will calm me down, what will de-stress me, what will give me that inner peace.

The truth is very few people ever experience inner peace. We spend all of our time regretting the past and worrying about the future so we mess up today. And we don't have inner peace.

The Bible is very clear about what brings inner peace. Philippians 4 says, *"Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."* What will bring me peace? *Pray about everything.* That's it. The key to inner peace is **prayer**. As I go through life I can either worry or I can pray. Those are my options. If you pray you'll have a lot less to worry about. If you pray you will experience inner peace.

Today we want to look at just the very first petition – Matthew 6:9 *"Jesus said, 'This is how you should pray. Our Father in heaven.'"* That simple phrase is one of the most radical ideas ever said by Jesus Christ. It doesn't seem too radical to you because we talk about God as our Father all the time now. But, for thousands of years, nobody called God Father. Jesus exploded all the stereotypes about God when He said, Here's how you talk to God: Father, Daddy, Papa. Father. An intimate term. And Jesus exploded the stereotype and said God is not an angry tyrant, God is not an apathetic creator who just winds up the world and lets it go. God is not some impersonal power. In fact, Jesus said **God is a Father not a force.**

That's really good news because I can relate to a father. God is a person not a power. I can get to know a person. I can relate to a person. I can connect with a person. There's only one problem. For many people the term "father" is a negative term. It brings up all kinds of bad memories. For many people you mention the term "father" they think of disappointment, resentment, anger. Maybe abuse. Many fathers are distant. They're distracted. They're uninvolved. They may be even abusive. So people think, "If God is like my father, no thanks, God!" One of the reasons why so many of your friends and neighbors and people you work with have never ever really personally connected with God is because of this barrier.

For instance, if you grew up with an unreasonable father, you're going to tend to think God makes unreasonable demands on your life.

If you grew up with an unreliable father, you're going to tend to think God is unreliable. That you can't depend on God because you couldn't depend on your dad and you really shouldn't depend on anybody. As a result of that, you worry a lot.

If you grew up with an unconcerned father, you're going to tend to think God is distant and detached. "Oh, yes, I believe in God. He's just not involved in my life. He's not concerned with me and the details. He's too busy to be bothered with me. He may watch my life but He doesn't ever get involved."

If you grew up with an unpleaseable father – and this is a real big one – you're going to tend to think God is unpleaseable. You were never quite good enough. You never quite measured up. You never felt you could really get your parent's approval it's no wonder you have a hard time connecting with God. So, as we start this journey down the path to inner peace, we're going to start with two words: Our Father. What is God really like? What kind of Father is God?

1. He is a caring father. God loves you more than you will ever know, or ever realize. In fact, God loves you more than you will ever understand. You can say, "Yes, I know He loves me." But you don't really know. Because you don't have the capacity to understand how wide and broad and deep God's love for you really is. God's compassion is His most outstanding quality. The Bible says in Psalm 103 *"As a father has compassion on His children so the Lord has compassion on those who honor Him."* God loves you.

Have you ever asked this question of God? "Hey God! Don't You care? Can't You see what's going on here with me – my health, my wife, my kids. Don't You care?" It's one of the most profound questions of life. Does God really care about what goes on in my life?

Fortunately, the answer is a resounding, "Absolutely, I care! I am a caring Father. 1 Peter 5:7 says *"Cast all of your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."* What anxieties are you still holding on to? If you're worrying about it, guess who's holding on to it? You. You're holding on to those anxieties.

God is intimately acquainted with every single little detail of your life. Matthew 6:31-32 Jesus says this, *"So don't worry saying, 'What are we going to eat? What are we going to wear?' Your heavenly Father knows you need these things."*

We are so stressed out! Our work, our family, our kids. We have a laundry list of things. We might think our real problem is "I just don't love God enough. That's why I worry so much." That is not your problem. Your problem is you don't realize how much God loves you. When you understand that He's a caring Father the stress will go down.

2. God is a consistent Father. God will never, never let you down. He can be counted on. He is dependable. He is reliable. He's entirely worthy of your trust. James 1:17 *"Every good and perfect gift is from the Father who does not change like shifting shadows."* God is always unchanging.

Our human fathers can be fickle. They can be unpredictable. There's no such thing as a perfect human father. Inconsistent fathers always produce insecure kids. That's just a rule of life because we're always insecure when we're confused.

The good news about God is He's never moody. He never has a bad day. He never wakes up in the morning feeling bad, thinking, "Who am I going to zap today?" The greatest news about this is God is consistent even when I am inconsistent. He is faithful even when I'm not faithful. 2 Timothy 2 *"Even if we are faithless He remains faithful for He cannot disown Himself."*

We need God's consistency for stability in this world. Some of you this week realize how unstable this world is. You faced some real challenges and you're feeling pretty unstable right now. Where do you go when life is confused like that? You go to the consistency and the stability of the love of God for you. While everything else in this world changes there is one thing that will never change.

Malachi 3:6 says, *"I, the Lord, do not change."* God is consistent. He's consistent in the way He keeps His promises. God never breaks His promises to us. Romans 11:29 *"God will never go back on His promises."* Psalm 59:10 *"My God is changeless in His love for me."* He is a consistent Father.

3. He is a close Father The Bible makes this very clear, God is not distant. He's nearby when you need Him. He's available. He's accessible. Acts 17 says this talking about God's closeness, *"God did this [in other words, He came close] so people would reach out for Him and find Him since He is not far from each of us."*

Many people grew up with an absentee father. Maybe was always going on trips or he was always out with friends. Or even when he was home he was distant, aloof, detached, reading the paper,

uninvolved in your life. So your image of “father” is detached, distant, not real close. It’s no wonder you’ve had a hard time connecting with God. That image gets in the way.

Three encouraging truths about the closeness of God.

God is never too busy for me. He never says, “Can you hold that thought? Can you wait just a minute? Not now. Some other time.” No matter what you come to God about and no matter when you come to God to talk to Him about it, God never says, “Just a minute.” You can come to God at any time of the day, with any kind of request.

God loves to meet my needs. I am a flawed parent. But even being a sinful parent I love to give my kid stuff. Caring fathers care about their kids. The Bible says this in Matthew 7 *“If you know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him.”* God is never too busy for me and He loves to meet my needs.

God is sympathetic to my hurts. Psalm 34 *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”* You may have had your heart broken and it is you that God is the closest to. He’s right there. You can turn to Him!

4. God is a competent Father He can handle any problem you give Him. Nothing is beyond God’s ability. That’s good because if God cared and if God were aware but He didn’t have any power to do anything about it, so what? But God is a competent Father. The Bible says in Luke 1 *“Nothing is impossible with God.”* I like that! That means He’s competent. Nothing is impossible.

You probably thought your dad could do anything! But as you grew up you realized he can’t. He has limited wisdom. He has limited resources. He has limited energy. Some of those times when you went to your dad for advice, the truth is he was just guessing. It sounded pretty authoritative but he was just guessing. Having been a father, I know that.

But there is one Father who is not limited in resources or wisdom or energy. It is your heavenly Father. Ephesians 3:20 says *“God is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of – infinitely beyond our highest prayers or desires or thoughts or hopes.”* God says, “You think of the biggest problem in your life, I can handle it!”

What is the biggest problem you’re facing right now? Tomorrow morning what is the biggest hang up, the biggest problem you’re going to face. I don’t care what it is, God can handle it. One plus God is a majority.

How do I get connected to God as Father? That’s why God sent His Son Jesus Christ to earth, to make the connection. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really knew Me you would know My Father as well.”* *“We are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.”*

Your Father in heaven who knows you intimately. And loves you completely. And accepts you unconditionally. And wants you. You can go to that Father for His approval and for His acceptance and for His advice. That Father – God – has seen every moment of your life. He watched you being formed in your mother’s womb. He watched you take your first breath. He watched every tear that’s fallen, every success you’ve had, every joy, every regret, every jealousy, every envy. He knows the good, the bad and the ugly about you and He still loves you. And He wants you as His child. Amen