

# Matthew Chapter 6 v 5 - 15

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, a very good morning, everyone. My name's Matthew Seymour. I come from Emmanuel Baptist Church in Leeds. It's lovely to be with you this Lord's Day to worship God together, to gather as his people, to bring him our praise and to hear more from his words in the Bible.

We're going to begin our service by hearing from God's word and then we'll respond to God's word in prayer and in song. I'm going to read Psalm 100, the whole Psalm, Psalm 100, as we begin our service of worship together.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever.

His faithfulness continues through all generations. Let us pray. Join me as I pray. Father God, as we gather to worship you this morning, we want to proclaim and declare that you are our Lord and our God.

Lord, you made us, you keep us, you sustain us, you are good to us in so many different ways. And we pray that you might help us in our service to remember all those ways in which you show your mercy and kindness and to rejoice in your kindness and goodness to us, particularly seen in the Lord Jesus and all that he did for us on the cross.

[ 2 : 13 ] So encourage us to encourage us to pray this day. So encourage us to pray this day. Lift our hearts to see more of your goodness to us and help us to worship you in spirit and in truth.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen. Amen. We're now going to turn in God's word to Matthew chapter 6.

So if you have a Bible, please turn there. Matthew chapter 6. We're going to begin reading verse 5. And if you have a church Bible, that's on page 970. This section's in the middle of a sermon that Jesus is teaching to people.

And this section's all about prayer. And we're going to be thinking about prayer together this morning. So Jesus says, Matthew chapter 6, verse 5. And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites.

[ 3 : 23 ] For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans. For they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. For your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

This then is how you should pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done.

On earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts. As we also have forgiven our debtors.

[ 4 : 35 ] And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. If you do not forgive others. Well, if you have a Bible, please turn to Matthew chapter 6.

If you do not have one, don't worry. I am going to mention a number of verses from the Bible. And you will be able to hear them as I share them. And we are going to look together at four words that

Jesus speaks right at the beginning of that section we read that had a prayer, which is known as the Lord's Prayer.

And in those four words, the four opening words, our Father in heaven, Jesus opens up a whole wonderful truth for us to see about the amazing reality that we can come to know God as our Father through faith in Jesus.

And then we are going to see what that truth of having God as our Father through Jesus Christ means for our day-to-day lives of prayer. That's what I am going to look at together this morning.

[ 6 : 08 ] Now, a few years ago, the NHS introduced health checks for people who are 40 and over, and I think they do them every five years.

And you're invited to go to your local surgery, and they do some tests, they ask you a bit about your health. And the goal of those health checks is to try and to pick up any issues before they might arise later in life.

Now, I'm not quite 40, but I'm almost there. I'm almost there, and I have a number of friends who have just turned 40, and they've been in for their health checks, and they've told me a little bit about what's involved.

And as they start to tell me about some of the things that the nurses ask you and some of the tests that they do on you, I've started to think about some of the things that might come up on my health check, which will be happening quite soon.

I know that I like cream too much, and so I'm a little bit worried about my cholesterol, and that might be flagged as a concern.

[ 7 : 16 ] And so I'm trying to take steps now to try and cut down so that I'm ready for the health check and I'm in good shape. Now, I wonder, I wonder, if you were to have a spiritual health check this morning, not a physical one and a doctor's surgery, but a spiritual health check, if you knew that was coming, what kinds of things might you be concerned about?

So like I was concerned about my cholesterol, preparing for a health check and the doctors, what kind of spiritual issues might concern you? What kind of things you might anticipate that could come up in that health check?

Now, I guess many things could concern us and many things might come up in that spiritual health check, but I think that for most of us and perhaps all of us, one of the things that we'd be concerned about would be our prayer lives.

Because we know that prayer should be something that is natural, but there are times when it feels just so forced and formal. We know that prayer should be something that is frequent and often, but sometimes we struggle to find time to pray.

And so I'd like us to look together at the first line of that Lord's Prayer that Jesus gives us to pray. And just those four words our Father in Heaven.

[ 8 : 47 ] Because in those four words, our Father in Heaven, Jesus teaches us wonderful truths that if those truths can sink down into our hearts, then they can be the key to bringing about huge change in our prayer lives.

Huge change. Or maybe you're here this morning and you're new to church. Maybe you're here this morning and you're finding out more about Jesus. And maybe prayer is something that really, really baffles you.

I became a Christian at age 16. I remember before I became a Christian, one of the things that really confused me was the whole issue of prayer. I thought, what are Christians doing when they pray?

It felt so alien and confusing. And I really struggled to understand what was happening and to see prayer as anything other than just a ritual that people go through.

Well, what I hope this morning for you, if that's you and you're here and you're finding out more about Christianity, I hope that as we look together at Jesus' words, you'll be helped to understand more about what it means to pray to God.

[ 10 : 05 ] And perhaps to see that if you came to trust in Jesus, if you came to believe in the Lord Jesus, then prayer would not be something unusual, but actually it would be the most natural thing in all the world.

So we're going to look together at those four words, our Father in heaven, in Matthew 6, verse 9. And we're going to see that in those four words, Jesus teaches us three things.

And the first is this. He teaches us about a relationship that gives us confidence. A relationship that gives us confidence. Now, it wasn't so long ago that I was at school.

And when I was a boy at school, we called all our teachers Sir and Miss. Is that still the case if you're at school? Is that what you call your teachers? Sir and Miss?

Yeah? And there was always a bit of a game at school because we always tried to find out the first names of our teachers. Because we knew their surnames. You know, there was Mr. Dedman.

[11:06] What a name. Mr. Dedman, our physics teacher. And we eventually found out that Mr. Dedman was called John. But we would never have dared to have addressed our physics teacher and said, put our hand up and said, John, can I have some help here with the experiment?

We wouldn't do it. Why would we not do it? Well, it would be appropriate, would it? Because the relationship we have with our teacher means that we address them by Sir or Miss and maybe also with their surname.

So, Mr. Dedman. We wouldn't call them John. We'd get into huge trouble if we did that. So, the titles we use when we're speaking to someone matter because they reflect our relationship to that person.

They express a relationship. And Jesus says that when we come to pray, we should address God as our Father.

Now, that may not seem like a big thing. But when Jesus spoke these words and told people to pray like this, that was a huge thing.

[12:20] It was a huge thing to address God as their Father. If people have done research and they've gone and they've looked at Jewish prayers of this time.

And they've gone and they've looked around at how Jewish people prayed and what they find it was as unheard of to use that kind of language. God is sometimes described in those Jewish prayers as the Father, but he is never described and never addressed as our Father.

And the reason a Jew would never speak to God in that way is because to use those words about God were to claim a relationship with God that no Jew could ever hope to have.

Because to call God the Father, our Father, well that's to give God a title, isn't it? But to call God our Father, well that's to claim a relationship.

And they felt it was wrong for them to claim a relationship to God that was as close as a father and a child. So when Jesus uses these words our Father, he is opening up an amazing reality.

[13:38] He's making us ask the question, how is it that anyone, any human being can call God their Father? Because by birth we're not children of God, are we?

By birth the Bible says that we are sinners in rebellion against God and actually the Bible says we are children of wrath. We are children under God's judgment.

So something has to happen for us to call God our Father. Because we have to go from being a child of wrath and judgment to become a child of God.

And the reality that Jesus wants us to think about when we read those words our Father is the amazing reality that by faith in him we can be adopted into God's family.

And Jesus says when you come to pray and begin your prayers I want that truth that you have been adopted through faith in Jesus into the family of God to be right there at the centre of your minds.

[14:58] to know that you have been adopted as a child of God and the amazing truth of the Bible is that that is something that is offered to anyone who will trust in Jesus.

We read in John's gospel in John chapter 1 verse 12 yet to all who did receive him that's the Lord Jesus to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God.

and it is through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross that we become children of God in Galatians 4 verse 4 we read God sent his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship that we might be adopted as sons and daughters of the living God now just think about what's being said in that verse for a second one of the purposes of the coming of Jesus Christ from heaven to earth was that by faith in him you and I might know that privilege of adoption and those privileges of adoption are known by men and women and boys and girls and anyone who will come to trust in Jesus

Christ and so we can become children of God through what Jesus has done on the cross when he dies for our sin and takes it away when we receive his perfect life it is given to us by faith and there are many blessings of being a Christian aren't there if I asked you this morning maybe if I give you a piece of paper and a pen I said write down all the different things that blessings that are yours as a

Christian you might write down five or six or ten or twenty things and there are many blessings blessings but I don't think it's too much to say that the blessing of being adopted by God as his child is perhaps the highest and greatest blessing of the Christian life and if you are a Christian this morning and you want to know what it means that Jesus has died on a cross for you what does it mean today as you sit this morning in church in Whitby what does it mean experientially for your life well it a great answer would be that it means that you are now a child of God that you know the God of heaven who made the world and everything in it that you know that God so closely that you can call him your father you know it was a common thing in the ancient world for children to be adopted into families as is sometimes the case today couples couldn't have children and it was particularly important to have children in the ancient world because it kept your family name going and it also meant that your family possessions and property will be preserved as well and so adoption happened in the ancient world and when a child was adopted by a family there was no going back they received all the rights and privileges of a child who had been born in that family and they were received for all time they got the family name they got the family property they got all that came with that new and permanent relationship in fact adoption in the ancient world was such a powerful thing that Julius

[18:59] Caesar one of the rulers of the Roman Empire used adoption to name his heir and successor so the man who became the ruler of the Roman Empire after Caesar was an adopted child of Caesar it was that powerful and when it comes to our identity as the children of God through the work of Christ well we come to know all the rights and privileges of being children of God and Jesus says when you pray I want you to have that reality at the very front of your mind that God is your father and that you are his child now there might be some here this morning who will find it very hard to think of God as their heavenly father perhaps you had a father who wasn't kind and loving perhaps you had a father who was distant and detached maybe you had a father who wasn't there maybe you had a father who hurt you and harmed you well if that's you then Jesus wants you to know that your father God is not like that he is a perfect father he is totally good and although it will be hard and a constant struggle he wants you to remember that your heavenly father is a perfect father and so the picture to have in your mind as God is your father is not the imperfect father that we've all known actually because no father is perfect are they but actually the picture of a perfect father who is who is everything we would have longed for in an earthly father and more so that's what

Jesus wants to think about we pray God is our father now why is that so important why does he begin with that well first reason why it's so important when you come to pray to know that relationship that gives you confidence you are praying to a father who loves you you are praying to a father who loves you if you've been adopted as a child of God then you can be sure of God's love for you the Bible declares this see what kind of love the father has given to us that we should be called children of God and so we are that's 1st John chapter 3 you know when a child knows that their father loves them well they'll talk to them about anything won't they it brings amazing confidence to the relationship they feel secure in that love and they feel that liberty and freedom to speak with their father about anything you don't have to be cautious and careful when you know that you have a father like that that settled loving relationship gives confidence in prayer now I wonder if you're working now or you've worked in the past think back to one of your bosses at work and the relationship we have with your boss at work maybe you had a really great boss maybe you had a difficult boss we probably all had bosses who were somewhere in between and maybe at the extremes as well but however good your relationship is with your boss there's always a sense in which you hold back and you're careful because ultimately you know that they can give you the sack and so there's just always that cautiousness in how you speak to your boss and in how you think about your boss you're always on your guard because you know you have to be but when Jesus teaches us here about prayer he doesn't tell us to think about God as our boss does he he tells us to think about God as our father because he doesn't want us to come with nervousness he doesn't want us to know that guardedness because we have that fear he wants us to come with confidence because we have been adopted for all time through the Lord Jesus Christ he wants us to know we are coming to a father who is always more ready to hear than we are to pray and that should give us great confidence in prayer that relationship of love with God should give us great confidence in prayer but it also means that when we come to pray we are coming to a father who loves to give us good gifts Jesus builds on this truth of God as our father right through the son on

the mount and a little later in

Matthew chapter 7 we read these words when he's speaking about prayer he says Matthew chapter 7 verse 7 ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find knock and the door will be opened to you for everyone who asks receives and the one who seeks finds and the one who knocks the door will be opened and which of you if your son asks for bread he's thinking about fathers and sons again will you give him a stone or if he asks for a fish will you give him a snake if you then though you are evil 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 so this truth that God is our father gives us confidence that our father is going to give us good gifts and and Jesus tells it speaks in that way to give us confidence and boldness when we come to our father

God because we can be sure that our father loves to give us good things he loves to give us good things he is not like a reluctant stranger who needs to be persuaded to care about us he is our heavenly father he is not like an evil tyrant who wants to play tricks on us when he answers our prayers he is our heavenly father and he is not like an indulgent grandfather who gives us everything that we ask for he is our good and loving heavenly father who gives us the good things that we need and that should give us great confidence in prayer brothers and sisters now that's so important for you to see if you're here and maybe you're not a Christian because I find that for many people when they think about how they might relate to God if they came to trust in Jesus they have a very different picture in their minds to what

[ 26 : 17 ] Jesus paints here perhaps in your mind you think Christianity is stale and boring and you think that God is uninteresting or maybe you think that Christianity is harsh and unkind and that God is far away and distant well whatever picture you might have in your mind about Christianity and about God can I plead with you to put that out of your mind and take to your mind the picture that Jesus paints here because the offer of the kind of relationship that can come if you trust in Jesus is that of a father and their child and that isn't distant is it that isn't boring is it that is wonderful and that is amazing and friends if that's all true that

Jesus is pointing here to a relationship that gives us confidence then our prayer lives should be about enjoying that relationship with our father God I think that one of the main reasons why so many Christians struggle with prayer is that we see it as just something we do perhaps in the mornings perhaps in the evenings and then we don't do through the rest of the day I don't know about you are you the sort of person who lives on habits and patterns so you know you get up and you get ready in a certain way in the morning you brush your teeth at one point if you're a man you shave you shave next and then you do something else and you go through your pattern in the morning and in that morning pattern is reading God's word and praying and that's a wonderful thing to do that's such an important thing to do but if you're a Christian and you know God as your heavenly father then your life of prayer to God isn't just something that would happen in the morning and evening is it it's not kind of a switch on switch off thing like that if you know that kind of relationship with God then it's something that can happen right through the day and sometimes maybe maybe it's a struggle for you in the morning to pray and read your

Bible maybe the life at home it's just it's chaos and you can't get any quiet in the mornings to read and pray and you think Lord I wish I had the time to do that but maybe there are other moments in the day when you can pray maybe as you're going perhaps to a difficult meeting that you know is going to be tricky and you're anticipating it's going to be a hard meeting well you can be praying as you walk to that meeting and preparing yourself for that meeting maybe there's something going on at home and it's difficult and you can see that it's hard and you're struggling through it and you can be praying in that difficult situation or maybe you're struggling with something in your life and it keeps on coming into your mind through the day and you try and push it out but it keeps on coming back well as those struggles come to your mind you can bring them to God's and you can ask for God's help as you pray for them through the day see what I'm saying here is that if God is our father then prayer becomes the channel for a relationship that we enjoy with God right through the day yes I hope you have a time in a day where you read God's word and you pray but but friends pray to the whole day you know Paul says pray without ceasing doesn't they and I think that's something the thought that's going on here that it's a natural part of our lives so we've seen a relationship that gives us confidence very briefly power that gives us hope power that gives us hope Jesus says we should pray to our father who is in heaven now when he speaks of God our father being in heaven he is thinking not so much about the location of God as he is about the power of

God because the location of God being in heaven is all to do with God's power and authority the the thought is that God reigns from heaven and there is nothing that he cannot do Psalm 115 verse 3 says our God is in heaven and he does whatever pleases him and any earthly father is limited in what they can do they might be kind and loving but there are always going to be limits to their power a couple of months ago I was preaching away from Leeds and Naomi was there with me and we'd sent the boys off some to see friends in York some to stay with grandparents in Stoke-on-Trents and it was a weekend back in March and it was when the snow came down in the north if you remember that weekend and a lot of snow fell particularly around York and Leeds and it was like in what it would be York Leeds and the

Pennines were pretty difficult and it was we'd made careful plans that having preached I would Naomi and I would come home and the grandparents would bring the boys back some friends would bring one of our sons back and they'd all be back at home safe so that when we arrived back late after preaching in the evening it would all be okay but all those plans fell apart when the snow came down because we just couldn't do it you know my father was saying oh Matthew I just don't think I want to risk the Pennines at the minute I said that's okay you're going to drive the car that's okay and then my mother was saying I'm not sure I can bring you know your eldest boy back from York because the snow is quite bad and we spent the whole afternoon trying to work out how we might get the boys home and what really came home to me in that experience was that however much I tried to be a perfect powerful father my powers were limited I couldn't get the boys safely home that afternoon but friends God's power is without limit he is our father in heaven nothing and no one else comes near to his power and he is able to answer our prayers according to that great power and that should give us amazing hope as we pray I love the way that Paul expresses it in Ephesians 3 you know the end of that prayer in the middle of the book of

[ 33 : 22 ] Ephesians he says now to him who is able to do immeasurably more immeasurably more than we ask or imagine in your mind you have an idea for the power of God and Paul says in that verse whatever thought you have as to how far God's power extends it's bigger than that he says it's a measure of more than we can ask or imagine God's power is so much greater and so when we pray we come to a father with that kind of power and we need to believe that don't we we need to believe that because there are situations in your life and in my life that at times feel so difficult they just feel impossible I wonder in your life what kind of situations are like that maybe it's something that's going on in the workplace for you and it's a very difficult relationship or a very difficult circumstance you have to deal with and it feels impossible maybe it's a broken relationship somewhere that you'd like to see restored but it just seems like it's impossible maybe it's a struggle that you have with a particular sin but it just feels impossible well when we face impossible situations we can lose hope can't we and sometimes we can stop praying about them but if we can remember that we are coming to a heavenly father whose power is beyond our imagination well then we have hope don't we then we have hope so friends God is your father in heaven he has great power that should give you hope God is your father who loves you that should give you great confidence in your prayers and then thirdly and finally Jesus teaches us here about a reality that makes us dependents in this these four words Jesus isn't just telling us something about God he's telling us something about each one of us here this morning and that is that we are children and we are dependent upon God if God is our father and we are his child then we are totally dependent upon upon him and one of the keys that unlocks our prayer life is a realization that we are dependent and need God's help now that is so countercultural isn't it because so many of the messages that we are given through perhaps education maybe in the workplace maybe in the media well it's all about being confident and independent but when it comes to our relationship with God there's a sense in which we should never grow up there's a sense in which we are always God's child elsewhere in the Gospels Jesus encourages childlike faith he says in

Mark chapter 10 truly I tell you anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it so in terms of our relationship to God we are dependent children that's what Jesus is saying here we have that kind of dependence now just think how dependent a little child is I've got three children and particularly when we had our first child you know you walk out of hospital your wife has just been through labor and all that goes with that as a husband you've just been through something of that and you're exhausted and they send you home because they need the space need the bed don't they and there you are you're carrying this this car seat with this little life in it and the realization sinks down into your mind that this little life can't do anything without you can't eat

unless you feed them can't look after themselves unless you do it for them the essence of being a child is dependence and Jesus wants to press home that thought to our minds because we are so tempted so often to think we're okay we want to live independent lives so often there are times when when we're proud people we think we can do it on our own and we don't need God's help or God's guidance but but those are not right attitudes to have towards God are they when Jesus says that God is your father he is telling you that you are as helpless as a child and you need God's help and if we can see that reality then we will start to pray and really pray to our heavenly father I know someone who will always pray when they're looking for a parking space in a car park and so driving into supermarkets driving up in the car park to park at church and they will always pray and when they shared that with me I just thought is that a bit insignificant to pray to God about is that a bit unimportant surely there are bigger things to bring to God but I was wrong wasn't I because what was going on in my heart was that I was being a typical man when I was thinking about cars I was confident I could sort out any problem without help if we need a parking space I could find one if we were lost I could find the way home and it was pride that made me react when I heard that someone prayed about parking spaces but if we can have an attitude of dependence upon God that changes everything doesn't it because we'll pray to God about parking spaces we'll pray to God about those day-to-day matters that feel small and we'll pray to God about those big things that really really weigh on our hearts and friends if you struggle to pray maybe maybe it would help to spend some time reflecting on your heart before God and it could be it might be that part of the problem is a proud heart but if we can see our pride and we can come back to God with humility we come to a perfect father who forgives us in Jesus and who restores our relationship with him so friends God is your heavenly father let that reality shape your prayer lives and as that reality sinks down into your hearts we'll start to come confidently to a loving heavenly father who is adopted as his child as that reality sinks down into our hearts we'll start to come hopefully to a powerful heavenly father who can do more than we ask or imagine and as that reality sinks down into our hearts we'll start to come dependently to a caring heavenly father whose help we need every moment of every day let's pray our father god how quick we are to forget that we are totally dependent upon you forgive us that we are proud forgive us that we try to live without your help when you made us for a relationship of loving dependence thank you that in Christ Jesus we can be adopted as your child knowing all the privileges that come from being belonging to you as we seek your help in the most challenging situations in our lives give us hope in your great power and stir us up we pray to a life of hopeful persistent and never ceasing prayer we ask these things in Jesus name amen standing as we pray and now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all amen amen all our we are as of amen one we are the