

Jesus at the Center of the Kingdom

Experiencing Intimacy with God • Message 3

Gene Beckner

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Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Thank God for being a loving Father.
- Pray to experience God, not just learn about him.
- Invite God into a deeper, more intimate relationship.

Scripture Reading:

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground." So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

Genesis 1:26-28 (NLT)

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to Brookwood.

Hope that you are doing well this morning, and we are thankful that you have decided to spend your morning with us.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Gene Beckner, and I am the Care Pastor here at Brookwood.

I am excited and honored to spend some time with you this morning.

I wanted to share a little bit about myself.

Some of you might not be aware that I am a big Philadelphia Eagles supporter.

And you might not be aware that they recently won this game called the Super Bowl.

And you might not be aware that I have three cats.

Put all those things together, and earlier this year, I got to celebrate with family and friends and furs.

(PICTURE ON THE SCREEN)

When Bryan Jones, our Senior Pastor, found out I was sharing these photos, he wanted to share some as well from when Dallas last won the Super Bowl.

He sent me this **(PICTURE ON THE SCREEN)**, but my computer didn't have any way to download the pictures because this technology is 30 years old....

Anyone have a computer that can access this? What is this, by the way?

A. Introduction.

(Matthew 6:9. C/R: Genesis 17:7)

We are in week three of our series entitled *Jesus at the Center of the Kingdom*.

Today, we will look at the beginning of what is known as the Lord's Prayer.

In Luke 11:1, the disciples ask Jesus how to pray.

So, as we look at the text today, specifically Matthew 6:9, Jesus says the following:

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name'"

Matthew 6:9 (NIV)

In the Greek, this word **hallowed** means to feel reverence or regard as holy, and the word **holy** means set apart.

What you see from the start of the Lord's Prayer is this reverence for God and that His name should be revered **and** set apart.

There would have been many other "gods" that were worshiped during this time.

Jesus is emphasizing that God is far above and separate from all the rest.

One thing that I want to bring your attention to is how Jesus starts this prayer with the word **Father**.

But not just Father, but **OUR** Father.

Immediately, Jesus is including the disciples and ultimately us with him in referencing God as Father.

What's interesting about this is that Jesus refers to God **165** times in the New Testament as Father.

Now, in the Old Testament, God is referenced as the Father of Israel as a country.

God says things like *I'll be your God, and you'll be my people*.

You can look up **Genesis 17:7** for an example.

So, it's not that the idea of God is Father of Israel that would have been foreign.

But the idea of a **personal** Father to them **was** new.

Jesus is actually accused of blasphemy for referring to God as Father.

Consider that word **Father** for a minute.

If that word leaves you with a good impression, then praise God!

Let your earthly Father or Father figure know that.

Trust me...they need to hear that from you.

For some of you, the idea of fatherhood may not leave you with a good impression of God as Father.

I had to **learn** Him as Father. I am **still learning** Him as Father.

I had to **experience** Him in that way. I am **still experiencing** Him in that way.

Despite our personal experience with our earthly father, we **can** all experience what a good father should be and feel like.

We can learn to model it ourselves because the scriptures show us something significant about God as Father.

God's design and purpose is to be your Father.

How does that sound to you? Do you sense anything when I say that?

As we spend some time together this morning, I pray that you will be able to internalize this truth.

In light of this, there are going to be three things that we're going to focus on today.

What is intimacy with God?

Why would we want to have intimacy with God?

How do we develop intimacy with God?

B. Intimacy

Let's start off with the first fill-in:

1. WHAT is intimacy with God? (Psalm 139:13-16a. C/R: Psalm 34:18)

What's a good definition that we can use to help us understand what Jesus is really offering us when he starts this Lord's prayer with **Our Father**?

The dictionary includes words such as: **Close familiarity or friendship. Closeness. Something of a personal or private nature.**

As good as these descriptions are, there is so much more when it comes to our relationship with God as Father.

Look at Psalm 139. Starting in verse 13, it says:

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
You saw me before I was born.*

Psalm 139: 13-16a (NLT)

Reflect on that for a moment.

BEFORE you were born...

GOD watched you and saw you.

He still sees you today; He sees you right now.

You were woven together; GOD knit you together.

GOD personally made you.

God the Father was with you; He is still with you right now.

You are Marvelous.

He made you **WELL**.

This is why, without a doubt, you can believe that **YOU ARE ENOUGH**

YOU ARE ENOUGH because **GOD THE FATHER** made you that way.

Are you trying to convince **yourself** that you are good enough?

Are you trying to convince **others** that you are good enough?

Are you trying to convince **GOD** that you are good enough?

What would it take for you to reach this “**good enough**” place?

Promotion at work?

Getting in shape and losing those 10 pounds?

Perfect family vacation?

Giving your kids the things you didn’t have growing up?

Nothing wrong with these things, but look at WHY you are doing these things.

These things make us feel good...**for a moment**.

But moments fade; moments go away; and then what are we left with?

As great as those things are, do you still have a nagging feeling on the inside?

A nagging feeling that is telling you, “*It’s not enough,*” “*I’m not enough,*” “*I should have done more.*”

Those nagging feelings and thoughts lead us to try harder and get on the hamster wheel...and burn out, or we give up and quit trying....and we settle.

What **motivates you** to do these things for your family, or friends, or at work?

What is the **driving force** behind what you’re doing?

If it is to prove your worth, you’ll never be able to stop.

If it is to silence the self-defeating thoughts, it won’t work.

The noise still rattles around on the inside because

Those are lies; what we need are God’s words, which are truth.

In John 8:32, Jesus instructs us to know the truth so we can be set free.

Set free from what? SHAME, STRIVING, PROVING OUR WORTH.

AND GOD THE FATHER continues to pursue you to convince you of the truth.

We need to learn to pursue GOD in return.

When that begins to develop, AS we experience God, we begin to **know** God as Father.

And we become **known** as His child.

Unfortunately, in a room this size, some of you were vulnerable and then exploited by others.

I’m truly sorry that you had to experience any kind of abuse or neglect.

So, this idea of God as Father? He doesn’t mind you wrestling with him, your questions, your hurt.

Sometimes it’s hard to receive this love from your Heavenly Father if the examples in your life have been abusive or neglectful.

As a source of encouragement for you this morning, **Psalm 34:18** says,

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted;

He rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

Psalms 34:18 (NLT)

I want to take a moment to pray for God's comfort for those of you who may be brokenhearted or crushed in spirit this morning.

PRAYER

It is interesting that people are generally open to the concept of God as a creator, a creator of the universe, a creator of the Earth.

We even use the phrase intelligent design, this idea that some entity could have created everything that we see and experience.

But God is **so much more** than just an architect.

God is **so much more** than just a designer.

God is **so much more** than just a creator.

Architect, designer, and to some extent creator, lack the emotional and relational aspect that **God as Father** communicates.

How would your prayer life go if you started your prayers with *our architect, who is in Heaven*.

Or our Designer, I praise you or our Creator, I worship you.

Those words lack intimacy.

How does it feel to address God as Father...Our Father in Heaven?

Our next fill-in is:

**2. WHY would we want intimacy with God?
(Genesis 1:26-28. C/R: Genesis 2:7; John 11:25-26)**

Let me draw your attention to our scripture reading from this morning.

It is the "creation story", but I want to draw your attention to the intimacy that God creates us with.

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the Earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

Genesis 1:26 (NLT)

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27 (NLT)

God created human beings in his own image. And just in case we missed it, it is mentioned again: *In the image of God, he created them, male and female. He created them.*

Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

Genesis 1:28 (NLT)

What does that sound like to you: an intelligent designer or architect, or something more...something more relational?

God is creating human beings, and He chose to make us in His image.

Did you know that?

You are in His image.

You aren't a **mistake**.

You didn't evolve from **monkeys**.

You didn't bubble up from some **primordial ooze**.

You are the image bearer of the **One True God!**

Let's go to **Genesis 2:7**:

Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

Genesis 2:7 (NLT)

That phrase, *he breathed the breath of life*.

Breath of life in the Hebrew is **Ruach**.

This translates into **Spirit or Spirit of God**.

Can you imagine this? Can you feel the intensity of this moment?

Life is being given to mankind; creation is occurring.

Our first reason as to **WHY** we would want to develop intimacy with GOD is that:

a) **He CREATED us.**

We notice, as we investigate this concept of intimacy with God,

When He made us, He set the tone by being close and by giving us a part of Him.

Consider that for a moment: God got close to us **AND** gave us a part of him...His Spirit.

Did you **know** that you were that valuable? Do you **believe** that you are that valuable?

Do you notice something different about the way God creates everything other than human beings?

He creates with words.

Everything he creates is with his word.

Let light appear.

Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place so dry ground can appear.

Let the waters swarm with fish and other life.

Let the Earth produce every sort of animal.

Then, when he got to us,

He said *I'm going to create mankind in my image* and then he did it...intimately.

Breathing the Ruah or Ruach into Adam's lungs.

I encourage you to consider that for a moment...

The God of the universe, the God of all creation,

Who can create anything with His words, **chose** to bend down, **chose** to get close to you, and **chose** to breathe His life into you.

Here is the counselor in me coming out: **HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?**

Would you describe this interaction between God and Adam as an Architect and his Architecture?

Designer and his Design? Or is there more?

GOD WANTS TO BE YOUR FATHER AND CREATED YOU IN A WAY TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE.

The image of God inside you gives you the opportunity to go deeper and become more intimate.

Maybe we're seeing a little more why Jesus is starting off the Lord's prayer with **Our Father** instead of our Architect or our Designer or our Creator.

Another reason as to **WHY** we would want to develop Intimacy with God is:

b) He provides a WAY back to himself.

HE provided a way back to Himself.

Have you ever been lost?

As a child, **(BUGS BUNNY PICTURE ON THE SCREEN)**, I always thought that Albuquerque was going to be more of a problem when it came to getting lost than it turned out to be.

Paper maps in the glove compartment of cars would never fold up neatly...always a mess.

Of course, now we have maps on our phones and a sweet-sounding voice telling us where to go.

Mine seems to use one word frequently: RECALCULATING

I don't think I knew what that meant until I used maps on my phone.

In many ways, recalculating is common in this life, isn't it?

We often get turned around and lost.

We get lost financially, relationally, spiritually and physically.

The moment we realize we are lost can be unsettling for sure.

I remember wandering off into the woods as a child once.

I was having the time of my life running through the underbrush, most likely exposing my skin to poison ivy, poison oak, unknown bugs, putrid water, and mud.

After who knows how long, I turned around to look at how far I was from the entrance to the woods when I realized that I did not recognize anything.

Have you been there? That moment when you realize, **I'm lost.**

The sun was beginning to set.

The nighttime sounds of unknown critters were to soon begin.

I started to panic. I started running in the direction I thought was home, but wasn't really sure.

Bushes were hitting me in the face, and briars were scratching my arms and legs.

I felt the lump in my throat start to begin as tears fell down my cheeks.

I started thinking, *I'm never going to see my family again, I'm going to die out here.*

The daylight was fading, and my confidence in getting home was rapidly declining.

In sheer panic, I yelled out, **MOM!**

All I heard was the echo of my voice and nothing more.

More negative thinking: *I'm going to be in so much trouble. No one is ever going to find me.*

I yelled again, louder this time, **MOM!**

Nothing.

More tears.

Bigger lump in my throat.

Running faster.

More negative thoughts: *How could I be so stupid? I wish I had never come out here.*

Then, as loud as I could yell, **MOMM-Y!**

No more daylight.

Nighttime sounds all around.

Vision was minimal.

I was alone and lost.

And then faintly I heard my name, **GINO?**

Relief flooded over my body as the voice of my mother made it to my ears.

Still couldn't see her, but I adjusted where I was running to get closer to that voice.

I yelled again with some hope this time, **MOMM-Y!**

I heard back, **GINO—WHERE ARE YOU?**

I had no idea where I was, but I responded, **I'M RIGHT HERE!**

Not sure how helpful that was, but that's all I knew to say.

Then I saw a **flashlight** and my mother coming towards me.

More tears, but now they were joyful as I had been found.

I'm not sure I ever hugged my mother tighter than when that happened.

Can you relate to that story?

Being lost and then being found.

Our ability to get lost in life is pretty high, especially if we don't have a map.

In **Matthew 18:12-14**, Jesus tells the story of a man leaving his 99 sheep so he can find the one that is lost.

This story illustrates God the Father's pursuing of us.

His desire for not one of us to be lost.

And like my mother rejoicing when she found me, dirt and all, God rejoices when you are found!

Did you know that God has provided a way back to Himself if you're lost?

While we don't like the feeling of being lost, it's actually a gift to become aware of it so you can adjust your travels.

Maybe you're in here today, and you are regretting **not** taking a certain path.

Or you are beating yourself up because you **did** take a certain path.

Here's the good news: **no matter where you are today, there is a way to be found: Jesus.**

God gave us the path back to Himself, and that path is Jesus.

Better than any flashlight in the woods, that's for sure!

And God made the path simple.

Look at what Jesus says to Martha **BEFORE** raising Lazarus from the dead:

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?"

John 11:25-26 (NLT)

Put yourself in Martha's shoes.

Right now.

Jesus is asking you, *Do you believe this, Mark? Lisa? Robert? Judy?*

Look at the words *Anyone* and *Everyone*.

I think that would include all of us.

Eternity with **Our Father**.

No test to pass.

Doesn't matter how you grew up,

Where you grew up,

What you look like,

How much status you have.

Anyone and *Everyone*.

Do you want to be intimate with this kind of Father?

Last reason as to **WHY** you would want to develop intimacy with God:

c) He is LOVE.

God Is Love.

We often say that God loves us.

And He does.

More than we can comprehend or understand.

And that love is eternal and never changing.

Hallelujah!

But it's even more than that.

GOD IS LOVE.

Love is His identity.

Love is inherent within Him.

Just like GOD can't lie, HE can't NOT love us because He IS Love.

When John the disciple is teaching on how to love one another, in 1 John 4, he mentions in 1 John 4:8 and 1 John 4:16 that GOD IS LOVE.

And because God the Father is Love, Psalm 46:1 reminds us that He is:

OUR REFUGE and STRENGTH

AN EVER-PRESENT HELP

You and I can have confidence that when we draw close to God, we draw close to a Father who is going to love us because He is love.

3. HOW do we experience intimacy with God? (1 Peter 5:7. C/R: Psalm 123)

I want to give us three ways to experience intimacy with God.

This is obviously not an exhaustive list, but a list that you can implement starting today.

a) RECEIVE the invitation.

What's the invitation? Him.

If you don't know Jesus as Savior, the invitation is there right now.

If you know Him but feel distant, or you are going through a hard, painful time...

The invitation is to draw near to Him.

1 Peter 5:7 says to cast your cares upon Him.

Don't let that nagging voice on the inside keep you from Him.

That voice that tries to tell you that you have to have it all together first...

Let me clean myself up first, and then I'll receive the invitation.

Do you think I "cleaned myself up" when I saw my mom after getting lost?

No, I did not. I "cast my cares upon her." I needed her to help me...and she did.

How much more will God the Father help you?

How much more do you need God the Father?

Some song lyrics come to mind that are inspired by Psalm 123...

**Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in his wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of his glory and grace.**

You might be asking: Well, what do I bring to Him?

Your hurts. Your tears. Your scars. Your fears. Your pride. Your sins. Your mistakes.

Ultimately, your posture toward Him.

Arms open to receive love is what you bring.

Will you let him show you His Glory and Grace?

b) INVEST your time.

Any relationship takes time.

If you want intimacy with GOD, you need to spend time with Him.

The Bible is the best place to spend time with Him.

You can read it or have someone else read it to you.

Just about any Bible app will have an audio version.

Learn God the Father's Character, His Integrity, His Love.

Learn how normal, ordinary people just like you became a part of His story.

Did you know **YOU** have a part in His story too? You have a part to play.

Learn practical ways of living this life.

Proverbs has tons of wisdom to live your life by.

Even if you feel like you don't get anything from reading or listening to the Bible,

I assure you that God is doing a work in you when you invest time.

Invest your time in prayer.

Many people sometimes feel like their prayers don't even reach the ceiling.

God's spirit is IN you, so when you pray, He is hearing it, I assure you!

Remember, God the Father is ever present!

If you are new to prayer, you can simply say, *Father, I am here. What would you like to say to me?* That's it.

If someone pops into your mind, ask God to bless them or ask God how He wants you to pray for them.

If a work thing comes into mind, ask Him for wisdom about it.

If something you have said or done that wasn't really nice comes to mind, tell God you're sorry about what you said or did, ask Him for forgiveness, and ask Him to change you.

Don't make it complicated and don't judge yourself. Just start investing time.

c) **WALK with others.**

We were not designed to walk this life alone.

We were designed to be in community with one another.

We experience more of our Heavenly Father as we hear and see Him through the ears and eyes of others.

If you're living life with others, fantastic. Invite some more folks to walk with you.

If you don't really have anyone to do life with, we can help.

In just a minute, you are going to have a moment of reflection on all that we talked about this morning.

There will be CARE Volunteers up here that will be available to talk and pray with you.

If you need some community, tell them. They'll help you get connected.

We are going to end today's service a bit differently.

I'm going to pray over you, and then I want you to spend a few moments with God, asking Him to help you experience Him as Father today.

Again, CARE volunteers are upfront if you want to pray or talk with someone.

There won't be an official dismissal, but rather, as you feel led to leave, go ahead.

Please be aware of those around you as you leave, who may still be communicating with GOD.

Let's pray...PRAYER.... END

The Pharisees lost their experience with Love.