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This week at MRC we started a new series - for the next 3 weeks we'll be in the Lord's prayer from Matthew 6v9-13. We'll be learning together from Jesus the 'Lord of prayer' - the one who despite pressures and people crowding him all the time - prayed.

We began by thinking about some of the reasons that we struggle to pray, ranging from over-busyness to a kind of practical pride or even an 'atheism' that means we only focus through the day on what we can see, rather than remembering the reality of our God who made the world, and our need to look to him for strength and help.

We'll spend 3 weeks in total in the prayer, starting this week by simply focusing on whom we pray to. We noted more generally beforehand and from the context that it's assumed we will be a people who pray (see repetition of 'when you pray' 3x beforehand in v5, v6 and v7) and 2 dangers of trying to impress people like the Pharisees or trying to impress God like the Pagans (babbling on like Pagans probably means the way meaningless mantras were said, hoping to twist the arm of their god or gods).

As we looked at 'Our Father in heaven' we split it in half, initially focusing on

Our Father

The way we relate to and address someone is dictated by our relationship with them - think of the way you address your boss, a parent, a spouse, a child or a friend. The same is true in prayer - compare how Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus pray, as opposed to Jesus' extraordinary call for us to pray to Our Father. We have an extraordinary intimacy with our God.

The Greek word Abba brings both a formality (though not as formal as Father) and an intimacy (though not as intimate as daddy). It's not just something that Jesus, the son, can pray but also a reality for his people. Think of how that truth is developed in the New Testament - for example in John 3, Romans 8, Galatians 4 and even Hebrews 12 (there'll be some questions on that...).

We noted that the idea of God as Father for some, who have had difficult or complex relationships with earthly Fathers at times needs addressing. Again some more questions on that for your groups...

We noted too the importance of Jesus referring to 'Our' Father - this is a corporate prayer for the family of God. In this prayer from Jesus He's not 'The' Father (as a distant 'unrelatable' being) or 'My' Father as a solo concept so I can pray selfishly. But 'our Father' together.

In Heaven

Much more briefly we considered 2 aspects of why our Father being *in Heaven* is such great news. Namely that Heaven is the place of power and authority where he reigns and rules, but also the place of righteousness and goodness. In a cynical and broken world where power is so often abused - we can trust him to be one who rules as one who is kind. Power will never corrupt him - he is totally righteous.

Consider how the prayer would alter if he wasn't 'in Heaven' - it may be that he's willing and wanting to listen, but is simply unable to do anything about it! No, rather the fact that he's in Heaven means he's not just a good ear, but also powerful and able.

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As always here are some questions to start your group off.
Feel free to adapt for your context...

Do you find it easy to pray? Why / why not? When do you find it easier? When harder? Be honest?

Why is it good news that Jesus calls us to pray to our Father?

What does it mean in the NT to be a child / son of God? Have a look at John 3, Romans 8, Galatians 4 and Hebrews 12 - find the references and explain them...

Have a look at Matthew 5-7 in broad terms, where does Jesus refer to God as Father? What kind of a Father is he?

(You might want to sensitively ask whether this concept of God as Father is difficult for any individuals within the group)

Why is 'our' such an important word in this prayer? Do you pray the Lord's Prayer with others in mind? How can we remember the corporate nature of this prayer?

Why is it such good news that God is 'in Heaven'?

How can we help each other to pray more in this mindset?