

The Bigger Story (Matthew 6:9-10)

Big Idea: Pray as part of a bigger story.

Char and I were hiking the other week and my phone died. We were trying to find our way back to the car, so we were relieved to find a sign with a trail map. The only problem is that it didn't show where we were trying to go, and it didn't have that all important marker on the map: "You are here."

So let me take a moment and tell you where you are.

You are, right now, in Liberty Village in Toronto. But beyond that, you are in Canada, which is on earth, which is part of our solar system, which is a small part of the Milky Way galaxy which contains 100 to 400 billion stars, and is about 100,000 light-years across.

We are just a small part of a small plant in a big galaxy. But zooming out even more, we are in one of about two trillion galaxies in the universe. If you saw the recent pictures from the James Webb Space Telescope, you got a small glimpse into the beauty and vastness of the universe.

That makes me feel really small.

Even if you just stick to earth, you are one of almost 8 billion people live today. Our lifetimes are only about 1/3,000 of humanity's existence, which itself is only 1/20,000 of the Earth's existence.

"In other words, we are unbelievably tiny and short-lived and no matter what we accomplish, our impact will be insignificant" (Ray Dalio).

I want to argue that this is very good news.

There are two ways to live.

One way is to think that we occupy a big place in the universe. This kind of comes naturally to us. The problem with this is that we start to feel crushed by the pressures of life, because our problems start to become big too. We become like the main character in the story called life, and everybody else – including God – becomes supporting characters. This is how most of us live, and it's making us miserable.

But here's the other way to live: to realize that we are very small; that there is a much bigger story going on of which we're a part. This takes so much of the pressure off. We are not a big deal. We don't see the whole picture. Our problems are big to us but they are small in the big scheme of things. We are part of a much bigger story, but the pressure's off, because it's really not about us after all.

It turns out that this is a very good way to live.

Where to Begin in Prayer

We're looking at the Lord's Prayer. This is Jesus teaching us how to pray. I want you to notice today how he begins:

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*

*Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
(Matthew 6:9-13)*

The prayer begins with "Our Father in heaven." It begins on a very relational tone. You have a Father who cares for you. You are loved. You matter. You are on intimate terms with God above who reigns and rules. He loves you like his child.

This is very good news. If you feel unimportant or small, you can know that you have a Heavenly Father who invites you to come to him.

After this opening phrase, there are six petitions. Jesus is teaching us how to pray, and he says, "Here are six things that you should make a regular part of your prayers."

And here's the surprising part: the first three petitions are not about us!

It's almost like Jesus, as he teaches us to pray, invites us to see the much bigger story of what's going on in the world. He's going to get to us and our problems. They matter too! But Jesus first invites us to see ourselves as small. Instead of our whole vision being consumed with what's happening right in front of us – our little slice of reality – Jesus wants us to see the much bigger picture and our small role within it and to live in this greater story.

"Before we begin to think of ourselves and our own needs, even before our concern for others, we must start with this great concern about God and His honor and His glory" (Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

Jesus wants to begin to help us pray – and live – by seeing our lives as small, and then to pray as part of a much bigger story. Zoom out from your life and see the bigger story in which you're invited to play a role.

The Bigger Story

What is this bigger story?

Jesus tells us to begin our prayers to God by focusing on three things: God's honor, God's kingdom, and God's will.

Before we focus on our needs, pray as part of a bigger story that focuses on God in three areas.

First: Pray for God's Honor

"Hallowed be your name..." (6:9) We don't use the word "hallowed" very often, so this is a little hard to understand. The Christian Standard Bible is helpful here: "Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy."

What does this mean?

It doesn't mean that anything changes about God. God cannot be improved upon. God is already as holy and awesome as he could ever be. There is no one superior to him. He is beyond comprehension. God is majestic, incomparable, beautiful, and glorious.

We don't even see much of God's glory. If we did, it would kill us. John Piper compares the revelation of God's glory to an iceberg:

I like to think of the biblical revelation of God as the tip of an iceberg floating in an ocean of mystery. Nine-tenths of God's majesty lies beneath the surface of revelation. And the tip of the iceberg revealed in Scripture is so high that it extends out of sight into the clouds beyond anyone's ability to comprehend it fully. Only a tenth of his character is given to us in this age for our contemplation, and even this is so great that we will never exhaust its riches.

In other words, we just see a fraction of God's glory and it's too much for us. When God shows up in all of his glory, even the holiest people can't take it all in.

But despite God being so glorious, and his glory being obvious, we seem to miss God's glory. Other things become bigger than him. God becomes much smaller than other things. Our hearts get captured by other things.

It reminds me of a story Skye Jethani tells in his book *With* about the mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Italy. Fifteen hundred years ago, the emperor of Rome built a tomb for his beloved sister. It's been called "the earliest and best preserved of all mosaic monuments" and one of the "most artistically perfect." But visitors to the mausoleum are often disappointed. The structure only has tiny windows, and it's hard to see.

Jethani writes:

But the impatient who leave the chapel will miss a stunning unveiling. With no advance notice, spotlights near the ceiling are turned on when a tourist finally manages to drop a coin into the small metal box along the wall. The lights illuminate the iridescent tiles of the mosaic but only for a few seconds. One visitor described the experience: "The lights come on. For a brief moment, the briefest of moments—the eye doesn't have time to take it all in, the eye casts about—the dull, hot darkness overhead becomes a starry sky, a dark-blue cupola with huge, shimmering stars that seem startlingly close. 'Ahhhhh!' comes the

sound from below, and then the light goes out, and again there's darkness, darker even than before."

The bright burst of illumination is repeated over and over again, divided by darkness of unpredictable length. Each time the lights come on, the visitors are given another glimpse of the world behind the shadows, and their eyes capture another element previously unseen—deer drinking from springs, Jesus gently reaching out to his sheep that look lovingly at their Shepherd. After seeing the mosaic, one visitor wrote: "I have never seen anything so sublime in my life! Makes you want to cry!"

It is difficult to experience the glory of God in our daily lives and when we do, it is only for brief moments. Jesus asks us to begin by praying here: help us see your glory more. Help us to see you for who you are. As Kevin DeYoung puts it, "May all the world and all created things see God for who he is, and may his human creatures, especially, adore and obey him." Pray that we see God for who he really is, that we think rightly about him, and that we become captivated by his glory. And pray that the whole world gets to know God like that.

Really what we're praying for is what Habakkuk said would happen one day:

*For the earth will be filled
with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.
(Habakkuk 2:14)*

We want in on that now. We want everyone to see God for who he is, and for God to get the glory that he deserves.

Pray that more and more people acknowledge God as their highest priority and ultimate authority. Pray that we see God for who he is.

Second: Pray for God's Kingdom

"Your kingdom come..." (6:10)

What does this mean?

Right now there are competing kingdoms on earth. We live in a war zone. That's become real to us in recent news, with Russia and Ukraine fighting for victory in different cities and regions. It's like that in the world: we live in contested territory. There is a "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). 1 John 5:19 says, "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." That explains why the world is so broken.

When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are praying for more of God's reign and less of Satan's reign. We live in that awkward in-between time: Jesus is already King, but his Kingship has not yet come in its fullness. We're praying, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism says:

- that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed; (Ps. 68:1,18)
- that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, (Rev. 12:10-11)
- ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; (2 Thess. 3:1, Rom. 10:1, John 17:9,20)
- and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened. (Rev. 22:20)

Andrew Peterson has a song called "Is He Worthy?" Some of the lyrics in the song go like this:

Do you feel the world is broken? (We do)

Do you feel the shadows deepen? (We do)

But do you know that all the dark won't stop the light from getting through?

(We do)

Do you wish that you could see it all made new? (We do)

If you can relate to these words, pray for God's kingdom to come. Pray for Satan's reign of terror to end. Pray for Romans 16:20 to come true: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Pray for God's honor, and pray for God's reign.

Finally: Pray for God's Will

"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." (6:10)

This goes pretty closely with the other two petitions. These three go really well together, which is why I'm covering them in this one sermon.

When people see God for who he is, and Satan's reign is overthrown, and God reign is finally established here on earth, God's will will be done. In heaven, God's will is always done perfectly. Not so on earth. What Jesus is talking about here is God's moral will: that God's commands are kept on earth, that he is obeyed as king in all the earth.

That day will come, and Jesus commands us to pray for it now. Sure, pray about your life and your needs. But start with a bigger story. Pray as part of a bigger story. Zoom out from your life as you pray and ask God to give you a picture of what he's doing in the world, and pray for his agenda for the world. Pray that he will make this broken world right again and that his glory, reign, and will be fully realized here on earth.

Two Benefits

As we pray this way, we'll experience two benefits.

First: we'll train our minds to care for more than just ourselves. Few things are worse than someone who's self-absorbed. Jesus invites us to come to our Heavenly Father, and then he gives us a much bigger perspective than the one we usually have. Jesus trains us to see the big picture of what he's doing rather than only our very small lives, and that's very good for us. Make this a regular part of your prayer. Ask him to help you see more than your small sliver of life. You are part of something much bigger.

Second, you'll start to experience some of this in your life. Right now God's name isn't honored as holy in the world. His kingdom hasn't fully come. His will isn't being done. But guess what? They may not become realities in the world right away, but they can become realities in your life.

In other words, pray this for your life. Pray that God helps you see the bigger picture of what he's doing. Pray that you see his glory. Pray that he reigns in you. And pray that he gives you a heart to do his will. All this is possible through Jesus, who came to set us right with God and bring us into relationship with him. So let's pray that this becomes the reality in our lives.

Pray as part of a bigger story.