



The Lord's Prayer

1: Our Father in heaven

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Please begin the session by giving each person a chance to introduce themselves. Some people will know each other well but some may be meeting for the first time.

A challenging ice breaker: Sharing in twos can you, albeit tentatively, describe what you think God is like? What is in your mind or imagination when you pray to him/her? If a stranger asked you what you thought God was like, what would you say? It would then be good if some of your thoughts and ideas could be briefly shared with the whole group.

Please read the following passage from the book of psalms. Here the psalmist is reflecting on the way God has been intimately present in their life. After someone has read the psalm please reflect on it together. The questions following the reading are to help us explore the passage.

Psalm 139:1-18

- ¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
- ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
- ³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain it.
⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
 Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
 if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
 and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
 and your right hand shall hold me fast.
¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
 and the light around me become night',
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
 the night is as bright as the day,
 for darkness is as light to you.
¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
 Wonderful are your works;
 that I know very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
 when I was being made in secret,
 intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
 In your book were written
 all the days that were formed for me,
 when none of them as yet existed.
¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
¹⁸ I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
 I come to the end—I am still with you.

- What are your overall impressions of this psalm? What strikes you? What excites you? Is there anything that puzzles or troubles you?

- The psalmist feels that God knows everything about their life. What do you feel when you think that God knows every detail and emotion of your life?
- In verse 7 why might the psalmist want to flee from God's presence?
- How do you respond to the psalmist's thoughts (from verse 13) that God has known us intimately from the very moment of conception and that "in your book were written all the days that were formed for me..."
- In verse 17 the Psalmist struggles to comprehend the scope of God's activity. How do we comprehend the idea that God knows everything?

A little breather: What is the best thing you have done this year?

Our second bible study is perhaps the most well known of all the parables of Jesus and very familiar to most of us. Like all parables, this one may have many different layers of meaning. But what, if anything, do you think it might have to teach us about the nature of God as Father? Please ask someone to read the parable and then the questions following may help to guide your discussion.

Luke 15.1 - end

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am

dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.' " So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." '

- This may be a very familiar passage to you, but is there anything that has particularly struck you today as you read the parable again?
- What thoughts do you have about the relationships that the parable portrays?
- Does this parable, for you, have things to say about God as Father and, if so, what are those things?

Closing Prayers