

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father in Heaven

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

Prayer of Illumination

Almighty God, in you are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your Word; and give us grace that we may clearly understand and freely choose the way of your wisdom; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 63:16 (NIV)

But you are our Father,
though Abraham does not know us
or Israel acknowledge us;
you, Lord, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is your name.

Matthew 6:9 (NRSV)

Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – The Lord's Prayer: Our Father in Heaven

Paul Simon was only twenty-one years old when he wrote the song *The Sound of Silence*. He penned the iconic tune in his water closet, of all places. Paul Simon loved the acoustics in his bathroom. It was a place where he could just get away from it all. He'd turn off the lights: just him and his guitar and the quiet—with all distractions left outside the door.

Hello darkness my old friend.

For us, the Lord's Prayer is like that. We go off into our prayer closets, shut out our distractions, enter the stillness, and speaking with our hearts we say, "*Our Father who art in heaven.*" There's an immanence, a closeness, a dependence—a sacred union we have with our Maker in the quiet.

At the same time, our Compassionate Creator is transcendent, holy, and mystical: Our Father, *who art in heaven.*

It's been called: *The Lord's Prayer*, *The Our Father*, *The Disciple's Prayer*. Whatever you call it, it's Christianity's greatest prayer.

Jesus gave us a gift with his prayer—in it he offers us his very breath, his life, his longings, his mission. Each time we utter the Lord's Prayer, we find ourselves standing—or kneeling—on holy ground. Heaven kisses earth—and we're changed.

When we pray with Christ in the school of prayer, we're reminded of not only bigger needs beyond ourselves, but we're reminded of how big God is. Linger in God's presence, we recollect and remember once again who *God* is and who *we* truly are. Things are put in proper perspective. Our priorities are straightened out.

The first half of *The Lord's Prayer* focuses upon the Divine:

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.*

The first half of the Lord's Prayer reminds us that God has a supreme and premier place in our lives.

The second half of the prayer focuses upon humanity:

Give us this day our daily bread
—taking our PRESENT needs to God, we seek his provision.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
—taking our PAST to God, we seek reconciliation.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil
—taking our FUTURE to God, we seek protection.

When we're feeling tense—the Lord's Prayer trains us to offer to God the past, present, and future tenses of our lives.

Immanuel, if Jesus needed to pray, we sure as heaven need to pray in all seasons and at all times!—when things are going good or when we find ourselves in our own personal Garden of Gethsemane. Think of prayer this way: Our cell phone batteries need to be daily recharged to enjoy the benefits of texting, internet, GPS, and phone calls. In the same way, prayer recharges our spiritual batteries, empowering us to do all that God has called us to do.

Prayer also reminds us we're not alone—and that it's not just about me. We may pray the Lord's Prayer by ourselves, but we never pray it alone. Have you noticed there's no "me, my, or mine" in the Lord's Prayer? Not "*My* Father," but "*Our* Father." Our Father, give us, forgive us, lead us.

The prayer not only reminds us that God is our Father, but that we're God's children and "I'm" not God's only child. We're brothers and sisters in the family of God. We're connected to each other. If you hurt, I hurt. If I hurt you, I hurt myself. God is also not our possession to hoard or keep from others. We can't put a "Keep Out—Private Property" sign on God. We share the one true God.

We share another thing in common—we're all made in the image and likeness of God.

Each time we pray that beautiful "Our" we're summoned to forgive our brothers and sisters, our enemies. There's a sacredness and mystery in The Lord's Prayer when we whisper, "Our Father" or "Abba Father," because God's divine Spirit meets our human spirit in holy communion and conversation. In this divine dance, God's identity, God's character, and God's will move in us and upon us for our earthly living.

In prayer, we lean upon and are led by the Triune God:

- Upon God the Father—*who sustains us.*
- Upon God the Son—*who forgives us.*
- Upon God the Spirit—*who upholds us in temptation.*

When we pray "Our Father," we pray to one God and one God alone. We don't pray to the Universe. We pray to the Creator of the Cosmos. We pray to the One who gave us life, the One who gave the world life. We don't look to the *god of this* and then worry about what the *god of that* will do. No. "Hear O Israel, the Lord *your* God is one God."

The one true God is also our Protector, our Savior, our Redeemer, and our Deliverer. He's our rock, our strong tower, our refuge. God heals our earthly father wounds. God isn't intrusive or abusive. God isn't absent or disengaged or distant. Our heavenly Father receives us, responds to us, embraces us, forgives us, and loves to "waste time" with us. In him we find security. He's patient with us—ready and waiting to take us back when we've wandered far from home. God is a prodigal-hugging God. God yearns to shower us with the same love he showered upon his Son Jesus.

When we pray "Our Father" we remember who *we* are. I'm a child of God. You're a child of God. We're beloved, cherished. We can forget this sometimes. When your crow—your inner-critic—perches on your shoulder cawing in your ear that you're a miserable fraud, you pray, "Our Father." Prayer helps you know who you are.

There's an old story about a Roman emperor who was enjoying a victory parade—marching his soldiers through the streets of Rome—with all the spoils of battle and prisoners of war following behind him. Cheers from the multitudes reverberated throughout the city. At one point in the parade, the emperor's family watched from a small platform. When the emperor's young son saw the emperor's retinue pass, the little boy jumped off the platform, ducked under the guard ropes, and averted the Roman guard and made straight for the emperor's chariot. The Roman guard scooped up the squirrely child saying, "You can't go there little boy! Don't you know

who's in that chariot? That's the emperor!" The little boy laughed, "He may be your emperor, but he's my father."

Immanuel, Our Father is a heavenly Father! The love of God and the power of God are forever joined. God's power is always motivated by love. And God's love has the muscle to accomplish his will.

The Lord's Prayer reminds us to boldly, yet reverently approach the living God with hushed reverence. There's no terror, but there's awe, respect, and holy fear. It's an act of great courage and audacity to pray, *Our Father*.

As children of the king, we're asking the living God to mentor us, to apprentice us, to train us up to do the royal work he's called us to do in a hurting world.

"As the Father sent me," says Jesus, "So I send you."

Father. Our Father. Our Father in heaven. Hallowed be thy name.

Amen.

The New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.