

After this manner therefore pray ye...

THE HOMESPUN OF THE SINCERE

No vice can harbor in you, no infirmity take any root, no good desire can languish, when once your heart is in this method of prayer; never beginning to pray, till you first see how matters stand with you; asking your heart what it wants, and having nothing in your prayers, but what the known state of your heart puts you upon demanding, saying, or offering, unto God. A quarter of an hour of this prayer, brings you out of your closet a new man; your heart feels the good of it; and every return of such a prayer, gives new life and growth to all your virtues, with more certainty, than the dew refreshes the herbs of the field.

William Law



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Recently, at a funeral for an old friend, the pastor leading the simple memorial service had everyone in attendance sing the hymn *How Great Thou Art*, verses one and four, from a photocopied sheet.

The singing of the hymn was a sad, anemic chorus, muttered more than sung, a distracted, otherwise-engaged rendition that barely reached the low tiled ceiling of the funeral home—let alone the throne of heaven. The gathering of homemakers, business people, retired folks, and the farmers seated behind us sang with the conviction of damp moss growing on the bark of a dying oak tree.

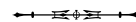
Later, near the end of the service, the pastor led us all in reciting a familiar passage of Scripture. This chorus was only slightly more robust; perhaps it is easier to speak, than to carry a tune. Most knew the words, and they were delivered with typical I-can-do-this force. Yet here again there was a sad poverty of conviction, the syllables spilling from the lips by rote: unfeeling, uninspired, insipid.

Both the song and the Scripture consisted of words directed up to God, yet the words of their make were mumbled into the chest, as if the people uttering them were embarrassed by the sound.

It is commonly referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer,” because Jesus is the one who originally uttered the words. It was not His prayer at all, however, but a template for prayer Jesus gave His disciples and followers to use for themselves. During instruction on quiet sincerity (as opposed to loud hypocrisy) in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His followers,

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray...”
Matthew 6:7-9

What followed was a simple, uncluttered prayer of praise, submission, entreaty, and confession in which the glittering oratory of the religious was replaced by the homespun of the sincere. It’s more than a little sad that this gift from the Savior has now been reduced to a monotonous drone, rattled off by parishioners with their brains set on auto pilot. For it is a prayer of praise that does not take arrogant liberty; a prayer of submission uttered in dignity; a prayer that acknowledges the correct order of things, and the source of our being; and a prayer that admits our inability to stand alone against evil.



The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him. Proverbs 15:8

THE IMMENSITY OF HIS NAME

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.

Right off the bat we find ourselves in the realm of the spiritual.

My real father—my dad—was born in Wellsburg, Iowa, in 1917. Alvin Louis Lampel married Elizabeth Maxine Worden in 1945. He was a hard worker, an electrician by trade, and in May of 1979, when I was twenty-seven, Dad died at the age of sixty-two.

But I have another Father, one who was not born, and one who will never die. This Father is not flesh, but spirit, and I did not spring from His loins. I never played catch with Him, and He never taught me how to drive a nail, repair my bike, or change a tire on my car. Yet, in a spiritual sense, He is more my Father than was my Dad, for He is the author of my creation—as well as the author of my eternity.

Before I ever prayed to Him—before I knew Him personally through His Son—He was simply God. But at that moment, back many years ago when I took His Son as the sole source of my redemption, I was given the right to call God “Father.” By adoption I was instantly related to Him.

God the Father, the recipient of my prayers, is spirit. His being knows no boundaries, but encompasses all time, all places, all space. When I gaze out my window I can see things that lie about a mile away; when He gazes out His, God sees everything that was ever created. When I page back through my personal memories, I can go back about forty-five years; events earlier than that I can discover in the dusty pages of the library. God has no memories, but at once dwells in the now, the far distant past, and the as yet unrealized future.

The Father stands astride all time and place, yet, for the sake of His people, He has a “home” called heaven. As the tabernacle, and later the Jerusalem temple were the sites of His earthly, temporary throne, heaven is the site of His permanent throne. The apostle John describes it for us in The Revelation:

At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” Rev. 4:2-8

The clear and fixed contemplation of God is the beginning of all true prayer, and that contemplation does not fasten on His remote and partially intelligible attributes, nor strive to climb to behold Him as in Himself, but grasps Him as related to us.

Alexander Maclaren

Father

pater, pat-ayr', Greek Stg 3962; apparently a primary word; a “father” (literal or figurative, near or more remote) :- father, parent.

heaven

ouranos, oo-ran-os', Greek Stg 3772; perhaps from the same as Greek 3735 (oros) (through the idea of elevation); the sky; by extension heaven (as the abode of God); by implication happiness, power, eternity; specially the Gospel (Christianity) :- air, heaven ((-ly)), sky.

hallowed

hagiozo, hag-ee-ad'-zo, Greek Stg 37; from Greek 40 (hagios); to make holy, i.e. (ceremony) purify or consecrate; (mentally) to venerate :- hallow, be holy, sanctify.

name

onoma, on'-om-ah, Greek Stg 3686; from a presumed derivative of the base of Greek 1097 (ginosko) (compare Greek 3685 (oninemi)); a “name” (literal or figurative) (authority, character) :- called, (+ sur-) name (-d).

Our words change nothing of God: He is who He is no matter what we think or believe. We haven't any power to bestow qualities on Him. So when we "exalt" Him, or "magnify" Him, we are conducting no actions upon God Himself, but on our own *perception* of Him.

Most people have a small perception of God. Since they cannot comprehend His immensity, they reduce Him down to manageable dimensions. On the other hand, the attentive believer hungers to comprehend the full, unabridged scope of His personality and being—but he can't. The human mind cannot process the unbounded immensity of God. So, to accommodate those who call upon Him, the Father set everything of Himself into His name.

God's "name" is a reflection of who He is. God's name is God Himself as He is and has revealed Himself, and so His name is already holy... To pray that God's "name" be "hallowed" is not to pray that God may become holy but that He may be treated as holy, that His name should not be despised by the thoughts and conduct of those who have been created in His image. D.A. Carson

CONSUMED IN HIS WILL

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven

Man is most truly himself, not when he struts about in pride of ability and possession, but when he sees himself as a creature of God and submits to the will of his Creator, which is his true happiness.

Warren A. Quanbeck

We all have our little kingdoms.

Not long after I was mustered out of the Navy, I took a job at a camera store in downtown San Diego, California. It was owned and run by a belligerent cuss whose word was the law of the land. This being a time when there were far fewer laws and regulations protecting the employees of a small business, those of us in his employ were at his mercy. He could hire and fire at will, without cause—and often did. Harassment and intimidation were not only his management methods, but also his manner of doing business. Customers were sometimes browbeaten into making a purchase.

That man's store was his own little kingdom. Within it he could harass attractive female employees, cheat his customers, publicly and profanely abuse male employees, and in general make life miserable for everyone around him. Once a week (every Wednesday, as I recall) he even cheated on his wife—at the store. Within its walls he was king.

Though they may not be built in this same perverse image, we all have our little kingdoms, our own spheres of influence. The homemaker in her or his kitchen, the husband in his woodworking shop, the gardener among the rows, the teenager in his or her room: society is built upon the latticed, interwoven structure of our tiny fiefdoms. Jesus tells us, however, that we should be praying for the Father's kingdom to come—for *His* rule to be preeminent.

In process, God's kingdom is a bit like the Christian's salvation. There is a point in time at which the believer is "saved," that is, becomes a part of the body of Christ. Yet this point of salvation is usually followed by years of remaining precisely in the same station physically, living out a life much like one's neighbor. This time is spent slowly, methodically maturing and growing into the image of Christ. The Christian is technically "saved," but physically he is still a citizen of a fallen world. Only when he dies and enters through the gates of heaven is the Christian truly, finally saved: saved out of a world of sin, and saved from an eternity of torment. To put it in blunt terms, at the point of salvation the believer gets his pass into heaven, but the pass isn't actually punched until he dies—or until Christ comes to get him.

The process of God’s kingdom is similar in that it exists now, in both heaven and (in a different form) on earth, but, on this side of the rapture, the kingdom has not yet been fully realized.

God’s “kingdom” or “reign” can refer to that aspect of God’s sovereignty under which there is life. That kingdom is breaking in under Christ’s ministry, but it is not consummated till the end of the age. To pray “your kingdom come” is therefore simultaneously to ask that God’s saving, royal rule be extended now as people bow in submission to Him and already taste the eschatological blessing of salvation and to cry for the consummation of the kingdom. Carson

Here we have the ultimate prayer of submission: “*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. Father, I acknowledge Your kingdom and will as superior; may the world bow to Your perfect reign, and may my will be consumed in Yours.*”



*Saviour, 'tis a full surrender,
All I leave to follow Thee;
Thou my Leader and Defender
From this hour shalt ever be.*

*No withholding—full confession;
Pleasures, riches, all must flee;
Holy Spirit, take possession!
I no more, but Thou in me.*

*As I come in deep contrition,
At this consecrated hour,
Hear, O Christ, my heart's petition,
Let me feel the Spirit's power!*

*Oh, the joy of full salvation!
Oh, the peace of love divine!
Oh, the bliss of consecration!
I am His, and He is mine.
Rebecca S. Pollard*

kingdom
basileia, bas-il-i'-ah, Greek Stg 932; from Greek 935 (basileus); properly royalty, i.e. (abstract) rule, or (concrete) a realm (literal or figurative) :- kingdom, + reign.

done
ginomai, ghin'-om-ah-ee, Greek Stg 1096; a prolonged and middle form of a primary verb; to cause to be (“gen”-erate), i.e. (reflexive) to become (come into being), used with great latitude (literal, figurative, intensive, etc.) :- arise, be assembled, be (-come, -fall, -have self), be brought (to pass), (be) come (to pass), continue, be divided, draw, be ended, fall, be finished, follow, be found, be fulfilled, + God forbid, grow, happen, have, be kept, be made, be married, be ordained to be, partake, pass, be performed, be published, require, seem, be showed, x soon as it was, sound, be taken, be turned, use, wax, will, would, be wrought.

earth
ge, ghay, Greek Stg 1093; concrete from a primary word; soil; by extension a region, or the solid part or the whole of the terrene globe (including the occupants in each application) :- country, earth (-ly), ground, land, world.

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Give us this day our daily bread.

But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:18-19 nasb

Here, in one brief segment at the end of one of his letters, the apostle Paul puts words to one of the deep mysteries of the Christian faith—a mystery that befuddles everyone without, and confuses many within. How can Paul credit both the Philippians and God for his abundance? If they passed the hat and sent him the offering, then it couldn't be God. But if he thinks God did it, why is he thanking the Philippians?

Prayer is not merely communion with God, not merely reverent contemplation of His fatherly and holy name, though that should always be first and chiefest in it. It is not merely the expression of absorbed contemplation, but of a nature that desires and is dependent. *Maclaren*

give

didomi, did'-o-mee, Greek Stg 1325; a prolonged form of a primary verb (which is used as an alternative in most of the tenses); to give (used in a very wide application, properly or by implication, literal or figurative; greatly modified by the connection) :- adventure, bestow, bring forth, commit, deliver (up), give, grant, hinder, make, minister, number, offer, have power, put, receive, set, shew, smite (+ with the hand), strike (+ with the palm of the hand), suffer, take, utter, yield.

daily

epiousios, ep-ee-oo'-see-os, Greek Stg 1967; perhaps from the same as Greek 1966 (epiousa); to-morrow's; but more probably from Greek 1909 (epi) and a derivative of the presumed participle feminine of Greek 1510 (eimi); for subsistence, i.e. needful :- daily.

bread

artos, ar'-tos, Greek Stg 740; from Greek 142 (airo); bread (as raised) or a loaf :- (shew-) bread, loaf.

There really is no good explanation for the world at large, for the sentiment Paul expresses comes from the Spirit-filled heart, not temporal reason. It's not so hard to grasp the concept if we walk into the forest and express thanksgiving to God for the natural beauty surrounding us. We know that man did not manufacture the stately trees, the grass and foliage, the myriad birds and mammals that call the place home. The concept becomes more elusive, however, when we consider the same response to man-made things.

Stand in your front yard and look at your house. If you are a typical homeowner, sometime back a stranger took his hard-earned money and paid a contractor to build the house. By the toil and sweat of his crew, and the funds of the owner, the builder set boards and paneling in place, laid shingles on the roof, and piped in electricity and water. After a period of time, the original homeowner decided to sell his house. You came along, added up your bank account and future earnings, and offered to purchase the house. You sold your soul to the bank, then worked your heart out every day to make the mortgage payments, insurance premiums, utilities, and cost of general maintenance and upkeep. Yet, with the Spirit in residence, you stand on your front lawn, gaze upon the domicile you've purchased with your own sweat and toil, and give God the praise and thanksgiving.

But what does *God* have to do with it? And while we're at it, why should we give thanks to Him for food we purchased with our own money, or grew with our own hands? If we are the ones who buy the day's ration with our hard-earned paycheck, why would Jesus have us pray to the Father for our "daily bread"?

Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands. Psalm 119:73

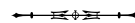
Here is the full, unclouded depth of our association with Christ. When we take Him as Lord, we're not agreeing to attend Sunday School every week, neither are we agreeing to contribute ten percent of our earnings to the collection plate. We're not saying, "I'll be good," or "I'll admit my sins." What we are saying is, "I now belong to the Lord Jesus Christ."

For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. Romans 14:7-8

Grass cannot call for dew as I do. Surely the Lord who visits the unpraying plant will answer to his pleading child.

C.H. Spurgeon

When we become a son or daughter of the living God through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ; when we begin and sustain the never-completed process of conforming to His image; when we ingest His mind, and strive for His vision; when we tune our hearing to His voice, tuning out the clamor of the world; when we give our lives over to His invasive yet comforting Spirit — then, and only then, are we able to see the powerful hand and gentle grace of God even in our own efforts. And, yes, we are able to ask Him for, and thank Him for, our daily bread.



*Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be;
I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within Thine arms,
And strong shall be my hand.*

*My will is not my own
Till Thou hast made it Thine;
If it would reach the monarch's throne
It must its crown resign:
It only stands unbent,
Amid the clashing strife,
When on Thy bosom it has leaned,
And found in Thee its life.*

George Matheson

FORGETTING THINGS PAST

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:33-34a nasb

Be careful to keep the old receipts which you have from God for the pardon of your sins.

William Gurnall

It's not uncommon, when visiting neighboring farms or homes, to come upon dogs or cats who are being forced to live something less than ideal lives. Dogs are given a filthy blanket by the back door and expected to live with the rain that pelts their face, or the snow that collects on their matted fur. Cats are left to fend for themselves, to multiply and divide according to the whims of nature, or the landowner's neglect.

Not so here. God has given man the beasts of the field to manage—but not to abuse. We're all God's creations, and are to treat each other with respect. Because this is the philosophy of this household—one in which even marauding mice are gently caught and released (at least, that is, by the humans)—it came as an unpleasant surprise the other day when Angel, our outdoor cat, slashed my face with her claws.

We're a hands-on family, and whether they like it or not, the four-footed members get their share of hugs. Cats, especially, don't mind a little face rubbing from time to time, so it was a natural move for me to bend down to greet Angel, placing my face close to hers. Apparently for this newest member of the family—who joined us one day from out of the woods, starved and pregnant—my face came a bit too close for comfort.

In a split-second she slashed my face, from just under the left eye and down the cheek, leaving me a bloody mess. Had she aimed just one centimeter higher, I would surely now be a writer of debilitated foresight. Angel was unapologetic, but after nursing by my good wife, the injuries were considerably improved, leaving my grizzled visage only slightly less pretty.

Angel didn't mean to hurt me; it was just survival instinct on her part. It's true that she's not terribly bright, but she's not mean. For a quick moment she simply forgot that I was not a threat. So I bore her no grudge. She was forgiven her transgression even as the blood oozed from between the fingers clutching my wounded face.

We have a God like that. In fact, we have a God who demonstrates an even higher form of mercy, in that He even forgives transgressions we commit *without* ignorance. We are not simple-minded beasts who live by instinct, but crafty creations of a "higher" order. We seldom sin accidentally; there is more often a self-serving motive behind our actions.

Yet still God forgives quickly—as quickly as those claws raked my cheek. When we come to Him on our knees, confessing the wrong, His compassionate response is swift and thorough. Angel and I made up within the hour. She still rubs against my legs and permits me the privilege of filling her bowl. I still give her a good rub (albeit at arm's length) and enjoy her scatter-brained company. Our relationship has not been tainted by a momentary mistake.

She didn't know any better; she's just a cat.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Col. 3:13

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:18-19

forgive

aphiemi, af-ee'-ay-mee, Greek Stg 863; from Greek 575 (apo) and hiemi (to send; an intensive form of eimi, to go); to send forth, in various applications (as follow) :- cry, forgive, forsake, lay aside, leave, let (alone, be, go, have), omit, put (send) away, remit, suffer, yield up.

debts

opheilema, of-i'-lay-mah, Greek Stg 3783; from (the alternate of) Greek 3784 (opheilo); something owed, i.e. (figurative) a due; morally a fault :- debt.

debtors

opheiletes, of-i'-let'-ace, Greek Stg 3781; from Greek 3784 (opheilo); an ower, i.e. person indebted; figurative a delinquent; morally a transgressor (against God) :- debtor, which owed, sinner.

UNSIGHTLY INCLINATIONS

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

If God does not in malice
tempt, still He does in mercy
try. God sends trials; we make
them temptations. *Maclaren*

lead

eisphero, ice-fer'-o, Greek Stg 1533; from Greek 1519 (eis) and Greek 5342 (phero); to carry inward (literal or figurative) :- bring (in), lead into.

temptation

peirasmos, pi-ras-mos', Greek Stg 3986; from Greek 3985 (peirazo); a putting to proof (by experiment (of good), experience (of evil), solicitation, discipline or provocation); by implication adversity :- temptation, x try.

deliver

rhuomai, rhoo'-om-ah-ee, Greek Stg 4506; middle of an obsolete verb, akin to Greek 4482 (rheo) (through the idea of a current; compare Greek 4511 (rhusis)); to rush or draw (for oneself), i.e. rescue :- deliver (-er).

evil

poneros, pon-ay-ros', Greek Stg 4190; from a derivative of Greek 4192 (ponos); hurtful, i.e. evil (properly in effect or influence, and thus differing from Greek 2556 (kakos), which refers rather to essential character, as well as from Greek 4550 (sapos), which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figurative calamitous; also (passive) ill, i.e. diseased; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. derelict, vicious, facinorous; neuter (singular) mischief, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners :- bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). See also Greek 4191 (poneroteris).

Oh, how we would love to cry out in our prayer, “Heavenly Father, leave me alone! I know You won’t tempt me to evil, but I beg You as well not to send me through Your trials. Leave me alone!” How we wish that Jesus had not prayed...

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. John 17:15

...but, instead, had asked the Father to lift us up and out of this hotbed of enticing transgressions, so it would not have been *necessary* to protect us from the evil one. How we would love to tell the Father, “I know You mean well, but I think I’m sufficiently mature already. No more trials, okay?”

These *could* be the words to our prayers—but it wouldn’t do any good. God the Father is in the business of raising us up into the image of His Son, and to expect Him to quit would be to expect Him to suddenly become a bad parent. Neither is going to happen.

So here we are: hapless lumps of insecurity, filled with our own unsightly inclinations, beseeching the Father to both give us success through His trials, and to get us out of the scraps in which we have set ourselves.

Prayer is, at its root, putting into practice the relationship we have in theory with the members of the Godhead. If we never speak to our human parent, then it is a thin relationship at best; if we never listen to what our parent has to say, then we are a poor daughter or son. God’s word says that at the moment we take Christ as Lord, we become adopted sons and daughters of God the Father. But if we never take the time to sit down and talk, the family tie becomes strained and brittle.

Here in the prayer-model Jesus gave us we have the full flowering and depth of heavenly conversation.

Praise

My Father above, I praise Your name

Submission

Have Your way here, in my life, as You do already around Your throne.

Entreaty

I ask for You to sustain me.

Confession

While I ask You to pardon my offenses against You, I ask for the grace to pardon, as well, the offenses against me.

Integrity

And when I am tempted by evil, from without or within, give my feet wings.

And though it was not part of Christ’s original prayer, someone has added a suitable coda of

Dedication and Praise

The kingdom is Yours, the power is Yours, the glory is Yours forever and ever. Amen.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14



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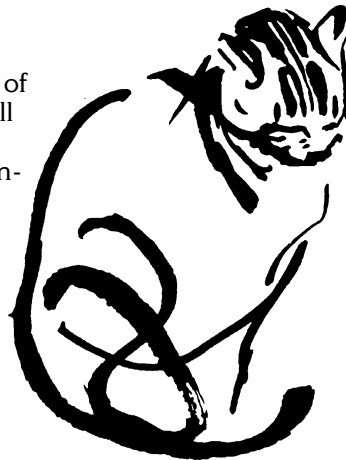
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