

After this manner therefore pray ye...

the Homespun of the Sincere

part one of three

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

AT A FUNERAL FOR AN OLD FRIEND, SOME TIME AGO, the pastor leading the simple memorial service had everyone in attendance sing the hymn *How Great Thou Art*, verses one and four.

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 dead 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 hymn and the Scripture consisted of words directed upward to God, yet the words *spoken* were mumbled into the chest, as if the people uttering them were embarrassed by their sound.



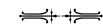
It is commonly referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer,” because Jesus is the one who originally uttered the words. It was not *His* prayer at all, however, but a template for prayer Jesus gave His disciples and followers

to use for themselves. During instruction on quiet sincerity (as opposed to loud hypocrisy) in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His disciples,

“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way...”

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 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 sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,
But the prayer of the upright is His delight.**

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 1916. 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 fifty-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 (to us) 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:

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the

throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."

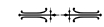
Revelation 4:2-8

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.

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

Most people have a rather 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, in the flesh, 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

Continued next week...



We recently added a second Bible Study at our web site: *The Beginning of Heaven: Footpath of our Trek* (a topical study).