

# The Golden Gate of Prayer

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, the Lord's Prayer as a model, and the true nature of prayer as communion with God, encouraging believers to pray sincerely and inclusively.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:9

**Topics:** "Communion with God", "The Lord's Prayer"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the profound significance of the Lord's Prayer, urging believers to approach God as their Father and to prioritize the hallowing of His name above personal requests. He explains that true prayer involves a deep communion with God, where the focus is on glorifying Him and seeking His will rather than merely presenting our needs. Miller highlights the importance of including others in our prayers, reflecting the love and unity of the Christian community, and encourages believers to recognize the transformative power of God's kingdom in their lives. Ultimately, he calls for a sincere and reverent approach to prayer, where the heart's desires align with God's glory.

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## Transcript

The Golden Gate of Prayer

Devotional Studies on the Lord's Prayer

J. R. Miller, 1900

"After this Manner, Pray"

"Our Father"

"Who is in heaven"

The First Note in Prayer

The Hallowed Name

"Your Kingdom Come"

How the Kingdom Comes

"Your Will be Done"

"As it is in Heaven"

A Career? or God's Will?

The Daily Bread

"Forgive us our Debts"

"As we Forgive"

Shrinking from Temptation

From the Evil

The Lord's Prayer is short--but every word of it is laden with precious meaning. In its few petitions it covers the whole field of prayer. It is easy to repeat its sentences, but it is hard to say it through as a real prayer, for it means the consecration of our whole life to God, and the submission of will, affections, and service to him. The aim of these short studies, is to help in a devotional way, by calling attention to the meaning of the several petitions, which too often is lost to our thought because of our familiarity with the sacred words.

"After this Manner, Pray"

May we pray? The question is a very important one. There are some who tell us that we may not, that there is no ear to hear, no one anywhere who cares for us and who could do anything for us if he did care. A mere great Force at the center of things cannot hear the cries for human distress on the earth or answer them. If that is the only God there is, prayer is vain and nothing comes from it but mocking echoes!

If, we are Christians, we accept the teaching of Jesus Christ concerning God, and there is no doubt that we may pray. There is one who hears, and that one is our heavenly Father! This is the truest answer to all the perplexities about prayer, to all the questions that arise concerning it. God is our Father, and we are his children. If we accept this name as a definition of God and as indicating the relation God bears to us and we bear to him--there need be no further question whatever concerning the privilege or the benefit of prayer.

Jesus gave many teachings regarding prayer. The Lord's Prayer gathers these teachings together into an example in a few great sentences. This prayer seems to us very simple and easy--but like all of our Lord's words--its petitions are wide and deep, each one carrying an ocean of meaning.

For one thing, the Lord's Prayer teaches us that all Christians need to pray. Not to pray--is to cut ourselves off altogether from God, the source of all good, of all blessing, of all life. No doubt there are men who do not pray, and who yet seem to live on and to receive mercies and blessings from God. They pay him no honor, recognize him not as their Father. Nevertheless he is an infinite loser who does not pray. He is leaving out of his life all the best things. He is gathering the weeds and pebbles that lie at his feet--and missing the crowns which hang above him, ready to be taken and worn. He is missing the love, the companionship and the help of God, without which life in the end can be only a poor shriveled thing, to be cast out to perish.

The first thing one begins to do when one comes to one's self, when one has been born from above, is to pray. The Lord said of Saul, an moment ago a fierce persecutor, now a Christian, "Behold, he prays!" That was evidence enough that Saul was no longer a dangerous enemy, that he was now a Christian man.

Christ's teaching makes prayer very easy. We do not have journey far off to some temple of marble and gold--to talk with our Father. We do not have to learn a system of theology in order to be able to pray acceptably. It is not necessary for us to approach God in some magnificent way, with elaborate ceremonial, in order to be heard by him. We are to come in the simplest way.

"After this manner" does not mean saying always even the few words of the form of prayer which our Lord gave to us--but refers rather to the spirit of our praying. We are to pray as children--who are talking to their Father. This makes it easy. It is not hard for a child to tell a loving parent its needs, to open its heart and reveal its inner feelings and desires. The most timid child, who shrinks from strangers, feels no embarrassment in the mother's presence. As glorious as God is, overwhelming as is the majesty which burns about his throne--his children should never dread drawing near to him. We may come boldly to his throne--for it is a throne of grace and love.

The Lord's Prayer tells us what we should pray for. It is very brief--but its petitions are most comprehensive. We should study them in order to learn what we may bring to God in our prayer. We do not know what to pray for as we ought. In nothing else do we need the help of Christ, more than in making our requests of God. Ofttimes the things we think we need most sorely--are not by any means our deepest, most real needs.

A man was brought to Jesus to have his paralysis cured. That was the prayer which he and his friends made in coming; it was for this, that the four men who carried their helpless burden, manifested such earnestness, overcoming so many obstacles and hindrances; they thought that paralysis was the man's most pressing need. Jesus looked into the man's life and saw that he had another need greater than this--and first forgave his sins, afterwards curing his paralysis. Forgiveness is always a sorer need--than the healing of any sickness. We come to God continually with cries for the taking away of some trial or the supplying of some need. God looks at us and says, "My child, that is not what you need most to have done!" He then gives us, not what we have asked for--but what he sees we ought to have asked for.

We are apt, in our praying, to give more thought to the things that concern our physical life, than to those which concern our higher, spiritual interests. We tell God of our sicknesses, and ask him to heal them. We pray to him for our friends who are ill, and implore him to restore them. We bring to him the matter of our daily bread, especially if our food-supply is short or precarious. It is well that we should take everything to God. Nothing that concerns us--is too small to be put into a prayer. God hears even the sparrows when they cry for food. But these temporal things should not have the first place in our asking.

Whatever use our Lord meant us to make of the Lord's Prayer as a form of prayer, the order of its petitions is certainly intended to guide us in our approaches to our Father, telling us what to put first. Thus we are taught what are the most important things.

The first three requests, are for things that concern the honor of God--the hallowing of his name, the coming of his kingdom, the doing of his will. We are half-way to the end, before there is a word about ourselves and our personal needs! Then only one of the three petitions which refer to our own needs applies to bodily needs, the other two being for forgiveness of sins, and deliverance in temptation. We are taught thus that the things of God should come first in our praying, not our own needs; and that among our

personal needs the most serious are not things for our body but the taking away of our sins and our delivering from evil.

The same truth is taught in that wonderful summary of duty, in which our Lord says, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Our prayers are ever to be for the things of God--and then God himself will look after our earthly needs.

The Lord's Prayer calls us to reality and sincerity--when we appear before God. Perhaps there is more unreality in our praying, than we think there is. How many of us go over the same petitions every time we pray? Probably we have used the same forms for years, with almost the identical words. Is it possible that our needs never vary from day to day? Can it be that we never have any new needs arising from our new conditions and experiences? Then do we really desire all the things we put into our daily prayers? Or how much of what we say is mere rote--without any thinking? It is worth our while to ponder seriously of this matter. Words without sincere desires--are not prayers.

It would be well if we should sit down always before beginning to pray, and think carefully over our needs. What are our deepest needs, the things we should ask God to give us, or do for us just now, today? What are our heart's actual desires for others, for our close friends, for our neighbors, for the unsaved, the tempted, the suffering? If we could get a clear and definite answer to these questions, before we begin our supplications and intercessions, it would make our prayers more real. It would make them shorter than usual, no doubt--but one sentence burdened with a heart's cry--is dearer to God than an hour's rote repeating of words and phrases, with no deep yearnings and longings in them!

Indeed we have but a narrow and unworthy conception of prayer, if our only thought of it is, making requests of God. In human friendship it would be very strange, if there were never fellowship except when there were favors to ask, the one of the other. Love's sweetest hours, are those in which two hearts commune on themes dear to both--but in which neither has any request to make. The truest, loftiest prayer is one of communion, when we speak to God--and he speaks to us. The deepest answer we can have to our praying is not God's gifts, however precious these may be--but God himself--his love, his grace! The prayer that rises highest and is divinest--is that in which we lose ourselves in God, when God himself is all to us, filling us, inspiring our dull life with his own infinite blessedness.

The Lord's Prayer has its earnest warning against putting selfish and earthly desires first. We must confess that even into our praying, SELF is apt to creep in! Especially in our secret prayers, the tendency is to speak to our Father in the first person singular, our thoughts absorbed altogether in our own needs--to the exclusion of the needs of all others. This tendency is rebuked in the phrasing of this form of prayer, where we are taught to approach God as "Our Father," not "My Father," and to plead, "Give us our daily bread," "Forgive us our debts," "Deliver us from evil" We may not forget others--even when we bow alone before God. The last place in the world where we should carry our selfishness, is into God's presence when we pray to him!

No doubt, however, there is a sense in which we should pray much for ourselves, for the time shutting out every other person. Our fellowship with God must be individual. Yet in this personal part of our praying, there is need also of great watchfulness, lest we seek inferior things for ourselves--and not the things that are really best. Our desires are apt to gravitate earthward, and the danger is that we choose lower rather than higher things; that we plead to be saved from costly self-denials, rather than to receive the spiritual blessings which are folded up in self-denials; that we ask for worldly prosperity, rather than for greater

likeness to Christ.

Perhaps it would be better if we would pray less than we do--that is, if oftentimes we should decline to choose at all for ourselves, or to make any definite requests, simply pleading with God to bless us as He sees fit; and referring especially all that concerns earthly things--to his wisdom and love.

A minister sat with a father and mother by the bed of a child, who was hovering between life and death. He was about to pray for the little sufferer, and turning to the parents he asked, "What shall we ask God to do?" After some moments, the father answered, with deep emotion: "I would not dare to choose. Leave it up to God!"

Would it not be better always in things of earthly interest--to leave the decision to God, letting him choose what it is best to do for us, or to give to us? We are not in this world to have ease and pleasure, to succeed in business, to do certain self-pleasing things--we are here to grow into strength and beauty of life and character, to accomplish the will of God, and to have that will wrought out in our own life.

Oftentimes the present must be sacrificed for the future, the earthly given up to gain the heavenly, pain endured for the sake of spiritual refining and enriching. If we are willing to have God choose for us, and to accept what he gives, we shall never fail to receive the best--perhaps not what worldlings would call the best--but always God's best. We know not what to pray for as we ought, and we had better leave it to God!

The truest prayer is oftentimes that in which we creep into the bosom of God--and rest there in silence. We do not know what to ask, and we dare not say even a word, lest it might be the wrong word; hence we simply wait before God in quietness and confidence. We know that our wise and heavenly Father knows best what to do--and we fully trust him.

#### Our Father

The words "Our Father" stand here as the golden 'gate' of prayer. This is the way we must enter, as we approach God. There is no other entrance. It was Christ himself who set up this gate. Not until he came, was this way consecrated and thrown open. There were many precious manifestations of God through the prophets--but the divine Fatherhood was not revealed, but in the dimmest way, in those ancient days. Only a few times in the whole Old Testament, is God spoken of as Father, and not once are men taught to pray to him by this name. But when Christ came--all things were made new. From the beginning he spoke of God as Father. Indeed Jesus scarcely ever called him by any other name. In the sermon on the mount alone, Jesus used the name seventeen times! All through the gospels we find it. Jesus wanted us to see God in the tenderest aspects of love. He wanted us also to understand his revealing of him, and no other name unlocks such a treasure of love-thoughts, as the name 'Father'.

This revelation never could have been made until Jesus came, for no man knew the Father, except the Son. And no other one could have made him known. Always men could pray, and God would hear them--the Old Testament has many examples of prayer, and many assurances that God hears prayer--but it was not until Christ had offered himself on the cross, that the way of access was fully opened. It was as he was dying, that the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom--a miracle--parable signifying that the way to God was now open to every weary one who would come. There was a reason, therefore, why this gate of prayer could not have been set up before Christ came and loved and taught and died. Through him we may call God our Father, and come as children--when we would pray.

The name we use for God in prayer--is very important. It is not the same whether we call him King, Creator, Judge, or Father. If we think of him only as our King, royalty is suggested to us--majesty, splendor, and power; but not tenderness, not ease of access, not love. If we call him only Creator, the name carries us back to the beginning, when all things came from the divine hand--and we think of strength, wisdom, goodness, beauty; but he is not brought near to our heart.

Some people begin their prayers by invoking God as the incomprehensible One, a God of majesty and holiness, the Lord Almighty. All these names of titles have their suggestions of attributes of qualities of the divine character, and each has its own comfort. But none of them present to us thoughts of God which make approach to him easy. When we speak to God, however, as our father--the vision which arises before us, assures us of welcome when we come to him.

In the midst of the splendors of royalty, when men of highest rank are admitted to the king's presence only at the king's pleasure, the children of the king's household always have free access! No court rules shut them away or prescribe any ceremonious manner in which they must approach the throne. The king is their father! To be a child of God, is to have assurance of access to him at all times. This golden gate of prayer, "Our Father," opens into the innermost sanctuary, into the very secret place of the Most High God--and it is shut neither day nor night, to any child of God!

The first word in this form of prayer is important. It is not "MY Father," but "OUR father." This does not mean that we should never present our own particular needs in prayer. In a sense, each one of us lives his life alone--apart from all others. We are to bring to God--our own needs, our own yearnings, our own infirmities and dangers, our own sorrows and trials; but in doing so, even when most engrossed with our own affairs--we must not fail to include others and to think of them.

"When you pray alone, shut your door--shut out as much as you can the sight and notice of others; but shut not out the interest and the good of others." We should never forget, even in the time when the stress of our own needs is greatest, that there are other children of our Father, who likewise have their needs, and that these should be remembered by us also, while we pray for ourselves. To live truly--is to love. If we love God--we will love our brethren also. Love puts others alongside ourselves, and we must think of them while we tell God of our own needs of troubles.

The word "our" takes in the whole family of God. None should be left out. It is not easy to use the words, our Father meaning all that is included in it. It is like the word "neighbor," which the Scriptures wrote in the commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself." The Jews had an easy way of defining this word. To begin with, they drew a circle which shut out all the world--but their own nation. Then among their own people--they regarded as neighbors only those of the sect, or the group to which they themselves belonged. But when Jesus came, with his larger definitions of the commandment, all these and other narrowing lines were swept away and "neighbor" appeared as including all the world.

So it is with this little word "our." We may wish to gather into the company for whom we would pray, only a small number, including at the most those in whom we are personally interested. There are a few people whom we would be quite willing to take with us--into the presence of God. We would take our own family with us. Then there are some dear friends, people we like because they are congenial, or because they are good to us, or because they are tied up with us in a social or religious way, whom we would be most willing to mention when we speak to God for ourselves.

But here again the lines of exclusion are swept away, every fence is torn down, and all the redeemed family are included. All who have a right to call God their Father, come in with us in the word "our". Thus all denominational lines in religion are obliterated; beside us kneel all who know, and worship, and love God. All national lines are swept away, and we recognize as our brothers, the Christians of all the world. All class and social distinctions fade out in the wide charity which is to fill our heart when we say, "Our Father." Here at the throne of grace there are no distinctions among men; none are to be left out in our intercessions. We cannot begin to pray at all, we cannot ask God for even the smallest things, without in heart and spirit including all others--people we do not love, those who are opposed to us, those who hate us.

It would be a great deal easier to say "MY Father" when we come to God, and not have to think about anyone but ourselves. It would save us a good deal of self-discipline, the schooling of ourselves into readiness to take the world in with us before God. But that is not the way it is in the prayer--it is not the way Jesus teaches us to pray. He demands that all exclusions shall be recalled and ruled out. Indeed the lesson is made still stronger in one of our Lord's special instructions concerning love, in which he says, "Pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you." If we have an enemy--he must have particular mention in our prayers. If we hear that anyone today has spoken bitterly of us or done us injury in any way--we are not only to take him with us when we enter the golden gate of prayer--but we are to make special supplication for him! We may never go into the presence of our Father--for ourselves alone, shutting out any other person. If we do, we shall miss the blessing.

When the Emperor of Rome was in the field with his army, it was forbidden that anyone should approach his tent at night. The penalty was instant death. One night a soldier was seen approaching the tent of the emperor, bearing a paper in his hand. He was promptly arrested and sentenced to die. The emperor, however within his tent, heard the commotion outside, and asked what it was about. He was told the cause, and gave the decree that if the petition with which the soldier had been approaching the emperor was for himself--that he must die; but that if it was for others--his life should be spared. It was learned that the petition was not for himself--but for three fellow-soldiers who had been found sleeping at their posts. He was coming to the emperor with the plea that their lives might be spared. So the emperor gave command that because of the nature of the petition the soldier should live, and also that his plea should be granted.

In a dim way, at least, this imperial command illustrates the law of prayer. When with our requests for ourselves, we bring also pleadings for God's other children, our prayers are heard. But when in our approaches to our Father, we ask only for what we want for ourselves, we find no acceptance. How the spirit of this prayer, brings our heart under discipline, to the law of Christian love! We can carry in before God no envyings, no jealousies, no resentments, no grudges, no contempt for anyone. We must be interested in every other, enough to pray for blessing upon him.

Thus it is not easy to say even the first word of this form of prayer! It searches our heart, and not only brings us low before God in reverent adoration--but cleanses us of all unlovingness and all uncharity. For it is not meant to be a barrier to shut us away from God; rather it is intended to be a school to prepare us for approaching God! Elsewhere Jesus gives this explicit instruction: "If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you--leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother--and then come and offer your gift."

Thus the gate of prayer--is a gate of love. Nothing unloving can enter it! Whatever other acceptable offerings we may bring to the golden gate of prayer, it will not open to us--until in our heart we bring love!

Who is in Heaven

There is wondrous uplift in the thought of the glory of the fatherhood to which we are introduced in Christ. Fatherhood itself means love, tender, strong, and faithful; but when we put divinity behind of all the love and goodness--Father in heaven--we make the vision infinite and eternal. Human fatherhood, as beautiful as it is and rich in affection, is frail and uncertain. Tomorrow it may be gone. God is our Father in heaven's eternal glory. Yet though he is in heaven--he never forgets us. Our names are always before him.

"Our Father who IS." This is one of the great present tenses of the Bible! God is. He is not a being who merely was in the remote past, and is now only a memory. Nor is he a God who is to manifest himself sometime in the future as our judge. He IS. He is the living God. He is our Father--and he is evermore our Father. There is never a moment when he is not near us, when his ear will not hear our faintest cry, when his hand is not ready to help.

This truth of the living God who is our Father, is wondrously rich in its meaning. In these learned days, some men like to talk of the God of the universe as a great mysterious force, at the center of things, which in some way keeps all words and all the things in being. But they deny to this great power--the elements of personality. They scoff the Christian teaching, that this God loves all his redeemed children, that he gives personal thought to any individuals, that he knows our needs or concerns himself with any of the perplexities of our life.

But this naming of our God as, "Our Father who IS" reveals to us a God who is the same yesterday and today--yes, and forever. All these nineteen centuries, his children have been calling him in the same precious way. Moreover, the name Father sweeps away all vague thoughts of God as mere force or power. Father means love, not love merely for a race--but love for his own children, a distinct love for each one of them! It means thought and care and providence. Our Father knows us by name--and carries each one of us in his heart! This is our Father's world, and wherever we go--we are beneath his all-seeing eye, near to his omnipotent hand, and within the circle of his infinite love.

It is the part of faith, to realize this truth of the living God, "Our Father who IS,"--a Father not far off--but close around us always. We never can get away from his presence! He is a very present help in time of trouble. The Scriptures seem to labor--to make this truth plain to us. Underneath us are the everlasting arms--again the present tense gives added preciousness to the teaching. The words are spoken directly to every Christian who reads or hears them.

We are told that the Lord holds us by the right hand, and we hear his voice saying, "Fear not; for I am with you!" With all the glory of his fatherhood, he is personally with every one of his children--for all their days. Our hope and confidence, are in God's ever-nearness. No human friend is half so close.

It is our Father who is heaven--to whom we pray. Thus our thoughts are lifted up above this earth. The Heidelberg Catechism, in answer to the question why the words "in heaven" are added, says, "In order that there may not be anything earthly in our conception of the heavenly majesty of God." While the blessed name assures us of all tenderness, affection, and accessibleness; the place of God's abode suggests to us his glory, greatness, and holiness. He is not like one of us. We faintly bear his image--but he is infinitely above us. All the visions and representations of God in the Scriptures, show him to us as

dwelling in light to which no man can approach. Thus we are assured, also, of the power of God. He is our Father--infinite in love--but infinite also in strength, omnipotent! We are safe in his hands. No power can harm us--if we are sheltered in his strong keeping!

This revelation of the fatherhood of God, suggests to us what an exalted privilege prayer is. It is free and open access into the presence of the God of heaven! In our continual approaches to God we are in danger of forgetting the stupendous meaning of prayer. Moses was bidden to take off his shoes before the burning bush, because the ground whereon he stood was holy. Isaiah was awed into deepest reverence, as he beheld the vision of God in the temple. Yet these are only glimpses of divine manifestations. Every time we speak to God in prayer--we are in the very presence of a glory greater and more real than that of any theophany which human eye ever saw! It becomes us, therefore, to be reverent, to be sincere, to be true-hearted, when we pray. We may come boldly and with confidence, for it is to our Father we are drawing near; but we should come remembering that he is our Father in heaven--the glorious One before whom highest angels veil their faces while they sing.

We need to think deeply of this. We are so assured of our welcome to God's throne and of his love, mercy, and grace--that we are much in danger of forgetting the glory of the presence into which we come. If for a moment, while we are praying, the veil were withdrawn and we had a glimpse of the stupendous scene--could we ever again pray heedlessly, or irreverently?

On the other hand, this revelation of the fatherhood of God, assures us of the infinite love that continually surrounds us. There is nothing in the divine majesty and glory, that should ever make us afraid--if we are truly trusting in Christ and faithfully following him. To some people, the thought of God's presence brings terror. Children are sometimes told that 'God sees them'--as if this should make them afraid. God always sees us--we cannot hide from him for a moment. This should lead us to live ever to please him. Yet it is in love that he watches us. "You O God, see me" meant mercy and deliverance to Hagar and her child. No truth should bring greater comfort and joy to the Christian, than this thought of God's ever nearness. It means all of a child's privilege in a father's house--safety, care, help, satisfying communion, all of love's blessedness.

A story of some little children alone during a thunderstorm, relates that each stated a favorite Scripture verse. One of them chose, "The Lord of glory thunders!" And when she was asked why she gave these words, she said: "Once I heard a great crash of thunder, and I was so sorely frightened that I screamed with terror! My father was near and he called, 'Don't be afraid, Margie; it's only Father!' Now when it thunders and I begin to be afraid, God seems to say to me, 'Don't be frightened, Margie; it's only Me--your Father!' and all my fear vanishes!

Fatherhood assures us of wise and loving discipline, "What son is he--whom the Father does not chasten?" This true of earthly fathers. Children who are not brought up under restraints, who are not taught nor disciplined--are brought up for sorrow and failure in life! Our heavenly Father does not permit his children to grow up--without correction and chastening. He does not give them their own way--when their own way would work only their hurt, perhaps their ruin!

Sometimes children of God complain at what seem hard things in their experience. They ask, "Can it be that God loves me--and yet lets me endure these losses, disappointments, and trials?" Really it is just because he loves--them that he deals thus with them--he would save them, train them for spiritual life, teach them higher lessons.

This revealing of God's Fatherhood, suggests also--the true glory of the Christian life. We make too little of this--we fail to recognize the dignity of our calling as God's children! "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" 1 John 3:1

There is a picture which shows a man dying in a wretched garret, on a bed of straw, amid the poorest surroundings. That is the earth side--what merely human eyes saw. But a closer inspection reveals a vision of angels waiting to receive the dying man's spirit unto heavenly glory. That is the heaven side of the same picture! That is truly what takes place whenever a Christian dies. "Absent from the body," and then, in a moment more--he is forever "at home with the Lord." We should think more of our privileges as God's children in this world, and should walk worthy of our high and holy calling.

The fatherhood of God also implies the brotherhood of all who are God's redeemed children. All are members of one family, and should therefore should dwell together in love. It was said of a good man, "He treated every man--as if he were a blood relative." That is true brotherhood. The strong--should help the weak. Those who have plenty--should share with those who lack. The joyous--should sing their songs of gladness in the ears of the sad. The victorious--should help those who are still struggling in life's battles.

The world today needs nothing more, than the realization of the true spirit of brotherhood among men. All social problems would find easy solution, if the love which Christ taught were to become indeed the law of life in all human relations. Society would be regenerated. Wars would no more devastate this fair earth. Business would be made holy, each man thinking of the good of his brothers as much as of his own. Heaven would be brought down to earth, if the great lesson of the brotherhood of all God's children were only learned and realized in life.

These are but hints of the vast and deep meaning of this wonderful invocation. We have found enough, at least, in it to assure us of welcome whenever we come as children to our Father. We need to strive more and more after the child spirit; for only when we have it--can we find our way to the innermost warmth of divine love!

#### The First Note in Prayer

The order of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer is not accidental, for it was Jesus who said, "After this manner, pray." We should notice, therefore, what we are to put first--when we come to God. It is not a request for anything for ourselves. Important and pressing as our personal needs may be, we are to set them all aside, while we ask first for the hallowing of God's name. In the opening word of the prayer, we are taught not to pray to God for ourselves alone--but always to bring others with us, "Our Father."

Here we learn further, that God himself must be put first. As the evening star is the brightest star in the heavens, so among all the petitions, this shines with the most brilliant luster, "Hallowed be your name."

Yet if we were making a form of prayer--we should probably not have anything like this in it. "Prayer," we would likely say, "is asking God for things that we need--or that we think we need. It is pleading with God for favors, for help to get on with our ambitions, for prosperity, for freedom from trouble and trial."

As for our friends and neighbors, so far as we put them into our prayers at all, we usually ask earthly good things. For the members of our own household, for whom we probably pray at times, if we really ever pray, we are apt to solicit things that will advance them socially, or in their work or business. For ourselves, most of us think of prayer, only as a way . . .

to make life easier,  
to get what we want,  
to add to our earthly comforts,  
to get rid of inconveniences,  
to escape trial.

It is scarcely likely, therefore, that if we were preparing a form of prayer we would have anything in it about hallowing God's name. We should probably make a number of changes on "Give us this day our daily bread," amplifying the petition and adding to it requests for a number of other things besides daily bread. But we would not likely rise above the level of earthly things. Almost certainly we would not rise to anything so sublime as a prayer for the hallowing of God's name.

We would better learn well, however, the lesson taught us by our Lord, when he set this petition in the place of highest honor, bidding us begin with it. Really we cannot advance to any petition that comes after it--until we have offered this one. It is dishonoring to God, when we go into his presence, to begin to clamor for poor paltry things for ourselves, with no thought or aspiration or pleading for the glorifying of God's name. We pray not as we ought, acceptably to our Father, unless we plead first of all--that God himself may be honored.

It is related that a French boy rode up to Napoleon, during one of his battles, and told him that the victory was won. "But you are wounded, my boy," said Napoleon. "Killed, sire," said the lad, dropping down dead. The boy thought only of the honor of his general, giving no attention whatever to his own condition. Our Lord, in putting this petition first in the form of prayer he gave to his disciples, teaches us that we should come before God in the same self-forgetful spirit, not telling him of our own sufferings and needs first of all--but pleading for his glory and honor.

Of course we need bread. Our bodies have their hungers, and God is not indifferent to our physical needs. A little later in the prayer we have a petition for bread. But before we come to this, we have three other petitions--for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of his kingdom, the doing of his will. All these great objects are to be put before any request for ourselves, even for bread, or for the forgiveness of our sins!

This teaching applies also to the spirit in which all our prayers should be offered, as well as to the order of the petitions. Indeed all our life is to be lived with a view to the glorifying of the divine name. God must be first in everything. We are to love him with all our heart, with all our strength, with all our mind. We are to seek first his kingdom and righteousness. We are to aim in all our life to give honor to him. "Whether you eat, or drink," says Paul, "or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Again, "Whatever you do, in word or in deed--do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." We are never to think in our daily and hourly living, what will most honor us, what will be the easiest thing, or the most profitable--but what will most honor God. How it would modify human ambitions and change the whole aim of living if this were to become the universal rule, if our question should always be, "What will please God--and make his name more glorious?"

Then, in all our praying as well as in our living--the first desire of our heart should be for the hallowing of God's name. And not only is this prayer to be offered as a specific petition at the very gate, as we enter the temple--but in all our praying, to the very close, the first object should be, not the obtaining of our requests

for ourselves--but the honoring of God. You want something very much. It seems to you to be essential to your happiness. Yet do you know that the granting of this thing so dear, would glorify God? You are not sure. Instead, therefore, of pressing your requests for things you would like to have, you would better refer the matter to God, saying: "I dare not decide. I would rather leave it to God, asking that he would grant my requests, only if to do so, would most honor his name."

If we had learned this effacement of self in all our desires, whether in our work or in our praying, if God were always first in our desires, it would lift up our commonest life into a splendor as radiant as that in which the angels live! And if we but lived thus altogether for the glory of God--we would have God's divine companionship and help in all that we do.

"Those who honor me--I will honor," is his promise. Poor indeed may be the work we do, with no beauty in men's eyes; but if it is wrought in pure love and with a sincere desire to do honor to our Lord--he will take the endeavor of our clumsy hands and give it the grace it lacks, transforming it into a loveliness which will really honor him whom we so earnestly sought to glorify.

In our praying, too, the same is true. It seems to us that the things we desire for our own comfort or pleasure, are the things that will be best for us. Indeed we think we cannot be happy, can scarcely even live, unless we get these things that are so dear. Yet if we press these desires with all human eagerness, thinking only of what we want for ourselves, and give no thought to the honoring of God, we are very short-sighted, and, at best, are choosing the lower rather than the higher good. To leave out thought of God in anything we seek--is to drag our life in the dust, when it ought to soar away into the clear blue of heaven.

If, therefore, we make our prayers always for the hallowing of God's name, first of all, whether the thing we desire is given to us or not, we take our place with God as co-worker, and are lifted up into fellowship with him. It may be that the thing we sought so earnestly may be withheld from us, or that the sorrow of loss against which we pleaded with such intensity desire--shall come with all its crushing weight; still if our prayer was "Hallowed be your name--whatever the cost may be to me," we shall find the glory of God shining in the very darkness about us, and the blessing of God in the very bitterness of the grief in which we sit.

Nothing that this world can give us is really good--unless it comes to us out of our Father's hands, the choice of his wisdom for us, with the blessing of his favor upon it. Though all of earth's joys and possessions are taken from us, leaving us bare of comfort, bereft of human love, broken and suffering--if God has been honored in what we have passed through and in all that has come to us--we are rich with an enriching that shall never lose its luster or its preciousness.

We should learn well this lesson, therefore, that the very first thing in praying always should be the pleading that God's name may be honored, though the thing we seek are not given; that it is not given, unless its bestowal would glorify God. When we have learned to pray in this spirit, we shall find ourselves exalted into fellowship with Christ himself. It was thus he prayed in the temple that day, in what seems to have been a preliminary Gethsemane agony: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify your name." If we learn to pray thus, our prayers will always be acceptable to God--and our life shall show forth his praise.

"Once it was the blessing,

Now it is the Lord.

Once it was the feeling,

Now it is his Word.

Once his gifts I wanted,

Now himself alone.

Once I sought for healing,

Now the Healer own."

The Hallowed Name

There is great need of the lesson of reverence. Men do not seem aware of God. Even in the holiest places of earth, there appears to be in most of us lack of consciousness of the presence and majesty of God. Almost nobody takes off his shoes, before the burning bush. "Nobody fears God nowadays," said one distinguished English clergyman to another, with deep pain in his heart. We all need to learn anew the lesson of reverence. This is one of the teachings of this prayer, "Hallowed be your name."

What are we to understand by the name of God? Among the ancient Jews there was one divine name which had peculiar sacredness. It was so holy that they never pronounced it in public. When they came to it in reading, they would pass over it in reverent silence, not daring to take it upon their lips. The Mohammedans, also, have a great reverence for the divine name. They will not tread upon a piece of paper, even the smallest torn fragment which they see lying upon the ground--but will reverently pick it up, saying, "It may contain the name of God." In this there may be little more than superstition in the outward honor shown to the divine name. Ofttimes men with wicked heart will treat the written or spoken name of God with seeming reverence, bowing at its every mention, while in their own life they have no true regard for God. It is very evident that more than this is meant, in this petition for the hallowing of God's name. We must honor it in our heart and in our life.

In the Bible, a name stands for the whole of the character of the person. Many scripture names have meanings in which are enshrined the qualities which belonged to the man. Even among us, a name comes to stand for all there is in the person's life and character. A little child is born without a name, and when a name is given to it, it means nothing as yet, for the child has no biography, no character, no personality, has done nothing to individualize itself. But as the days and years go on, and the child grows into manhood, everything he does and all that he is are gathered into his name--until by and by the name has a meaning wherever the man is known. The person's name becomes, as it were, a composite photograph made up of all the phases and aspects of his life. Any man's name when spoken in the ears of his friends conveys to them a conception of his personality, his character, his disposition, his whole story; all that he is--is enshrined in his name. There are certain names in every community that by reason of the noble life which the people live, or the great or good things they have done, mean a great deal: standing for honor, for patriotism, for heroism, for philanthropy, for beneficence, for religion.

So the name of God includes all that God is and all that he has done; that is, all the revelations which have been made to us of him. When we speak his name, there arises before our mind a vision which gathers in itself all that we know about God--all our thoughts of him, our impressions of him, our experiences of his

goodness, his mercy, his help. When we mention the name of Jesus Christ, the whole story of his life is suggested to us--his condescension, his beautiful character, his gentleness, his works of power, his teaching--above all, his atoning death, and then his resurrection and ascension. Thus the name of God stands for God himself--all that God is. In this petition we pray, therefore, not merely for the formal honoring of a name--but for the honoring of God himself in the revelations of him which have been made in the world.

Of course we cannot add a particle to the essential glory of God's name. Nothing we could do, would make his character any more glorious. We cannot add to the sun's brightness, by lighting candles and lamps on the earth; nor can we, by anything we may say or do--make God any more glorious than he is in his essential character.

What then is meant by the hallowing of God's name? In what sense can we honor God? What is implied in this petition? It is a prayer that God himself shall hallow his name; also, that he would make its real glory appear before men, and that he would enable us to hallow it in our life. There are several ways in which we may do this.

We may add to the honor in which we hold God's name in our own heart. Some people live year after year, and give little serious thought to the divine character, not studying the Scriptures to discover its glory and its beauty. The more we know about God--the more will we revere and honor his name. Every new revealing of him shows us something more that is wonderful in him.

Everything in this world has in it, for a devout mind--some suggestion of God. Every flower that blooms, every cloud that flits across the sky, every star that shines, every human face--suggests something about God, the Creator; reveals some feature of his power, his wisdom, his goodness. In the Bible there is not a chapter, scarcely a verse, in which the child of God may not find something which speaks to him of his Father. In every true Christian life and character, also, there are revealings of God, qualities in which something of him is reflected. As we thus learn about God, the honor in which we hold him in our heart, becomes greater and greater. Every new glimpse of him, makes him appear greater and more glorious to our thought and love.

This is a prayer that God would make himself known to us in new ways. "Show me your glory," was the prayer of Moses, as he pleaded for some visible manifestation. Our prayer here is not, however, for a theophany--but for deeper knowledge of God as our Father, for new experiences of his love, his goodness, his mercy, his faithfulness; for new revealings of his character. "Those who know your name--shall put their trust in you," was the testimony of a devout psalmist. The deeper cry of our heart--should be to know God better, for then we shall love him more, and serve him more devotedly.

We ask in this prayer, also, that God's name may become better known among men. As dear as God may be to us, his children, and as highly as we may honor him in our own heart--he is not worthily revered in the world about us. Men do not know him, and do not honor him as he ought to be honored. We say of a good man, that he needs only to be known--in order to be loved. If we can get men to know God--they will love him. We should pray, therefore, that his name may become better known, that those who pay him no reverence now shall thus be brought to trust him. What joy it would give to thousands of weary sufferers in this world today--if they knew God!

This is one of those prayers that is not finished when we have breathed its words, however sincerely and earnestly, into the ear of our Father. When we ask God to make his name known among men, he says to

us, "I have put my name into your keeping--for you make it known. I have given you a knowledge of me--go and tell the people everywhere of my love, my mercy, my holiness, my grace. I have gone to the cross to reveal there the divine heart--you must show now in your life, the meaning of the cross, interpreting it not merely in words--but in life, in service, in deeds of self-denial and sacrifice." It is ours to make known to men, who God is.

We ask in this petition that we may be enabled to do our part in spreading the knowledge of God in the world. There are many ways in which we may do this. We may scatter the printed Word of God, and its pages will be as the leaves of the tree of life for the healing of the nations. We may speak to men everywhere of what God is, what he has done; especially of what he is to us--and what he has done for us!

Another way in which we may hallow God's name among men, is in our own life. If a child does well and lives worthily, he honors his parents before the world. If he lives unworthily, he brings reproach, shame, and grief upon them. We, as God's children, by our life bring either honor or dishonor upon the name of our Father.

One has said, "Christians are the world's Bible." The world does not read the written book--but it does read the life of those who profess to be God's children. If our life is to be the interpretation of God's Word to the world, we should write nothing in it which would in any way misrepresent or misinterpret God. If we live carelessly, dishonestly, speaking lies, acting deceitfully, doing unloving things--we are dishonoring God. It is important that all those who stand for God in this world, shall live in all their common days--so that all who see them shall learn something more about God's grace and the beauty of holiness.

Wherever we go--our life itself should declare God. It should not be necessary for us to tell people that we are Christians; there should be something in the very temper and spirit and atmosphere of our life--that would say to everyone, that we belong to Christ and have been with him.

It is related of a great artist that he was once wandering in the mountains of Switzerland, when some officials met him and demanded his passport. "I do not have it with me," he replied, "but my name is Dore." "Prove it, if you are," replied the officers, knowing Dore was a famous artist--but not believing that this was he. Taking a piece of paper the artist hastily sketched a group of peasants who were standing near, and did it with such grace and skill that the officials exclaimed, "Enough! you are Dore."

The world cares little for a mere profession. We say we are Christians, and the challenge is, "Prove it!" If we are of Christ--we must be able to do the works of Christ, to live the life of Christ, to show the spirit of Christ. The artist's skillful drawing proved his identity. We must prove that we are the followers of our Master--by the love, the grace, the beauty, the holiness of our life.

True religion is not merely a matter of creed and profession, or of church-going and public worship; it is far more a matter of daily life. It is not how we behave on Sundays, nor the kind of creed we hold, nor the devoutness of our worship; it is the way we act at home, in school, in business, in society, in our associations with men. It is vitally important, that all who profess to belong to Christ--shall manifest Christ's beauty in life and character. It is not enough to witness for Christ in our words; we are to be witnesses to Christ and for him in ourselves. It is not enough to preach to gospel in sermon or exhortation; the gospel that honors Christ truly is the gospel men read in our daily life.

Let us so live that in all our life we shall, indeed, not only with our voice, but in our life--give honor and praise to him whose name should be hallowed above all other names!

## May Your Kingdom Come

Already we have learned to keep back the thought of our own needs when we enter the gate of prayer, and to pray first for the hallowing of God's name. We are here checked again in our expression of our own eager desires, and bidden to pray instead for the coming of God's kingdom. The things of God must come before our things.

"May Your kingdom come." What is the kingdom of God for whose coming we are here taught to pray? It is not the rule of God over the material universe. Already the divine sway in this realm is complete. No star ever rebels against the laws ordained for the heavenly bodies. There is nowhere in nature any resistance to the will of God, which is revealed in what we call nature's laws. There is no need, therefore, to pray for the coming of our Father's kingdom in the natural world.

Nor is this a prayer for the speedy coming of death to the child of God, that he may enter into the joys and felicities of heaven's blessedness--the full glory of the kingdom of God. Our Lord's own prayer for his disciples, was not that they should be taken out of the world, for they have a work to do here--but that they should remain in the world--and be kept from its evil.

"May Your kingdom come" is a prayer for the coming of God's moral and spiritual sway over the hearts and lives of men in this world. There is no need to prove that in this realm, God's kingdom does not now have unresisted sway. We know well how man is in rebellion against God. It is not necessary to recite here the sad facts of this story of rebellion. It began in Paradise. It is interesting, however, to notice that immediately after man had fallen, God set about restoring his kingdom upon the earth. The gospel promise was spoken amid the very words which told of sin's ruin. From that day to this, God has been seeking to reclaim his place as king in the hearts and lives of men. In the fullness of time, Jesus Christ came to declare God's mercy and love, to reveal to man the possibilities of spiritual life, to die for sinners, and to set up the kingdom of God in full power on the earth.

We have only to turn to our Lord's teachings, to learn the character of this kingdom. It is spiritual; it seeks to rule over man's conscience, his affections, his whole life. A kingdom is where a king rules; God would rule in our heart. God's kingdom has come in any of us--just in the measure in which God governs our thoughts, our will, our desires. The kingdom has failed fully to come in us--in so far as we still resist God's will and fail to obey him perfectly, whether, it be in act, or word, or wish, or affection, or feeling.

If we ask "What is the character of this kingdom of God?" We find the first answer in the name of the King. He is our Father. We need not be afraid of this King. The Bible in every chapter, declares the goodness of God. The Old Testament shines with revealings of his mercy. Then in Jesus Christ, we have the full revelation of the divine character. "He who has seen me--has seen the Father," Jesus declared. Every word, act, and disposition of that life of marvelous beauty--showed us some new revealing of God. Then on the cross we have the unveiling of the very heart of our Father--when he gave his only begotten Son; when Christ the Son of God, gave himself up to a death of shame for us.

This is our King. He was one of us in his earthly revealing. He was lowly and humble, moving among the people with infinite gentleness. Yet divine love filled his heart and wrought itself out in every touch of his hand--until at last that hand was nailed on the cross!

The King desires to reign in us. His name is Love. No reign of the gentlest sovereign on earth--was ever so beneficent, so gracious, as the sway of him who desires to be our King, and who craves of us that we

submit ourselves to him.

When we turn to our Lord's teachings, we find many thoughts about this kingdom, revealing to us its character. It "comes not with observation"; that is, so that its progress can be noted by earthly signs. Earthly kingdoms advance with pomp and noise, in cruel war, crushing enemies before them, and in display of power which awes men. The kingdom of God advances silently. One of its symbols is light--the morning comes noiselessly.

This kingdom is not an earthly organization. The visible church is not the kingdom of God--the church, with its ecclesiastical system, its rituals, simple or elaborate, its membership footed up in statistical tables, its sacraments, its ministrations. "The kingdom of God is within you," said the Master. It sets up its throne in men's hearts. It rules over men's lives. The kingdom of God is not food and drink--but righteousness and peace and joy. Every true Christian is in the kingdom of God, and this kingdom is also in him. But the kingdom of God and visible church are not identical. There are many lowly friends of God in whom this kingdom has been set up--yet whose names are on no roll of any church; and no doubt there are members of the visible church, perhaps some who are prominent and conspicuous in it--in whom the kingdom of God has not found a realm!

Christ himself came and lived and taught and died to make men holy, and to bring them into the heavenly kingdom. If we ask what the LAWS of this kingdom are, we find them plainly revealed in our Lord's teachings; the sermon on the mount is Christ's own exposition of the life of the kingdom God. This sermon begins with the beatitudes which tell us who are the blessed or happy ones.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:3-12

At every point in these beatitudes, we recognize the difference between earth's ideals of happiness, and God's standards. The whole sermon runs upon the same lofty lines. Think what the community would be--in which these teachings should be fully realized, lived out, wrought into conduct and character. Yet that is the coming of the kingdom for which we pray in this petition!

LOVE is the great central law of this kingdom. Christ taught his disciples that they must love each other--as he had loved them. They must love not merely the good and the lovable--but the evil and the unlovely as well. The love must be like God's, and he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. John, who learned the lesson on the Master's bosom, into whose life the kingdom came with marvelous power, transforming him into the very gentleness of Christ, taught that "if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us... If a man says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he who loves not his brother whom he has seen--cannot love God whom he has not seen."

We have come under the rule and sway of the kingdom of God, only in so far as we sincerely love others. This love must not be a sentiment merely; it must rule the life, revealing itself in all graces of character,

and leading to lowliest service--love always serves.

When the disciples once were disputing among themselves as to who was greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus took a little child and set him in the midst of them, and said to them that they must become like this little child--if they would even enter the kingdom. He referred to the absence of ambition, the simplicity and sincerity, humility and lowliness of heart, in a child. True greatness is unconscious of itself. It is not puffed up with a sense of its own importance. It is humble and simple-hearted.

On another occasion, when a like question was being considered, and the disciples asked Jesus who was greatest in the kingdom, he said the greatest was he who served most deeply and unselfishly. The world's idea of greatness, is exemption from service; but he is the best Christian--who serves others the most humbly and the most helpfully.

In Christ himself, the kingdom of God had perfect development, and he said of himself, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto--but to minister." The kingdom of God has come in us--just in the measure in which we love and serve.

#### How the Kingdom Comes

The answers to some prayers come at once. Even while we are speaking to God--the thing we ask for is laid in our hands. The answers to other prayers, however, are delayed. Sometimes the delay is for the schooling of the suppliant's faith, or for the discipline of patience. Sometimes the answer is one which in its very nature, could not be given at once. If in the early summer, as the first buds are appearing, one kneels in his orchard and prays that his trees may bring forth abundant and luscious fruit, his prayer could not be answered until the later summer or autumn. Fruits must have time to ripen.

Then there are prayers whose answers may begin to come at once--but cannot be granted in fullness and completeness at any one time, because the blessings that are sought are progressive and can be given only gradually. The prayer, "May Your kingdom come," belongs to this class. It was not a sudden coming of the heavenly kingdom to earth, that was in the mind of Christ when he gave this prayer to his disciples. He did not mean that they should ask for the letting down of the throne of glory from amid the splendors of heaven--to some locality on earth.

The petition contemplates the ultimate bringing of all the hearts and lives of God's redeemed people, under the divine sway. But the subjugation is a moral one. It is not such submission to Christ as King as takes place when one nation is conquered by another in war. The conquests of this kingdom are not made by force; they are moral conquests and are made by love. "Your people shall be willing--in the day of your power," ran the ancient word of hope. Not until men love God--can they be in the kingdom of heaven. "If you love me, " said the Master, "keep my commandments."

The coming of the kingdom of God, must therefore be gradual. One by one, men are saved by Christ and become his subjects. The surrender cannot be made fully and perfectly in a moment--but must be progressive. They go on from strength to strength. The inner man is renewed day by day. Jesus calls us to him to learn of him, and the learning takes all our life.

Thus it is that the prayer, "May Your kingdom come," has been receiving its answer every day since it began to be offered. The spiritual sway of Christ in this world, has been extending continually. Especially in recent years, has its progress been wonderful. The work of Christian missions during the nineteenth

century has been stupendous.

No doubt it seems to many even now, that the answer to the petition has scarcely begun to come. Still is the world full of violence and strife. The great nations yet resort to war for the settlement of their disputes. Wrong and injustice prevail. The poor are oppressed. The weak are crushed. Foul sins stain the story of daily life even in communities where Christian civilization has done the most for the uplifting of society. When we look abroad and see the evil t

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