

## **Our Father Is Personal and Exalted**

Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:1-4

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Our prayers become mechanical and lifeless, become more of a chore than a delight, become a struggle to us in faithfulness and regularity because we have forgotten (or have never known) who it is to whom we pray: “Our Father which art in heaven.” Nothing we seek in prayer will truly matter if we do not get this right. What we seek is meaningless if we do not first seek, “Our Father which art in heaven.” And just using the right words as Jesus has given them to us is not sufficient if those words are not filled with meaning, understanding, faith, and love to the glorious God to whom we pray.

Our prayers reveal much about our understanding of God, our faith in Jesus Christ, and our love for Him. The fervency of our prayers (or lack thereof) will tell us whether we are just going through the motions or whether there is really a living communion with our heavenly Father. Our prayers reveal whether our God is great or small, whether He is our heavenly Santa Claus or our heavenly Father, whether He is holy or common, whether He is near or distant.

Our prayers will be full of life and communion with the Lord to the degree that we remember who He is and what He has done. When the greatness, sovereignty, power, mercy, love, and holiness of our heavenly Father fill our minds and our hearts, prayer will not be just designated to a period of time each day, but will become a way of life. God will be our air that surrounds us—prayer will throughout the day be breathing in and out our exalted and yet personal Father.

I have come to understand that the key to enjoying prayer as a way of life each day is (as Jesus makes clear) to begin with Him to whom we pray: “Our Father which art in heaven.” Our main points are: (1) Our God Is Personal (“Our Father”); (2) Our God Is Exalted (“Which art in heaven”).

### **I. Our God Is Personal (“Our Father”).**

A. Pharisaical religion is herein exposed by Jesus for the mere outward show that it was/is. Their keeping of God’s Law was outward in mere actions and not also in keeping God’s Law inwardly in their thoughts, desires, and motives. Their acts of piety (caring for the needy, praying, and fasting) were again mere outward acts that were like a performance on a stage just to be seen and praised by man. Jesus condemns such hypocrisy in religion and teaches that true religion seeks not to please man, but our Father in heaven (who will reward all who do so for His glory). Let us remember that God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is our audience for our acts of worship and deeds of charity (whether in private or in public) and not people. When people become the audience, we are engaging in the showmanship of pharisaical religion. Even when people see us, let us give and let us pray not because they see us, but because God sees us from the inside out.

B. In contrast to the hypocrisy in prayer of the Pharisees and to the meaningless words in the prayers of pagans, Jesus gives to us a pattern or summary of prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 (the Lord’s Prayer).

1. This prayer may be prayed as written (if prayed with sincerity, faith, and love), but it is especially given to guide us in what should be included in our prayers (*Larger Catechism* 186,187). Jesus says in Matthew 6:9: “After this manner therefore pray ye” (literally “Therefore, thus pray ye”). In other words, “Therefore in contrast to how the Pharisees and the pagans pray, you pray in this way.”

2. In Luke 11:1-4 (later on in Christ’s ministry), Jesus gives a slightly different version of basically the same prayer. Can you imagine listening to the Lord Jesus praying? After hearing Him pray, it was as if the disciples needed to be taught how to pray.

3. The Lord's Prayer has a **Preface** (Matthew 6:9), six **Petitions/Requests** (Matthew 6:9-13), and a **Conclusion** (Matthew 6:13). It is structured similar to the Ten Commandments (first duties to God in 1-4, and then duties to our neighbor in 5-10). The Lord's Prayer begins with honoring God (the Preface and first three Petitions), then praying for our needs (last three Petitions), and closes with honoring God. The greater part of the Lord's Prayer is spent in honoring our glorious God. Calling out to the Lord for the needs we have in our lives is important, but it is not as important as exalting the greatness of God.

C. Let us now turn our attention to the God to whom we pray. As noted, the Lord Jesus teaches us to call upon God as "Our Father".

1. God is described in Scripture as the Father of all as all find their being in Him (Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 8:6). The *Geneva Bible* (1599) notes on 1 Corinthians 8:6: "When the Father is distinguished from the Son [in this verse], he is named the beginning of all things." But that distant relationship to the Father as Creator will not rescue and save any of us. In fact, when we only have God as Father through creation, we stand under His holy wrath and condemnation because we have all sinned against our Creator. Our holy Creator stands in judgment over us. Jesus declares that Satan is the spiritual father of all who do not believe in Christ (John 8:44). One cannot be more distant from God than this. That is not the sense which Jesus uses here.

2. Jesus addresses God as "Our Father" not in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense. God must become your Father through faith in Jesus Christ, His Only Begotten Son (John 1:12). Only as you become God's adopted child through trusting Jesus as your Savior and Lord is sin, guilt, and God's condemnation removed. Jesus is the Son of God (having the very same divine nature as the Father) from all eternity. Jesus is the natural Son of God. We who trust in Christ are the adopted children of God by faith alone in Christ alone. Though God was a Father to His people in the Old Testament (Isaiah 63:16), it is through the incarnation of Jesus Christ that God "our Father" has become ever so near to us in everlasting love.

3. "Our Father" emphasizes that God is your very own Father. He is not simply "the Father", but "our Father" in a personal and close relationship. We are His children (in His family) and bear the closest relationship to God of any creature—nearer to God than even the angels; for we are the heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). Your Father supremely demonstrated His love to you in sending Jesus to bear His punishment for you (1 John 4:10; Romans 8:32). He is nearer to you than the most loving earthly father is to his beloved children. In the study of theology this personal nearness speaks of the immanence of God. He is with us and near us—not merely because He is omnipresent which He is to all His creation, but because He is personally and relationally near us and lives within us through Jesus. "Our Father", speaks of His nearness to us, His begetting us in the new birth, His everlasting love for us, His constant care for us, and His authority over us.

4. This family relationship with God is not merely a relationship of a King that exercises supreme dominion over the universe and everything in it—though that is absolutely true of God. God is sovereign King, but Jesus wants you to know that God is your loving, caring Father. There is no Father like Him who comforts you and picks you up when you fall, who assures you of His presence when you are afraid, who guides you by His wisdom when you are lost, who disciplines you in love when you disobey, who gives you what is good when you ask.

5. You must not judge God by the standard of earthly fathers who do not love their child nor care for him/her (who have abused or spoiled the child). To the contrary, it is the standard of our heavenly Father by which all earthly fathers are to be judged. Your Father is a perfect Father who will only do that which is good for you, His children (Matthew 7:11). He takes you through trials, afflictions, loss, loneliness, heartache, and confusion, but He is with you each step of the way to use all hardships and blessings to build your character. He is more interested in your character than in your earthly comfort (as Christian fathers

should likewise be). He will never leave you, abandon you, nor forsake you. He is a merciful Father who forgives and restores (Psalm 103:13; prodigal son).

6. If you did not know your father or the father you had was destructive in your life, do not live in the past—let not that relationship destroy you through bitterness. You have a perfect Father. Fall upon your perfect Father who loves you with an everlasting love. As a father, you may have not had the example of a Christian father from whom to learn by his example to be a Christian father to your children. But you have a perfect Father who will train you to be a godly father if you will fill your mind with His Word and live in communion with Him. If your earthly father was no godly example to you, his sin and destructive ways do not have to define who you are. Determine (by God’s grace) that it is your heavenly Father is who will define who you are. Wallowing in self-pity, living in the past, or making excuses for your present sin because of the father you had is choosing to be a victim rather than a victor. It is blaming your father for your own sin. It is looking to your earthly father rather than to you heavenly Father. You are more than conquerors through Christ who loved you (Romans 8:37). Christian fathers, we have no excuse for not being loving, godly, patient, merciful fathers. We have the perfect example in our heavenly Father.

D. Question: Does “Our Father” mean we cannot pray to Jesus?

1. All of God’s Word is to instruct us in how to pray. Prayers are offered to Jesus (Acts 7:59; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; Revelation 22:20).

2. Since Jesus is God, we ought to worship Jesus (Matthew 14:33—and the Holy Spirit as well). We don’t worship Jesus as He is man, but as He is God. If we ought to worship Jesus as God, then we ought to pray to Him as God.

## II. Our God is Exalted (“Which art in heaven”).

A. If “Our Father” addresses the immanence (nearness) of God, then “which art in heaven” addresses the transcendence of God (His infinite exaltation and glorious distinction from us, Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 46:5; Isaiah 55:8-9).

1. Prayer is not trying to coax God into agreement with our thoughts and our ways. Prayer is exalting God’s sovereignty, majesty, and wisdom. Prayer is calling upon this sovereign God to mercifully supply all our needs, but it is also submitting ourselves under His supreme rule as a Royal Father when He answers “No” or “Wait”. Prayer is bringing our will into harmony with His will (not my will but thine be done).

2. Our Father is unlike any other father, for He is “our Father which art in heaven.” Whatever the weakness or sinfulness of we who are earthly fathers, God our Father has none of them. We cannot be all that a father should be to our children (we cannot pardon their sin), that is why we must always cry out to our Father to be their heavenly Father. “Be to my children all that I’m not.”

B. Application.

1. Until you truly understand your own finiteness and limitations, your own sinfulness and rebellion, your own foolishness and short-sightedness, your own fears and worries, you will not fall before your Father in heaven and declare His sovereignty, holiness, wisdom, and power. God is not only a personal Father. He is also a royal, majestic, kingly Father that is to be feared and revered. He is to be taken seriously. He is not “the old man upstairs.” He is not to be treated as if He does not see or hear what you do in secret. He is not to be ignored nor neglected. He is not to be mocked or used in jokes. He is the God who has no needs. He doesn’t need you or me. He chose us because He loved us.

2. So what is your need today? Forgiveness, overcoming some besetting sin, healing, work, courage, holiness, love, patience, contentment. There is nothing that you truly need that He cannot provide (Philippians 4:19). He is a mighty Father, and He is a good Father. Your need is a drop in the ocean compared to His infinite greatness, love, mercy, power, wisdom, and holiness. Before you get to your needs and

requests, exalt "Our Father which art in heaven."

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