

The Model Prayer (Part Two): Our Father In Heaven

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh
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Prayer is a form of communication from subject to Sovereign, suggesting the former requesting aid from the latter, just as in ancient times supplicants would approach the king's throne for a boon. The English word *pray*—"to entreat, implore, plead, or request"—finds its source through French in the Latin word *prex*, which means "a request, supplication, petition, or prayer." It is very much in line with Paul's exhortation in Philippians 4:6, ". . . let your requests be made known to God."

Opening His instruction to His disciples on how to pray, Jesus highlights the august Recipient of our requests, God the Father, who resides in heaven (Matthew 6:9). Listed first, as the salutation of the prayer, this instruction may be the most important for multiple reasons. Not only does it identify the Father as the Receiver of our petitions, but it also addresses Him in a reverential manner, stipulating the nature of the conversation: of a humble beseecher, hat in hand, asking for help from the Most High God.

The prayer's brief salutation, "Our Father in heaven," contains at least three elements critical to establishing the requester's proper frame of mind as he begins his prayer. It is always beneficial for a supplicant to know just Who he is asking to supply the answers to his requests.

1. Is God the Father of all? Ephesians 4:6.

Comment: In Scripture, each word is critical (see Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). The model prayer begins with the possessive pronoun "our," which provides a small detail that a praying person should heed. "Our" presupposes that others can claim the Father as the great God. Jesus, the Son of God, frequently calls Him "My Father" (see Matthew 20:23; Luke 10:22; John 8:38; 20:17; etc.), and in fact, He came to reveal the Father to us (John 1:18). Angels

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are sometimes called “sons of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Psalm 29:1; 89:6), so they can claim Him as Father too.

In Luke 3:38, the first man, Adam, is described as “the son of God.” By being descended from him, all humanity is likewise children of God through creation. As God Himself says in Jeremiah 32:27, “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh.”

A distinctive sub-group of all human sons of God are those, Paul writes, who “are led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:14). These elect sons of God are the people who can legitimately call the Sovereign of the universe “our Father in heaven,” because God has specifically chosen them to become His spiritual children and bear His Spirit. By this shared Spirit, effective communication between earth and heaven can occur (see John 16:13-15; Romans 8:15-16; I Corinthians 2:10-16; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 6:18).

In Matthew 6:9, “our” reminds us that converted Christians are a special people to God (I Peter 2:9-10). He has opened the way for us to have a unique, personal relationship with Him, a Father-child relationship whom no others of His angelic or uncalled human children claim: to become His Firstfruits, the Bride of His beloved Son, and heirs of all things (James 1:18; Revelation 19:7-8; Galatians 4:7). He is *our* Father in an exclusive and wonderful way!

2. In what way is God a Father? John 1:12-13.

Comment: A Christian’s relationship with God is rightly analogous to that of a human child with his human father. The Bible describes a process of spiritual growth from birth to maturity (and ultimately glorification) that the Father begins through a summons to His Son (John 6:44). Christ then works to bring us to belief and repentance to the point that we accept Him as our Savior and commit to a life of submission to God. God then gives us His Spirit.

When this occurs, regeneration happens (see Titus 3:5); it is a new birth—a new man is created (see Colossians 3:10), born spiritually

into true life (Romans 6:4; I Peter 3:18). The recent convert begins to learn and grow—just like a human baby—striving to mature “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). The apostle John puts it slightly differently: “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and . . . whatever is born of God overcomes the world” (I John 5:1, 4; see John 16:33).

Like a human father, God the Father cares for His children, providing them the benefits they need to thrive in their new life (Psalm 103:1-14; see I Peter 5:7, 10; II Peter 1:2-4). Jesus promises, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. . . . Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:23-24).

3. Why is the distinction “in heaven” significant? Ephesians 2:4-6.

Comment: Jesus’ instruction for us to address the Father as “our Father in heaven” does more than distinguish Him from our earthly fathers. For starters, it raises our sights from the earthly to the heavenly just by mentioning the place where God lives (see Revelation 4:1-11). In this way, it inspires us to focus our minds on godly, spiritual things rather than the material things and circumstances of this world.

It should also remind us that our true position, even as we live within the confines of earth, is seated with Him “in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). While adding to the realization of our unique status with God, it points toward our responsibilities as God’s children: to live godly in this age (Titus 2:12) and be witnesses of Him and His way of life before the world (Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:14-15; I Peter 2:12). The author of Hebrews explains that the faithful, whom Jesus says are not of this world (John 17:14, 16), “seek a homeland. . . . But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country” (Hebrews 11:14, 16). In seeking their heavenly homeland, they take on its characteristics and model them before the world.

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If we think on these things as we begin our prayers to our heavenly Father, we should be in the right frame of mind to communicate with Him effectively.