

Some Reflections on the Meanings  
Of the Prayer Commonly Known as



# The Lord's Prayer



*Prepared for the  
2011 Family Winter Retreat*

*At Iroquoia Bible Camp  
Hallstead, Pennsylvania*

*February 18 – 20, 2011*



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## Introduction

These studies will deal with prayer as our Lord Jesus taught it to His disciples in that sample prayer known as the Lord's Prayer. But first we must ask ourselves: "Why do we pray?" Certainly we pray to petition God for necessities. In fact one of the Greek words regularly translated to pray is δεησις deesis, {pronounced deh'-ay-sis} which means to petition or supplicate. We praise God in prayer for His goodness and mercy toward us. We were created to worship God and the act of worship certainly involves that prayer which affirms the worthiness of God. Yet there is a facet of prayer that is absolutely essential to all of these modes of prayer: awareness. Behind words lies thought. Behind thought lies awareness. Awareness controls what we think, feel, and do. All forms of prayer involve awareness at some level; awareness of the existence and presence of God, awareness of His blessings, awareness of our deep needs and our inability to meet them, awareness of His ability and desire to satisfy our often desperate needs. Jesus has given us a model prayer. When we deal with God's words, we strive to understand His thoughts. And when we have grasped as best we can those thoughts that He has set before us, He may choose to illuminate our hearts so that we become aware in new ways. Such a process is called μετανοεω metanoeo, {pronounced met-an-o-eh'-o} and is directly from God, experientially irreversible, and life transforming. This process is most easily illustrated by the retelling of a variant of an old parable.



There was once a great king who loved his subjects deeply and wished to provide much for their good. He was both wise and kind. He sought through the whole world and found an elephant. He understood how useful this creature could be to his subjects so it bought it at great price and brought it back to his palace. Not wishing to frighten his subjects with its size and power, he brought it into the palace at night so that none ever saw it. When he had stabled it in a great room, he drew all the curtains so that the room was in total darkness.

Revelation

Then he summoned several of his faithful servants. "I have brought a creature of great value to all my people and I want you to tell them about it."

"What shall we say sire?" They asked.

To one he said "Tell them that it is great in stature and mighty." To another he said "Tell them that when well treated, it is gentle and loving for all its power and strength." To a third he said "Tell them that it can bear each of you high above the earth." To a fourth he said "Tell them that it can do things for you that you could never do alone"

Inspiration

So they each went into the realm to tell the king's subjects of this most wonderful gift. Some spoke of its strength, some of its power, some of its gentleness and the need to treat it with care. But each said only what the king had told them to say. And they all aroused wonder in those who heard their report.

Soon the people came to the king and desired to behold the creature. The king let them enter the room but did not draw back the shades, lest they be frightened. Carefully they each circled around the creature in the dark and moved forward cautiously. They stretched forth their hands and gently touched it. One felt his great leg. "It is like a great palm trunk higher than I can reach." Another felt his ear. "No it is like a great palm leaf that stretches on forever." Another felt his tail. "No it is like a great whip." Another felt his trunk. "You are all wrong. It is like a powerful snake."

Contemplation

In their minds each tried to understand how best the creature might be used for the King's glory and for their own benefit. "I shall cut down the trunk and build a mighty palace", said the one. "And I shall cover it with the greatest of palm leaves." "Nay, I shall use the whip to subdue the nations." But the other said "I shall use the snake to bind what no rope can bind, the will of man!"

Reason & attachment

Each maintained his own use for the creature based on what he had perceived. Soon they fell to arguing and began to fight with each other over its use. As they argued and fought, some began to doubt the goodness, wisdom, and love of their king. Why would he give us a gift that causes us to strive and hurt one another? Some answered we fight not because of the king's gift but because of our failure to listen to each other. So each tried to understand the other's view by sharing their experience of the creature but this only left them more mystified. How can it be both trunk and snake, or palm leaf and whip, they asked in amazement?

Division & strife

Doubt

Confusion

Finally the King grew sad at their quarreling and grieved at their blindness so he directed that they step back and had the curtains drawn. Light filled the room! At last they all saw the elephant. Immediately they realized how foolish they had been. Each had understood something of the creature, but none had understood it all.

Illumination

Repentance

Then they looked at one another and saw the bruises they had caused by their fighting and remembered their hard words ill spoken. Shame filled their faces and they began to beg each other for forgiveness. Once again they were filled with brotherly love that they had known before being told of this wonderful creature. The king smiled and rejoiced at their change of heart.

Contrition

Faith & love

Finally the king told them how best to use his great gift, and each began to develop his own farm with the help of the King's elephant.

Obedience

## The Lord's Prayer



Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.



Those who pray well, live well. When the disciples asked Jesus “Lord, teach us to pray”, they might as well have asked Him ‘teach us to live’. They prayed but not the way Jesus did! They knew the difference. Watching Him pray awakened a deep yearning in their hearts and with it their request. What an answer they received! Jesus gave them not just the prayer of all prayer, but the blueprint of the entire spiritual life in just fifty seven words (in Greek – sixty six words in English). Jesus’ words are so simple a child can understand them; and so profound that the wisest scholars cannot plumb their depths. They inform and guide our thought and lead us to repentance and faith. What depths lie uncharted in these profoundly simple words? What a challenge to ponder their meaning? This is the fourth or fifth time that I have returned to this prayer. Each time I feel like a child on the seashore. Each time I find a new friend engaged in the same deep reverie. From John Chrysostom to Thomas Watson from Evelyn Underhill to Alan Redpath, from Nicholai Velimirovic to Igor Sikorsky, how many individuals have sought to plumb the depths of our Lord’s profoundly simple and transcendently profound words! How many have tried to understand and to live this prayer. I read their works, and am touched by the depth and breadth of their insights, each different, each uniquely their own. My heart returns again and again to this inexhaustible well. It is with the greatest delight that I look forward to read others for the first time, even as I meet old friends again, sharing together in trying to understand what Jesus has taught us so simply. We are all like children standing by the seashore with the ‘pretty shells’ we have found in hand, wondering about the glorious mysteries of the great deep hidden before us! Please join our number.

## Structure and Sequence

Jesus’ prayer has a structure that helps us understand it. The structure may be seen by looking at the words of the prayer in parallel columns:

<u>Address</u>	<u>Petitions of Committment</u>	<u>Personal Petitions</u>	<u>Affirmation</u>
	Hallowed be thy name.	Give us this day our daily bread.	For thine is the kingdom,
Our Father which art in heaven,	Thy kingdom come.	And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.	And the power,
	Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.	And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:	And the glory, for ever. Amen.

Behind the structure of this prayer, lies its order and it is in dwelling with the order of this prayer we can become aware of God's priorities for our lives.

### Address

The prayer begins with a direct address to God the Father. It contains the first of the three confessions in the prayer and the one that is fundamental to all prayer (and life in God): faith. "Our Father which art" is the basic **confession of faith**. As the Apostle reminds us, "...he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he rewards them that diligently seek him."<sup>1</sup> Without faith prayer is meaningless.

### Three Petitions of Commitment

The address is followed by six petitions<sup>2</sup>, but the first three have to do with the interests of God rather than personal needs. In so addressing ourselves to God, we not only set Him first in our thinking, but also align our will with His. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us..."<sup>3</sup> The fact that petitions for God's interests precede personal petitions lies in the nature of our relationship with Him. We were created for God. He does not exist for us or our benefit. Yet to hear the average array of prayer requests would seem to argue that our thinking is otherwise. Alan Redpath describes it aptly.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11:6

<sup>2</sup> I do not wish to be dogmatic here. There are many who break the last petition into two, making the count seven, which is fine. The last petition really has two parts but a close examination reveals that they are more closely linked. It is not the number (form) that is important but the petition itself (content).

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 5:14

“Every Sunday we receive in my church a number of requests for prayer. We count it a privilege to be entrusted with these and seek to enter sympathetically into every prayer request with the one who has sought prayer for his needs. Is it not, however, a reflection upon the general standard of our praying that practically all of these requests center around physical needs? Very seldom do we get a request to pray for a real spiritual issue, a revelation of the will of God, the glory of God in the life, the breaking through of the power of God in hearts.”<sup>4</sup>

This is not to say that we should not make our needs known to God, rather that we recognize that our very real needs are secondary and incidental to the real and overarching purpose of our lives: to glorify God by doing His will on earth as it is in heaven.

### **Three Petitions for Need**

The first petition of these three (“Give us this day our daily bread”) contains the second confession of the prayer, the **confession of need**. It reflects our humanity and sets the tone of this second triad: need. We are needy people. We are also dependant people. These three petitions reflect the awareness of our dependence upon God for our needs. They address the full temporal scope of our needy existence: Present (bread), Past (forgiveness), and Future (Leading & Deliverance). We are needy creatures, not only for things material (like bread) and things immaterial (like love and fellowship) to sustain our lives but especially for God, Himself.

The next petition contains the third confession of a need that our first parents ‘created’ through their sin. “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” is the basic **confession of sin** and reflects the need for forgiveness as a basis for daily fellowship with God. The fifth and sixth petitions both rest upon this confession, the fifth looking back to sin and the sixth looking forward to temptation, which simply tells us that sin affects all of our life time. Most people think of sin as a breaking a law or rule of God. Actually the laws of God are a revelation of the nature of the heart of God. So when we have sinned we have broken the heart of the One who loves us more than any other. When we have caused such pain to one we love, the normal response is sorrow (How could I do that to the One I love so!?). Considering that God is holy and just, the other response is guilt, which itself contains elements anger (Why did I **do** that!? What

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<sup>4</sup> Alan Redpath, Victorious Praying Fleming H. Revel Company Westwood, New Jersey 1962.



was I **thinking!**?); elements of fear (What if I get caught!? What will God do to me!?); and elements of shame (I am so ashamed of what I did!). We also experience fear because sin ruptures relationship (Why would God want me now!?). While these are very painful emotions, they are beneficial for the spiritual life. They humble us and teach us to look to God for forgiveness for having wronged and offended Him. They become great motivators to pray and hope in the mercy of God.<sup>5</sup>

The last petition looks ahead to future needs created by sin, for leading away from the temptation to sin that so easily besets us<sup>6</sup> and for deliverance in the terrible battle for the human will which is central to the spiritual life for us on earth. (Not my will but thy will be done!). When we look forward to the possibility of future failure, our emotional response is fear (What if I fail again!?). Thus it is that this profoundly simple prayer addresses two of the most prevalent and damaging emotional states in modern life: Guilt (over past failures) and Fear (of future failures). What we are looking for from God is that triad of blessings announced by the Apostles Paul and John in the introductions of some of their letters: Mercy for past failures, Grace to avoid future failures, and (at their intersection in the present moment) Peace with God and from God.<sup>7</sup> While grace, mercy, and peace extend far beyond this narrow compass, it is comforting to know that in this wonderful prayer the blessed triad makes its much needed appearance.

### **Affirmation**

The final words of the prayer are not a petition. They are an affirmation. They are also the justification for the entire preceding prayer. They continue the confession of faith and represent a commitment on the part of the person praying this prayer to live his life in a way that reflects the truth of God's existence. The

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 18:13 – 14      And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 12:1-2a      Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; ...

<sup>7</sup> 1 Timothy 1:2      Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

2 Timothy 1:2      To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Titus 1:4      To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

2 John 1:3      Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

last section echoes the prayer of King David.<sup>8</sup> A careful examination of the petitions of commitment reveals that they parallel the assertions of the affirmations.

Hallowed be thy name.

(Thine is) the glory, for ever.

Thy kingdom come.

For thine is the kingdom,

Thy will be done in earth,  
as it is in heaven

(Thine is) the power

Note that three things are mentioned as belonging to God: the kingdom, the power, and the glory.

As we dwell on these last affirmations, we realize that we can affirm God's plan for our lives without a detachment from our innate tendency to self control, self glorification, and self actualization is necessary not only to prayer, but also to godly living. The prayer reminds us that it is only as we follow Jesus' spiritual path and lose our lives for His sake that we find them, and as we renounce them that we are enabled to keep them unto eternal life.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Address**



Our Father which art in heaven,...



Communication requires awareness, and awareness is tied to reality. We achieve awareness by several means: by sight, by reason and by faith. Awareness can have many realities as its object, but the reality of God and supranatural things of

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<sup>8</sup> 1Chronicles 29:11      Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 10:39      He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.  
Matthew 16:24-26      Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

God are apprehended only by faith. So it is that prayer to God must be an expression of faith.

It is well to point out that there is a difference between our awareness of reality and reality itself. Reality exists apart from our perception of it. There is what the scriptures say and there is what we perceive the scriptures say. Our faulty perceptions of God's truth do not invalidate the truth of the scriptures; they only limit the application of it in our lives. Where perception of truth is an increasingly accurate and objective assessment of truth, human decision making and the governance of the will can align more perfectly with the truth. A simple example of this is found in law courts where the witness is sworn to tell the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". Without knowing the truth about a certain set of events, a judge can form no reasonable judgment about the lawfulness of the events being tried<sup>10</sup>. In short without truth, there is no justice. But the witness can only tell what they have perceived to have happened and this is at best an approximation of the objective truth about the events under scrutiny. This is the reason for the biblical principle: "in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."<sup>11</sup> It is important to remember that failure to be aware of reality does not in any way limit the existence of that reality. Whether or not justice was done in a particular case, justice can be done in every case. Many a case has been reopened and the innocent have been exonerated in the light of new evidence not subject to the vagaries and errors of human perception after having been condemned in an earlier court through misinformation. Awareness, the ability to discern truth from falsity, may be seen as a fundamental measure of progress of the spiritual life.<sup>12</sup> Reflection on this opening phrase of the model prayer presents several aspects of reality for us to grow in awareness of.

## **Community**



Our...



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<sup>10</sup> Psalm 89:14      Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 18:16b, II Corinthians 13:1, I Timothy 5:19, Hebrews 10:28

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 5:14      But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The pronoun “our” is the first of eight such references<sup>13</sup>. It marks this as a corporate prayer and encourages a personal awareness of the corporate nature of our existence. “We would remember we are one with every saint that loves thy name”<sup>14</sup> It constrains us not to lapse into egocentricity that is so often the field of selfish desire. Although we are praying individually, we are praying as part of a believing community. We are not alone. We have a vast set of horizontal relationships in Christ. And we are not praying for ourselves alone but for all the saints. If our “I, me, and my” prayers were compared to this beginning, how short many of them would fall. So often we come to prayer aware only of what I need or (worse yet) what I want, totally oblivious of the situations and needs of our brethren. We would do well to hearken to the words of Jesse to his son David: “Run to the camp to thy brethren...and look how thy brethren fare”<sup>15</sup> And what would we find? Wonder of wonders, we might find that they are praying for us when we have forgotten to pray for them. At every hour of the day and night prayers for us all ascend before the throne of God to be joined with the unceasing intercession of our risen Lord Jesus.

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.<sup>16</sup>

What better way to love one another than to pray for each other? Although we pray individually, the deep awareness that we are praying as part of a believing community, enables us to fulfill Jesus’ command to love one another, and to testify to men that we are His disciples. We are not alone relationally. We have a vast set of horizontal relationships; we are a community, a family. The world knows something of this in its societal structures. But society is not community as David Timms points out so clearly in his meditations on living the Lord’s Prayer,

Western culture is adrift. At some point in the past, we left the moorings of community and settled for society. The shift has had profound implications. *Society* speaks to our ability to organize ourselves as a group of people. *Community* speaks of our connectedness to one another. The two terms share common ground – people – but their commonality stops there. A stronger society does not necessarily produce a stronger

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<sup>13</sup> Our Father ... Give us ... our daily bread... forgive us ... we forgive our debtors... lead us ... deliver us...

<sup>14</sup> From the hymn of James G. Deck (1807-1884) “Lord, We Would Ne’er Forget Thy Love”

<sup>15</sup> 1Samuel 17: 17a & 18b

<sup>16</sup> John 13:34-35

community. For example, a well oiled Little League Baseball club (a sporting *society*), with a weekly email contact and automated phone reminders of upcoming events, carefully planned schedules and smooth administration does not automatically produce camaraderie among parents and good will among players. As a group of people with a mutual interest in baseball they may have a strong society but a relatively weak *community*. Many people within a society get a service they want, but may barely know each other. The club (society) has rules that tell people how to report misbehavior, fulfill team responsibilities, collect sponsorships, and treat umpires. But a *community* requires more than policies and procedures. Indeed, community cannot be legislated with bylaws or constructed with a constitution.

In short we have generally failed to build community and, instead, settled for society. We function satisfactorily with many people but have virtually no meaningful connection with any of them.

We need not dwell on the multiple and complex factors that produce social isolation. Suffice to note that most of us have grown up in it and have grown accustomed to it. Indeed evidence of our inclination to prefer society over community is that we have to resort to *systems* rather than rely on *people*. If someone injures us, we immediately consider lawsuit options through the courts. We use judicial, political, educational, medical, and financial systems to our advantage if at all possible. We no longer negotiate firsthand with people but third hand (I will speak to my lawyer who will speak to your lawyer who will speak to you), and we insist that the various systems protect our personal rights. All this breeds a culture absorbed by personal rights rather than collective good, something that reflects a strong society and a weak community.”<sup>17</sup>

Where David Timms draws the tension between the terms society and community, I have customarily used the terms organization and organism. In either case, the church should reflect the latter of each: community and organism. How tragic that often the church is an organization and a society (a ‘club’) where the individual members know little to nothing of each others’ lives and seem to care less. May the opening word of this prayer bring much needed repentance in this area!

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<sup>17</sup> David Timms, Living the Lord’s Prayer, Page 26-27, Bethany House, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2008 ISBN 978-0-7642-0506-4.

## Family



...Father...



The second word “Father” encourages us to be aware of Whom we address. It tells us something of the nature of that vertical relationship that we all have with God. It also modifies all of our horizontal relationships. If all who truly pray this prayer have a common Father, then they must more than just a community, they are the fundamental community – the family: brothers and sisters in the faith. Furthermore the character of the Father defines the character of the family, so awareness of the character of the One whom we are called to address should inform our underlying attitudes not only in prayer but also in all of our life and relationships with our brothers and sisters. The word ‘Father’ calls up a wealth of human experience with our earthly fathers.

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?<sup>18</sup>

Ideally the human experience of a ‘father of our flesh’ (i.e. a human father) should have been good and rewarding. It should be one of the earliest revelations of the character of God. Tragically, not all people have had such parental examples. For some believers, this second word is a real roadblock. Their understanding of God, colored by a dysfunctional or failed relationship with their human father, is painful or threatening. They have a poor foundation for understanding the most important relationship in life. God understands such tragic souls.

A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.<sup>19</sup>

As I have grown older, it has been one of my chief aims to emulate our “Father in heaven” particularly as a father to the fatherless, as a father image or role model

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<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 12:9

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 68:5

for younger people who desperately need to understand the nature of God's love for them and to see that in everyday situations.

When our familial relationship with "our Father" is as it should be, then the tone of our horizontal relationships will be one of shared awe and reverence for the Father. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."<sup>20</sup> How vast is the impact of that awe which attends the dawning awareness of the One we are instructed to call "Father". The Fear of the Lord is teachable<sup>21</sup>, foundational to knowledge<sup>22</sup> and to wisdom<sup>23</sup>. It is the means by which wisdom is obtained<sup>24</sup> and is the very summation or essence of wisdom<sup>25</sup>. Obtaining it is a choice that we make<sup>26</sup> which should become an unbroken daily discipline<sup>27</sup>. If sought for its great value, it will be found<sup>28</sup> and become the individual's treasure<sup>29</sup> bringing great recompense of reward<sup>30</sup>. It has many salutary consequences. Among these are repentance<sup>31</sup>, purification<sup>32</sup>, and separation<sup>33</sup>. It produces integrity<sup>34</sup>, and restrains evil intentions<sup>35</sup>. It is a source of life<sup>36</sup>, prolongs life<sup>37</sup>, protects life<sup>38</sup> and encourages a full and rich life<sup>39</sup> by means

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<sup>20</sup> Proverbs 9:10

<sup>21</sup> Psalm 34:11 Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

<sup>22</sup> Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning {or, the principal part} of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

<sup>23</sup> Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

<sup>24</sup> Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility

<sup>25</sup> Job 28:28 And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

<sup>26</sup> Proverbs 1:29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD;

<sup>27</sup> Proverbs 23:17 Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.

<sup>28</sup> Proverbs 2:45a If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD.

<sup>29</sup> Isaiah 33:6 And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation {Heb. salvations}; the fear of the LORD is his treasure.

<sup>30</sup> Proverbs 22:4 By humility {or, The reward of humility} and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honor, and life

<sup>31</sup> Proverbs 16:6 By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

<sup>32</sup> Psalm 19:9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

<sup>33</sup> Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

<sup>34</sup> 2 Chronicles 19:7 Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

<sup>35</sup> 2 Chronicles 17:10 And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat.

<sup>36</sup> Proverbs 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

<sup>37</sup> Proverbs 10:27 The fear of the LORD prolongeth {Heb. addeth} days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

<sup>38</sup> Proverbs 14:26 In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.

<sup>39</sup> Proverbs 19:23 The fear of the LORD tendeth to life; and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

satisfaction with what God provides.<sup>40</sup> The Fear of the Lord describes the inward life of our Lord Jesus<sup>41</sup> and is clearly applicable to His Church<sup>42</sup>.

But the vertical relationship with God is not one sided. As noted by Paul, the term Father is chosen against the background of divinely appointed human parentage in which, under ideal circumstances, the children learn or become aware of the nature of parental love. This is needful because prayer is not only an expression of faith, it is also an expression of love, love learned from a loving parent, a parent whom we trust and want to talk to. Arriving at the levels of faith (awareness) and love (desire) manifest in this prayer is often the result of severe trials as in the case of the prodigal son whose awareness of his father's love is achieved in two distinct stages. Foolishly and prematurely he asked his father for his inheritance. Unaware of the labor required to generate wealth, he set off to enjoy the pleasures of consuming wealth he had not amassed by the sweat of his own brow.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! <sup>43</sup>

When the prodigal thinks about his miserable situation, the consequence of his unwise choices, he “comes to himself”. Necessity forces him to change his mind. He now realizes more accurately the truth about himself and his folly. This awareness gives him the words to say to his father. He sees life in a new and tragic way with new possibilities for (humiliating) actions and a new (but faint) hope for the future. As mentioned above, the Greek word for such a mind changing event is μετανοια (metanoia) normally translated repentance. But it is his trust in his father that provides him with the motive for going to him and saying what he has discovered. He decides I will “arise and go to my father, and

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<sup>40</sup> Proverbs 15:16

Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.

<sup>41</sup> Isaiah 11:2-3

And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 9:31

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

<sup>43</sup> Luke 15:14-18a



will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, ..."44. In short it is when he wills to go to his father that he prays for his father's forgiveness and mercy.

... the son said...Father, I ... am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said... this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.<sup>45</sup>

What a lesson in prayer! In a moment, in response to his prayer, the younger son becomes aware of a far greater reality than that of his folly and sin. He finds the lesson of a lifetime: that he is loved not for what he has done or failed to do (of that he has become painfully aware). Rather he is loved because of who his Father is. This is a lesson that even the older brother does not understand, and maybe never will. So then we may observe that this sudden burst of awareness of the character of his father following hard on the heels of that earlier awareness of his profligacy is at once liberating and compensating. It liberates him because, like all truth, it sets him free<sup>46</sup> to serve his father out of a love born in response to the Father's love and not for selfish gain which is all his older brother seems to know. It is compensating because to experientially know the love of the Father is a treasure worth more than all he could have inherited. He has squandered all his assets in profligacy, but the new-found awareness of the character of the Father's love is a treasure worth more than lost materialities.<sup>47</sup> These two stages taken together represent a complete change of the mind. So we see that thought can bring repentance which tells us what to say, but "faith which worketh by love"<sup>48</sup> prompts us to pray.

Prayer has real therapeutic value for us, in altering and increasing personal awareness of ourselves and of God and the redirection of our will in love. The consideration of the mechanics of intelligent prayer not only leads us to the realization that reason and faith are cooperatively linked, but that repentance and faith are inseparably and foundationally linked as well.<sup>49</sup> Repentance as an integral part of growing faith is the norm for communication with God. They are

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<sup>44</sup> Luke 15:18 b

<sup>45</sup> Luke 15:21-24 (selected)

<sup>46</sup> John 8:32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

<sup>47</sup> Philippians 3:7-8 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ...

<sup>48</sup> Galatians 5:6

<sup>49</sup> Hebrews 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,...

the hallmarks of spiritual growth. With this realization, the words of God thorough Isaiah take on new meaning. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."<sup>50</sup>

So it is that the title 'Father' draws forth both awe (the fear of the Lord) at the presence of the transcendent One and love in response to the insuperable and marvelous Love of God whose immanence in our lives is like the familiar fragrance of his Father's beard which the prodigal smelled when the Father embraced him with such love. Love and awe are fused in one glorious instant never to be parted again! When our Lord's word 'Father' rings in our soul, we understand that all is different, changed in an instant! The word that He has spoken to us truly is spirit and life.<sup>51</sup> We have become irreversibly aware of our relation with a loving Father God! No wonder Teresa of Avila speaks of an old woman who spent an hour over the first two words of this prayer, absorbed in reverence and love.

## The Cross



Our Father...



That these horizontal and vertical relationships interpenetrate and inform each other should not be surprising. The Apostle John reminds us of this.<sup>52</sup> Paul in reflecting on the Decalogue summarizes the commandments including those relating to God under the heading of love of neighbor for much the same reason.<sup>53</sup> The interrelation of horizontal and vertical relationships is not accidental, seeing that the establishment and maintenance of both is rooted in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.<sup>54</sup> So the third aspect of awareness

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<sup>50</sup> Isaiah 1:18

<sup>51</sup> John 6:63      It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

<sup>52</sup> 1 John 4:20      If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

<sup>53</sup> Galatians 5:14      For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

<sup>54</sup> Ephesians 2:13-16      But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

that is encouraged by these opening words is the Cross. We cannot begin to enter into the meaning of this prayer without a profound awareness of the reality of Jesus' suffering on the cross for us and what that He has accomplished there. The apostle Paul reminds us that not only are we made one, but the cross forever stands between us and the world.<sup>55</sup> The articulation of the words "Our Father" presents the reality that we are dead to the world and the world is dead to us. The cross has done its work completely. It really is finished!

Then too, the intersection of two lines shows location. The phrase "X marks the spot" is proverbial not just for the fictional treasure map, but for all of life. The intersection of two lines defines a point in space. That intersection conveys a sense of place. We go to the mall and scan the map for a particular store. After locating the store, we must discover where we are. We are looking for an "X" that tells us "you are here." So these two words taken together tell us something of our place in the spiritual universe. Our place is in relation to God and our brothers and sisters. Not only do these two words tell us who we are, but they tell us where we are. We are no longer lost. We are family. We are home.

### Presence



Our Father which art ...



As noted above, this is the first of three confessions in the prayer: the confession of faith. In order for communication to occur, there must be an awareness of the presence of the person we are communicating with. Suppose you asked me about meditation and as an exercise in maintaining focus on a particular verse, I propose the total deprivation of all sensory inputs so that the interior processes of reflection on the word of God may proceed without distraction. I ask you to step into a room without windows and totally devoid of any furniture except for a comfortable chair. You sit down and I tell you to engage in thinking about the selected verse and that I will be back in about half an hour. After I close the door, the room is completely dark and totally silent. Presumably your interior thought processes are sufficiently developed so that you are comfortable with the temporary silence and darkness and do not need to externalize your thought

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<sup>55</sup> Galatians 6:14

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom {or, whereby} the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

processes by talking to yourself.<sup>56</sup> Your meditation proceeds for the appointed time but you are not aware of passing time. I enter softly, admitting no light, so as not to disturb you. You are still not aware of my presence. I mention your name quietly and you begin to speak and tell me what has transpired during the exercise. Note, that until I speak, making you aware of my presence, you do not communicate. But, as soon as you are aware of my presence in the darkened room, the need to communicate finds expression.

Unlike the human experience described above, we become aware of the presence of God by faith. We have a remarkable example of the consequences of a habitual recognition of the presence and character of God in the testimony of Nicholas Herman (better known by his 17<sup>th</sup> century monastic name Brother Lawrence). His simple faith, exercised in a monastic setting, bore witness of a real work of God in his Heart:

Br. Lawrence told me .... That all possible mortifications would not serve to blot out a single sin, unless they were grounded in the love of God. We ought patiently to await the remission of our sins through the precious blood of our Lord, simply trying to love Him with all our heart. <sup>57</sup>

Brother Lawrence spoke to me, openly and with deep fervor, about his way of going to God, .... He told me that it consists in one good act of renunciation of all those things which we recognize do not lead to God, so that we may accustom ourselves to a continual communion with Him, a communion devoid both of vagueness and of artifice. We need only realize that God is close to us and to turn to Him at every moment, to ask for His help to learn His will in doubtful things, and to do gladly those which we clearly perceive He requires of us, offering them to Him before we begin, and giving Him thanks when they have been finished for His honor.

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<sup>56</sup> While this may seem a strange exercise, it really is not. It has its roots in Jesus' admonition in Matthew 6:6 "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret..." In early Christian writings like those of Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, and in others: the room was the body, the closet the heart and the door the five senses, the discipline of prayer involving the conscious removal from all external distractions to prayer. It is for this reason that we still close our eyes when praying. There is a personal account of the struggle for interior stillness in Mrs. Cowman's famous devotional *Streams in the Desert* for June 30<sup>th</sup> that is not unlike the spiritual problems that would be encountered in such an exercise.

<sup>57</sup> Second conversation

The Practice of the Presence of God recounted by Abbe de Beaufort, translated by Donald Attwater, Templegate Publishers 1974

That in this uninterrupted communion we are unceasingly occupied in praising, worshipping and loving God for His infinite goodness and perfection. .... That his prayer was simply to realize the presence of God, at which time his soul was unconscious of aught else but love; and afterwards he found scarcely any difference, for he continued with God, praising and blessing Him with all his might. And so he passed his life in unbroken joy; yet hoping that God would give him somewhat to suffer when he should grow stronger.”<sup>58</sup>

Prayer and faith are intimately linked in scripture.<sup>59</sup> The phrase “the prayer of faith” in James leads us to consider how are they related? Faith is sometimes seen as something to be conjured up so that God will answer the prayer we have just uttered. Some think of it as a kind of post facto spiritual state that must be created after praying in order to make the prayer work, like gasoline makes the automobile work. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Faith has to do with perception or awareness. And our perception or awareness influences our actions. But the question that is supremely important is whether our perceptions are accurate or more precisely do they accord accurately with truth. The frequent affirmation “you gotta believe” is pointless unless we ask ourselves, “believe what?” The answer clearly is to believe the truth. Faith, in and of itself, has no real value apart from the truth. When people believe a lie, it is disastrous in their lives.<sup>60</sup>

The perception of reality or truth rests upon our ability to perceive, which lies on at least three levels, physical, mental, and spiritual. On the physical plane, our five senses are all focused on materiality. We are inundated with physical sensations from the world outside ourselves, a world that may be very pleasant (a lovely day in the park) or very threatening (a fast ride on a crowded and poorly lit superhighway during an ice storm). Under the latter circumstances we drive very much by sight and sense. Further information is provided about the why and how of what we see, hear, touch, smell and taste by our cognitive abilities. Not only do we experience but we think. The danger of the fast ride is certainly mitigated by our understanding of how to drive under such conditions.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> James 5:14 – 15

Fourth conversation

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

<sup>60</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:11

... And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.

So we drive not only by sight and sense but by prior training, memory, habit, and an understanding of basic physics.

But there is truth that is not accessible to physical sense or reason. We become aware of these supranatural realities and live our lives in the light of them every day. We call the ability to lay hold of these immaterial realities: faith. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."<sup>61</sup>

It is common to confuse mental assent (or a merely rational perception of truth) with faith. For example, it is common theology to accept omnipresence as an attribute of God. But what does this mean in our practice? We say that we "believe" God is present at all times and in all places, but why then do we go on sinning before the face of God? Would we behave in the physical presence of our fellow church members as we behave when we sin privately? We say we that we "believe" in the omnipresence of God but our actions belie the truth of that assertion. In thought we are Christian, but in faith we are atheists. Stephen Charnock notes that all sin may be looked upon as a form of "virtual atheism"

All sin is founded in a secret atheism. Atheism is the spirit of every sin; all the floods of impieties in the world break in at the gate of secret atheism, and though several sins may disagree with one another, yet, like Herod and Pilate against Christ, they join hand in hand against the interest of God. ....All the wicked inclinations in the heart, and struggling motions, secret repinings, self-applauding confidences in our own wisdom, strength, &c, envy, ambition, revenge, are sparks from this latent fire; the language of every one of these is, I would be a Lord to myself and would not have a God superior to me."<sup>62</sup>

That sin so easily besets us<sup>63</sup> does not mean, however, that we are lost and doomed to hell. It only indicates that we have confused thoughts about truth with faith in the Truth. Both thought and faith deal with immaterialities, and it is quite common, therefore, to confuse the two. Thought may or may not influence action, but faith most assuredly governs it. This is what James meant when he

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<sup>61</sup> Hebrews 11:3

<sup>62</sup> Stephen Charnock, Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God reprint of 1853 Robert Carter & Brothers Edition by Baker Book House 1988. Chapter II "On practical Atheism"

<sup>63</sup> Hebrews 12:1-2a Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith ...

said, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."<sup>64</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the difference is known by the fruits.<sup>65</sup> It is the grace of God in response to faith that results in the transformation of the "tree" from evil to good (repentance), and the inevitable yielding of good fruit. While our ideas of what is true (intellectual assent) may be quite accurate they can far outstrip our faith in those very truths. Faith makes us aware of truth in a way that inevitably results in actions or "works" chief among which is prayer.

It was this deep awareness of God's presence that seemed so overwhelming for David<sup>66</sup> that no matter where he was God was there. This is not David having a thought about God which he will alternately entertain and forget but rather a deep awareness that never leaves him. It is this awareness that transforms the spiritual life. We must learn to rely steadfastly on faith's testimony about the presence of God. Faith in God and the deep sense of God's presence is absolutely essential to the spiritual life "for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."<sup>67</sup> The profound awareness of God's presence inevitably precipitates that communication which we call prayer, the prayer of faith. Prayer (if it is real) is an expression of faith from start to finish. In abstract this may seem a mundane truism; in practice it is not always realized. The very act of praying is the expression of faith that believes that God is present and that He hears. The lack of such deep awareness of God's presence results in the failure to regularly communicate with Him. We act, all too often as if God, who is ever present and totally aware, is really nowhere and unaware. Such is the blindness of unbelief, even though we "know" better.

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<sup>64</sup> James 2:17

<sup>65</sup> Matthew 7:16-20    Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

<sup>66</sup> Psalm 139:7 – 13    Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

<sup>67</sup> Hebrews 11:6

## Place



Our Father which art in heaven ...



What does the word “heaven” mean to us? As creatures in time and space, we tend to think geographically. The scriptures speak of three heavens, the air that surrounds us,<sup>68</sup> the universe of celestial wonders that lies beyond the atmosphere,<sup>69</sup> (sometimes called the heaven of heavens<sup>70</sup>) and the third heaven which is likened to paradise<sup>71</sup>. But God cannot be contained spatially. Solomon realizes this. As he begins building the Temple, he says of God, “But who is able to build him a house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him?”<sup>72</sup>

When we think about heaven in contrast to earth, what emotional response do we have? Perhaps we have a great longing to be there as Paul did.<sup>73</sup> Certainly in keeping with our thoughts about the fear of the Lord and the exceeding greatness of the Father, heaven should evoke a sense of awe. Heaven not only tells *where* we are not, but *what* we are not.

... God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.<sup>74</sup>

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Jeremiah 4:25

I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled.

<sup>69</sup> Psalm 8:3 - 4

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

<sup>70</sup> Nehemiah 9:6

Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.

<sup>71</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:2

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven ...How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

<sup>72</sup> 2 Chronicles 2:6

<sup>73</sup> Philippians 1:23

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

<sup>74</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:1-2

<sup>75</sup> Isaiah 55: 8, 9



As we ponder the vastness of the heavens and the starry host, our sense of awe may be accompanied by the sense of our smallness as was David.

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him?  
And the son of man, that thou visitest him?<sup>76</sup>

When we look at the phrase we are considering, a more accurate translation is “Our Father which art in the heavens” Certainly this reflects Solomon’s awareness of the special transcendence of God, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. But it also reminds us that God who is in the heavens is also very near to each of us, since the heavens begin with the very air which we breathe. God who is transcendent is also immanent. When we breathe out our prayers of devotion and faith, in a sense we are “whispering” into the ear of God, and He hears His child’s every word, though it is but a groan.

As for us, we are creatures of place and will be for eternity if we take our Lord’s words at face value.

In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.<sup>77</sup>

But is Heaven primarily geographic? We know that God is in all places. He is understood by us as omnipresent, and cannot be trapped within the space of His creation, though that space itself is unbounded. We also know that He is undivided<sup>78</sup>. Reason suggests that He must be wholly present in all space undivided and undiminished. It is not that “heaven” is a place that defines where God is, but rather it is God who defines where heaven is. To be with God is to be in heaven, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being;<sup>79</sup>... Therefore all space may be said to be, at least potentially, “heaven”. Lest we wax too speculative, however, this sin filled earth is most certainly not heaven, as the second and third petitions imply. Solomon’s pointed question needs to be answered “will God dwell with men?”<sup>80</sup> The answer, according to scripture is

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<sup>76</sup> Psalm 8:3 – 4

<sup>77</sup> John 4:2-3

<sup>78</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

<sup>79</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>80</sup> 2 Chronicles 6:18 But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?

definitely yes.<sup>81</sup> So, while all space is potentially heaven, it is God's choice (as was the case of Jerusalem<sup>82</sup>) as to the exact time and place of His entry into our limited universe. The establishment of God's kingdom on earth is therefore a most valid prayer.

But we are not only beings trapped in time and space, we are also spiritual beings, capable of having communion with God. The awareness of God's presence enters into what heaven is for us. Spiritually, heaven is not so much a matter of place as it is a state of the awareness of the reality of God's presence. When we are sensible of the wonder of His glorious presence, though we apprehend that only through the eye of faith, we really are in heaven. For Jacob resting in a barren field of rocks, the remarkable experience of God's presence transformed his vision of where he was.

And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, how dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.<sup>83</sup>

Are you in such a barren field of worthless obstacles? So often we pray to God asking Him to change our situation. It is far better if prayer changes us in our situation! This phrase, rightly understood, can change everything. If you are whispering this phrase "Our Father which art in the heavens" into the very ear of God, are you really where you think you are? Are you really in the situation that you think you are? The awareness of God's presence in every situation (good or bad) of our lives can change our perception of that situation dramatically. For me, this is the genius of the poetic words of the hymn writer who said: "Shut in with Him far, far above the restless world that wars below..."<sup>84</sup> To be deeply aware of His presence, of who He is, and who we are in relation to Him and of our place in Him spiritually, that is to be aware of heaven.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,  
Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ,

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<sup>81</sup> Revelation 21:3      And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

<sup>82</sup> 1Kings 11:36      And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there.

<sup>83</sup> Genesis 28:16-17

<sup>84</sup> Alexander Stewart    Lord Jesus Christ, We seek thy Face

(by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:<sup>85</sup>

Spiritually that is where we are now. That is our position, not geographically (or experientially), but in reality! When once we grasp this all is changed, as with Jacob in Bethel. Jesus says it so simply: “ ... the kingdom of God is within you.”<sup>86</sup>

We love to spread our branches;  
The root-life we neglect.  
We love to shine in public,  
And human praise expect;  
While in the inner chamber,  
Where creature voices cease,  
We may meet God in silence,  
And breathe in Heaven's peace

The secret of deep living  
Lies in the secret place  
Where, time and sense forgotten,  
We see God face to face;  
Beyond mere forms and symbols,  
Beyond mere words and signs,  
Where in that hidden temple  
The light eternal shines.

- *Max I. Reich*

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<sup>85</sup> Ephesians 2:4-6

<sup>86</sup> Luke 17: 20 – 21

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation {or, with outward show}. Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you {or, among you}

## **The Petitions**

What does it mean “to petition”? Why do we petition? Apart from a legal understanding, there is the human experience of desire. That is, back of every real petition, there is human desire. Prayer then may be understood as the articulation of our desires. Human desire, however, is not simple. It is richly layered and interwoven on many levels of our thinking and affections, both conscious and unconscious. Thoughtful consideration of human desire will reveal that the interrelations have priorities.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?<sup>87</sup>

Peter’s desire for Jesus is unquestionable, that is not the issue here. The issue here is the priority of his love or desire: lovest thou me more than these? The psalmist knows of this deep desire when he says:

Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.<sup>88</sup>

There are six petitions in this prayer in two separate close - coupled triads. The first triad focuses upon God.

## **The First Three Petitions**

The first three petitions of this prayer are first because they are to be expressions of our highest priority, our deepest desires, and our most profound love. They all center in God: thy name, thy kingdom, thy will. Having entered this prayer by way of faith through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are soon challenged by the very words of the prayer to be enflamed with an all consuming love for God. If this becomes our experience, then these petitions will follow naturally as the best expression of that love. But why are there three petitions and in what way are they connected? Here we see an indirect reference to the three persons of the Trinity. Although each person (hypostases) is legitimately linked to each object of petition, the use of the Name has special reference to the Father.<sup>89</sup> The Kingdom has special reference to the Son.<sup>90</sup> The Will (Leading & Power) has

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<sup>87</sup> John 21:15

<sup>88</sup> Psalm 73:25

<sup>89</sup> John 17:6

<sup>90</sup> Revelation 11:15

I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world...

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

special reference to the Holy Spirit.<sup>91</sup> As we are ineffably loved by each person of the God Head, the love that we have for God in return is due to all the Persons of the Trinity

### Hallowing the Name



Hallowed be thy name



“Hallowed be thy Name” is the first petition. The strange word “hallow” comes from the Anglo-Saxon halgian, from halig, meaning “holy”. To “hallow the name” includes not only the inward attitude of profound reverence and the outward action of active praise, but also personal godliness, loving obedience and aggressive Christ-likeness, which reveal the presence of God in the life, which is His true earthly glory. Our relationship with our heavenly Father should be such that we hallow or set apart His name by the character of the life that we live. As the Apostle Peter reminds us, “it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”<sup>92</sup>.

But what is meant by “thy name”? When Moses came to “the bush burned with fire, and ... was not consumed”<sup>93</sup>, God spoke to him and commissioned him to go to Pharaoh and bring the people of God out of Egyptian bondage.

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.<sup>94</sup>

When we pray are we aware that we are addressing the great “I AM that I AM”, before whom Moses removed his sandals and bowed his head on holy ground? Such a realization is startling and even frightening! But what does the Name

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<sup>91</sup> Zechariah 4:6      Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.  
Galatians 5:18      But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.  
Acts 1:8              But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you:

<sup>92</sup> 1Peter 1:16

<sup>93</sup> The story is found in Exodus 3

<sup>94</sup> Exodus 3:13 - 14

mean? I AM THAT I AM is the language of pure self existent being. The Name of God constitutes the revelation of His Person. We who are made in the image of God use this nominal construct all the time. If you were to ask me who I am, I might say I am Joseph. That is the name that invites relationship. Colloquially we speak of knowing someone on a first name basis. The other day, my wife Dianne and I were going for a little ride. She mentioned that “Mr. McEwen” had cows again. Who is that, I asked? I recognized the family name of our next door neighbor, but I didn’t know which family member of that name she was speaking of. I told you their name, she answered. But I don’t who you mean. What is his first name? I know several neighbors with that family name. If their first name is mentioned, I know who they are immediately without their surname. Names speak of relationship as well as identity.

But there are other bases for identity. If you asked me Joe, who are you really? I could give several answers, each equally valid because of different bases for identity. It could become quite a list

Statement of <u>Identity</u>	Basis of <u>Identity</u>
I am an engineer	Profession
I am a husband	Marital / relational / legal
I am a man	Gender
I am a father	Relational...
Etc.	

The point to be observed is that for each “I am” statement of identity there is some external basis for that identity. When God reveals His identity, he does so in terms of Himself. He is the basis of His own identity.

Statement of Identity	Basis of Identity
I AM THAT I AM	I AM

When we think about the bases for our identity, they are not only external to ourselves but mutable and linked to this present world. This means that when things change (we lose our job, our mate dies or divorces us; we lose our savings) we can suffer an identity crisis. As the basis of His own Identity, God is unique, immutable, perfect, and complete! The dialogue of Jesus with Peter becomes very enlightening here for us. Jesus stops and asks the disciples a very simple but

profoundly searching question: Who do you say I am?<sup>95</sup> When Peter articulates what God the Father has shown him of Jesus' true identity, Jesus responds by proclaiming him blessed and changes his name from Simon (changeable) to Peter (a Rock). Jesus had foretold that this would happen<sup>96</sup> and now it had. When Simon discovers who Jesus really is, Peter's name (identity) changes. That is he had previously been the "son of" or "Bar Jonas". Now he has a new identity not based on human generation but on the Son of God Himself. Jesus is now the basis of Peter's identity. This is not unique to Peter; it pertains to all of us. When God reveals the identity of His Son experimentally, Jesus becomes the unique, immutable, perfect and complete basis for our new identity.

In David's famous shepherd psalm<sup>97</sup> he begins with the sentence "The LORD is my shepherd". In the Hebrew it is two words: **רעה יהוה** (Jehovah - ra'ah), one of the names by which God reveals Himself to David. But the translator correctly inserts "my" because the revelation of His name "Jehovah - ra'ah" gives David a new identity as his sheep.

When we pray "Hallowed be thy name" God might well ask us 'What is my name? Who do you say I AM? The scriptures give us many insights.

### Jehovah – jireh

And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Matthew 16:15 - 18 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

<sup>96</sup> John 1:42b And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

<sup>97</sup> Psalm 23:1

<sup>98</sup> Genesis 22:11 – 14                      Jehovah-jira                      the LORD will provide or the LORD will see (to it)

God sees our needs and cares for us. He provided a sacrifice for faithful Abraham, and has provided the Sacrifice of all sacrifices for you and me – his beloved Son! Do we show forth our confidence in His provision, even in hard times? Or do we fret with care over the daily needs of life? Have we not experienced His continual care? Then surely the Sacrifice of all sacrifices should be seen in our lives of self denial and self sacrifice as we give glory to Jehovah – jireh, the God who sees.

### Jehovah-rapha

And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.<sup>99</sup>

Sin has produced all manner of spiritual sickness. The earthly miracles of our Savior testify to his healing ability, making the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the dumb to speak, the lame to walk, the leper cleansed, and the dead raised to life. Such were all of us in sin: deaf and blind to God, dumb to His praise, crippled and infected by sin's corruption and cut off from God, dead in trespasses and sin. But God has healed us, and is healing us every day. Have we discovered Him as the Divine Physician? Then surely we are his patients and the healing that we receive at his hands should bring glory to Jehovah-rapha, the LORD that healeth thee.

### Jehovah-shalom

And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.<sup>100</sup>

Fear is one of the most powerful motivators in our age. People fear everything but God. Gideon is privileged to encounter God in a wonderful way as Jehovah-

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<sup>99</sup> Exodus 15:26      Jehovah-rapha      the LORD that healeth

<sup>100</sup> Judges 6:22 – 24      Jehovah-shalom      the LORD our peace



shalom, the LORD our peace. Have you discovered Him in this way in your life? Then His name will be glorified by your tranquility and composure even in stressful times. Do people wonder at how you can keep calm even in threatening times? If you have really entered into the awareness of Jehovah-shalom you know the joy and blessedness of trusting Him to order and provide, of resting in His marmoreal peace.

### Jehovah-tsidkenu

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.<sup>101</sup>

What a wonderful name is this! How full of promise. The psalmist asks “who shall stand in his holy place?”<sup>102</sup> Before the prophetic voice falls silent in Israel for 400 years, Malachi asks much the same question. “But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire,...”<sup>103</sup> There is none righteous, not one. So indeed who will stand? But when we see Jesus, the righteous branch raised unto David, we find in Him Jehovah-tsidkenu, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS and all striving with the dead works of the law ceases. At last we are freed not only from fear (Jehovah-shalom), but also guilt. What joy and release this discovery brings. Does the joy of your salvation still burn as brightly as it did the day you discovered Jehovah-tsidkenu?

### Jehovah-nissi

Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the

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<sup>101</sup> Jeremiah 23:5 – 6 Jehovah-tsidkenu the LORD our righteousness

<sup>102</sup> Psalm 24:3b

<sup>103</sup> Malachi 3:2

other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovahnissi:<sup>104</sup>

One of the great features of this world in contradistinction to heaven is that here we have warfare and tribulation, both physical and spiritual. In war victory is uppermost in the minds of those engaged. Moses discovered a remarkable thing, that when he held up his hands in intercessory prayer the battle went in the Israelites favor, but when he got tired and let his hands drop, the battle went against them. So it was that Aaron and Hur (the priest and the soldier) held Moses' hands up. What a great lesson for us to persevere in intercessory prayer. Eternity will tell how much our prayers have brought forth spiritual victory. But whose victory was it anyway? Clearly Moses understood that it was God's and that he was little more than a standard bearer with his arms aloft. It was God's banner he upheld in prayer. He found that God was his source of victory: Jehovah-nissi, the LORD our banner. In the American Civil War, many brave soldiers on both sides laid down their rifles to pick up the troop's fallen banner and move it forward as a rallying point. What of you? Will you let the LORD's banner fall? Many of your brothers and sisters are engaged in spiritual combat of which you know nothing, but when you have entered into the name, Jehovah-nissi, you have become the standard bearer and must bear up our LORD Jesus, the captain of our salvation, as the banner of victory. Is Jehovah-nissi hallowed by your unflagging intercessory prayer?

Jehovah-oz, Jehovah-zimrath, Jehovah-yashuw`ah

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.<sup>105</sup>

Martin Luther has blessed the church with his great hymn: A Mighty Fortress is Our God. He knew from first hand experience the struggle with those who persecuted him and the evil one who lay behind it. He wrote:

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<sup>104</sup> Exodus 17:8 – 15 Jehovah-nissi                      the LORD our banner

<sup>105</sup> Isaiah 12:2                      Jehovah-oz                                      the LORD my strength  
    Jehovah- zimrath                              the LORD my song  
    Jehovah- yashuw`ah                          the LORD my salvation

A mighty fortress is our God,  
A bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He amid the flood  
Of mortal ills prevailing.

For still our ancient foe  
Doth seek to work us woe  
His craft and pow'r are great,  
And, armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide  
Our striving would be losing,  
Were not the right Man on our side,  
The Man of God's own choosing.

Dost ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus, it is He  
Lord Sabaoth His name  
From age to age the same  
And He must win the battle.

Martin Luther's life was living proof of Isaiah's testimony "the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength (Jehovah-oz) and my song (Jehovah-zimrath); he also is become my salvation (Jehovah- yashuw`ah<sup>106</sup>).” Have you discovered this wonderful threefold name that Isaiah and Martin Luther discovered? Do you glorify the Name of God by resting in the strength of and rejoicing in the company of Jesus? The question for us then becomes who am I in Jesus Christ? We might consider the scriptures that tell us who Jesus is and entering into this by faith discover who we are.

He is the shepherd and we are His flock.<sup>107</sup>

He is the way, and we are fellow pilgrims.<sup>108</sup>

He is the light, the truth and we are His disciples.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> יְשׁוּעָה yeshuw`ah, (pronounced yesh-oo'-aw) or the anglicized Joshua, in Greek - Jesus. Jehovah-Jesus means the salvation of Jehovah.

<sup>107</sup> John 10:2, 11

<sup>108</sup> John 14:6, 1Peter 2:11

<sup>109</sup> 1 John 1:5, John 14:6

He is the heir, and we are joint heirs with Him of the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>110</sup>  
 He is holy, and we are His saints.<sup>111</sup>  
 He is the great physician and we are his patients.<sup>112</sup>  
 He is the captain of our salvation and we are his army of Christian Soldiers.<sup>113</sup>  
 He is the bridegroom and we are His betrothed bride.<sup>114</sup>  
 He is the sower and we are his crop.<sup>115</sup>  
 He is the vine and we are His branches.<sup>116</sup>  
 He is the master and we are His stewards.<sup>117</sup>  
 He is our great High Priest and we are His kingdom of priests.<sup>118</sup>  
 He is the chief corner stone and we are living stones in the House of God<sup>119</sup>

But why make so much of our identity? Because what we do is a direct consequence of how we see the circumstances of our lives and who we perceive ourselves to be. Imagine two men walking down the street and turning a corner they behold a fire in full progress. One is an accountant and the other is a retired fireman. You cannot tell which is which. The crew is few but the crowd is large. The fire is not under control and the firemen are struggling to contain it. As you watch, one of the two stands behind the fire line while the other crosses the street and pleads with the fire chief to loan him a fire coat and let him help. Now you know who the fireman is. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He "by their fruits ye shall know them"<sup>120</sup> Who we are determines what we do. When we by faith have seen who Jesus really is, we are never the same again and by our consequential actions and words we hallow the Name.

### Longing for the Kingdom



Thy kingdom come




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<sup>110</sup> Romans 8:17

<sup>111</sup> 1 Peter 1:16

<sup>112</sup> Luke 5:31

<sup>113</sup> Hebrews 2:10

<sup>114</sup> John 3:29

<sup>115</sup> Matthew 13:3

<sup>116</sup> John 15:1 - 10

<sup>117</sup> Luke 12:42 - 48

<sup>118</sup> Hebrews 8:11

<sup>119</sup> 1 Peter 2:4 - 8

<sup>120</sup> Matthew 7:16    Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Thy kingdom come is the second petition. The word kingdom speaks of governance. When God created the world, He had governance in mind as man's role in His economy.<sup>121</sup> The entrance of sin changed all that. Instead of dominion over the creatures of the earth, people struggle to achieve domination over each other, one people, race or tribe over another, men over women and women over men, children over parents and parents over children. And no where would anyone acknowledge the Lordship of God. The temptation that led to the first disobedience centered on this very issue: being like God.<sup>122</sup> The petition "thy kingdom come" therefore harks back to man's earliest charge and addresses man's fall at its most basic point. Man was meant to acknowledge God's authority as part of his dominion. He was basically to rule the created world as a steward. This is a role that mankind, after having exploited the earth, polluted its waters and air, exhaustively extracted its wealth for selfish ends and driven whole species to extinction, fortunately is starting to remember vaguely! The kingdom of our God has become for sinful man the kingdoms of his own making, and he means to hold on to them! Yet they come and go with frightening regularity and considerable violence. And so it continues today. Our world is as full of violence and violent people each seeking to establish their own kingdom as Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Alexander, Ptolemy, or Caesar ever did. The loss of lives runs to the millions in case after case of genocide and the destruction of defenseless people whether in Africa, Europe, or Asia. Seeing that all these things are so and have been so for thousands of years, it is a wonder that people aren't more urgent in making this petition of God.

There is evidence in the scriptures that God still intends for us to have dominion.<sup>123</sup> So praying this prayer has ramifications for us as well. When we think about the coming of the Kingdom of God we recognize two aspects of the petition. It has both an internal and external aspect for us. Externally the Kingdom of God will come. Not because human kind will progressively get better and better. Our Lord intimates as much. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of

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<sup>121</sup> Genesis 1:26 - 28      And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

<sup>122</sup> Genesis 3:5      ... For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

<sup>123</sup> 2 Timothy 2:12      If we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us:  
Revelation 5:10      And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”<sup>124</sup> Paul makes it even clearer. “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.”<sup>125</sup> Two thousand years of bloodshed and violence have made it quite clear that when the Kingdom of God comes, God will do it. Daniel addressed the great ruler of his day Nebuchadnezzar in answer to his dream. “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”<sup>126</sup> We read again “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”<sup>127</sup> How the saints of every age have longed for this prophetic fulfillment.

There are internal dimensions of this petition as well that are both personal and corporate. Our Lord Jesus says quite plainly. “The kingdom of God is within you {or, among you}.”<sup>128</sup>

On the personal level, it is false to believe that we can have Jesus as our Savior and not have Him as our Lord, our King, and our Master. “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”<sup>129</sup> This means that we must personally acknowledge the Kingship of God in our own life. Some people have pictured the spiritual heart of man as a throne room where either the sinful self or God sits on the throne of authority. This petition is a request for God (in the person of Jesus) to sit on that throne.

The entrance of sin (or the emergence of the sin nature which inclines the will to individual acts of sin) made all of us unfit to have dominion as God intended in the beginning. The principal manifestation of this in my experience has been a ready attachment to the things of the Kingdom of God without being attached to the King. We are like Absalom, David’s rebellious son, who desired the kingdom but not his father.<sup>130</sup> We seek power, authority, “turf”, control, glory, possessions, wealth, praise of men, reputation, and honor; but not God! It takes many forms but at the root, it is the exaltation of self against God. We even have “Christianized” versions of such behavior. How many of us have seen people

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<sup>124</sup> John 3:5b, 6

<sup>125</sup> I Corinthians 15:50

<sup>126</sup> Daniel 2:44

<sup>127</sup> Revelation 11:15b

<sup>128</sup> Luke 17:21b

<sup>129</sup> Mark 10:15

<sup>130</sup> 2 Samuel 15 - 18

who, when their “hidden agenda” could not be imposed on the local church, left in a huff, because they could not get their way. How many people have managed to parade their “spiritual” accomplishments so that they will win the admiration of naïve believers?<sup>131</sup> Let the plans for an overhaul of the kitchen or the sanctuary or even its curtains be discussed and watch the congregants (or their wives) get offended. Under circumstances like these, brotherly love seems more like love between porcupines! I have seen men get terribly upset because their little church authority empire built up over many years was threatened even as the local church was in the process of dying! Men seem bent on being lords over the flock of God even though such behavior is expressly forbidden.<sup>132</sup> Jesus not only bore our guilt for such sins as these but He was made sin for us.<sup>133</sup> He died to set us free from such behavior patterns. To pray “thy Kingdom come” is to be aware that our hearts are not yet right with God<sup>134</sup> and to ask God to deal with the root of all selfishness in our hearts on the basis of Jesus’ finished work on the cross.<sup>135</sup>

As pointed out, this is a corporate or communal prayer, even though we pray it individually. To say thy kingdom come is to renounce our own kingdom. And our own kingdom may not only be personal it may also be corporate. Ideally, the local church is a heavenly community on earth that acknowledges the lordship of Jesus Christ. But the carnal nature of believers is very subtle. It is quite possible that the entire local church is busily building its own little kingdom instead of laboring for the extension of the Kingdom of God. Again “the kingdom of God is among you”, speaks of the communal nature of the Kingdom. How may we discern when a church is building its own empire as opposed to sincerely praying “thy kingdom come?” History is full of examples of people who supposing themselves to be “the Church”, sought to maintain control over the souls and bodies of men through violence, deception, intimidation, and ostentation. Whenever the Spirit of God began to work among men these “church men” were in the forefront of the persecution, supposing that

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<sup>131</sup> Matthew 6:3 – 4 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

<sup>132</sup> 1 Peter 5:2 - 3 Feed the flock of God which is among you {or, as much as in you is}, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

<sup>133</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

<sup>134</sup> Jeremiah 17:9-10 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

<sup>135</sup> Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

“whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”<sup>136</sup> Such gross manifestations of the fallen nature are somewhat abated in Christendom (It is no longer *derigueur* to burn people at the stake for having a Bible). But the same carnality emerges today in subtle ways. The problem becomes even more threatening in its subtle corporate manifestation. The mission as given by Jesus is to go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.<sup>137</sup> This command explains our part in living out the petition “thy kingdom come”. In an enlightening analysis of the state of the Christian Church in North America in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and start of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Reggie McNeal puts forth the case that denominational Christianity, faced with decline, is asking the wrong questions about how to proceed.<sup>138</sup> When the wrong question is asked, the right answer cannot be arrived at. He suggests six wrong questions and six tough questions in their place.

Wrong Question #1 How do we do Church better?

Tough Question #1 How do we deconvert Churchianity to Christianity?

Wrong Question #2 How do we grow this Church? (How do we get them to come to us?)

Tough Question #2 How do we transform our community? (How do we hit the streets with the Gospel?)

Wrong Question #3 How do we turn members into ministers?

Tough Question #3 How do we turn members into missionaries?

Wrong Question #4 How do we develop Church members?

Tough Question #4 How do we develop followers of Jesus?

Wrong Question #5 How do we plan for the future?

Tough Question #5 How do we prepare for the future?

Wrong Question #6 How do we develop leaders for Church work?

Tough Question #6 How do we develop leaders for the Christian movement?

The differences between the questions may seem slight to insignificant but they are worlds apart. One is focused on the survival of the local body that inhabits

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<sup>136</sup> John 16:2

<sup>137</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>138</sup> Reggie McNeal, The Present Future, Jossey-Bass (a Wiley Imprint), 2003 John Wiley & Sons ISBN 0-7879-6568-5



the great 'rock pile' built in 1846. It is concerned with church real estate, bricks, and mortar; church programming, who's in and who's out, member services (translation: am I getting what I want out of church). The other is focused on furthering the Kingdom of God: the street, people's needs, breaking down barriers, community issues (translation: am I partnering with God's work in people?)<sup>139</sup> If you are really interested in living out the petition "Thy kingdom come" the questions in this book would go a long way to fostering the repentance (metanoia) necessary to support your part in the prayer.

Finally, this petition relating to the governance of the King is closely linked with the next which relates to submission and obedience to the will of the king.

### Obedience



Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven



### Thy will be done

When I think about the meaning of this third petition, I am reminded of the words of Paul, "Behold, I show you a mystery ..." <sup>140</sup> The Apostle is talking about the translation of the living saints at our Lord's return. But there are many mysteries in scripture. <sup>141</sup> Mystery is commonly defined as that which has been concealed in ages past that is now revealed. But if we think about the greatest mystery in human history "God was manifest in the flesh" and consider the marked disparities between human attributes and divine attributes (omniscience, for example) we wonder how it could be that Jesus could remain omniscient God and become truly human with the necessity to learn everything. The nature of the God-man Jesus was a problem that the early theologians wrestled with for nearly four hundred years. The issue was 'resolved' by the second the Creed of Chalcedon <sup>142</sup>. But as the church historian, Philip Schaff points out,

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid page 65

<sup>140</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51a

<sup>141</sup> 1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

<sup>142</sup> Developed at the fourth ecumenical council held at Chalcedon, opposite Constantinople on Oct 22-25, 451AD.

The Chalcedonian Creed is far from exhausting the great mystery, 'God manifest in flesh.' It leaves much room for a fuller appreciation of the genuine, perfect, and sinless humanity of Christ, of the Pauline doctrine of *Kenosis*, or self-renunciation and self limitation of the Divine Logos in the incarnation and during the human life of our Lord, and for the discussion of other questions connected with his relation to the Father and to the world, his person and his work. But it indicates the essential elements of Christological truth, and the boundary lines of Christological error.<sup>143</sup>

So the mystery of the incarnation still remains a mystery even though there has been revelation. When we come to the will of God we are confronted with a similar intractable mystery. For simplicity this mystery usually surfaces under the antithetical rubric: Divine Omnipotence vs. Human Free Will. The danger with human pride that exalts reason is that such pride is blind to the existence of matters that are simply beyond the grasp of reason. We do well to remember that we deal with a supra-natural Being whose transcendence easily outstrips our petty powers of reasoning. Having said this I can say comfortably that no attempt will be made here to resolve apparently contradictory statements in scripture relating to the omnipotence of the divine will and man's apparent freedom to choose wrongly. Long ago, I learned to live with the tension of such dichotomous assertions and doctrines under the simple rubric: mystery.

It is this sense of mystery about the exercise of the Divine Will that Evelyn Underhill articulates so beautifully in her treatise on the Lord's Prayer.

The Will: that mysterious attribute of the Living Godhead of which a little crumb is given to men, in order that it may be united in love to the Whole from which it came.<sup>144</sup>

But how does this union of wills come about? If we consider the use of our own will, every day we make thousands if not hundreds of thousands of decisions. As I am writing this sentence, I must decide which words to use and which keys to push on the keyboard to record those words. But to sit down and write was also a choice. To come to this conference was a choice. We are exercising our will in making choices almost continually every day. So when I pray "thy will be done" am I to wait for Divine guidance for every keystroke? I trust that in some

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<sup>143</sup> Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, first reprinted in 1983 from the 1931 edition published by Harper and Row, reprinted 1993 by Baker Books, Grand Rapids Mi. ISBN: 0-8010-8232-3

<sup>144</sup> Evelyn Underhill, Abba, Vintage Spiritual Classics Vintage Books a division of Random House, 2003 ISBN 0-375-72570-9 Chapter 5, page 179

ineffable way unknown and probably unknowable to me, the Divine Will is being exercised in every decision. Yet every decision that I make has consequences for myself and possibly numberless others. My decision has outcomes. I throw a rock in the lake and the resultant ripples travel out to the far side. Whether the lake is dead calm so that I can see them, or whether it is driven by the wind so that I cannot see them, the ripples are still there.

The Apostle Paul asserts,

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”<sup>145</sup>

So then, the Will of God is also being done continually, for all things are working together for the good that God in his infinite love and wisdom has designed for each of the children that He has called. How then do these two wills (Divine and human) intersect?

As noted under the section on the structure of the Prayer, the petition “thy will be done” is linked to the assertion “thine is the power.” And implicit in the assertion “thine is the power” is the renunciation ‘not our (or my) will.’ This renunciation is not the obliteration our will, but rather the realigning of it, like a compass needle aligns in the magnetic field of the earth. It is this realignment that makes the invisible lines of magnetic flux visible (a very valuable tool when lost in the woods). So in this petition, we are asking that our wills might continually align and realign with the Divine Will. No matter where we are or in what situation we find our selves His will is to be done as our very own will. If, on the other hand, the compass pin on which the needle rides is corroded or interferes with free rotation of the needle, I will get a faulty direction. But the faulty direction does not mean that the lines of magnetic flux are no longer there. God’s will is continually and universally carried out at all times and all places throughout His creation, whether on earth or in the heavens. Now when a community makes this petition, all their hearts point in the direction of God’s will and we have the consensus and fellowship of “kindred spirits.”

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<sup>145</sup> Romans 8:28 - 31

Take the wrath of man. We know that "...the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."<sup>146</sup> But does the presence of man's wrath mean that somehow God has lost control of the universe of his creation. The Psalmist clearly doesn't think so. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."<sup>147</sup>

God turns the wrath of man to the praise of his adorable sovereignty. Never have the Lord's people had such awful impressions of the sovereignty of God, as when they have been in the furnace of man's wrath, then they become dumb with silence. When the Chaldean and Sabeen robbers are let loose to plunder and spoil the substance of Job, he is made to view adorable sovereignty in it, saying, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." It is in such a case as this that God says to his own people, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen." What work of God about the church is advanced by the wrath of men?

His *discovering* work; for by the wind of man's wrath he separates between the precious and the vile, betwixt the chaff and the wheat. In the day of the church's prosperity and quiet, hypocrites and true believers are mingled together, like the chaff and the wheat in the barn floor: but the Lord, like the husbandman, opens the door of his barn, and puts the wind of man's wrath through it, that the world may know which is which. O, sirs, much chaff is cast up already, both among ministers and professors; but it is like the wind and sieve may cast up much more yet ere all be done.

God's *purging* work is advanced among his own children by the wrath of men: there is much of the dross of corruption cleaves to the Lord's people while in the wilderness. Now, the Lord heats the furnace of man's wrath, and casts his people into it, that when he has tried them, he may bring them forth as gold.

God's *uniting* work is hereby advanced. In a time of peace and external tranquility the sheep of Christ scatter and divide among themselves; but

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<sup>146</sup> James 1:20

<sup>147</sup> Psalm 76:10

God lets loose the dogs upon them, and then the flock runs together; or like pieces of metal cast into the fire, they run together in a lump.

God's *enlarging* work, or his work of spreading the gospel, is sometimes advanced by the wrath of man.<sup>148</sup> The gospel, like the chamomile, the more it is trodden upon, the more it spreads.

The remainder of wrath, i.e. what is left behind of the wrath of men, when God has glorified himself thereby. Even after God has defeated the purposes of wicked men, and made them contribute to his glory, yet there is abundance of wrath remaining. But what becomes of that wrath that is left? God shall restrain it. The word signifies to gird up. However God may see fit to slacken the bridle of his providence, and suffer wicked men to vent their wrath and enmity, as far as it shall contribute to his glory; yet the super abounding and the remainder of his wrath that is not for his glory and his people's profit, God will gird it up, that they shall not get it vented... If any wrath of man remain beyond what shall bring in a revenue of praise unto God, he will restrain it, and bind it up like the waters of a mill: he will suffer as much of the current of water to run upon the wheel, as serves to carry it about and grind his corn, but the remainder of the water he sets it off another way: so God will let out as much of the current of man's wrath as shall serve the ends of his glory and our good, but the remainder of the stream and current he will restrain, and turn another way. ... The flame of man's wrath shall praise the Lord, and the superfluous fire shall be quenched, or hemmed in; for here we have God's parole of honor for it: Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.<sup>149</sup>

Let me further illustrate the importance to each one of us of the flawless execution of God's insuperable providential will. My hobby is recording family history. There is an old and tragic story about my grand father. Wednesday, June 4, 1904, dawned with excitement for his wife and three small children. Early in the morning, he left for his butcher job at Armour Meat packing. A while later,

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<sup>148</sup> Acts 8:1 – 4 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

<sup>149</sup> Ebenezer Erskine as quoted in The Treasury of David Charles Spurgeon, Vol. 2 page 309-310, MacDonald Publishing Co. McLean, Va. ISBN 0-917006-25-9

his little family boarded a day liner named the Slocomb as part of the Sunday school celebration arranged by the German Lutheran Church of which they were members. The boat was to take the celebrants (mostly women and small children) to a park on Long Island for the day. It traveled up the east river on the way to Long Island sound. Near Hells gate, a turbulent section of the river, a fire broke out on the boat. The crew was unprepared and the safety precautions were all compromised by the careless indifference of the owners. The boat went up like a tinderbox. Rotted life preservers proved to be like sponges that dragged small children to their deaths by drowning when their mothers dropped them overboard in a vain attempt to save them. As the boat drove for the nearest shore, the headwinds and forward speed of the boat fanned the flames into an inferno. Over 1200 people (half under the age of 15) died that day by burning or drowning. It was the greatest single loss of life in New York history until the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001. My grandfather came home that day to a silent and empty apartment. It took him two weeks to reclaim the all the bodies of his loved ones and bury them. Terribly depressed, he contemplated suicide. (Several did take their lives by jumping in the East River after identifying their loved ones.) He purchased a revolver. His landlady, suspecting the worst, let herself into his apartment with her pass key, found the revolver, and took it. When my grandfather banged on her door and demanded his gun back, she answered, "Not on your life John Hetterich. You're not going to kill yourself in my apartment." She subsequently introduced my grandfather to Louise Lillian Ohlnhausen. Two years later, almost to the day, the first child of that second marriage, my mother, was born,. Had my grandfather succeeded with his planned suicide, I would not be writing this and you would not be reading it! The momentary decision of a nameless German landlady has changed all of our lives!

Genealogically, we each have two parents, four grandparents, eight great grandparents, etc. In just ten generations there are 1024 different family names. It took 2048 separate human beings for each one of us to be born! Each of those people made hundreds of thousands of decisions on each of the thousands of days of their lives. It may be a stretch to realize, but if any of those untold millions of decisions had been made otherwise, you would not be here today! That is the power of divine providence, the reach of the Divine Will!

## As it is in Heaven

The real focus of this petition is in the phrase “on earth as it is in heaven.” It leads us to ask the how His will is done in heaven. Alan Redpath puts it quite well, (*italics mine*).

The will of God is done in heaven *constantly* without failure. Am I only intermittent in my allegiance and obedience? – do I fail from time to time? The will of God is done in heaven *universally*, without exception. Do I make selections from God’s commands; pick and choose as to which ones I should obey? ...

In heaven the will of God is done *joyfully* without weariness. Do I tire of doing God’s will? ...

In heaven the will of God is done *humbly*, without glory to anyone but Jesus. If I do the will of God, do I make it known that in this issue and that one I have done God’s will, and I am progressing?

Thy will be done in me, O Lord, as it is in Heaven – *constantly, universally* (in every part of life), *instantly* (without hesitation), *obediently, joyfully, humbly*.<sup>150</sup>

## In Earth

But the phrase also leads us to think about the earth as well. Clearly our Lord makes a real difference between heaven and earth. Surely our continued presence here is not an accident anymore than our Lord Jesus’ advent was unplanned. The earth, just as it is, plays a very real part in this petition.

Like the earlier petition “thy kingdom come”, this petition has significance both internal and external to us. This world is not our friend. Our Savior reminds us “...in the world ye shall have tribulation...”<sup>151</sup> While the world may potentially be heaven because God is here undivided and undiminished, yet like the exalted Christ “... now we see not yet all things put under him.”<sup>152</sup> The will of God will be done in this world as it is in heaven when “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Alan Redpath, Victorious Praying Fleming H. Revel Company Westwood, New Jersey 1962. Pages 60 - 61

<sup>151</sup> John 16:33b

<sup>152</sup> Hebrews 2:8c

<sup>153</sup> Revelation 11:15b

That still leaves another world, however, the world of our heart. This world is crucial for us. Jesus links authority and obedience when he says, "Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven."<sup>154</sup> It is folly in the extreme to believe that we can actually have Jesus as our Savior and to give lip service to Him as our Lord. In that sense this petition is our earnest plea to enter the kingdom of heaven, to do the will of the Father. Does that bring us again into the bondage to works of righteousness? God forbid. The truth shines forth forever in his Name - Jehovah-tsidkenu - THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!

But even here our Savior holds out hope for us "For whosoever shall do the will of God from the heart, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."<sup>155</sup> God, who knows the desire of our hearts in making this plea, also knows that we are helpless to do the will of God by ourselves. "Without me {or, severed from me} ye can do nothing."<sup>156</sup> We cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven without His grace. But how will he do this? Where will take us? The answer is right where we are – in the world.

The world is a place of *impermanence* "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."<sup>157</sup>

The world is a place of *metanoia* in which our minds are changed by the grace of God. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."<sup>158</sup>

The world is a place of *choices* about how we spend our time in the light of the Cross of our Lord Jesus "That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."<sup>159</sup>

The world is a place of *ignorance* that must be stopped<sup>160</sup> "For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Matthew 7:21

<sup>155</sup> Conflation of Mark 3:35 For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother. And Ephesians 6:6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

<sup>156</sup> John 15:5c

<sup>157</sup> 1John 2:17

<sup>158</sup> Romans 12:2

<sup>159</sup> 1 Peter 4:2

<sup>160</sup> Titus 1:11

Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

<sup>161</sup> 1 Peter 2:15



The world a place of our *sanctification* “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification that ye should abstain from fornication...”<sup>162</sup>

The world is a place of rejoicing. “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”<sup>163</sup>

But the world is also the place of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.”<sup>164</sup> This the central point of how God answers the petition. It is at this point that our Savior prays the very petition He gives us. “He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.”<sup>165</sup> The world is not only the place of His trial but also of ours.

We all have a preconceived idea of the path which we ought to follow, the way in which we shall use our talents best. But in the world of prayer, our eyes cleansed by adoration, we perceive and acknowledge that the initiative lies with God; and only with us insofar as we give our energy to Him and take up our inheritance as Children of God, recognizing and welcoming His quiet directive action, His steady pressure within life as the only thing that really matters about it. .... This means death to self will however cunningly disguised; the work that we love done with zest and care, but done God’s way not ours, at His pace not ours, for His glory not ours, and laid down without reluctance, as the movement of the Will demands.... “Thy will be done” means always being ready for God’s sudden No over against our eager and well meaning Yes: His overruling of our well-considered plans for the increase of His Glory and advancement of His Kingdom, confronting us with His Cross – at the least appropriate time. .... A strange reversal of fortune, the frustration of obviously excellent plans, lies behind most of the triumphs of Christian history. It was by an unlikely route that Christ Himself, the country carpenter, itinerant preacher, and victim of local politics carried humanity up to God.<sup>166</sup>

In the end what is required for us of this petition is patience. “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:3

<sup>163</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:18

<sup>164</sup> Galatians 1:4

<sup>165</sup> Matthew 26:42

<sup>166</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Abba*, Chapter 5, page 183 – 185.

<sup>167</sup> Hebrews 10:36

So then what are we to do?

“You ask, “Must one do something?” Of course one must! And do whatever comes along – in your circle of friends and in your surroundings –and believe that this is and will be your real work. More will not be demanded of you. It is a great misconception to think, whether for the sake of heaven or, as the modernists put it, to “make one’s mark on humanity,” that one must undertake great reverberating tasks. Not at all. It is necessary only to do everything according to the commandments of God. Just what exactly? Nothing in particular – only those things which present themselves to everyone in the circumstances of life, those things that are required by the every day happenings we all encounter. That is how God is. God arranges the fate of each man, and the whole course of one’s life is also the work of His most gracious foreknowledge, as is, therefore, every minute and every encounter. Let’s take an example: a beggar comes up to you; it is God who has brought him. What should you do? You must help him. God has brought you the beggar, of course, desiring you to act toward this beggar in a manner pleasing to Him, and He watches to see what you will actually do. ... If you do what is pleasing to God, you will be taking a step toward the ultimate goal, the inheritance of Heaven. Generalize this occurrence, and you find that in every situation and at every encounter one must do what God wants him to do. And we know truly what He wants from the commandments He has given us. If someone seeks help, then help them. If someone has offended you then forgive them, If you yourself have offended someone, then hasten to ask forgiveness and to make peace.<sup>168</sup>

In the end doing God’s will is a matter of faith and love. The exercise of faith in a simple direct action of obedience, no matter how difficult in presentation, draws forth the enabling grace of God for its accomplishment.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Theophan the Recluse Letter to a young girl

<sup>169</sup> John 14:15     If ye love me, keep my commandments.

John 14:21     He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

John 15:10     If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

## Needy Creatures



Give us this day our daily bread



Give us this day our daily bread is the fourth petition. This petition looks back to the day of our creation. Having been created in the image of God,<sup>170</sup> we are similar to God but are not God. Since this is the first petition that focuses on us, it is wise to stop for a minute and consider what we actually are as God created us. When God created us, He made us both creatures of earth and heaven.<sup>171</sup>

### In the Image of God

Jesus gives us a simple blueprint of the soul when He says “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”<sup>172</sup> The words “if ye know” speak to the cognitive aspect of the human soul. We were created rational creatures. We can think (reason). For most people today, that aspect of our being is quite painful. We would rather go to an a-muse-ment park (a-muse : not – thinking) than a muse-um (muse : thinking).

The words “if ye do” speak to the volitional aspect of the soul. We were created active creatures. We can will and consequently do.<sup>173</sup> For many people today we do too much (the tyranny of the urgent) and not always in the most timely fashion (procrastination).

The words “happy are ye” speak indirectly to the affective or emotional aspect of the soul. We were created emotional creatures. We have feelings. For many people today feelings are suspect. We deny or ‘stuff’ our feelings (particularly men – “Big boys don’t cry”) or are overwhelmed by their complex intensity so that we can’t process them properly (particularly women – “You are **so** emotional, you don’t think!”<sup>174</sup>)

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<sup>170</sup> Genesis 1:27      So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

<sup>171</sup> Genesis 2:7      And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

<sup>172</sup> John 13:17

<sup>173</sup> Philippians 2:13      For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

<sup>174</sup> These are indicative of the false and dehumanizing sayings of our times: Of course big boys do cry! Tears are a manifestation of the intensity of our feelings (tears of sorrow, joy, gratitude or anger). We need to listen to our feelings.

These aspects of the human soul equip and enable us for fellowship with God.

We were given a reasonable nature so that we might know God and our self in relationship with Him. We are capable of reasoned thought with memory leading to understanding and awareness both of self and that which is outside of self. We are moral creatures. An important aspect of cognition is the conscience. Conscience makes us capable evaluating thoughts (intents) and actions for consistency with internalized values and moral codes so that we might be morally responsible to Him. The most profound moral code is found in the scriptures: "Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and strength and thy neighbor as thy self."<sup>175</sup> It lies at the root of the Ten Commandments.<sup>176</sup> We are also capable of self perception or self awareness including our strengths and weaknesses, our emotional dependency, physical and spiritual needs, our position relative to others including God, and as mentioned before a moral awareness that holds us accountable for decisions that we make. We are capable of perception of others, of the things outside of our self, of the memory of decisions made, actions taken, and consequences of those actions which may help us become more aware of the outside world. And we are distinctly and uniquely capable of the awareness of God. The corollary here is that we are creatures that are capable of learning.

We were given a volitional nature so that we might choose Him freely - In concert with cognitive ability, we are enabled to make decisions (planning) and coupled with strength/power that enables us to take action (execute plans). We are also mutable creatures. We can change. Tragically (and blessedly) a mutable – moral – volitional creature is a peccable creature, one who can sin. In this we are unlike God who is impeccable (He cannot sin).

We were given an affective (emotional) nature so that we might derive pleasure from Him. We are capable of emotional response to both external stimuli and internal processes. We can respond affectively to God. We feel wonder at His Transcendent Vastness. We feel awe at His exceeding Greatness. We feel fear

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The great issues of life almost invariably present themselves first emotionally. Of course women do think and well! Some of the most remarkable thinkers I have ever met or read are women. But the foolish gender biased tendency of the age is to base men's worth on brains and women's worth on physical beauty. Nothing could be further from the truth! Some of the most beautiful women in history are marked by superb minds whose beauty does not fade in like the face in the mirror!

<sup>175</sup>Luke 10:27

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

<sup>176</sup>Romans 13:9

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

before His Holiness and Omnipotence. We feel reverence at His Glory. We feel thankful for His blessings, provisions and gifts. We feel love at His unspeakable Goodness and Kindness toward us and above all for His Mercy shown us in the unfathomable gift of His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus!

Above all we share one common attribute with all created beings that we know about: finitude. We are finite. We know in part. God is omniscient. We have limited power. God is Omnipotent. As noted above: we are peccable. God is Impeccable. We are limited in space. God is omnipresent.

We are dependant on God (and on what He allows for us through one another). Because we are finite, relational creatures with need, there is our overarching need for relationships which work together to meet those needs: families, tribes, nations, villages, peoples, in a word: communities.

### **Needs Material and Immaterial**

We are needy creatures, not only for things material (like bread) and things immaterial (like love) to sustain our lives but especially for God, Himself. That is what Jesus means when He says “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”<sup>177</sup> So this petition may be understood literally (bread) or parabolically (bread of life). Whether physically or parabolically, there are four interrelated terms that occur in my thinking that must be understood first. They are: need, dependence, vulnerability, and exploitation. They are related as follows. We have needs. We were created that way. When we cannot meet those needs ourselves, we realize that we are dependant on another who may be able to meet that need for us. We experience this every day. I own an automobile. It is mechanically and electronically complex. As long as it works well (reliability) I’m content to go on my way. But when it breaks down, I’m at a loss as to how to repair it. Fortunately I know a very knowledgeable and skilled mechanic who will meet help me meet my need for transportation (i.e. fix my automobile). However he does this for a price (sometimes quite a price!). So I pay him. Where did I get the money from? I worked for it. I used my special skills as an engineer to help design someone else’s transportation: helicopters, and got paid for my services. And so it goes. We all have needs. We can’t meet all our needs we look for someone who can help us. If we find someone, fine. We pay them as we are able. But what if there is no one to help us? Or what if the person who could help us won’t? Then we experience another condition: vulnerability. The fact that we are

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<sup>177</sup>John 6:35

needy creatures means that we are vulnerable creatures. When the price for meeting our vulnerabilities violates our autonomy, we are being exploited. If the case of my mechanic friend, he tells me that he will fix my automobile for a price. That is fair trade. If I do not like the price, I can go down the road to the next mechanic and ask him. His price might be lower (or higher) but I can shop around. I have a choice. I may still not like the best price but if I don't plan on riding my bike to work and elsewhere, I pay it.

But suppose I am a woman traveling alone across a vast stretch of desert. My car breaks down. There is one lonely gas station up ahead and I go in to ask for help. Yes, the mechanic knows how to fix the car and it will only take a few minutes with an inexpensive part. But he looks me over and has other ideas. The price he asks me to pay is morally wrong and I am absolutely unwilling to pay it. This is not fair trade. It is exploitation. Exploitation is an abuse of our humanity. Abuse has many levels from manipulation of the will to physical, emotional, verbal, sexual abuse to genocide. In every case the fundamental liberty of the will of the individual is violated.

When God meets our material needs, He does so partly through community. So while it may not be obvious, this petition leads us to consider our understanding of community. Let us think about the bread in the petition. Where does it come from and how do we get it. "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."<sup>178</sup> In explaining his and Apollos' co-laboring with God in the ministry of the gospel, Paul also hints at how God meets the request for bread. God gives all of us something to do. One plants and waters the grain. God gives the increase. Another harvests the grain. Another grinds it into flour. Another kneads the flour into dough. Another bakes the dough into bread. Another sells the bread to me. And God, who gave the increase, has answered my prayer through the community of the farmer, the miller, and the baker<sup>179</sup>. As long as the community (the "us") of this prayer is linked to God, the whole community works together with God to meet our mutual human needs. But let sin enter the picture and it all goes wrong. Greed, selfishness, lust for wealth and power over one another give rise to theft and exploitation of one another's vulnerabilities. It is not only that I as an individual have been cut off from God by sin, but the whole community has been cut off from God by sin with disastrous results.

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<sup>178</sup>1 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>179</sup>And incidentally fulfills His judgment upon man: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Genesis 3:19)

But how does sin affect the individual in that society? Besides exposing him to the abuse of his fellow man over his need for bread (or love), it isolates him from God and affects how he sees his needs being met. As I write these lines, I have two loaves of excellent bread in my refrigerator, as well as milk, butter, cold cuts, vegetables, fruits, and all kinds of condiments! I've got it all. And if I need more there are three supermarkets in the neighborhood that are open till 9:00 pm. And there are several restaurants<sup>180</sup> in the neighborhood that are open all night, seven days a week as is the ATM! In the light of such a modern society, why do I need this prayer? Why bother petitioning God for bread? For that matter why do I need God?! He and His Church are totally irrelevant to my modern life, vestigial entities from some ancient past marked by poverty and ignorance. Such is the blindness of sin!

To pray give us this day our daily bread is to pray that society will begin to function again as God intended it to: in dependence on God and with compassion for each other as faithful stewards sharing manifold blessings of God with each other. The prayer can give us a new vision of society.

Most people look at prayer as a long list of primarily material needs that they are requesting God to meet. They miss the point that this petition makes. In praying that God would give us our daily bread we are, in effect, praying that God would make a sin sick society that is blind to their need for God and His Righteousness work well again as a community of faith as He meant it to.<sup>181</sup> We understand this "body life" well enough when it comes to the church. Paul has made that abundantly clear.<sup>182</sup> But we misunderstand this petition when we come to the wider society of mankind in general. Remember this petition follows hard on the heels of "thy kingdom come" and "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is of a piece with those two.

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<sup>180</sup> There are two places where I moved almost to tears of gratitude, in the supermarket at the sight of the superabundance of food, and in the restaurant at the sight of the excellence and variety of the prepared food. I whisper silent prayers with awe at His goodness. I find the overwhelming abundance of God's provision all the more touching since it is provided to such ungrateful, self centered, and over eating people that go on in their abysmal blindness to their eternal doom, with no realization of the Hand that blesses them continually.

<sup>181</sup> Revelation 3:17 - 18      Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

<sup>182</sup> 1 Corinthians 12      (...For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ, ....)

When we look at the parabolic meaning of this petition (i.e. as a parable where the physical entity, in this case bread, stands for something or someone else), it clearly centers in the person of our Lord Jesus, and how life is sustained, particularly spiritual life. It is as if we were saying “give us this day Jesus, the Bread of Life, He who has given us life and who sustains our life.” There is so much of the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus as well as our lives buried in the image of a loaf of bread, how we get it, and what it means to us. He is the grain of wheat that falls into the ground, dies and brings forth much fruit,<sup>183</sup> fruit after its own kind.<sup>184</sup> The grains of wheat are gathered together<sup>185</sup>, ground in the mill of adversity, mixed with the water of the word, baked in the fiery oven of trial. They come forth from the oven, having begun as many, they come forth as one, one loaf and one body, the body of the grain that fell into the ground and died. And the loaf is broken for the life of all. By that loaf all live forever.

But with what manner of bread will He feed us, the bread of affliction,<sup>186</sup> the bread of tears,<sup>187</sup> the bread of adversity<sup>188</sup> or the bread of sincerity and truth?<sup>189</sup> What matters that to us? If we ask Him for our daily bread will He give us a stone?<sup>190</sup> He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?<sup>191</sup> He will give us exactly that bread that is suited to our needs. Only let us fear Israel’s mistake in speaking against the wise bestowment of God,<sup>192</sup> for if we determine what manner of bread we will eat He may give us our request, with leanness of soul.<sup>193</sup>

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| 183John 12:24         | Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.  |
| 184Genesis 1:11a, 12a | And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass [Heb. tender grass], ...And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind,...   |
| 185Psalm 50:5         | Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.   |
| 186Deuteronomy 16:3   | Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even <u>the bread of affliction</u> ; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life. |
| 187Psalm 80:5         | Thou feedest them with <u>the bread of tears</u> ; and givest them tears to drink in great measure.  |
| 188Isaiah 30:20       | And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers:   |
| 1891 Corinthians 5:8  | Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.  |
| 190Luke 11:11a        | If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?...  |
| 191Romans 8:32        |  |
| 192Numbers 21:5       | And the people spoke against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loathes this light bread.  |
| 193Psalm 106:13-15    | They soon forgot {Heb. They made haste, they forgot} his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.   |



If we were more profoundly aware of our fundamental need in all things pertaining to life, we would be continually thankful to God for all His blessings even for our next breath. He has given us Jesus and we should be deeply thankful that He has given us His only begotten son, that through faith in Him we might live indeed. He has also freely given us all else pertaining to life and Godliness.<sup>194</sup> If we understood this deeply, saying that prayer of thanksgiving before meals which we call “grace” would be more common. When we see God as a kind of cosmic bellhop to meet our every request, we will not be grateful. If we are not really grateful for our daily bread, does it seem likely that we will be grateful for God’s dear Son? “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”<sup>195</sup>

### I vs. Us

Not only society but also stewardship is nascent in this petition. This is a corporate prayer but often prayed by an individual. That awareness creates a tension between the individual and the community. It is as if God hears “give me – our daily bread.” That is one individual praying for the needs of the many. And I am convinced that He often answers in just that way. Let us say that you are praying this petition as an individual. God hears and gives you not one but several loaves of bread, more than you could possibly eat in a day. What will you do with them? The answer is obvious in this context but in practice it seldom is.

St. Basil the Great, the fourth century Bishop of Caesarea, concluded that nothing we have is ours alone. “The bread that is spoiling in your house belongs to the hungry. The shoes that are mildewing under your bed belong to those who have none. The clothes stored away in your trunk belong to those who are naked. The money that depreciates in your treasury belongs to the poor.”<sup>196</sup>

The wider implication of the Paul’s assertion that “God that giveth the increase” in the agricultural paradigm above, is that all wealth, though humanly derived from honest work, really comes from God. The wealth is His and not ours. We hold all wealth as from His hand. Wealth and possessions are a Divine loan to all men. As with any loan, the one granting the loan has the right to set down

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<sup>194</sup>2 Peter 1:3

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

<sup>195</sup> Luke 16:10

<sup>196</sup> Quoted by David Timms, Living the Lord’s Prayer, Page 144 - 145, Bethany House, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2008 ISBN 978-0-7642-0506-4.

conditions for granting it. In the case of renting an apartment, for example, the landlord has the right to specify the way I will live my life when I live in his apartment. He may forbid my keeping animals. He may insist that I pay the utilities bills. He could even insist that I maintain the property by keeping trash off the front lawn. These become terms and conditions in my lease agreement. In precisely the same way, God in granting us the use of His wealth (in response to our honest work) places a condition that involves helping those whom He sends our way with that wealth.<sup>197</sup> At any time God may take an account of our management of His entrusted wealth. That is the case of the rich farmer called to account at the time of his greatest increase<sup>198</sup>. God reveals to the farmer that a lifetime of saying “no” to God’s condition on his wealth has rendered him a fool.<sup>199</sup> He then asks the most telling question: “This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” All wealth must be surrendered at death, all property transferred. Possessions and wealth are ours only in our lifetime. Had he torn down his existing barns instead of building new ones, he would have improved his view. In the fields beyond the barns, he would have seen the ‘the fowls of the air that sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. He would have seen that the heavenly Father feedeth them.’<sup>200</sup> Instead of asking “What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?” He might have asked ‘Am I not much better than they?’ How different it would have been for him had he thought to fill empty stomachs of the hungry and not empty barns with his great agricultural increase! In keeping his wealth to himself, he stole from the poor. In stealing from the poor, he stole from God, Himself.<sup>201</sup> When we finally to come to grips with the Eighth Commandment we recognize that we are really only stewards of wealth, and that “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful<sup>202</sup> in pursuing their master’s interests. Hence while we are not to serve

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<sup>197</sup> Ephesians 4:28 is the clearest explanation of this principle. “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

<sup>198</sup> Luke 12:15 – 21      And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, the ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, this will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

<sup>199</sup> Psalm 14:1 & 53:1      the fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.*” I.e. he does not wish to acknowledge God’s claim on his life or his wealth.

<sup>200</sup> Matthew 6:26

<sup>201</sup> God asks this most poignant question in Malachi 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me.

<sup>202</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:2

mammon<sup>203</sup>, we are to “make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness”<sup>204</sup> and to show ourselves “faithful in the unrighteous mammon”.<sup>205</sup> That the necessity of using our wealth for the good of others is incumbent on us is revealed in the judgment of God of the faithful steward: “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.”<sup>206</sup> May His grace enable us all to observe the Eighth Commandment: Thou shalt not steal (the daily bread of others!).

### **This day...our daily**

This petition is the “clock” of this great prayer. The use of the words “day” and “daily” mark it as a daily prayer. And in so doing, our Lord reminds us that we live our lives in exactly the same way.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take

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<sup>203</sup> Matthew 6:24

<sup>204</sup> Luke 16:9

<sup>205</sup> Luke 16:11

<sup>206</sup> Matthew 24:44 - 46

therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.<sup>207</sup>

While this passage reflects the priorities of this prayer {...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things - what ye shall eat, what ye shall drink, what ye shall put on - shall be added unto you.}, Jesus also presents another critical piece of guidance.

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” What He is telling us is to live our lives today.

John Wesley was asked by some of his friends, “Supposing, Mr. Wesley, you knew that this was to be your last night on earth, how would you spend it?”

“Well, at four o’clock I would have some tea,” he replied “and at six o’clock I would visit Mrs. Brown in the hospital. Then at seven-thirty I would conduct mid-week service at the chapel. I would have my supper; at ten o’clock I would go to bed and in the morning I would wake up in glory!”<sup>208</sup>

A dear friend once mentioned something very strange on first hearing. He said most people do not live their life in the present moment. They are either living in the future or in the past. I asked him how he knew this and he said “Think about yourself. How much time do you spend worrying about things to come or regretting things past?” In response to his question, I determined to keep track of my thoughts during the day and sure enough there were many times when I caught my thoughts wandering into tomorrow or back into yesterday. Yet our Lord warns us not to do this. Why? It is only in the present moment that we can meet and have fellowship with God. Isn’t that what prayer is really all about? This petition focuses us on the present moment. It teaches us to live life moment by moment.

Moment by moment I’m kept in His love,  
Moment by moment I’ve life from above;  
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine,  
Moment by moment, O Lord I am thine.

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<sup>207</sup> Matthew 6:24 - 34

<sup>208</sup> Alan Redpath, op. cit. Pages 71 - 72

Is there guilt or hard feelings against someone that draws us to lament and fuss over the past? The fourth petition will deal with it. Is there fear over what the future will hold? The fifth petition will deal with that. What are these shadows of past and future to thee o my soul? Follow thou Jesus, now, in the present moment. In every moment that passes keep your eyes upon Him, not your erring brother or sister, not the falling stock market or advancing years and illness or any of the chaotic distractions of this passing world. "He is thy Lord; and worship thou him."<sup>209</sup>

### **In the Image of God**



And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors



Sorrow and guilt are very painful emotions, but they teach us to look to God for mercy and forgiveness for having wronged and offended Him. Jesus tells a story about this:

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.<sup>210</sup>

The man was a publican. Publicans paid money to the Roman government as taxes for others and for the privilege of collecting those taxes from the public. Since that involved effort on their part, they were permitted to collect more taxes than they had paid as a fee. In effect, this gave them the authority to collect as much money as they could from poor people, without mercy. They became public extortionists or publicans.

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<sup>209</sup> Psalm 45:11

<sup>210</sup> Luke 18:9-14

What we do to men, we do to God. Evidently this man had come to understand this. He had changed his mind about what he was doing to poor people. Observe how the man “smote his breast.” His guilt and sorrow were so painful. He did not lift up his eyes because he was so ashamed of himself and his actions. Repentance, guilt, shame, and sorrow: all are the ground of this simple prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Jesus tells us that God heard his prayer and that the relationship between God and him was restored (“justified”, that is: God saw him as a just man and no longer as a sinner) But what happened the day after his justification, the week after, the month after? If his experience was anything like mine (and maybe yours) the next day he was overcome by joy. He felt that he loved everyone and everything was different. All seemed new, wonderful! “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”<sup>211</sup> New, that is until two weeks later his wife lost a bag of money that he needed, then you should have heard him swear at her and threaten! Now our Lord never told this part of the story. That wasn’t Jesus’ point when He told it. But if poetic license be granted, we can recognize again that this is our story. And this petition speaks to the day, the week, the month, the year, the life after conversion.

Some people have trouble with this petition because they think that Jesus is saying that our eternal salvation ultimately rests not on what He has done, but on what we do. That misunderstanding fails to account for the context of this prayer. This is the prayer of the believer in Jesus who is privileged to call God “our Father” on behalf of the entire community of faith. It is the prayer of one who has already been forgiven. This is not the same as the publican’s prayer. The person who prays this prayer has already been forgiven, justified by grace through faith in the “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”<sup>212</sup>

Why then ask for further forgiveness? Hasn’t Jesus seen to it that all our sins are forgiven? Yes, God will not bring us into judgment for our sins. That is past in Christ and His finished work on the cross. This petition is not about the event of justification but the process of sanctification, not about relationship with God but

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<sup>211</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>212</sup> John 1:29

fellowship with God and with our brothers and sisters. It is not about a position but a process.

Sin is of two types: commission and omission. Some one may actively wrong us, gossip about us, tell lies, swear at us, or even assault us emotionally, verbally, and physically. These are trespasses, violations of the boundaries of our rights! Then there are things people fail to do, irresponsible behavior, failing to fulfill their promises on which we depend, or omitting to help us when we desperately need it. These are the unfulfilled duties that we were entitled to expect; they owed them to us and failed to pay. These are debts!

Whether a debt or a trespass, the question is how do you feel when such things happen to you and what do you do with those feelings? It is inevitable that you will feel hurt and angry about being hurt. Anger is difficult to manage. Anger management lies at the root of the story of Jonah perhaps the greatest and least willing revivalist of all time. His short message resulted in an entire nation's repentance and yet he was profoundly unhappy, angry with Nineveh and God for sending him to a people that he hated. Paul counsels us about anger, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil."<sup>213</sup> What happens when the sun goes down on our wrath? Well there are only two things that people can do with anger, express it or suppress it. If we express anger (especially in response to anger) the tenor of the communication gets ever angrier and its stability declines rapidly. We may feel better momentarily but it is doubtful if the relationship has been greatly strengthened. If on the other hand we suppress it, stuff our anger, it is like carrying burning coals in the bosom. Experience teaches us that neither approach works. There are long term consequences for either. The strained relationship becomes weaker or ceases to be altogether and the suppressed anger (aided by emotional self deception) becomes resentment and even bitterness. What is the answer? The answer is the grace of God. The grace of God has a remarkable ability to extinguish both burning coals of resentment and hot fires of new borne anger. We know the grace of God is operative when with the extinguishing of anger we experience joy and peace. It is for this reason that the writer to the Hebrews encourages us to look "... diligently lest any man fail {or, fall from} of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled..."<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Ephesians 4:26 - 27

<sup>214</sup> Hebrews 12:15

The little word “and” at the start of the petition ties this both temporally and conceptually to the pervious petition. Just as that petition was for daily feeding, so this is for daily forgiveness. As our life depended on that petition, it depends on this one.

If we cannot live without His Life feeding and supporting us, still less can we live without His loving – kindness; tolerating our imperfections, rectifying our errors, forgiving our perpetual shortcomings and excesses, debts and trespasses, and giving us again and again another chance.”<sup>215</sup>

Just as the last petition deals with a world community cut off from God and infected by sin, this petition deals with our part in that community, or, more specifically our disentanglement from that sin sick society. What Jesus is teaching us in this petition is what He has taught elsewhere. “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”<sup>216</sup> It is the reciprocity of grace.

Think of a man who comes to you looking to borrow some money to invest. You decide to give him a small amount telling him that he is now responsible to you for the way he uses it. The next day he returns. You now take account. What has he done with the money that you gave him? If he answers I spent it on something that attracted my eye, will you give him more? But if on the other hand he hands you twice what you gave him, the favorable accounting will prompt you to entrust still more to him. If this becomes a consistent pattern you will begin to look at him as your investor. This simplistic story illustrates what I call the stewardship of grace. “Forgive us our debts” is the request for an ‘asset’ with the receipt of which we incur responsibility. “As we forgive our debtors” represents the accounting for grace already received. Whether God will answer this petition will depend very much on how we have received the grace of God “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”<sup>217</sup>

“You come to prayer meetings, carrying the bitterness of a life-time, and when you ask God for blessing, you wonder why your prayers are not answered, your Bible is dead, and your devotional life has gone to pieces.”<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Evelyn Underhill Op. Cit. page 201 - 202

<sup>216</sup> Luke 6:31

<sup>217</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:1

<sup>218</sup> Alan Redpath Op. Cit. Page 89



We are encouraged make this petition for three reasons. First, the wrongs others have done unto us are within God's will for our lives and we need to submit to that will as matter of trust and love for God. "The Saints," says Teresa of Avila, "rejoiced at injuries and persecutions, because in forgiving them they had something to offer God"<sup>219</sup> Secondly, when God forgives a person, the removal of guilt, shame, and sorrow is answered by joy and peace. The natural expression of the human will in response to such joy and peace is to share them by forgiving others their wrongs against us so that they too can experience our joy and peace. Our Lord warns us in awful terms what the consequences of a failure here entails.<sup>220</sup> Thirdly, sin damages our relationship with God. When God forgives our sin, He is in effect restoring our fellowship with Himself. Since God is Holy, our fellowship with Him should be according to Justice. But our fellowship with God is no better than our fellowship with those around us. It is as the apostle John tells us: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"<sup>221</sup> Therefore the forgiving of those indebted to us, is a clear evidence that we have been forgiven by God.

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<sup>219</sup> St. Teresa of Avila as quoted by Evelyn Underhill Op. Cit. Page 208 - 209

<sup>220</sup> Matthew 18:24 - 35      And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

<sup>221</sup> 1 John 4:20

## Warfare and Overcoming



And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil



### A Cooperative Petition

This petition occasions confusion in some people's minds. Would a loving God really lead us into temptation? Would He deliberately want us to sin? Must we ask Him not to do this? Intuition (if not sound reason) tells us no. But what is Jesus telling us to ask for?

If we take away the specifics of the petition; the core petition becomes quite clear. "Our Father ....lead..." At the very root of this petition is the fundamental request for God to lead us. And that root petition implies a cooperative effort. If we want God to lead, we are in effect promising Him that we will follow. After all, that is the nature of faith. When God would answer any of our requests, He gives us something to do as an expression of faith. In this case if we ask Him to lead, we are promising to follow Him by the eye of faith. God is faithful; the problem arises with us. The question is not how well will God lead; He does all things in perfection. The question is how well will we follow? Our Lord Jesus fully realizes this when He addresses the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."<sup>222</sup> Willing for what? It is willing to follow. But the problem is that our human willingness suffers from the corruption of Sin, the ingrained propensity to wander off from God when He is leading. "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."<sup>223</sup> "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way..."<sup>224</sup>

So if we've asked God to lead, and we've agreed to follow, what happens when we renege on our promise? Like any small child that disobeys, we get chastened for our unfaithfulness. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh

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<sup>222</sup> Matthew 26:41

<sup>223</sup> Romans 7:19 - 20

<sup>224</sup> Isaiah 53:6a

unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"<sup>225</sup>

Now the purpose of that chastening is to yield "the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."<sup>226</sup> So what is the chastening and how does it yield that fruit? Chastening is normally referred to variously as a test, a trial, a tribulation, or temptation, the purpose of which is to test or expose our character. Jesus tells His disciples, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation."<sup>227</sup> It is not that God leads us in such a way (that He solicits us to do evil or tempts us as Satan did our first parents - for God is not evil). Rather it is we who habitually choose to go our own way and that way will involve temptation. We "enter ...into temptation "all by ourselves.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" says James.<sup>228</sup>

The Greek word translated "tempt" is peirazo (pronounced pi-rad'-zo) means a putting to proof (by experiment (of good), by experience (of evil), solicitation, discipline or provocation); by implication, adversity:--temptation. peirazo comes from peira (pronounced pi'-rah) which means to test, to attempt, to assay, to make trial of. piera comes from the root word peran (pronounced per'-an) apparently accusative case of an obsolete derivative of peiro (pronounced pei'-ro) meaning to "pierce". But there is an ambiguity in the concept piercing associated with the Greek word for tempt. We can pierce things for different reasons.

Let me illustrate. I greatly enjoy pumpkin pies. When I bake a pumpkin pie, I need to know whether it's done or not. I take a table knife and "piero" or pierce the pie and then pull the knife out. If the pie is done, nothing sticks to the blade. I am testing the pie to discern its character (done or not) by piercing it. I test meats by piercing them with a meat thermometer. The Centurion "tested" to see if Jesus

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<sup>225</sup> Hebrews 12:5 - 7

<sup>226</sup> Hebrews 12:11

<sup>227</sup> Luke 22:40

<sup>228</sup> James 1:13 - 15

was dead by piercing his side. A surgeon pierces our bodies for diagnostic purposes, to obtain a biopsy as an indication of cancer. So testing or tempting as it pertains to God's permissive will is involved with a test of character, not with soliciting to sin.

A murderer pierces our body because he wants to kill us and steal our possessions. So while Satan tempts (peirazo) and God permits such, God allows it for a totally different reason. Satan tempts us to do evil because he is a murderer and has no interest in the truth about us or anyone.<sup>229</sup> God allows temptation to establish the truth.

But why does God, who is omniscient, need a test to tell Him about our character good or bad? "...Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."<sup>230</sup> He doesn't. The temptation is for our sakes. God permits temptation as chastening because sin brings blindness and deception to the one who sins. The test then is administered or permitted for our sakes to bring about enlightenment, to change our minds about ourselves and God, to bring about μετάνοια (metanoia), and ultimately deliver us from the evil (the flesh, the sin nature, the carnal man, the old nature) in us. The test is the fiery trial that removes the dross of unbelief from the gold of faith.<sup>231</sup>

The classic case of this in the New Testament is Peter's denial of Jesus.

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me."<sup>232</sup>

Peter is deceived as to his love for The Lord. This self deception makes him spiritually worthless for his brethren. Jesus tells him that Satan has desired to

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<sup>229</sup> John 8:44

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.

<sup>230</sup> John 2:24 - 25

<sup>231</sup> Mark 9:24

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

1Peter 1:6 - 7

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

<sup>232</sup> Luke 22:31 - 34

sift him. Satan wants to murder him by piercing his heart. Apparently God the Father is allowing Satan to do this, as He once did with self righteous Job. Job and Peter are suffering from a similar problem. They are not unrighteous as far as man's righteousness goes, but they are ignorant of God's righteousness<sup>233</sup> and convinced of their own way.<sup>234</sup> Jesus knows that Peter's love is not what Peter thinks it is and tells him beforehand what will happen. Then Jesus says one of the most things in the scriptures. "But I have prayed for you." Jesus' prayer makes all the difference for Peter. Satan may wound, but Peter will not die ("thy faith fail not"). Jesus is not asking that Peter should not be tempted. That must happen; given Peter's state of self deception, there really is no other way. Jesus is praying that through this temptation, Peter will be delivered from the evil within himself that has blinded him ("when thou art converted") and is preventing him from following Jesus ("strengthen thy brethren"). Jesus prayed for Peter and Jesus prays for you and I every day. **(Halleluiah, What a Savior!!)** That is why we will ultimately be "delivered from the evil."

But Jesus tells us to pray "Our Father .... lead us not into temptation..." Must we always be put to the test? Is there no other way? We all sin, and chastening which happens to all of us is unavoidable when we sin. So is it not pointless to pray this prayer?

For Jesus to ask us to pray to avoid an unavoidable situation this would be disingenuous on His part. And Jesus is not disingenuous! Again the necessity for such trials and chastening rests with us, but of ourselves we cannot stop sinning. What the petition then comes down to is that we are asking God to lead us in such a way that we will not sin by departing from following Him. Trials certainly do "open our eyes". But the scriptures can "open our eyes" just as well as or better than trials and with far less pain. Prayer (especially this one, if entered into deeply so that growing repentance and faith emerge from our communion with God) can obviate much suffering of trials and temptations. The very act of deeply praying "lead us not into temptation" (testing, trials) can prevent their occurrence. But vain and mindless prayers will not be heard. In early Christian thought prayer was likened to a whip with which the believer drove out the wicked one from his presence. "Because thou hast kept the word

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<sup>233</sup> Romans 10:3      For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

<sup>234</sup> Job 13:15      Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. {Heb. prove, or, argue}

Lu 22:33 – 34      And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."<sup>235</sup>

After a very hard experience, my daughter once asked me, "Dad, why do I have to learn everything the hard way?"

"Because you don't learn the easy way," I said.

"And what is the easy way?"

"To listen to me, and do what I say!"

Every good parent knows that the lessons that their child doesn't want to learn at home, they will sooner or later learn in the world. But experience is a dear teacher!"

### **A Corporate Petition**

This petition is, like the entire prayer, a corporate petition. The first two corporate personal petitions have dealt our common need (bread) and our common fellowship with the Father (forgiveness of sin). This petition deals with warfare (deliverance from evil). A dear friend and former Navy Seal acquainted me with a remarkable difference of which I was unaware: the difference between a warrior and a soldier. Both the warrior and the soldier fight in wars. But the warrior is essentially a lone figure skilled in martial arts. The soldier also fights and therefore understands the martial arts. But the soldier takes and follows orders and moves not as an individual but as part of a larger fighting unit. We might say all soldiers are warriors but not all warriors are soldiers. (My friend might disagree, but it makes sense to me! ☺) The point here is that when we make this petition, we are part of a heavenly Army.<sup>236</sup> Now an Army has a sense of unity but each individual soldier has a unique part to play in a larger plan.

"Brethren, if {or, although} a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ, for if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden."<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Revelation 3:10

<sup>236</sup> The hymn is "Onward Christian Soldiers" not Onward Christian Warriors!

<sup>237</sup> Galatians 6:1 - 5

This evening, my wife was sorting through some old family papers and found a map that was printed in Germany by the 78<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (the Lightning Division) my older brother David's WWII Division. The map traced their progress across Germany; including the crossing of the Ludendorf Bridge over the Rhine River at the town of Remagen (the 'Remagen Bridge'). I remembered a story my brother told me about his experience there. The Division was crossing under heavy enemy fire. David was carrying a mortar with his back pack. Suddenly, the sergeant called to David, "Get that man off the bridge!" One of his fellow soldiers, somewhat inebriated, had stopped to emulate General George Patton's example of urinating in the Rhine. No one could challenge Patton, but this 'grunt' was no longer a trooper but a target and could get himself killed. The sergeant didn't want that. The soldier was so tipsy, he could barely stand straight, let alone walk fast. Nor did he have any desire to desist from his emulation of General Patton. So David picked him up, put him on his back (along with the mortar and his own backpack), and carried him to the other side of the bridge.

"Bear ye one another's burdens ...every man shall bear his own burden" That's what a soldier does. That's what this petition commits us to. We all are fighting a common enemy ('the evil'), but have different parts of the battle ('burdens'). Some will falter and we must help them with their burden. We must bear them up while we continue to fight our own part of the common war. What is your burden, your specific battle with evil? Perhaps it is greed or uncontrolled rage, impatience or procrastination, lust or chemical dependence (alcoholism or drugs). It may seem terrible in society's eyes or very minor. But it is God we have to deal with, not with society! We have asked Him to lead and whatever it is that takes us away from following Him is evil – hateful - shameful, and must be dealt with. That is the work of discipleship that addresses itself to the eradication of the (particular) sin "which doth so easily beset us..."<sup>238</sup> Sin, persisted in, becomes easier with each successive commission until it becomes an entrenched habit that we call vice, vices have a terrible grip. In that situation, chastening via trial will come. But if we bear well the burden (the work) of laying aside the burden of sin, then testing is much less likely. But we were to do this only for ourself, the Lord would have told us to pray 'lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil.' We are responsible for bearing our own burden of dealing with the old man but we are also to help those who are "overtaken in a fault." Those who have ceased from following God; who have ceased from putting off the old man, who have abandoned the burden or work of their own sanctification. They are no longer soldiers but targets. They are no longer pilgrims but tourists. They are no

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<sup>238</sup> Hebrews 12:1b

longer walking in the light of His countenance but wandering in the darkness of self will. Had my brother not forcefully removed that man from the bridge, almost certainly he would have been shot by a sniper! But to save that life, David put his life at risk. Burdened down, he moved more slowly and was an easier target himself. He literally laid down his life<sup>239</sup> for a fellow soldier. But how do we bear a burden? How do we fight against the sin “which doth so easily beset us...”?

There is an old medieval practice called ‘naming the demon’. I think it comes from Jesus’ *modus operandi* when confronted with the Gadarene demoniac.<sup>240</sup> Knowing the name or giving someone a name implies a power over or influence with the one bearing that name. It was in giving all the creatures names that Adam manifested his dominion over them. It is in giving children their names that parents manifest their governance over their minor children. It is in revealing His Name to us that God gives us access and influence with Him. When God asked Jacob his name, drawing forth a confession of his entire sin plagued life (Jacob means ‘supplanter’), God renamed him ‘Israel’ meaning ‘Prince with God’ i.e. one who has power with God. Certainly, the evil within each one of us has a name. When we ‘name the demon,’ we stop our problem denial and accept the fact of its existence. Until we do this we will never even begin the task of being delivered from it. The alcoholic will not begin the process of deliverance until he stands up and confesses “I am an alcoholic.” The doctor cannot begin our cure until he can say, “You have cancer.” The leper, coming to Jesus, must say “If you will, you can make me clean.” That is not what the blind man will say when Jesus asks him “What do you want” He will say “That I may receive my sight.” The lame will say “That I may walk” and the deaf “that I may hear.” Sin affects us all in different ways even as it unites us in a common struggle against its endless manifestations. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” means for us to help each other to bear our individual burdens, getting on with the work of our sanctification, to end our ubiquitous problem denial by helping each other to ‘name the demon’, the unique the particular sin (or sins) so easily beset us. This is why we are admonished to “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”<sup>241</sup> Only as we do our part, gently and compassionately disabusing one another of our

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<sup>239</sup> 1 John 3:16

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

<sup>240</sup> Luke 8:30

And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.

<sup>241</sup> James 5:16



own unique self deceptions, does it become unnecessary for God to permit the temptation as part of our deliverance from the evil. "For if we would judge ourselves; we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."<sup>242</sup>

Finally observe it is not victory that is asked for but deliverance. Victors are heroes. People who are delivered are not. There is room for self glorification for victors. There is none for people who have been delivered. We are told to ask to be delivered and that is not to our glory but God's. Jesus is the Victor, we are the delivered.

### **The Renunciation and Affirmation**



For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.



The last section of the prayer presents an explicit three fold affirmation that supports the first three petitions of commitment. They also present an implied renunciation. We may understand how this can be by considering decision making in our everyday lives. We all make many decisions every day. When we think about those decisions, we may understand them as saying 'yes' to something or saying 'no to something. But for every 'yes', there is at least one corresponding 'no'. My wife asks me if I want go with her to shop for groceries. I answer "No, not right now. I'm writing." Later we will go shopping. Later, I will say 'no' to continued writing and 'yes' to shopping for groceries. For every yes, there is a no and *vice versa*.

One of the problems that people have with making poor decisions is that they do not have a clear understanding of both sides of their decision. They either know what they are saying yes to but not what they are saying no to, or the other way around. For example, spending money on a desired object (saying 'yes' to spending - when finances are tight) is saying 'no' to savings at a time when they may be most necessary. By affirming that the kingdom, power and glory belong to God, the individual is renounces any claim they may suppose themselves to have in these areas. In saying "yes" to God, he says no to himself.

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<sup>242</sup> 1Corinthians 11:31 - 32

The final affirmations and renunciations are parallel with the first petitions of commitment.

<u>Petitions of Commitment</u>	<u>Affirmation</u>	<u>(Renunciation)</u>
Hallowed be thy name.	(For thine is) the glory,	(Not our glory)
Thy kingdom come.	For thine is the kingdom	(Not our kingdom)
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.	(For thine is) the power,	(Not our will)
	(Thine) for ever, Amen.	(Not mine -forever, Amen)

When we look at the structure of the prayer in this way, we recognize an important principle. Without a deep heart renunciation of personal or corporate gain or aggrandizement, there can be no real commitment to the glorification of His Name, the furtherance of the kingdom of God or the doing of His will. We cannot serve God and self (either the individual or the corporate self).

Given this attitude, the personal petitions in the middle of the prayer all rest upon our being willing agents of His interests and not God being an adjunct to our desires. How different the prayers of many would be if this awareness was in the forefront of their hearts and minds.

The Apostle John in his first letter admonishes us to “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world....for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (John’s first letter 2:16).

Here too we see a set of three things. These three things are not unrelated to these renunciations. The fleshly nature in all of us lusts for the niceties of the kingdom which actually belong to God. The eyes of our old nature look with longing on the power that actually belongs to God. The pride of the sinful self life is always looking to drape itself in the robe of glory that belongs to God alone. This part of the prayer is really a complete renunciation of our old sinful, lustful, selfish self. Properly understood, then, this part of the prayer acknowledges the person of God as He is to be acknowledged in a proper relationship as the one to be trusted and loved who supplies all our needs and forgives all our iniquities. This part of the prayer encourages us to live lives of simplicity, to be obedient to those through which God would speak to us for good, and to be faithful in all our relationships.

The little word “amen” is perhaps even more subject to vain repetition than the rest of this prayer being associated with endless prayers of every sort. To many it means ‘yes’ or ‘so be it’. Actually it is transliteration from the Hebrew אָמֵן (pronounced aw-mane’) meaning sure; abstract, faithfulness; as an adverb, truly, so be it, truth. It has the same sense of verily or what I am saying is the truth. It is a firm commitment that affirms that what we have just said to God in prayer is the way we are willing to have it in truth, forever. It is an oath!

So what do we lose by saying no forever as part of our renunciation? We lose all the grief and woe, the violence and bloodshed, the suffering and pain that have followed man’s vain pursuit of glory, power and kingdoms for the last several thousand years.

What do we gain by saying yes forever as part of our affirmation? We gain unbroken fellowship with the transcendentally Wise, Loving, Gentle, Good, Beautiful, Holy One, forever. And all this is made possible through the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus on the very cross through we entered this marvelous prayer. Who would not want to strike such a bargain?!

## Appendices

Over the years I have developed some ancillary thoughts on various aspects of prayer that while not directly germane to the Lord's Prayer will still be interesting (I hope). So I have included them here as appendices.

### Suffering and Prayer



...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?<sup>243</sup>



There is a real link between suffering and prayer, as the words of our Savior on the cross remind us. "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."<sup>244</sup> James reminds us that "The effectual fervent prayer (petitions) of a righteous man availeth much."<sup>245</sup> As those experienced in intercessory prayer know, fervency is the child of suffering over those we love deeply. Tears as well as faith have long been the twin hall marks of effectual intercessors.<sup>246</sup> As Jesus did, we pray more earnestly because we suffer for others

As in the parable above, some suffer because of their persistence in sin. The apostle warns us not to be among their number. "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters."<sup>247</sup> But there is suffering that has nothing to do with sin, as Peter goes on to tell us. "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."<sup>248</sup> And again:

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<sup>243</sup> Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34

<sup>244</sup> Luke 22:44

<sup>245</sup> James 5:16

<sup>246</sup> Matthew 8:5-13, 15:21-28, 17:14-21

<sup>247</sup> 1Peter 4:15

<sup>248</sup> 1Peter 4:16-19

“For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously...”<sup>249</sup>

On one level we know only too well why Jesus experienced the desolation of abandonment: He was identified with all sinful humanity, was joined with you and me on the cross. But we are also to be joined with Jesus. As the Apostle Paul tells us: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death ...”<sup>250</sup> That I may know by experience the “fellowship of his sufferings;” that I may deny myself and take up my cross and so be conformed unto his death in my daily experience<sup>251</sup>; that I may live in the power of his resurrection. This is suffering, not for the sake of obtaining our salvation (Jesus alone could do that) but out of love for our Lord and for the sake of entering into the fullness of Jesus’ life that He has bequeathed to us through His very death on the cross. As Israel entered into the land that was promised to them by struggle, so we too must enter into that which is promised to us by struggle. Paul admonishes us to “put off the old man and put on the new man”<sup>252</sup> We must let the mind of Christ be in us<sup>253</sup>. But this process is painful for another reason. The pain of chastisement for sin comes from God. The pain of suffering for Jesus comes from the world of men. But the pain of becoming like Jesus comes from within. We can better understand this if we consider those two sufferers of the Old and New Testament, Job and Peter, In Job’s case, his suffering was not because of some hidden sin as his “miserable comforters” intimated. He is the clearest picture of the righteous Christ suffering wrongfully that I know of in the Old Testament. What a singular honor to be the adumbration of the Lamb of God who suffers to bear away the sins of the world! Despite all suffering Job persists in his trust in God as his heroic testament makes clear. “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” But then he adds “But I will

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<sup>249</sup> 1 Peter 2:20-23

<sup>250</sup> Philippians 3:10

<sup>251</sup> Mt 16:24 - 26 ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

<sup>252</sup> Colossians 3:1-17

<sup>253</sup> Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus - The object of this reference to the example of the Savior is particularly to enforce the duty of humility. This was the highest example which could be furnished, and it would illustrate and confirm all the apostle had said of this virtue. The principle in the case is, that we are to make the Lord Jesus our model, and are in all respects to frame our lives, as far as possible, in accordance with this great example. The point here is, that he left a state of inexpressible glory, and took upon him the most humble form of humanity, and performed the most lowly offices, that he might benefit us.

- Albert Barnes

maintain {Heb. prove, or argue} mine own ways before him.<sup>254</sup> This is the language of Job's attachment to his own righteousness. I believe that it is this assertion that draws forth God's confrontation with Job in chapters 38 to 42. God begins the long desired discourse with Job out of a dark and thick cloud, from which he sent a terrible and tempestuous wind, as the harbinger of his presence. He asks in tones of admiration and reprehension 'Who is this that presumes to talk at this rate? This language becomes not a creature, much less a professor of religion, to obscure, misrepresent, and censure the wise, and just, and glorious counsel of God<sup>255</sup> by words without knowledge of such a God.'<sup>256</sup>

God begins the desired discourse not to condemn Job as his miserable comforters had but to make Job sensible of his ignorance; to convince his friends that Job was a righteous man, and that they had done him injustice. Thus all parties were humbled, and profited by the transaction. With terrible majesty the Lord spoke out of the cloud or tempest, which probably was raised to a vehement whirlwind while he was speaking.<sup>257</sup> The discourse takes the form of a series of questions that display Job's ignorance of even the most basic facts of God's governance of nature let alone His moral governance. Deeply convicted of his ignorance, Job answers "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."<sup>258</sup>

In Peter's case, he entertains an illusory sense of his devotion to Jesus. He tells him, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." But Jesus, who knows what is in each of us, tells Peter, "... the cock shall not crow this day, before you shall thrice deny that you know me."<sup>259</sup> When it came to pass as Jesus had foretold Peter "Peter went out, and wept bitterly."<sup>260</sup> It is a painful thing to come to the realization of the truth about ourselves. That pain forever changes our self awareness. As in the parable of the elephant, such circumstantial illumination provides a total change of heart that leaves us a changed person for the rest of our lives.<sup>261</sup> Simply put: illumination leads to repentance and with it

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<sup>254</sup> Job 13:15

<sup>255</sup> For the great matter of the dispute between Job and his friends was concerning God's counsel, and purpose, and providence in afflicting Job

<sup>256</sup> This gloss is extracted from Matthew Poole's excellent commentary on a this difficult passage.

<sup>257</sup> Comments from Thomas Scott

<sup>258</sup> Job 42:5-6

<sup>259</sup> Luke 22:33 -34

<sup>260</sup> Luke 22:54-63

<sup>261</sup> This process is formally called repentance. In the Old Testament the word for repentance is נָחַם *nacham*, {pronounced naw-kham'}. The term is used most frequently (37 times) in reference to God usually signifying a contemplated change in His dealings with man for good or ill according to His just judgment. It is also used negatively to certify that God will not swerve from his announced purpose. It is used of man only 6 times, Job's use being one of them. In the New Testament the word for repentance is μετανοεω *metanoeo*, {pronounced met-an-o-eh'-o}. It is used 23 times as a noun and 34 times as a verb. It comes from two Greek words: *meta* a preposition denoting accompaniment and *noeo* meaning to exercise the mind and

awareness of truth. It is this awareness that forever afterwards underlies all our prayers. It is interesting that after Job's repentance, God gives him a ministry of intercessory prayer for those who persecuted him. He says to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job."<sup>262</sup> And to Peter Jesus says "...when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."<sup>263</sup>

### **The Problem of Prayer**



Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.<sup>264</sup>



But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, ...<sup>265</sup>



When it comes to praying there seem to be two schools of thought: those that prefer to use prayers that have been written for them and are made available in such formats as prayer books or liturgical books of some sort, and those who

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(figuratively) to comprehend, to consider, to perceive, think, understand. It refers not to just a purely cerebral comprehension based on discursive reasoning, but a more profound heart awareness that totally affects the way we feel, think and above all act for ever after the event.

<sup>262</sup> Job 42:7-8

<sup>263</sup> Luke 22:32

<sup>264</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:1-2

<sup>265</sup> Matthew 6:7-9a

prefer extempore prayers of a more personal and immediate nature. In my experience the proponents of the use of predetermined or written prayers are concerned that left to their own devices, praying individuals who favor *extempore* prayer may lapse into unwise expressions that are dishonoring, presumptuous and even sinful with God; that they have a tendency to be 'rash with their mouths and let their hearts be hasty to utter presumptuous things before God.'

The proponents of extempore prayer, on the other hand, are concerned that the use of written prayers tends to mindless and heartless repetition. They are concerned that proponents of prayer books are prone to 'vain repetitions, as the heathen are, thinking that they shall be heard for their much speaking.' Even those who favor extempore prayers, however, are not able to avoid the use of prescribed prayers altogether. Many of the hymns in our hymnals are prayers written down and set to music. How much of the book of Psalms (Israel's ancient hymnbook) that we recite are prayers? If we look at prayers as a form of communication and consider the role of the written word in human communication, should it seem strange to us that written prayers may be acceptable to God?

Actually, people make both kinds of mistakes in prayer: rash utterance and vain repetition. But these mistakes reflect a problem with the heart of the person praying, not the presence or absence of a prayer book. Unwillingness to be still before God or deal with the lusts of the heart, self exaltation or low thoughts of God leading to empty repetition; thoughtless and heartless communication are all heart problems. Can we resolve these problems on a common ground?



## The Power of Words



Pray without ceasing.<sup>266</sup>



The Apostle Paul's command to the church at Thessalonica to "pray without ceasing" has occasioned much reflection on the practice of prayer through the ages. Paul's words pose a real problem for our understanding. How can this be done? If we accept omnipresence as an attribute of God, Paul's command seems potentially reasonable. But how can we pray continually and keep our words so few and varied as to avoid empty repetition? How can a few meaningful words to fill so much time? Then too, prayer requires our full attention. This is not possible since every day places many demands for our undivided attention. We may speculate that Paul was just saying that prayer should play an ongoing and regular part in our lives. But we are not sure. So we let the passage slip by in a kind of quiet truce and think no further about the cognitive tension it creates.

Behind this exegesis is the notion that prayer is a specific mental exercise that requires our full attention. But is this always the case? Might it be that we pray at times without an awareness of praying? When the disciples came to Jesus and asked him "teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples"<sup>267</sup> surely they were praying but were unaware of it.

If we look at prayer as communication with God, we may ask what that purpose of communication is. Is it necessary politeness? Saying 'Hello' when you pass an acquaintance in the hall? Is it the communication of ideas in a classroom? Is it the expression of our feelings, especially painful ones: I'm angry or I'm frightened? Is it part of problem solving as we talk through confusing difficulties with a trusted friend? Is it asking for help or for a need to be met? Or is it the revelation of our deepest longings and hopes in soul searching self revelation? Communication involves all these, and more. But is this prayer? What have these communications to do with God? Can we tell Him anything of which He is not fully aware? Our needs, hopes, longings, feelings; everything about ourselves is fully known. "For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." So why pray?

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<sup>266</sup> 1Thessalonians 5:17

<sup>267</sup> Luke 11:1b

After Adam had sinned, God approached him and called out: “Where art thou?”<sup>268</sup> Did God not know where Adam was or what he had done? Then why call out? God called Adam to give him a chance to communicate, to pray. In asking the question, He gave Adam a chance to think about where he was (spiritually as well as physically) and why. How could Adam answer God without thinking about these things? He also gave Adam a chance to reflect on the new necessity that his disobedience had introduced: the need for a Savior and renewed fellowship with God. Unfortunately the rationalizations in Adam’s answer revealed that problem denial which is the hallmark of fallen intellect. If prayer (the expression faith) is communication which involves reasoned thought before articulation, then reason and faith are linked!

Whether it is the reiteration of a prayer of someone else or the extempore product of our own reasoning, for words to be spoken meaningfully, they must represent our thoughts. It is clear from parrots (“Polly wants a cracker”) that the mere recitation of a string of meaningful words is not meaningful communication for the parrot. If the mind has not possessed the words (the case of ‘Polly’) or is disengaged (the case of vain repetition) meaningful communication for us has not taken place. How many a hymn, mindlessly repeated, has made a liar of us. We sing “take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold” and never think that we have just given the Almighty full control of our 401K! If He took us at our empty words, how painfully shocked we would be! Rather He bears His grief at our vain repetitions quietly and with patient nobility!

When the mind is engaged, even though we did not write the words we utter, there is still the necessity of making the sentences our own before, during, and after their articulation. The words that we speak in prescribed prayers or sing in hymns can suddenly become very meaningful to us even as we utter them. That is why hymns are an expression of faith and devotion while being a powerful didactic tool at the same time. We may learn as much dogmatic theology from our hymns as from the scriptures.

I remember realizing at age 12 that I would one day die. It was during a worship service as I was singing the wonderful words of the old hymn: Lord Jesus, I Love Thee.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Genesis 3:9

<sup>269</sup> William R. Featherstone (1842 – 1870) who died at the young age of 28.

I'd love Thee in life; I would love Thee in death,  
And praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath,  
And sing, should the death-dew lie cold on my brow,  
'Tis Thou who are worthy, Lord Jesus, 'tis Thou.

From that day to this, I have known the brevity of my life, and the importance of living each day with eternity in view.

Since new thoughts (i.e. truth) can result in positive life changing experiences, it stands to reason that prescribed prayers may in fact have a far more profound affect on the person praying, than on the situation about which the individual prays. The fact that Jesus tells us to pray "after this manner" when he has just told us that the Father knows what we need before we ask argues that prayer has value for us. Real communication requires awareness and thought before we speak. And thought prepares the way for a change of mind that is the start of faith.

But this still begs the question why communicate with God? Jesus says "... the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."<sup>270</sup> God created us to have communion with Him. While created beings can never know the fullness of the Divine purpose in creating us, it is enough for us that the Eternal Son tells us that the Father seeks those who will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth. Communion involves communication, and communication is two sided – sending and receiving. Prayer is not only sending, but receiving, not only speaking but listening.

"I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly. Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land."<sup>271</sup>

A dear friend of mine, now with the Lord, summarized all of this with beautiful simplicity.

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<sup>270</sup> John 4:23

<sup>271</sup> Psalm 85:8 - 9

What is prayer...? Prayer... is the *relationship* between a human being and God. By looking at prayer as relationship, we see that the words and phrases ... the thoughts...*if taken to heart*...deepen our relationship with the Almighty by transforming us. ... the purpose of prayer is to lead us into a deep and personal relationship with the divine Maker and Savior, in whom all that is has its being, and to whom, by our very humanness, we make our way through life. ...as we pray, as we live out the dynamism of this relationship with God, we grow *spiritually*, i.e., into whole and integrated people. It is only by praying that we learn how to pray – a process that clarifies and refines the deeper aspects of the pilgrimage of discovering who we are, what we should become, and how to achieve this transformation. The scriptural command to pray always is no less than a challenge to turn our hearts and minds – indeed our entire being – and not just our mouths to the service of a loving God and living in harmony with this love. We have a pattern of prayer in the *Lord's Prayer*, and this shows us a practical application of this challenge. And, our response to prayer arises precisely from the attraction to God that burns at the very heart of our being. This enables us to grow in ever greater knowledge, reverence, and fortitude, and to acquire the strength to persevere in the “inner warfare” in the face of society’s chaotic distractions.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Archimandrite Lawrence, Sighs of the Spirit New Skete 1997