

How to Pray

How Did You Learn to Pray?

When I was in a Bible class in graduate school, the professor out of the blue made what I thought was a controversial statement. He told us that the prayer which starts, “Our Father who art in heaven”, or as translated differently, “Our Father in heaven”, was not the Lord’s prayer but rather a model prayer. I had always heard it called “The Lord’s Prayer” so this sounded a bit unbiblical to me. As he explained what he meant, I agreed with him. This prayer, found in Matthew 6 was introduced by Jesus this way. “This, then, is how you should pray:” He Himself prayed quite differently in John 17 when He prayed for Himself and then for His disciples. The Matthew 6 prayer wasn’t even mentioned, not a bit of it. More properly, that prayer was in fact, “the Lord’s prayer”. The same would be true of what is quoted in the other three Gospels of fragments of what Jesus prayed with the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane and again it sounds nothing like the prayer He presented in Matthew 6. Although many church people see the prayer Jesus shared in Matthew 6 as the way you must pray each time and word for word to boot, it is clear that what Jesus was giving us was not a prayer to quote from memory each day but rather a model of how praying should be...its framework. As such, we are going to examine today the very first phrase found in the model prayer, “Our Father in heaven...” The Big Idea for today is: Your God is a heavenish Father who loves you supernaturally.

To best understand exactly what Jesus wants us to do with this model prayer, we need to look at it piece by piece. Let’s start with the opening phrase, “**Our Father in heaven...**,” (Matthew 6: 9b NIV) It seems quite simple when you consider this. Your praying is to be to the Father in heaven. Let’s dig into this a bit deeper. A literal translation of it reads, “**Our Father, the one in the heavens...**” Take this one step further. The preposition translated “in” can be used a bit differently in the Greek version. It is context alone that governs how “in” is translated. What this prayer is declaring is not the location of God. The Bible indicates clearly that the Lord fills the universe. **If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.** (Psalm 139: 8 NIV) **Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the Lord. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the Lord.** (Jeremiah 23:24 NIV) You cannot go somewhere and not be with Him. In fact when you put your faith in Christ, God lives in you. **If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.** (1 John 4: 15 NIV)

One of Israel’s hated enemies, the Arameans, with a vast army surrounded the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, Samaria. Knowing their military superiority, the Arameans arrogantly demanded the Israelites give up all they had, even the women and children and all their wealth in exchange for the Arameans not slaughtering all the people. The Israelites, trusting God to help them went out with their far smaller army and demolished the Aramean forces. The Aramean leaders excused their defeat with a very odd and almost laughable explanation. **Meanwhile, the officials of the king of Aram advised him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they.** (1 Kings 20: 23 NIV) The Lord made this an object lesson for both the Arameans and the Israelites. Now I need to make something clear. The Arameans weren’t completely wrong. They did realize their defeat was supernaturally determined. They of course didn’t know there is actually only one God in existence and were soon to discover that God is not just stationed in the hills but also found in the valleys. **The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, "This is what the Lord says: 'Because the Arameans think the Lord is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the Lord.'**" (1 Kings 20: 28 NIV) In the next battle, which took place in the valley, the Lord empowered the Israelites to once more smash the much bigger Aramean army.

Today, based on our knowledge of the Bible, the Aramean logic sounds ridiculous. We are much more sophisticated theologically, knowing quite well that there is not a location where the Lord does not reign as King of Kings. But are we really? Do we see Jesus Christ as the Lord of the dinner party just as much as He is the Lord of the communion table? Is He the God of your debit card? Would it be proven that God is the Lord of the conversation with your co-worker just as much as the Bible study discussion? Would you say He is the Lord of your conflicts the same as He is the Lord of your peaceful relations? Is He Lord over your driving? Is Christ the God of all your relationships? How about your free time, your temper, your language, your plans for the weekend, your family? Many have this view of God. You can be in charge but only so much. If God started speaking to you about taking up a ministry that you have never done, would He be the Lord there? Is He the Lord of your eyes, your tongue, your mind? I am sure that the Jewish priest and Levite each said He was the Lord where they were but was He? When each of them came upon the Jewish fellow

who had been beaten by robbers, the response was the same. They both left the stripped and badly wounded man and did nothing to help him. God was the Lord of the synagogue but was he the Lord of the road for these two religious leaders? It is theologically correct to say that the Lord is God of the hills and the valleys but is He the Lord of your time, your commitments, your decision making?

Let's return to that first phrase in the model prayer. Precisely translated, it reads, **Our Father, the one in the heavens...** We can recognize that Biblically, God is not only the God in the heavens but the God of everywhere we are and everywhere we aren't. To see this in the prayer, you have to understand the grammar of the phrasing. "...in the heavens". Another way to translate this and I believe it is the best way is, **"Our Father, the one with reference to the heavens."** The emphasis is not where the Father is located but rather what sort of Father He is. He is, to coin a term, heavenish. The Father is not earthish, but beyond the earth, beyond the universe. His substance is not material, of atoms and molecules but rather supernatural. He is the Creator of the material universe and is beyond it. Keep in mind that the Bible tells us in Genesis that we are made in the image of God. That means something about you is just like God, you are connected to Him in some way. You, in contrast to God are material, you are earthish. Modern leaders in the field of biology insist that you are nothing more than molecules and atoms, mixed together in a complex way, but that is it. You are fully earthish. Many in the field of psychology have latched onto this view of you and claim that you are essentially a machine, that you are determined by your molecules and the machinery of their operation. There is no heavenish Father involved, no supernatural God working in and through you so the sum of who you are is how you are put together materially and the set of experiences you have had.

Many leaders in the field of psychology take this one step further. They say that God is not only earthish, He is a figment of your earthish imagination. You and billions of others believe in something the chemicals in your brain concocted. We know that is not true, He is in fact otherworldly, supernatural, heavenish and real. The other day, as is my regular practice, I was taking my early morning thirty minute walk and listening to the Bible on my phone. All of a sudden it began to rain. Now I could have been bothered by it. Rain wasn't predicted and it was getting me wet and somewhat uncomfortable. At the same moment however as the drops began to pelt me, the narrator of the Bible came to a verse that described the rain God sends. In a splash, the Bible changed subjects and the rain ended. I wondered how such a coincidence could occur, the rarity of the unexpected rain and the sudden, at the same moment rare mention of rain in the Bible passage. That may seem like a silly example of how I know the heavenish Father is real, but I have spoken with hundreds of people over the years who have told me of similar experiences where God broke through to them in supernatural ways.

God is your heavenish Father and He loves you with supernatural love that is perfect without any selfishness in it. I know how much I love my children, and even if they sometimes doubt my love because it is not perfect, the love your heavenish Father has for you is complete and good. You pray to a Father who is supernatural and even if you cannot explain Him to your non-believing friends or family members, He still exists and He acts in heavenish ways to bless, encourage, and help you. Why even start praying to God? Because He is your heavenish father, one who loves you with supernatural love and who with supernatural insight and power knows exactly what is best for you and can make it happen. I've mentioned Mary the mother of Jesus recently and I want to add a different wrinkle to her life. How painful, how horrific was it for Mary to watch Jesus suffer so terribly; her most terrifying fears coming to pass! All of the promise she held in her heart for what Jesus would be collapsed as she stood at the foot of the cross. I have known many people in a situation like that. Everything seems to have fallen apart for them. Their finances are shot. Their health has deteriorated. Their kids are a mess. Their marriage is in shambles. Their dreams of a good career are wrecked. Maybe something like that has happened to you. Like Mary, God does not seem like a heavenish Father. He seems cruel and uncaring. Yet that is Friday at the foot of the cross. The same heavenish Father you trusted for your salvation is there for you now. It may be Friday, the day of the cross for you but your heavenish Father is still loving you and still working out your life. Resurrection Sunday is waiting for you. Your prayers are answered, the impossible coming to pass. The love of God revealed for you. This is your mantra when it is the night of the cross. **...weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.** (Psalm 30: 5 NIV) The Big Idea for today is: Your God is a heavenish Father who loves you supernaturally. This week repeat Psalm 30: 5 over and over again. ...weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. Your heavenish Father is for you!