



Teach ^{Us} to Pray

PART 1

by
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An Amazing Fact:

During the battle of Valley Forge, revolutionary troops were entrenched on the battlefield, freezing and starving. One day, a farmer who lived nearby brought much-needed provisions to the troops, and on his way back through the woods, he heard someone speaking. He tracked the voice until he came to a clearing, where he saw a man on his knees, praying in the snow. The farmer rushed home and excitedly told his wife, "The Americans will secure their independence!" His wife asked, "What makes you say that?" The farmer replied, "I heard George Washington pray out in the woods today, and the Lord will surely hear his prayer. He will! They may rest assured, He will." The rest, of course, is history.



This country was built on prayer—a strong foundation if there ever was one. Revisionists would have you believe that the signers of the Declaration of Independence were all pantheists, deists, or agnostics who didn't have a lot of time for God. If that's true, then agnostics back then surely prayed a lot more than Christians do today. For instance, both morning and evening, our first President knelt before an open Bible to pray for God's leading. Perhaps one reason this nation is faltering morally is because God's people don't spend much time praying for her.

What I find especially fascinating, however, is that Jesus also needed prayer. Naturally, we assume that His faith was inherently strong, but the Bible tells us Jesus would arise early in the morning and go off by Himself to pray. Sometimes He would pray all night, as He did before choosing His apostles.

After reading that story, I realized that I don't pray enough and I don't pray very well. Yet prayer is so important. Indeed, every revival comes on the heels of prayer. For instance, God poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost after His new church was on its knees together for 10 days. And later, "When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:31 NKJV). We need to pray more as a church and in our own lives.

The Principal Business

Charles Spurgeon said, "All the Christian virtues are locked up in the word 'prayer.'" One of the main tasks of the Christian is prayer, to have direct communion with God.

William Kerry was a missionary to Burma, India, and the West Indies, but he was also a shoe cobbler. People sometimes criticized him for "neglecting" his trade because he spent so much time in prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. Kerry answered, "Cobbling shoes is a sideline; it helps me pay expenses. Prayer is my real business." And God used him mightily to convert many. Martin Luther added, "As it is the business of tailors to make clothes, so it is the business of Christians to pray."

But how do we pray? I am asked this question a lot, but the truth is, even I have to ask, "Lord, teach *me* to pray." The disciples asked Christ this question when they saw Him coming from a session of prayer. His face was beaming with the light of heaven and energized by the Holy Spirit. No wonder they pleaded, "Lord, teach us to pray." Still, these men had been going to church, the temple, all of their lives. They had recited hundreds of prayers and had heard the priests pray out loud. Yet when they saw Christ, they knew they were missing something. Somehow they, like most of us, failed in their principal business.

Sadly, not very many know what it means to pray, and thus it is probably the most neglected opportunity and privilege we have. Yet every Christian needs the gift of prayer because it's the breath of the soul. Jesus said, "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2 NKJV). He wasn't saying we never pray, but that we ask poorly. So how do we ask?

I think the best way to find out is to first look at the pattern our Lord gave us, which is commonly called the "Lord's Prayer." Of course, that's really a misnomer, because it wasn't actually Jesus' prayer. Jesus said, "After this manner therefore pray ye" (Matthew 6:9). It's a pattern for us to pray, so technically it's really a disciple's prayer. Let's briefly look at this blueprint for prayer to learn how God wants us to come to Him.

The Makeup of Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is comprised of seven petitions, which are divided up very much like the Ten Commandments. The first three petitions are God-ward, vertical, and the last four petitions deal with the horizontal relationships we have with others. Likewise, the first great commandment is to love the Lord, and the second great commandment is to love your neighbor. God should come first in our prayers; His counsel and will should be the great priority in our lives. But we must also not neglect our relationships on earth, which is why Jesus' model includes those around us.

In this study, we'll concentrate on those first three petitions, and in the next issue, we'll look at our prayers concerning our friends, family, and neighbors, and then find some biblical and practical answers to common questions about prayer.

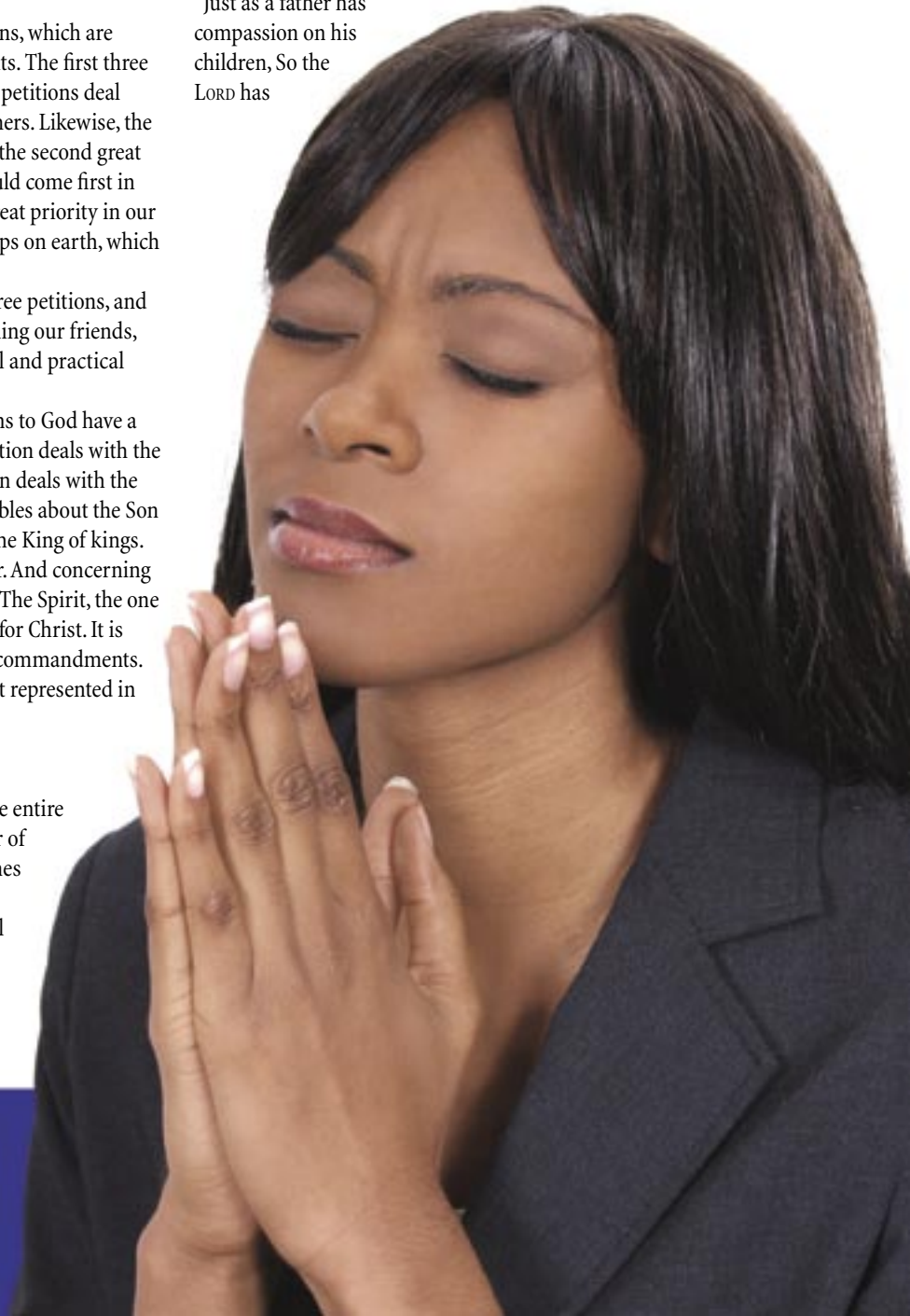
First, let's consider that these first three petitions to God have a unique relationship to the Godhead. The first petition deals with the Father, "Our Father, thy name." The second petition deals with the "kingdom;" that's the Son. Jesus spoke many parables about the Son going to receive a kingdom, and coming back as the King of kings. Without Him, we couldn't even come to the Father. And concerning "your will," who is it that leads us into God's will? The Spirit, the one who impresses on us the will of God and the love for Christ. It is the Spirit who gives us the power to follow God's commandments. And so you have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit represented in the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

"Our Father"

God as a father is a theme that runs through the entire Bible. He is the creator of all life, and the protector of His children. In the Old Testament, His list of names include "Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, the everlasting *Father*" (Isaiah 9:6). He is powerful and omnipotent, yet He is also the all-sufficient provider. Taken together, He surely is the God of the universe ruling from heaven, but we can still approach Him personally as our Father.

Even better, "Our Father" tells us that we are received as children of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). God is willing to adopt us into His family. What a beautiful truth! "Our Father" says we can share in the inheritance He gave through Christ, that we are a part of the heavenly family. The Bible says, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father ... give good things to them that ask Him?" (Matthew 7:11). We can go to our Father knowing that He has the very best gifts in store for us.

The very phrase "Our Father" is clothed with love. He's someone who we can safely approach with love, even when He disciplines us. Proverbs 3:12 records, "For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights" (NKJV). Psalm 103:13 adds, "Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has



compassion on those who fear Him" (NASV). This also means that we are a family of brothers or sisters, praying to our Father. He's not just my Father; He's your Father too.

This brings to mind another reason why this prayer is such a great pattern for us. Notice the word "I" doesn't appear in the entire prayer! We all typically pray frequently using "I" or "me," but in this prayer, it's a collective. In our culture, we get the equation upside down; it's you, then your friends, and then God. In the Bible, the priority is reversed. Love the Lord, then your neighbor, and then you. (If you need an easy way to remember, just think of J-O-Y. That's Jesus, Others, and You!)

"Which Art in Heaven"

Our pattern of prayer also tells us how near and how far our Lord really is from us. "Our Father" is a very intimate, up-close idea, but "in heaven" gives us a sense of His distance from us. We are separated from God, and we're acknowledging that by saying, "There's a problem: We're here; You are there." What's caused this separation? Isaiah says, "Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God" (59:2).

In the garden, God asked Adam, "Where are you?" In our prayer, we're confessing to God that we are far away from Him in the same way that Adam ran from God. We've been separated from paradise. But we have

hope. Did you know that the first three chapters in the Bible tell how sin came in through the serpent and that we've been separated from heaven and paradise; however, the last three chapters of the Bible tell how the serpent is destroyed, paradise is restored, and we're once again together with God?

Another reason the Bible says "which art in heaven" is because we need to make a distinction between our earthly fathers and our heavenly Father. Our earthly fathers are frail, carnal, and sinners by nature of being human, but the God in heaven is perfect. All of us have a natural, subconscious tendency to superimpose on God our relationship with our earthly father. For instance, those who have earthly fathers that are overly indulgent end up thinking that God the heavenly Father is also permissive. Those who have earthly fathers that are stern generally have a picture of the heavenly Father as an exacting judge.

That ought to make us think. We need to spend a lot of time in prayer asking God to overrule the mistakes we have made with our children. Yet when the Bible says, "Our Father which art in heaven," it's telling us we need to look past our flawed earthly relationships and know that He is our perfect model and that we can approach Him directly. You don't have to see God through the broken glasses of your family experience.

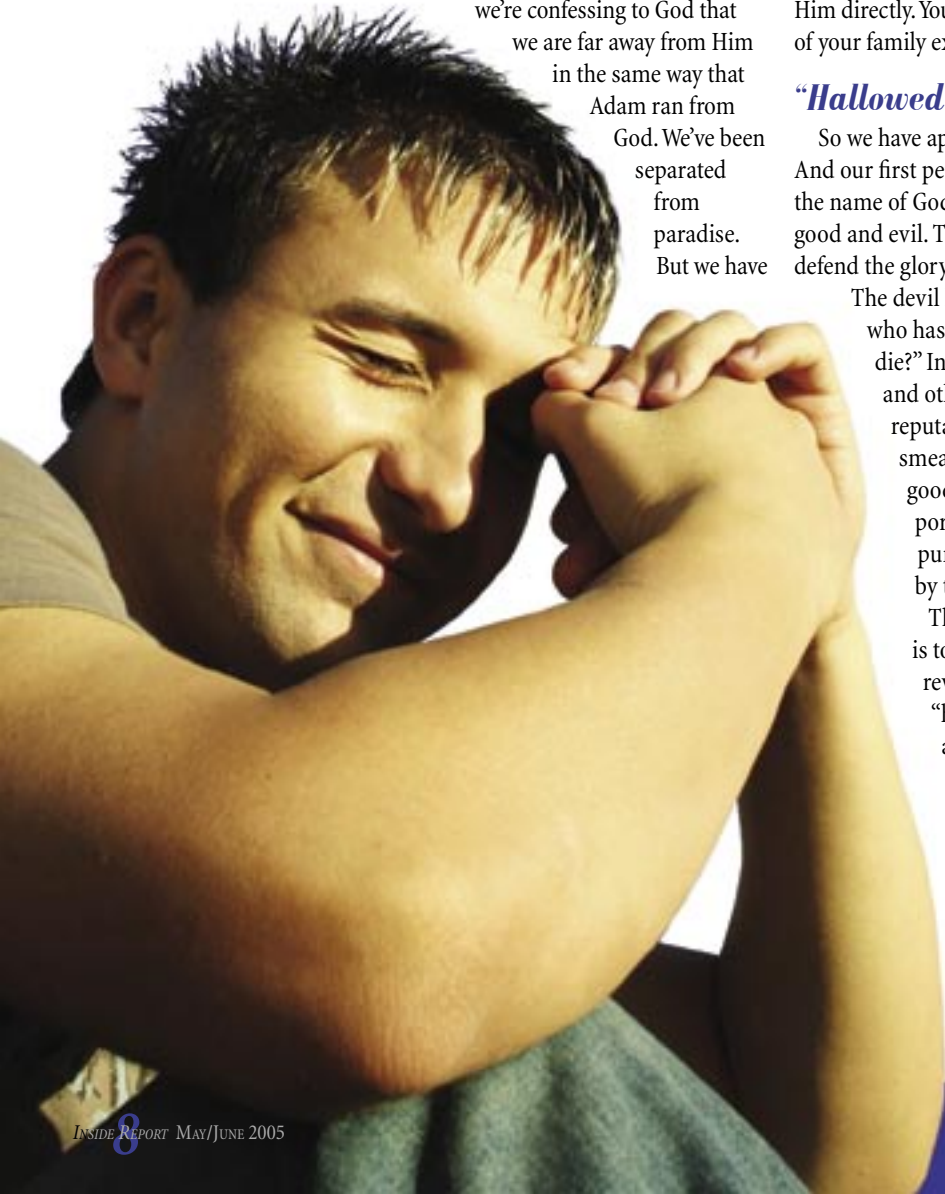
"Hallowed Be Thy Name"

So we have approached God because He's our Father in heaven. And our first petition to our God is "hallowed be Thy name." Now the name of God is a central issue in the great controversy between good and evil. The whole purpose of the plan of salvation is to defend the glory of God.

The devil has slandered God's name. Do you know someone who has said, "If God is love, then why do innocent children die?" Insurance companies call earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters "acts of God." What kind of reputation does that give God? The devil is a master at smearing the character of our Father. He has God, the good, wonderful, loving, longsuffering, merciful One, portrayed as a cruel, indifferent tyrant arbitrarily punishing His creatures. God's name has been defiled by the devil.

Thus the purpose of the Christian, by God's grace, is to defend the name of God as much as we can, to reveal who He really is. Unfortunately, we need to pray "hallowed be thy name" because we're not very good at it. Even in the Bible, we see God's own people do more to dishonor His name than the full-fledged pagans. And times really haven't changed much since antiquity.

Remember, we said the Lord's Prayer somewhat mirrors the Ten Commandments. The third one commands, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his





But someday the meek will inherit the earth and God's literal kingdom is going to rule over this world with a very real and physical kingdom. Do you think we would need to pray, "Thy kingdom come," if God's kingdom were already established? When Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, as recorded in Acts 1, the disciples asked, "Will You at this time restore the kingdom?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know times or seasons" (Acts 1:6, 7 NKJV).

name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Using God's name in profanity is only one small part of breaking this commandment. But taking God's name is like a wife taking her husband's last name. When you're a baptized Christian, you take the name of Christ, but if you live like the devil after you've taken Christ's name, you're taking His name in vain. Who does more harm to the Christian cause, the pagans or professed Christians who live like the world?

Christians should be advertising for the goodness of God, but in many cases Christians do more harm. Instead, all around the world, we see professed Christians are attacking and killing others, such as in Ireland, Africa, and Croatia. What does that do to God's name? Jesus says, "Love your enemies . . . overcome evil with good" (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:21). Christ is slandered because of the bad behavior of those who take His name in vain. So "hallowed be thy name" is asking God to help us, in word and deed, honor His precious name.

"Thy Kingdom Come"

We are in the middle of a battle between two kingdoms. An enemy kidnapped the world when Adam and Eve surrendered the dominion that God had given them over the earth. Ever since, the priority of God's children has been to "seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

Of course, we must make two distinctions when we speak of God's kingdom—the spiritual and the physical. We know that the spiritual kingdom of God is very much alive in the world today, because Luke 17:21 says, "The kingdom of God is within you." When Jesus began preaching after His baptism, He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). This aspect of the kingdom is available now. If you have accepted Christ into your heart, then He reigns from His throne in your heart. Paul says, "Let not sin . . . reign in your mortal body," but rather let Jesus be your King and rule over all that you do (Romans 6:12). That's the first kingdom we should seek for: God's spiritual kingdom within our hearts.

The central message in the book of Daniel is that all the kingdoms and idols of the world, whether they are made of gold, silver, bronze, or clay will all disintegrate before the Rock of Ages, the kingdom of God. "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44 NKJV).

For the time being, we are ambassadors of another empire, advertising for a kingdom that will someday fill the earth. Christ said, "I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me" (Luke 22:29 NKJV). When the thief on the cross turned to Christ and said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom," he accepted Christ as his King (Luke 23:42 NKJV). That's why he'll be in the kingdom, because he had the spiritual kingdom that begins in your heart.

The phrase "the kingdom of God" is found 70 times in the New Testament. Why? Because there are two kings at war, Jesus and the devil, who says he's the prince of this world. That's why we still need to pray that His kingdom will come: first within us, then someday around us.

"Thy Will Be Done in Earth as It Is in Heaven."

Contrary to popular belief, God's will in this world is not always being done. I respectfully disagree with the notion that everything that happens is in accordance with the Creator's will. When something bad happens, like a tornado, you inevitably hear someone say, "Well, it must have been the will of God." I don't believe that's what the Bible teaches, and if that's really true, why would God have us pray that His will be done?

Conversely, not everything that appears to be good is from God's storehouse either. Sometimes the devil may even cast prosperity in someone's path to stall or derail their longing for God. You and I

have no idea what's going on behind the spiritual veil, which is why we have to pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

You and I naturally have our wills twisted and confused by our carnal desires. We need to pray that God's grace and His Spirit will guide our wills into conformity with His. We also need to learn what His will is for us, and we find the best expression of that in the Word. For beginners, the simplest form of God's will is called the Ten Commandments. "I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8 NKJV). So when we pray "Thy will be done," we're really praying that His will be done in us through submission and obedience.

Of course, Jesus is the perfect example of doing God's will here on the earth. In John 6:38, He proclaims, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (NKJV). In the garden of Gethsemane, facing separation from the Father, Christ petitioned God three times with, "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Is it always easy to do God's will? No. If it was a tremendous struggle for Jesus, we will also need to pray, "Thy will be done."


A Greater Will

When God created most things, He merely spoke them into existence. But when He made Adam, He took dust from the ground, formed it with His hands, and breathed life into it. He made humanity from the earth. So when we pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," we're also admitting we're really just clay. "In earth" also means in us. We're humbling ourselves before God, recognizing that in our rebellion, our wills are perverted. When we pray "Thy will be done," we're giving Him permission to use us according to His purpose.

The Lord will never force His will on you because of the precious gift of freedom. He's not going to force you to pray, "Thy will be done." You have to choose to do it, to surrender your will, to be His servant, and give Him permission to activate His power and plan in your life. When you understand that secret, you'll unlock the storehouses of heaven's power.



But be advised, it works the other way too. Many of us are harassed by the devil because we give the devil our will. You may choose who your master is. And when we through constant surrender comply with the temptations that the devil puts in our path, we start giving him increased power to activate his desires in our lives. And ironically, when we exercise our freedom to submit to the devil, we, inch by inch, lose our freedom! The devil possesses our natures, and we become his slave.

Yet it is possible to be filled by God's Spirit. Would you like that experience? Most of us are struggling somewhere between the willing spirit and weak flesh, but when you understand that by you choosing and saying, "Lord, I want you to be my God. I want you to take control. I surrender my will. I'm giving myself to you. I am powerless on my own," you are then giving Him the power to release His will in your life. He's waiting, but He can't force it on you. So remember that when you pray, don't forget to say, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." 

In the next Inside Report, Pastor Doug will address the parts of the Lord's Prayer that deal with ourselves and those around us. Plus, he'll also tackle the practical issues in our daily prayers, like posture, time, and other questions Amazing Facts receives regarding prayer in the Christian's life.

