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Reflections on the Lord's Prayer
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I

PREFACE

Our Father in Heaven



What does this preface to the Lord's Prayer teach us?

The preface of the Lord's Prayer, which is, *Our Father which art in heaven*, teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.

—Westminster Shorter Catechism

Those who can say, "Our Father which art in heaven," are something more than God's creatures: they have been adopted into his family. He has taken them out of the old [sinful] family in which they were born; he has washed them, and cleansed them, and given them a new name and a new spirit, and made them "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ"; and all this of his own free, sovereign, unmerited, distinguishing grace.

—Charles H. Spurgeon

OUR FATHER

What does it mean to address God as "Our Father"?

Right at the beginning of the prayer, with the word "Our Father," Jesus reminds us of what God demands and promises. God insists that we give him the respect, honor, and reverence he deserves, just as earthly fathers expect this from their children. Also, God the Father wants us to

trust that he will meet our needs. We are overjoyed to be his children through Christ. And so, because we trust that he will give us what he promised, we can pray to him with confidence, in the name of Christ, our Lord.

—Martin Luther

Princes on earth give themselves titles expressing their greatness, as “High and Mighty.” God might have done so, and expressed himself thus, “Our King of glory, our Judge,” but he gives himself another title, “Our Father,” an expression of love and condescension. That he might encourage us to pray to him, he represents himself under the sweet notion of a father. The name Jehovah carries majesty in it; the name Father carries mercy in it.


—Thomas Watson

At the very beginning of our prayer Christ wants to kindle in us what is basic to our prayer—the childlike awe and trust that God through Christ has become our Father. Our fathers do not refuse us the things of this life; God our Father will even less refuse to give us what we ask in faith.

—Heidelberg Catechism

And thanks be to the mercy of Him who requires this of us, that He should be our Father,—a relationship which can be brought about by no expenditure of ours, but solely by God’s good will.

—St. Augustine



Christ taught us also to approach the Father in His name. That is our passport. It is in His name that we are to make petitions known.

—E. M. Bounds

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

—Romans 8:14–16

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father.

—James 3:9

Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

—I John 1:3

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

—I John 3:1

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

—Ephesians 1:3

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

—Ephesians 4:4–6

I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.

—2 Corinthians 6:18

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

—James 1:17–18

Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—Ephesians 5:19b–20

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

—Matthew 7:9–11

IN HEAVEN

Why is it important to acknowledge our Father is in heaven?

God is said to be in heaven, not because he is so included there as if he were nowhere else; for “the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (I Kings 8:27). But the meaning is, that he is chiefly resident in what the apostle calls “the third heaven,” where he reveals his glory most to saints and angels (2 Corinthians 12:2).

—Thomas Watson

Heaven is a place of perfect purity, and we must therefore lift up pure hands, must study to sanctify his name, who is the Holy One, and dwells in that holy place. He is a Father, and therefore we may come to him with boldness, but a Father in heaven, and therefore we must come with reverence.

—Matthew Henry

The words “in heaven” teach us not to think of God’s heavenly majesty as something earthly, and to expect everything for body and soul from his almighty power.

—Heidelberg Catechism

Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day...

Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear,
forgive.

— I Kings 8:28, 30b

The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people,
and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his
holy dwelling place.

— 2 Chronicles 30:27

From heaven the LORD looks down
and sees all mankind;
from his dwelling place he watches
all who live on earth—
he who forms the hearts of all,
who considers everything they do.

— Psalm 33:13–15

The LORD has established his throne in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over all.

— Psalm 103:19

“Am I only a God nearby,” declares the LORD,
“and not a God far away?
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 23:23–24

I lift up my eyes to you,
to you whose throne is in heaven.

—Psalm 123:1

The LORD is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.
Who is like the LORD our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,
who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?

—Psalm 113:4–6

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

—Acts 17:24–25

After [Jesus] said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

—Acts 1:9–11

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand
of God the Father Almighty.

—The Apostles' Creed