

OUR FATHER

Week #1 of a 2-Week Series, "The Lord's Prayer"

With Rev. Richard Maraj

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A lawyer told an attorney friend of his that he was about to start teaching Sunday school. His astonished friend replied, *"I'll bet you five bucks you don't even know the Lord's Prayer."*

The lawyer fumed, and he said, *"I know it! Everybody knows it."* And then he proudly recited, *"Now I lay me down to sleep." [Congregants laugh] "I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."*

And his friend stared at him in absolute shock and he took out \$5, handed it to him and said, *"I didn't know you knew the Bible so well."* [Congregants laugh] Okay.

"The Lord's Prayer" is the best known of all Christian prayers. It is heard in services and funerals and weddings and christenings. And we have said it so often it becomes rote. And I think, in some ways, we miss the depth of the meaning of this great prayer.

This prayer is stated by Jesus in the Book of Matthew, Chapter 6 in response to being asked by the disciples how to pray. And Jesus warns to do not use heaped-up, empty words and don't stand in synagogues where people can see you. That prayer is not about a lot of words. It is not about getting attention. It is, in fact, a very private and personal, sincere and heartfelt activity.

Jesus said, "When you pray, go into thine inner chamber and close the door and pray to your Father, who is in secret. And your Father, who is in secret, will reward you."

He's saying, go into your inner chamber and close the door on the distractions of the world. And go to that secret place where you are one with God. That secret place that no one can go to except oneself. And there your Father will hear you and reward you.

And then he follows up and says, *"Then pray like this":*

Our Father, who 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, the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Now, "The Lord's Prayer" is not meant to be a word-for-word prayer that you memorize and keep saying it consistently. It is more about showing a mindset, a level of awareness, an understanding, a consciousness behind which we pray.

And so, today we're going to start just a two-week series looking first at the first four statements. Next week we'll look at the last three.

So, let's begin with the first, which is **OUR FATHER.**

Oliver Wendell Holmes, the Supreme Justice, said that his entire religion could be summed up in the first two words of the Lord's Prayer. He says that "Our Father" really shows an entire system of theology, as it clarifies a relationship with God as a parent-child relationship; as a loving parent that is there for us. And that the relationship that we have with all other human beings is that of brothers and sisters. Because if it's "Our Father," it means that we are all children of God; that we are all one, created in the image and likeness.

And notice he said, he did not say "My Father"; he said "Our Father." And so, it's clearly inclusive of everyone; that we are all one. We are all connected. We are all brothers and sisters.

And so, Neil Douglas-Klotz, an Aramaic scholar -- and Aramaic is a language that Jesus spoke -- said that this first line, "Our Father who art in heaven," translates in Aramaic to approximately this: *"O cosmic birther: Mother/Father of all radiance and vibration."*

And he said what it is doing: it's portraying God as a birthing Source from which all things come forth that is gender-inclusive -- Mother/Father -- and not strictly male.

And it describes God as all light, all sound, all substance: the breath of the universe. The divine source of life; the presence that gives life and makes all things possible.

And so, Jesus is saying that we should start our prayer in that mindset and in that consciousness: that we are connected. That we are one with the one source and connected with all people.

And think about that. If we were to pray in that consciousness of "Our Father" that is inclusive, that is so connected ... don't you think you'd feel comforted? You'd feel supported? You know, you'd feel a sense of reassurance -- a sense of faith when we pray, starting in this mindset -- that we're connected to the very Source that is a loving Source. That it makes us feel in prayer that we are comforted; that we are reassured; that we have the faith that good things will happen and come forth.

Prayer, when you think about it, is a unifying activity. Because most of the time we turn to prayer, it's because we feel disconnected. We feel fragmented. We feel lost. We feel like we are being stretched and pulled in all kind of different directions. And so, prayer is a unifying activity that brings us back to center; that brings us back to Source; brings us back to home; brings us back to ourselves; brings us back to our true nature.

And the symbol of the Father -- sometimes that isn't always/hasn't done well for us culturally. But he's really trying to represent a parent-like figure that's all-providing; that is all-loving; that is always there for us and willing to guide us divinely.

Again, can you imagine starting all your prayers in the consciousness of "Our Father"? That we are connected, that we are loved, that we are supported?

Charles Fillmore said that *"Prayer is man's steady effort to know God."* So, most of the time we're praying, we're praying for something that we need help with. Like, it might be employment. It might be health. It might be a relationship. It might be to have greater success or financial abundance. There's nothing wrong with those things.

But ultimately, he says, what we're really seeking and searching for is a connection with our soul to connect with its Source; to know our oneness. And so, it's really to know our connection, to know our oneness with our Source.

"Our Father," you know, is a very powerful statement that we should use, because it unifies us. It makes us connected and realize that there's good and support that is available to us. So that's the first one: "Our Father." Comforting, reassuring, supportive way to begin all prayers. We're not bringing it desperate or in fear. We're actually and centered in the truth when we say, "Our Father."

And now: **WHO ART IN HEAVEN.**

And so, we've been taught that heaven is up in the sky. We often just look up for heaven or think we're talking to God. But Jesus, when he was asked, *"Where is God? In the mountain? Or is God in the temple?"* Jesus said, *"Neither. So, you shall not say, 'Lo, there it is, or here it is,' for the kingdom of God is within you."*

The kingdom of God is within you. You know, Unity believes that heaven or hell are not places, but they are states of consciousness that we are in. We literally believe that it's not a location, but it is a dimension of our own consciousness: a way of perceiving and a way of being. A consciousness that we can awaken to now, right here and now.

John Milton said this in "Paradise Lost": *"The mind has its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven."*

So, when we are tuned in and at one with God as our Source, that we are an expression of God -- that is a heavenly consciousness. And that when we feel disconnected and can't see the good in our lives, we only see lack. We only see limitation. We only see negativity. That is a hellish experience.

I saw this thing once and it said, *"Two prisoners behind bars. One saw mud, the other stars."* And sometimes in the same situation that we're in, some hold a consciousness of positivity and hopefulness and joy and potential. And some see negativity and hopelessness and powerlessness and feeling sorry for ourselves.

Consciousness is what it's about! And this is saying -- "Who art in heaven" -- Who is in consciousness. And it's our job and our work to connect with that consciousness.

You know, heaven is not a place we're going. It's right within us and we need to cultivate it. "Our Father" is a reminder of our oneness, and we seek the comfort of beginning prayer that way. And "Who art in heaven" is about aligning ourselves with the kingdom within and the consciousness within.

And the next one is: **HALLOWED BE THY NAME.**

So, there was this kid in Sunday school. He went up to a Sunday school teacher and said, "Hey, I know God's name!"

He said, *"What is it?"*

He said, *"It's Harold."*

He said, *"How do you know that God's name is Harold?"*

He said, *"It says it right there: 'Our Father, who art in heaven, Harold be thy name.'"*

So, the next: Hallowed, be Thy name.

Hallowed means wholeness. It means holiness. It means sacredness and unlimited goodness. So, "Hallowed, be Thy name." And in the Bible, name refers to your nature. So: Holiness be our nature. That is God's nature -- is wholeness, is abundance, is sacredness. You know, peace is God's name/nature. Love and joy is God's name and nature.

And so, Charles Fillmore says, *"The highest form of prayer is the affirmation of truth."* The highest and most powerful form of prayer is the affirmation of truth. Like, *"Hallowed be thy name."* Like, *"Thy kingdom come."* Like, *"Thy will be done."* Like -- my favorite 23rd Psalm -- *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."*

It is the affirmation of truth -- is the power of prayer. *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* *"God has given us a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."* These are incredible affirmations of truth. Because it helps align us with the truth. It helps align us with the Power that is in us and fully available to us.

So, if "Hallowed be thy name," and we are children of God -- offsprings of God -- it must mean that hallowed is my name. Hallowed is your name. Hallowed is all of our names. Holiness is our name. Abundance is our name. Peace, joy, and love -- that is our nature. And to accept that truth is a powerful, powerful form of prayer.

In Aramaic, the translation to this particular aspect of the Lord's Prayer -- "Hallowed be Thy name" -- is this: *"Focus your light within us. Make it useful as the rays of a beacon show the way."* All-powerful is our nature. All-powerful is your nature. And it says: shine that light in us so that the rays will be a beacon to show the way.

And so, it's really saying – “Hallowed be Thy name” -- that light be thy name, and shine that light in us so we can be a beacon. Let that hallowedness -- the wholeness in us -- radiate from us that it will show ourselves and others to greater truths.

You know, prayer changes us. It awakens us and opens us to the truth that we often forget. And prayer is a wonderful reminder that “Hallowed be Thy name”: that unlimited abundance and goodness is our nature.

The next one is **THY KINGDOM COME**.

Again, affirmation of truth; very powerful: *“Thy kingdom come.”*

So, what if Jesus wasn't telling us that we had to wait for heaven? What if Jesus is teaching us and inviting us to participate in the manifestation that Thy kingdom will come? Maybe that is what Jesus is doing: saying that, *“For the kingdom to come, I need your help. I need you to help transform. I need you to awaken. I need you to expand your consciousness.”*

In Unity, we'd say that the kingdom is already a spiritual reality, but we've got to do the work and awaken and express to bring it forth; to bring the kingdom forth. It is a calling. It is a work that we're all here to do: to let peace come through us; to let love come through us; joy come through us; healing and wisdom to come through us.

So, if I had to say to you: What is your soul calling you to have come through you more? What quality is being called to express more through you? What do you think that quality would be right now in your life? Would it be kindness? Would it be love? Would it be joy? Maybe it would be peace. I don't know what it is, but I'll bet all of our souls are calling us to express more of something in our lives.

Jesus said, *“My kingdom is not of this world.”* And the coming of it is really about drawing in our consciousness.

Here's what Eric Butterworth says. He says, *“For the kingdom to come, old beliefs in us must be released. We can no longer think the many negative thoughts that we have been thinking about ourselves. We have to begin to think the truth that we are sons and daughters of God with unlimited potential. This can only happen with the renewing and transforming of our minds, our inner thoughts, by letting go of all habits that are restricting and hampering our spiritual growth.”*

For the kingdom to come, it requires our willingness, our participation, our willingness to change, our willingness to transform, our willingness to let go and release. Not something that we wish, but something that we participate in and allow to happen in us and through us.

This guy was looking for Mount Olympus. He kept going around saying, *“Can you tell me the best way to get to Mount Olympus?”*

Person said, *“No.”*

Next: *“How do I get to the Mount Olympus?”*

“I don't know.”

Came upon Socrates and he said, *“Socrates, how do I get to Mount Olympus?”*

He said, *“Well, the best way to get to Mount Olympus is to make sure every step you take is in that direction.”*

And so, let's say your Mount Olympus is really good physical health. The best way to get to Mount Olympus is to make sure every step you take is in that direction. But sometimes if we eat fried foods or have too many desserts, we're not taking a step in the right direction. There are all kinds of things. When we say we want to spend more time with our family, but we don't discipline ourselves and set

boundaries at work and end up staying longer. There are all kinds of things that we say is our goal, but we actually take steps in the wrong direction and not in the right direction.

If we want the kingdom to come, we must participate in it. We must be a channel, you know, for these amazing qualities to move through us and to do the work.

So let me ask you a question: What steps are you taking? What good steps are you taking right now towards your Mount Olympus? Of knowing your oneness with God? And what are some habits and patterns that you're holding onto that are taking steps in the opposite direction that it might be time for you to let go and release?

I believe that we are all being called to help manifest the kingdom; allow it to come forth in and through us. The question is: Are we willing to take more steps towards that and release the ones of not moving in that direction?

And the last one is: **THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.**

Eric Butterworth again: *"Each person is a perfect idea in God Mind: a divine possibility of infinite capacity. Like the pattern in a seed, there is a plan for every person in the mind of the Infinite which gives rise to a ceaseless urge within each person toward fulfillment. The will of God is a ceaseless longing to the Creator to express Himself and perfect Himself in the creation."*

I love that line where it says, *"The will of God is a ceaseless longing to the Creator to express Himself and perfect Himself in the creation."*

How many people have ever had inner guidance and Spirit calling you to do something, but you did not want to do it? Anybody ever have that? How many people ever had some guidance you were called to do -- the inner urge was there -- and you knew it was the right and best thing, and you still didn't do it? Okay. And how many have had the opposite: That you got the guidance, it was very clear; you did it, and it helped you, and it made a difference? I think we all know that.

I think some of the scariest words I've mentioned at times growing up in my church life were the words, *"Thy will be done."* I always got scared about that. I kept thinking, *"God, I'll take it, but can you not make it too hard?"*

And so, it's often that we hear, *"Thy will be done,"* and it sounds like something is being imposed upon us. That there'll be something demanding, and there'll be something scary and difficult that'll be hard for us to do.

And at this stage in all of our spiritual lives, we have to get to a place of surrender: where you truly can let go at the deepest level and trust that Spirit has a plan, that there is a guidance, and to pay attention to the inner urge.

I heard a fabulous definition of surrender, and it's this: *"Surrendering is to stop fighting against the deeper wisdom within."* Stop fighting the deeper wisdom within. The wisdom's there! The guidance is there! But we need to stop fighting, stop resisting, stop fighting it.

Lao Tzu said, *"When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be."* John Hyder says, *"You've got to let go of who you were to become who you will be."*

And so, the question is: Are you ready to surrender your will to God at the deepest level? To put aside all the things that are in the way of you totally and completely being open and receptive to the guidance of Spirit?

You know, Jesus got to that place where he was scared and he had to say, *"But not my will. Thy will be done."*

One of the most powerful spiritual moments is when we get to the place of: Are we willing to release? And are we really willing to totally surrender? It is a higher place on our spiritual path to fully surrender.

And we all will need to do it in our own way for our own reason to take us to the next step to help fulfill our divine purpose and God's will for us in our lives. The question is: Are you ready and willing to surrender?

A man was caught in a terrifying violent storm in a small sailboat. Fearing for his life, he dropped to his knees on the deck and prayed, *"Lord, if you save me and bring me to shore safely right now, I promise I will give up drinking, I'll stop gambling, and never tell another lie for the rest of my life."*

Then instantly, a wave pushed the man's boat to safety to a calm, sandy beach. He stood up, brushed off the sand on his pants, and he said, *"Oh, never mind, God; I think I've got it now."* [Congregants laugh]

So, we say and sing "The Lord's Prayer" a lot. You know, we memorize it. But the question is: Are we really living it? Have we really taken it in and really captured the depth and the power that is available to us? It's really like a map -- a spiritual guidance map -- for us to pray and to follow.

And so, "Our Father" is about a unifying awareness that we are one with God. And that actually gives us a sense of comfort and a sense of support, and a sense of reassurance. And what a wonderful way to start. any prayer: "Our Father."

"Hallowed be thy name" It is affirming the nature of God is holy; unlimited goodness. And since we are children of God, that that hallowedness -- that holiness and goodness -- is already within us.

And then the third is, "Thy kingdom come." This is when Spirit is saying, *"Hey, you're a part of this."* For this to be transformed into the new kingdom, that we need to do our part. We need to release the things, and we need to express our divinity.

And finally, *"Thy will be done on"* What is it?

[Congregant: *"On earth as it is in heaven."*] Yeah, what you said! And what it is saying is that to align our mind with the inner wisdom and get to the place where we can truly surrender to the will and the purpose and the reason that we are here, and the difference that we are here to make.

If we want to live the fullest life that we can, I truly believe it's to follow the prayer of "The Lord's Prayer." To realize that a prayer is about the evolution and expression of our own consciousness. So, this week, I invite us all to work on the power and the practices of "The Lord's Prayer."

God bless you all.