

The Lord's Prayer: Introduction

Our Father who art in heaven.

What does this mean? With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear Father.

Devotion

In the name of Jesus. Amen. Little children know that Daddy is very important to them. No matter what breaks, Daddy can fix it. No matter what goes wrong, if Daddy knows, he can help. And on the playground, “My Daddy is bigger than your Daddy.”

When Jesus teaches us to pray, He begins by telling us to call God “Father.” What Gospel! And God is not just someone else’s Father, but our own “Daddy.” In Baptism, we have been adopted by God and now our spirit calls out “Abba (Daddy), Father” (Rom. 8:5). “Ab” is the Hebrew word for “Dad.” When it is repeated, it’s like a child repeating “Dad-dy.” God would have us think of Him as “Daddy.”

Could there be any greater news in the world? The God who created the universe in seven days, who formed Adam from the dust of the earth and Eve from Adam’s side, who spoke to Moses from the burning bush, and was the pillar of fire that led the children of Israel out of Egypt, that God, the only One there is, invites us to call Him, “Daddy.”

And not because you’re so wonderful either! It’s all because the Son of God took on your flesh and lived as a true Son of God. He died in your place. He rose and proclaimed you a child of God.

Now, our concerns are now our Dad’s concerns! What bothers us, bothers Him. What is going on around us doesn’t miss His attention. He is always watching, always attentive, always at the edge of His seat watching to see what things we’ll do next.

That’s prayer! Dad gives us eternal life in Jesus, and we tell Him what is going on in this world He has put us in. He is not angry with us – not the God who tenderly invites us to call Him “Daddy.” Not after what Jesus did for us on Good Friday. The Father speaks to us in His Word, and we say back to Him all that He has said to us. That’s how Christians pray. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Discussion

God would bid us call Him, “our Father.” That's the starting point of prayer in Christ. God is your Father. You are His child. That seems unbelievable, doesn't it?

It's not unbelievable, if you study how God became your Father. To start your study of prayer, read John 20:1-18.

1. What was Mary Magdalene looking for when she went to the tomb early on Easter morning?
2. At what point did she recognize Jesus? What does this mean for us?
3. Jesus' words direct her to tell His disciples words which are very important for us. What does He say? (v. 17)
4. How does He address His disciples? What is His relationship to God?
5. What does this mean for us?
 - a. What is our relationship to Jesus?
 - b. What is our relationship to Jesus' Father?
 - c. What does this relationship depend upon (1 John 3:1, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6)?

6. How does Jesus change everything in our lives with the words of John 20:17?
7. Since God is our Father and Jesus our brother, how do we now live (2 Corinthians 6:18)? How do we pray? (Hebrews 4:16)
8. We might have gotten used to calling God “Father,” but what about “Dad” or “Daddy”? How does that make you feel?
9. How did God become your Father? (Galatians 3:26-27, 4:4-6)
10. Reread the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer in the *Small Catechism*. What does this say about how we pray?
11. What is “boldness” and “confidence?” Is that how you pray? If not, what should you do?
12. How do kids ask their parents for things? Do you ask God for things this way? What keeps you from doing that?
13. Could we pray this petition without the cross of Christ?

Prayer

Thank you, Heavenly Father, that because of what Jesus did for us on Good Friday, you are our Father and we are your children. Help us to live as your children, to call upon your name, and to take comfort in your forgiveness. Through Jesus, your Son and our Lord, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

The Small Catechism

As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household.

Our Father who art in heaven.

What does this mean?--Answer.

God would thereby [with this little introduction] tenderly urge us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father.

The Large Catechism

1] We have now heard what we must do and believe, in which things the best and happiest life consists. Now follows the third part, how we ought to pray. **2]** For since we are so situated that no man can perfectly keep the Ten Commandments, even though he have begun to believe, and since the devil with all his power, together with the world and our own flesh, resists our endeavors, nothing is so necessary as that we should continually resort to the ear of God, call upon Him, and pray to Him, that He would give, preserve, and increase in us faith and the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments, and that He would remove everything that is in our way and opposes us therein. **3]** But that we might know what and how to pray, our Lord Christ has Himself taught us both the mode and the words, as we shall see.

4] But before we explain the Lord's Prayer part by part, it is most necessary first to exhort and incite people to prayer, as Christ and the apostles also have done. **5]** And the first matter is to know that it is our duty to pray because of God's commandment. For thus we heard in the Second Commandment: *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain*, that we are there required to praise that holy name, and call upon it in every need, or to pray. For to call upon the name of God is nothing else than to pray. **6]** Prayer is therefore as strictly and earnestly commanded as all other commandments: to have no other God, not to kill, not to steal, etc. Let no one think that it is all the same whether he pray or not, as vulgar people do, who grope in such delusion and ask, Why should I pray? Who knows whether God heeds or will hear my prayer? If I do not pray, someone else will. And thus they fall into the habit of never praying, and frame a pretext, as though we taught that there is no duty or need of prayer, because we reject false and hypocritical prayers.

7] But this is true indeed that such prayers as have been offered hitherto when men were babbling and bawling in the churches were no prayers. For such external matters, when they are properly observed, may be a good exercise for young children, scholars, and simple persons, and may be called singing or reading, but not really praying. **8]** But praying, as the Second Commandment teaches, is to call upon God in every need. This He requires of us, and has not left it to our choice. But it is our duty and obligation to pray if we would be Christians, as much as it is our duty and obligation to obey our parents and the government; for by calling upon it and praying the name of God is honored and profitably employed. **9]** This you must note above all things, that thereby you may silence and repel such thoughts as would keep and deter us from prayer. For just as it would be

idle for a son to say to his father, "Of what advantage is my obedience? I will go and do what I can; it is all the same;" but there stands the commandment, Thou shalt and must do it, so also here it is not left to my will to do it or leave it undone, but prayer shall and must be offered at the risk of God's wrath and displeasure.

10] This is therefore to be understood and noted before everything else, in order that thereby we may silence and repel the thoughts which would keep and deter us from praying, as though it were not of much consequence if we do not pray, or as though it were commanded those who are holier and in better favor with God than we; as, indeed, the human heart is by nature so despondent that it always flees from God and imagines that He does not wish or desire our prayer, because we are sinners and have merited nothing but wrath. **11]** Against such thoughts (I say) we should regard this commandment and turn to God, that we may not by such disobedience excite His anger still more. For by this commandment He gives us plainly to understand that He will not cast us from Him nor chase us away, although we are sinners, but rather draw us to Himself, so that we might humble ourselves before Him, bewail this misery and plight of ours, and pray for grace and help. Therefore we read in the Scriptures that He is angry also with those who were smitten for their sin, because they did not return to Him and by their prayers assuage His wrath and seek His grace.

12] Now, from the fact that it is so solemnly commanded to pray, you are to conclude and think, that no one should by any means despise his prayer, but rather set great store by it, **13]** and always seek an illustration from the other commandments. A child should by no means despise his obedience to father and mother, but should always think: This work is a work of obedience, and what I do I do with no other intention than that I may walk in the obedience and commandment of God, on which I can settle and stand firm, and esteem it a great thing, not on account of my worthiness, but on account of the commandment. So here also, what and for what we pray we should regard as demanded by God and done in obedience to Him, and should reflect thus: On my account it would amount to nothing; but it shall avail, for the reason that God has commanded it. Therefore everybody, no matter what he has to say in prayer, should always come before God in obedience to this commandment.

14] We pray, therefore, and exhort every one most diligently to take this to heart and by no means to despise our prayer. For hitherto it has been taught thus in the devil's name that no one regarded these things, and men supposed it to be sufficient to have done the work, whether God would hear it or not. But that is staking prayer on a risk, and murmuring it at a venture; and therefore it is a lost prayer. **15]** For we allow such thoughts as these to lead us astray and deter us: I am not holy or worthy enough; if I were as godly and holy as St. Peter or St. Paul, then I would pray. But put such thoughts far away, for just the same commandment which applied to St. Paul applies also to me; and the Second Commandment is given as much on my account as on his account, so that he can boast of no better or holier commandment.

16] Therefore you should say: My prayer is as precious, holy, and pleasing to God as that of St. Paul or of the most holy saints. This is the reason: For I will gladly grant that he is holier in his person, but not on account of the commandment; since God does not regard prayer on account of the person, but on account of His word and obedience thereto. For on the commandment on which all the saints rest their prayer I, too, rest mine. Moreover, I pray for the same thing for which they all pray and ever have prayed; besides, I have just as great a need of it as those great saints, yea, even a greater one than they.

17] Let this be the first and most important point, that all our prayers must be based and rest upon obedience to God, irrespective of our person, whether we be sinners or saints, worthy or unworthy. **18]** And we must know that God will not have it treated as a jest, but be angry, and punish all who do not pray, as surely as He punishes all other disobedience; next, that He will not suffer our prayers to be in vain or lost. For if He did not intend to answer your prayer, He would not bid you pray and add such a severe commandment to it.

19] In the second place, we should be the more urged and incited to pray because God has also added a promise, and declared that it shall surely be done to us as we pray, as He says Ps. 50, 15: *Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee. And Christ in the Gospel of St. Matthew, 7, 7: Ask, and it shall be given you. For every one that asketh receiveth.* **20]** Such promises ought certainly to encourage and kindle our hearts to pray with pleasure and delight, since He testifies with His [own] word that our prayer is heartily pleasing to Him, moreover, that it shall assuredly be heard and granted, in order that we may not despise it or think lightly of it, and pray at a venture.

21] This you can hold up to Him and say: Here I come, dear Father, and pray, not of my own purpose nor upon my own worthiness, but at Thy commandment and promise, which cannot fail or deceive me. Whoever, therefore, does not believe this promise must know again that he excites God to anger as a person who most highly dishonors Him and reproaches Him with falsehood.

22] Besides this, we should be incited and drawn to prayer because in addition to this commandment and promise God anticipates us, and Himself arranges the words and form of prayer for us, and places them upon our lips as to how and what we should pray, that we may see how heartily He pities us in our distress, and may never doubt that such prayer is pleasing to Him and shall certainly be answered; which [the Lord's Prayer] is a great advantage indeed over all other prayers that we might compose ourselves. **23]** For in them the conscience would ever be in doubt and say: I have prayed, but who knows how it pleases Him, or whether I have hit upon the right proportions and form? Hence there is no nobler prayer to be found upon earth than the Lord's Prayer which we daily pray, because it has this excellent testimony, that God loves to hear it, which we ought not to surrender for all the riches of the world.

24] And it has been prescribed also for this reason that we should see and consider the distress which ought to urge and compel us to pray without ceasing. For whoever would pray must have something to present, state, and name which he desires; if not, it cannot be called a prayer.

25] Therefore we have rightly rejected the prayers of monks and priests, who howl and growl day and night like fiends; but none of them think of praying for a hair's breadth of anything. And if we would assemble all the churches, together with all ecclesiastics, they would be obliged to confess that they have never from the heart prayed for even a drop of wine. For none of them has ever purposed to pray from obedience to God and faith in His promise, nor has any one regarded any distress, but (when they had done their best) they thought no further than this, to do a good work, whereby they might repay God, as being unwilling to take anything from Him, but wishing only to give Him something.

26] But where there is to be a true prayer, there must be earnestness. Men must feel their distress, and such distress as presses them and compels them to call and cry out; then prayer will be made spontaneously, as it ought to be, and men will require no teaching how to prepare for it and to attain to the proper devotion. **27]** But the distress which ought to concern us most, both as regards ourselves and every one, you will find abundantly set forth in the Lord's Prayer. Therefore it is to serve also to remind us of the same, that we contemplate it and lay it to heart, lest we become remiss in prayer. For we all have enough that we lack, but the great want is that we do not feel nor see it. Therefore God also requires that you lament and plead such necessities and wants, not because He does not know them, but that you may kindle your heart to stronger and greater desires, and make wide and open your cloak to receive much.

28] Therefore, every one of us should accustom himself from his youth daily to pray for all his wants, whenever he is sensible of anything affecting his interests or that of other people among whom he may live, as for preachers, the government, neighbors, domestics, and always (as we have said) to hold up to God His commandment and promise, knowing that He will not have them disregarded. **29]** This I say because I would like to see these things

brought home again to the people that they might learn to pray truly, and not go about coldly and indifferently, whereby they become daily more unfit for prayer; which is just what the devil desires, and for what he works with all his powers. For he is well aware what damage and harm it does him when prayer is in proper practise.

30] For this we must know, that all our shelter and protection rest in prayer alone. For we are far too feeble to cope with the devil and all his power and adherents that set themselves against us, and they might easily crush us under their feet. Therefore we must consider and take up those weapons with which **31]** Christians must be armed in order to stand against the devil. For what do you think has hitherto accomplished such great things, has checked or quelled the counsels, purposes, murder, and riot of our enemies, whereby the devil thought to crush us, together with the Gospel, except that the prayer of a few godly men intervened like a wall of iron on our side? They should else have witnessed a far different tragedy, namely, how the devil would have destroyed all Germany in its own blood. But now they may confidently deride it and make a mock of it; however, we shall nevertheless be a match both for themselves and the devil by prayer alone, if we only persevere diligently and not become slack. **32]** For whenever a godly Christian prays: Dear Father, let Thy will be done, God speaks from on high and says: Yes, dear child, it shall be so, in spite of the devil and all the world.

33] Let this be said as an exhortation, that men may learn, first of all, to esteem prayer as something great and precious, and to make a proper distinction between babbling and praying for something. For we by no means reject prayer, but the bare, useless howling and murmuring we reject, as Christ Himself also rejects and prohibits long palavers. **34]** Now we shall most briefly and clearly treat of the Lord's Prayer. Here there is comprehended in seven successive articles, or petitions, every need which never ceases to relate to us, and each so great that it ought to constrain us to keep praying it all our lives.