

PRAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER IN PRIVATE

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Chapter 1. The Prayer

There are numerous English versions of The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6: 9b-13. Most are similar in content, but there are differences. Here are several for comparison.

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The King James Version of the Bible (KJV):

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

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The New International Version (NIV):

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

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The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV):

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

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The Jerusalem Bible (JB):

Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us. And do not put us to the test, but save us from the evil one.

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The Our Father or Pater Noster:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

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The Good News Bible (GNB):

Our Father in heaven: May your holy name be honored; may your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need. Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us. Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe from the Evil One.

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The Message (M):

Our Father in heaven, reveal who you are. Set the world right; Do what's best – as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the devil. You're in charge! You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes.

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The above are translations of the original Greek text of the New Testament. The following is The Lord's Prayer (transliterated) as it appears in The Greek New Testament, a publication of United Bible Societies:

Pater hemon ho en tois ouranois, hagiastheto to onoma sou, eltheto he basileia sou, genetheto to thelema sou, hos en ouranoi, kai epi ges;
Ton arton hemon ton epiouision dos hemin semeron; kai aphes hemin ta opheilemata hemon, hos kai hemeis aphakamen tois opheiletais hemon; kai me eisenegkeis hemas eis peirasmon, alla rhusai hemas apo tou ponerou.

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Questions:

List some of the differences found in the versions above. In your opinion, are any of these differences significant?

The Gospel of Luke also contains a version of The Lord's Prayer:

"Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."
Lk. 11: 2-4 (NRSV)

What major difference do you see between Luke and Matthew?

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Some Christians, including Presbyterians, say *forgive us our debts* when praying TLP. Others, including Methodists, may say *forgive us our trespasses*. Which one is it? I suppose it makes a difference because one summer two small congregations dealt with low church-attendance by coming together for worship. One was a Presbyterian congregation, the other a Methodist. They met in the Methodist church building.

At the end of the summer, a Methodist lay-leader said, "This is our last day of joint worship. I'd be happy for us to stay together all year, but next week you Presbyterians have to go back to your *debts*, while we Methodists stay here with our *trespasses*."

Why the difference? The Greek word for trespasses, transliterated into English, is *paraptomata*, which is not found in the TLP. A mistake was made by William Tyndale in 1525 while he was translating the New Testament into English. Tyndale, to whom we readers of the English Bible are greatly indebted for his massive work, translated *opheilemata*, which means debts, as trespasses. One little mistake, but then Thomas Cranmer perpetuated it

by using Tyndale's version of TLP in The Book of Common Prayer in 1549.

Methodists, Anglicans, and Episcopalians are among those who have a history of saying, *forgive us our trespasses*.

The Book of Common Prayer (1662):

Our Father, which 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 trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, Forever and ever. Amen

The word in TLP is *opheilemata*, which clearly means debts, *Forgive us our debts*. But Jesus does use the word *paraptoma*, trespasses, in a comment following TLP:

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses (paraptomata), your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6: 14, 15 (KJV)

Question:

What is the difference between a debt and a trespass?

The Good News Bible (above) says, *"Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us."* Be it a debt, trespass, or wrong; is it also a sin?

Chapter 2. The Context

The immediate context of The Lord's Prayer is a teaching concerning prayer. Jesus says:

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: Mt. 6: 5-9a (NIV)

"Our Father in heaven..."

In this context we can see that although TLP is used in worship services, and appropriately so, Jesus gave it for use as a private prayer. And when I *"go into (my) room, close the door and pray to (my) Father, who is unseen,"* there is great benefit: *"Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."* What is this reward, or what is it that God knows I need before I even ask? To be put right with God. TLP orients me toward God in such a way that I can constantly be put right with God.

In Matthew, righteousness (being right with God) is a main concern:

- The Gospel is organized in five discourses on the Way of Righteousness (a way of life). One of these discourses is the Sermon on the Mount, in which we are given The Lord's Prayer.
- Jesus says of John the Baptist, who prepared the Way for him, that he *"came to you in the way of righteousness"*. (Mt. 21:32)
- Discipleship is stated in terms of being right with God, *"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,*

you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 5: 20)

Righteousness, though, is something we ourselves cannot attain. It is God’s doing if my righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

- Salvation is set forth as being among the righteous. Cf. Mt.25: 31-46

The reward of praying TLP is being oriented toward God in such a way that God regards me as being among the righteous, something I myself do not deserve.

TLP comes to me in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5: 1- 7:29. Only a hypocrite could respond to the Sermon on the Mount apart from seeking God’s forgiveness. Jesus said, *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.”* He also said, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* Furthermore, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”*

Those who heard Jesus in person said, “There’s no way I can live up to such expectations! I have no righteousness apart from God’s forgiveness!” And they were correct. Being right with God is a Way of life made possible only by God’s forgiveness, that form of God’s love that persistently takes the

initiative in restoring a relationship that has been damaged by giving God less than God's due.

And there is no lessening of God's expectations. If Jesus commands, "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*" I am forgiven, not excused, for an instance in which I lash out in hatred. To experience forgiveness I may feel regret to some degree, but certainly I must be willing to try again to love my "enemies." Never am I excused because I think that what God demands of me is too difficult. Forgiveness enables me to try it again God's way, not give up because I think it is beyond my capabilities.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus invites me to join him in a way of life, the Way of Righteousness, in which I'm constantly being put right with God. Whatever integrity I have, it is God-given. God's forgiveness is fundamental to the Way of Righteousness, but so is praying The Lord's Prayer. The prayer orients me to what God is doing in our world, and calls me to make my contribution.

Questions:

The pagans above (Mt. 6: 7) seem to think that their god(s) will eventually grant them a hearing if they pray long enough: "Shut up already! What do you want?" Is this different from God answering some prayers and not answering others? Is "no" an answer? Or if I pray for A and receive B, can this be God's answer? Has God ever answered one of your prayers in a surprising way?

Jesus says about prayer, "*Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*" Some respond to Jesus by saying, "If God knows what I need before I even ask, why pray?" What do you think? Could the answer be that I pray to become aware of what I truly need? I obviously know what I want, but do I know what I need?

Chapter 3. The Structure

The table format, used to enhance teaching, has been around since long before Jesus. Suppose Jesus did not give us a random set of petitions to pray. Rather, he gave us six petitions and two qualifiers interconnected in a two-column table. It is prefaced by the name of the One to whom I pray:

Our Father, in heaven,

<i>(1) Hallow your name</i>	<i>(4) Give us this day our daily bread</i>
<i>(2) Your kingdom come</i>	<i>(5) And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors</i>
<i>(3) Your will be done</i>	<i>(6) Lead us not into temptation</i>
<i>(re.1-3) On earth as it is in heaven</i>	<i>(re.4-6) But deliver us from evil.</i>

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To Whom I Pray

The One to whom Jesus teaches me to pray is *Our Father, in heaven*. Our, in this portion of the prayer, refers to all humankind. See Chapter 4.

Petitions 1-3

In the first column of petitions, 1-3, I join with all others in Jesus' church, the Us in the prayer, in lamenting how things presently are on earth:

- God's name is not being hallowed,
 - God's rule is largely ignored,
 - God's will is not obeyed,
- and call on God to put things right.

In the original Greek of TLP, the verb mood of all six petitions is imperative, the form in which an exhortation is given. But I'm not exhorting God to do just anything. Petitions 1-3 are consistent with God's nature. I'm not urging Our Father to do anything that God isn't already doing. In Petitions 1-3 I'm simply rooting for God to continue. "Go for it, God! I'm with you and I'm for you as you hallow your name, make your kingdom come, and demand that your will be done!"

In TLP I am not begging a disinterested God to put things right, nor am I asking Our Father to act contrary to His nature. In the first three petitions I am exhorting God to complete the work begun in Jesus Christ.

A more-to-the-point translation would be,

Reveal yourself so all might know your nature!

Bring the world fully within your rule!

Accept no way but your way!

The First Qualifier

On earth as it is in heaven applies to each of the first three petitions, not to just the Third. I.e., *Reveal yourself so all might know your nature!* *Bring the world fully within your rule!* *Accept no way but your way!* – all this *on earth as it is in heaven.*

Petitions 4-6

In the second column of petitions, 4-6, I join Jesus' church, the Us in the prayer, in exhorting God to give what I need to be put right and to cooperate in the work of Petitions 1-3. If the tone of the first three petitions is "Go for it, God! I'm with you and I'm for you!" Petitions 4-6 follow by stating how I'm with God and what I need from God to join in the work of Petitions 1-3. Again, I am asking for nothing that God isn't on record as providing. In fact, I'm agreeing to cooperate as God would have me.

A more understandable translation would be,

Give us that which fuels the life of faith,

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,

Do not let us to tempt You with our agenda.

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The second set of petitions dovetails with the first set in table-format fashion, 4-1, 5-2, and 6-3.

(1) Hallow your name -- *(4) Give us this day our daily bread*

(2) Your kingdom come -- *(5) And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors*

(3) Your will be done -- *(6) Lead us not into temptation*

To pray *Hallow your name* (1) obligates me to also pray *Give us this day our daily bread* (4). See Chapter 5.

Your kingdom come (2) necessitates *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors* (5). See Chapter 6.

Your will be done (3) requires *Lead us not into temptation* (6). See Chapter 7.

The Second Qualifier

Deliver us from evil, applies to each of the last three petitions, 4-6, and not to just the Sixth. I.e., if I want more than *daily bread* as I help *hallow* God's name, or if I do not *forgive* while seeking God's *kingdom*, or if I *tempt* God to do it my way while praying *thy will be done*; I am in cahoots with the evil that opposes what God is doing in Petitions 1-3. I am not right with God and need to be put right, delivered.

Notice in the translations of Chapter 1 that in the NRSV, the NIV, the JB, and the GNB, the prayer ends with being delivered or rescued or saved from the "evil one", i.e., Satan. This is consistent with the Greek New Testament text, *But deliver us from the evil one*.

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The Customary Ending

"*For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever*," which most often concludes TLP in worship services, is not found in most English translations of the Bible. Nor is this conclusion found in the printed Greek New Testament text of Matthew 6: 9b-13.

One More Look

Another way of looking at the structure of TLP is as follows (After *Our Father, in heaven*, read down each column, left to right):

Our Father, in heaven

I support Your	While I, a member of Jesus' church,
Putting the world right	Need Your help in these three ways
In these three ways,	So that I might also be put right with You,
So life on earth will come fully under Your rule.	And be delivered from the evil that opposes Your rule.

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Questions:

To lament is to express sorrow or disappointment. Lamentation was a way of life in the Biblical era, but is it now? Do we lament the world's disinterest in God – God's name is not hallowed, God's rule is ignored, God's will is not obeyed - or do we accept it as just the way things are? What difference does it make?

Some people describe prayer as "magic wishes." Is this true if you pray for God's will for your life? Or pray to be a part of what God is doing in the world?

If you were confident regarding what God gives and what God doesn't give, would it affect the level of confidence in your prayers?

Chapter 4. Our Father in Heaven

Our

Our is unexpected in a private prayer. I would expect Jesus to teach something like, "My Father, in heaven." Still, this beginning helps puts me right with God and all God's children by reminding me that I pray as a member of two groups, the church and the human race.

Our in the address refers to all human beings, or God's children, those who follow Jesus and those who don't; whereas *Us* in Petitions 4-6 refers only to those who follow Jesus, his church. As a Christian, I am one of a people who, because we love God, are also obligated to love all God's children, love meaning, "*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.*" Mt. 7:12.

When Jesus was asked which of the commandments is the greatest, he said:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Mt. 22: 37-39. (NIV)

The word *neighbor* carries no restrictions. No one is excluded from God's love. As the song goes, "*Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red, brown, yellow, black, and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.*"

Our also links *Us* of the church to God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3:

"Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will

“bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (NIV)

Christians are to be a blessing to all humankind as we love *Our* neighbors, all of whom are also God’s children, as self in no less a neighborhood than the entire world. There is no one who doesn’t live on Jesus’ block.

Questions:

What is difficult for you when it comes to regarding all humankind as your spiritual brothers and sisters? Interestingly, there is no divide in TLP according to race or nationality. The only difference is whether or not one believes that there is a God and God’s nature is that of Our Father, in heaven.

Jesus’ church is to be a blessing to all humankind. Is this your experience of the church? Never? Some times? What would life be like had Jesus’ followers just gone their separate ways and not “congregated”? What would be lost?

Individual Christians have the need to be put right with God time and time again. What does this say about the nature of Jesus’ church, if anything?

Father

The following are teachings of Jesus, also from the Sermon on the

Mount:

“Ask and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Mt. 7:7-11 (NRSV)

"Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" Mt. 6: 26 (NRSV)

In TLP Jesus teaches me to pray to Our *Father*, the God whose nature Jesus clarifies in the Sermon on the Mount. According to Jesus (above), Our *Father* values every human being and provides for our needs, just as a parent values and provides for his/her children. None other than Our *Father* has as great a commitment to Our wellbeing. No one else has the power to provide for Our needs.

Furthermore, God the *Father* constantly seeks Our wellbeing. The author of the Letter of James says about God's love:

"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation due to a shadow of turning." James 1: 17 (NRSV)

Our *Father*, who is known in the Bible for a countenance that shines like the sun, never gives any of his children the cold shoulder, never turns his face from us, always give us his full attention – *"no variation due to a shadow of turning"* (away). What we need is what God constantly gives, and it is perfect or appropriate to our wellbeing.

Jesus uses the name *Father* to mean that it is God's nature to value every human being, just as a parent treasures and provides for each of his/her children. God constantly seeks Our wellbeing, and God doesn't play favorites. Our *Father* has a whole world full of children, each of whom is loved as though he/she is an only child. Remembering this when I pray TLP helps put me right both with God and my brothers and sisters.

"My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes, and say, 'Have a seat here, please,' while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there,' or, 'Sit at my feet,' have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?" James 2: 1-4 (NRSV)

No matter how different I am from another person, regardless of how far apart we are in our beliefs and lifestyle; I am charged by Jesus to treat this person as though he is every bit as important as all others of God's children. This person demands my respect and concern simply because she is provided for and valued by Our *Father*.

Questions:

There are names other than Father for God in the Bible. How many do you know? What do they mean?

For a variety of reasons, some today have difficulty calling God, Father. Would any other term convey the essential meaning, which is the One who values and provides for all human beings?

Observation. Praying TLP implies that I am Our *Father's* child. Some people find it offensive to think of themselves as a child. But there is a difference between being childish (immature) and child-like, one who trusts the parent for what is needed to live one's life.

God gives all His children a mind, and we're obligated to make the most of this gift. In the Bible, David was a military genius, Paul had few intellectual equals, and Jesus said, *"I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."* Mt. 10: 16 (NIV)

I cannot think of a single statement made by Jesus that implies I should be childish or immature. Rather, in the Bible a child reflects the character of his/her father, carries on the interests of the father, and trustingly walks in the way of the father. "*Be perfect (or mature), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" Mt. 5: 48 (NRSV)

Being a child of God is an identity that no Christian gets right all the time, which is why we regularly need to be put right with Our *Father*. Jesus, the Son with a capital "S", who shows us how to walk in God's way, is the only one to have perfectly lived as Our *Father's* child.

One of the things that is exciting about being a child of God is the knowledge that Our Father gives us what it takes to be fully-alive to the possibilities of life.

In Heaven

Heaven is more than our destination when life in this material world is over. *Heaven* is the realm of the unseen, the spiritual world as opposed to the material, the eternal as opposed to the transient, the realm where God, who is spirit, dwells and reigns fully.

Heaven is also the foundation for quality of life on earth (life lived within God's rule) in that the spiritual connection taught by Jesus gives shape to how I behave toward all others in the material world. We are all children of Our Father *in heaven*. Apart from this spiritual relationship, my life with others would fall apart. There would be no foundation for Our life together.

Some people are of the opinion that simply being human ought to be enough reason to treat each other with respect. Maybe so, but I have additional reason. I believe in God *Our Father, in heaven*. This spiritual connection gives shape to my life in Jesus' neighborhood.

Question:

Many people have difficulty finding purpose and meaning in their lives. Do you think this could be because they are ignoring the spiritual dimension? One's life lacks the spiritual foundation, and therein one is not right with God, creation, and others?

Observation:

A person once said, "In heaven, I'll be with all my loved ones." More to the point, "In heaven we'll love all who are there." Jesus, in TLP, invites me to begin now.

Chapter 5: Petition 1 & 4:

Hallow Your Name... Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

To *hallow* a name is to reveal it as *holy*, i.e., belonging to One who is different from and greater than all other forces and powers. And the reason for praying for God to *hallow or make holy* his name is so that God might be known by all his children rather than just some, the Us of the church.

The Good News Bible, above, Chapter 2, translates the first petition as, "*May your holy name be honored;*" The Jerusalem Bible says, "*May your name be held holy;*" and The Message puts it, "*Reveal who you are,*" namely, One who is more powerful than and different from all else.

We don't often use the word *hallow* nowadays. Apart from Halloween, many people would never have heard the word. Still, it's not like we never engage in *hallowing*-like activities. When I taught high school in the late eighties, my students wore T-shirts that touted their favorite music groups - "Judas Priest Rules!" or "Prince Rules!" or "Buddy Holly Rules!" (My T-shirt, I had to challenge their rule.) *Hallow your name* is not unlike saying, "Let it be known that 'Our Father Rules!'"

The giving of credits for a TV show or movie is also akin to *hallowing*. The actor or actress with most clout is listed first. When I pray *hallow your name*, I'm saying, "On the marquee of life, Our Father, may all people give you top-billing!"

Question:

"One nation under God" is a hallowing sort of statement. What does this say to you about the powers of the nation in relation to those of Our Father? Or

about the influence of God, who is different from all else, upon politics as usual? Should God be an influence in our national life?

Pharoah was a powerful and important force in his part of the world. Moses asked him to let the Israelite slaves go so they could hold a festival to the Lord in the wilderness.

"Pharoah said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.'" Exodus 5:2 (NIV)

Pharoah did not *hallow* the name Lord because he did not know the Lord. God had not revealed himself to Pharoah as he had to Moses. Likewise, there are many today who do not know Our Father, in heaven. To pray *Hallow your name* is to pray that Our Father reveal His existence and nature so they might know.

Although there are additional names in The Bible for God, Lord for example, Jesus gives us Father in TLP as the name that is above all others in terms of power and importance to humankind. Who is more important than the One whose difference is expressed by His ability to value and provide for each of us as though we're an only child?

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Petition 1, *Hallow your name*, laments the reality that God Our Father is not known and revered by all. Thus, I pray that God reveal Himself so all who will might believe that His nature is Our Father, the One who values each and every human being, His children, and who provides for Our needs.

How I then contribute to the hallowing of God's name is by praying as a member of Jesus' church, *Give us this day our daily bread*, Petition 4. This

petition means, "Our Father, help me trust that You will provide enough of what I need. Give me bread, that which fuels the life of faith, sufficient for the day. I need no more than what you provide."

Integrity demands that Petition 4 follow Petition 1 in the table-format explained above. Why? As a Christian, I cannot expect others to believe that it is God's nature to value all humankind and provide Our needs if I don't trust that God will supply my needs, or if my behavior implies that I want more than or other than God gives. What kind of a Christian would I be to pray *hallow your name*, yet live in anxiety as though God doesn't always provide my needs? One who isn't right with God, and one who doesn't set the right example for others. Thus, along with other Christians I pray, *give us this day our daily bread*, no more. What you provide is sufficient for my needs.

In the Greek of TLP, Jesus actually says, *Give us our bread for tomorrow today*, "Ton arton hemon ton epiousion dos hemin semaron." Stated in this manner, I am pointed to Exodus 16, one of the background stories for this prayer, a story in which the Israelites do not trust that God will take care of them as they journey in the wilderness. They complain regarding Moses and his brother Aaron:

"If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Exodus 16: 3 (NRSV)

But what happened? God rained bread (manna) in the morning that the people cooked for their evening meal. There was enough to fuel their

journey of faith. Since the Hebrews measured their days from sundown to sundown, God provided them bread for tomorrow (eaten after sundown), but bread gathered today (in the morning), exactly the way it is stated in TLP, *Give us our bread for tomorrow today*. Still, the people had doubts that there would be enough.

"When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was.

" Moses said to them, 'It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'

"The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.

"Then Moses said to them, 'No one is to keep any of it until morning.'

"However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them." Exodus 16: 15-20 (NIV)

God provided enough bread (manna) then, and provides me with enough bread now to live as His child. Exodus 16 teaches me that wanting more than I need fouls-up my life, and Jesus teaches that I cannot pray with integrity for Our Father to *hallow* His name unless I walk the walk. Mine is to trust that I too am valued, and that Our Father will provide me with what is needed to fuel the life of faith.

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Jesus taught the following about God Our *Father's* giving nature:

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6: 31-33 (NIV)

God provides Our food, drink, and clothing, indeed *"your heavenly Father knows that you need them."* That God provides enough to meet the material needs of humankind is a given according to Jesus, but as we all know, not everyone has sufficient food, drink, and clothing, or access to housing, schools, clinics, etc. Material necessities, even though abundant, are not always available to everyone. Around the globe humans starve, die from drinking contaminated water, live on the streets, and suffer because basic medical care is not available. Humankind constantly faces a distribution problem not of Divine making, one perpetuated by human short-sightedness, selfishness, apathy, greed, stupidity, in short, injustice; one that God seeks to rectify, in part, via the generosity and outcry of Jesus' church, the Us in Petitions 4-6. As Jesus said:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The king will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.'" Mt. 25: 31-40 (NIV)

There are enough of life's goods to go around, but because not everyone has access to these goods, it is the task of Jesus' followers to help see that they are provided. Thus, even though there are a material and

spiritual component to daily bread, the spiritual is the primary concern of TLP. My daily bread may turn out to be the generosity to share, or the guidance and courage to confront an injustice; in any event, my spiritual needs must first be supplied in order that I live responsibly in a material world with the rest of God's children.

Jesus himself clarifies the sort of daily bread that is most needed in the first of his three temptations, this when Satan tempts him to prove that he is God's Son by taking his material needs into his own hands.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'

"Jesus answered, 'It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Mt. 4: 1-4 (NIV)

The proof that Jesus is God's Son is not that he can turn stones into loaves of whole wheat, but that he relies first and foremost on the spiritual daily bread – *every word that comes from the mouth of God* - provided by Our Father. This faith-fuel not only guides and strengthens Jesus to do what God requires of him, but it enables him to trust that his physical needs will be provided in due time, which they are – *Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. Mt. 4: 11.*

Questions:

Christians sometimes give as their reason for going to worship, "the need to be fed." Might this be a felt acknowledgement regarding the importance of spiritual daily bread?

Most of us have thought to ourselves about some task, "I could never do that!" Why? Maybe we think we don't have the resources or the faith to do the job. The Bible tells us about several people who don't think they can:

- Moses is commanded by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses responds by saying that he could never do such a thing. He is a poor speaker, slow of speech. At least that is his excuse. Exodus 4: 10.
- Jesus says to the father of the epileptic boy, this regarding his ability to heal, "*All things can be done for the one who believes.*" *Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe help my unbelief!'"* Mark 9: 23, 24 (NRSV)
- Abraham and Sarah found God's promise that they would be parents hard to believe. Sarah was too old, couldn't possibly happen. Such a notion was laughable. Genesis 18: 9-15.

Yet, Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, the father's son was healed, and Sarah bore Isaac. Could these three exemplify persons who don't think they have enough "daily bread" to continue along the path God has set before them?

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God's name is revered by all in heaven, the spiritual realm where God dwells, but not by all on earth, or by any of Us consistently. I am supportive of God being recognized by all His children when I pray *Hallow your name*: "Reveal to all that Your nature is like that of Our Father, the One who values

each and every human being, Your children, and who provides for Our needs, both spiritual and material.”

Such a revelation on God’s part requires that I follow up as a member of Jesus’ church and also pray, *Give us this day our daily bread*, I need no more. Trusting God to provide enough of that which fuels the life of faith is how I bear witness that God’s power is sufficient in daily life, and how I am being put right with God and all others.

Chapter 6. Petitions 2 & 5:

Your Kingdom Come...

Forgive Us Our Debts As We Forgive Our Debtors

The announcement of God's kingdom or rule was Jesus' mission. His first public proclamation is recorded in Matthew 4: 17, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near;*" i.e., God's just and loving rule over earth has arrived. Embrace it! Jesus inaugurated this kingdom and invites all who will to live within it, but God's rule is not present fully. There is more to come.

The fullness of God's rule is the concern of Petition 2. Jesus teaches me to pray, *Your kingdom come*, or *Make your kingdom come*, to lament the way things are today - the world largely rejects God's rule - and to hasten the time when God rules fully.

Praying this petition reminds me that the way things are now is not yet the way God intends them to be. God is still at work putting all things right. I look forward to the time when there is justice and peace for all. My hope is for the sort of life in which God rules fully over earth, just as God rules fully in heaven now.

Observation:

One of the criticisms that Jews and Muslims have of Jesus is this: if he was the Messiah, God's anointed, he would have fully instituted God's rule. There would be no waiting around for more.

To pray *Your kingdom come*, and to do so with integrity, requires that I strive to live within God's rule now. I cannot hope for God's kingdom in the future and not want to live in that kingdom now. But there is no way that a sinner such as I can live within God's rule apart from God's forgiveness. I am the same sort of person as were the Israelites at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 32. When Moses delayed coming down the mountain, the people made and worshiped a golden calf rather than the Lord. We humans constantly attach ourselves to idols, those powers and symbols thereof, which we hope will help us achieve our agendas. But inasmuch as the Lord had made a covenant with the Israelites – He would be their God, and they would be His people – they owed the Lord better than they gave, which was to worship only the Lord and keep His laws.

Again, when I read Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, Mt. 5-7, my response is that I have not given God His due, nor can I. My only hope of being right with God lies in forgiveness, the persistence of God's love that takes the initiative in restoring a relationship in which much more is owed than has been given, while at the same time not lowering expectations of the debtor in the future. To live within God's rule now, along with Jesus' church I pray Petition 5, *Forgive us our debts*. "Forgive us, Our Father, for not giving you your due."

Questions:

1. Regarding the Sermon on the Mount, Mt. 5-7, do you strive to be blessed? (Mt. 5: 3-12) If so, do you also rejoice "*when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on*

my (Jesus') account"? For what reason might a person rejoice? Cf.

Acts 5: 41

2. "*Blessed are the pure in heart*" refers to those who have no motivation other than doing the right thing. Is ignoring the politics of a situation something you always do? You never have ulterior motives?

In the Sermon on the Mount we get a glimpse of how we are obligated to follow Jesus in bringing about the fullness of God's rule over the earth. But we too often fall short. We owe God better. We are in Our Father's debt, a debt that we cannot repay.

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The good news, of course, is that God does forgive, and by so doing restores debtors to right relationship with Him. Given that I am a recipient of God's forgiveness, I must also forgive others for giving me less than my due. Lest it be overlooked, there are two parts to Petition 5: *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

I pray TLP so that I might be put right with both God and all others of God's children, which is not going to happen if I fail to forgive. Just how great a debt God forgives in order that I might live within his present rule is found in Jesus' story about a king settling accounts with his servants:

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made.

"So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he

went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.'

"Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?'

And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart. Matthew 18: 23-35 (NRSV)

A servant owing ten thousand talents of silver comes before the throne. A talent is more than fifteen years of wages for a laborer; thus, he owes more than a laborer could make in one hundred-fifty thousand years. And although he can earn more than a laborer, there is no way he can possibly pay this debt, (same Greek word for debt, *opheilama*, as in TLP). The servant and his family are ordered to be sold into slavery, but the king responds to the man's pleadings by forgiving the debt. The servant owes him nothing. The account is settled, the relationship restored, full payment expected of the servant in the future.

Instead of being thankful and throwing a party to celebrate, the man collars a servant who owes him one hundred denarii, or the equivalent of three months wages, and demands payment. When this fellow asks him to be patient, the servant has him thrown into prison. The king finds out and is enraged. He then punishes the servant whose debt he had forgiven.

To pray *Your kingdom come* requires that I strive to live within God Our Father's rule now, which requires that I be forgiven. The magnitude of my debt to God is of the order one hundred-fifty thousand years of wages.

What is due me from anyone else, his or her debt, is more on the scale of three months' wages. But regardless of how great the damage – and certain offenses certainly run up a greater tab than others - I am being put right with God and others when I pray as a member of Jesus' church, *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*. Note that Jesus even adds a caveat to the end of TLP:

If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done. Matthew 6: 14, 15 GNB

The Lord's Prayer begins with *Our Father, in heaven*. This reminds me that I'm related to all human beings as their spiritual brother. When I have not forgiven persons or an individual who has given me less than my due, I have created a division in God's family that is not mine to make.

Questions:

1. What is meant by cheap grace?
2. In Mt. 18: 21, 22 (NRSV), Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you seventy times seven," i.e., as many as it takes.

Suppose another question is this: Lord, if a person sins against me – gives me less than my due – how many times must I say to myself, "I forgive you," before I actually have forgiven him/her? Seven times?... "Not seven times, but, I tell you seventy times seven," i.e., sometimes forgiveness is hard. I have to work at it.

Chapter 7. Petitions 3 & 6:

Your Will Be Done... Lead Us Not Into Temptation

Whenever I pray the Second Petition, *Your kingdom come*, also to be emphasized is the word *Your*. It is God's rule, no one else's.

Imagine a college coach who has labored to build up an athletic program. This head coach is a person of integrity, scrupulously observing the rules that govern his sport. But one day an investigative reporter breaks the story that his assistant coach, along with a group of boosters, has broken the rules in an effort to recruit sought-after high school players. They have bribed principals to change grades on transcripts, and they have paid athletes under the table. The head coach is devastated. He had no idea this was going on. He would never have approved. Not only is his program blemished, but his character is tarnished.

This coach is not unlike God in that there are practices that God will not countenance. Indeed, the one thing that Our Father cannot do is be untrue to His nature. As God works to bring about His rule in its fullness and to hallow His name, not just any mean justifies the end, which is the issue in the third temptation of Jesus:

Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Matthew 4: 8,9 (NIV)

Satan displayed his stock of worldly resources in the hope that Jesus would arm himself with the ways of the world. This temptation was not the

devil saying, "Abandon the work God has given you." This was no either/or choice being offered to Jesus, no kingdoms of the world as opposed to the kingdom of God. This was the devil saying, "Why not use my means of doing God's work? Employ worldly power to bring the world into line with God's rule. Use the kingdoms of the world to bring about God's kingdom!"

Satan was deviously asking Jesus to buy in to the thinking that the end justifies the mean; agree that God's work can be done using means other than those of God. Jesus refused:

"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Mt. 4:10 (NIV)

Establishing God's kingdom by using the means of the devil would mean that Jesus was serving two masters, not one. It can't be done. For Jesus to have yielded to this temptation would have resulted in furthering Satan's interest at the expense of tarnishing God's name.

"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (mammon)." Mt. 6:24 (NRSV)

Because not just any means will bring about the fullness of God's rule and hallow God's name, Petition 2, I pray Petition 3, *Your will be done*. I lament the damage done by followers of Jesus who use the ways of the world, the "might-makes-right way", and call on God Our Father to put things right. *Demand that your will be done*.

Observation:

The difference between WWJD and BMWJD is this: WWJD is "What Would Jesus Do?" BMWJD is "But My Way's Just Dandy!"

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In order that I don't become a problem when I pray *Your will be done*, I follow Petition 3 with Petition 6, *Lead Us Not Into Temptation*. But I do not pray this in the sense that many maintain.

Perhaps the one thing that is most unclear about The Lord's Prayer involves *Lead us not into temptation* (or "*peirasmon*" transliterated from the in New Testament Greek). Why would we need to pray in such a way? Is God going to tempt us to sin if we don't? Does God want us to be obedient on the one hand, yet tempt us to be disobedient on the other? What kind of a father would treat his children this way?

The author of the Letter of James is rather clear regarding what he believes. (The verb "tempted" in what follows is *peirazein* in New Testament Greek, the verb form of the noun *peirasmon* in TLP.)

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. James 1: 13-16 (NIV)

So which is it? Does God tempt us to sin, or does temptation stem from one's own desire as influenced by the "evil one"?

When Jesus taught the crowds to pray Petition 6, he naturally assumed that they knew the Exodus story. In the Septuagint, the Greek-language version of the Old Testament, the verb form for "test" or "tempt" in what follows again is *peirazein*.

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?" (Or, "Why do you tempt the Lord?")

But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."

The Lord answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink."

So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord (or "tempted the Lord"), saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Exodus 17: 1-7 (NIV)

The Israelites weren't nearly as much into hydration as are we North Americans; still, they were thirsty and demanded water. And it wasn't that God was going to refuse them. What was needed would be provided in God's time. But the people were so impatient that they committed an offense. Moses named the place Massah, which can mean "Test", as in putting God to the test, or "Tempt", as in tempting God to do it their way. "Are you really with us, God, or have you abandoned us? If you really love us, God, you will give us water now. Don't you love us? We were told that you do. Did we hear wrong? Or maybe you aren't capable of providing water. Why is it that we call you God if you can't give us water?"

Jesus teaches us to pray, *Your will be done*, and to follow it with, *Lead us not into temptation*, meaning, "Don't let us tempt you to do it our way. Your will, not ours!"

What kind of a person would I be to pray *Your will be done*, but then expect God to go along with my will? Certainly not one in whose opinion the rest of the world would be interested. Such would never lead to God's name being hallowed.

Another relevant use of *peirazein* or to "tempt" is the second temptation of Jesus:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Or better, "Do not tempt the Lord your God," else they will pick you up with a spatula.) Matthew 4: 5-7 (NIV)

I am being supportive of what God is doing when I pray *Your will be done*; and then as a member of Jesus' church I am being put right with God when I follow with the petition, *Lead us not into temptation*, meaning do not let me tempt You to do it my way.

Questions:

1. Would such a temptation actually have to be voiced as opposed to implied? I.e., do we have to say, "God, if you really love me, you will..."? Or could this be the understood context of our prayer?
2. Is it ever difficult to determine what God is calling you to do as opposed to what you want to do?

Chapter 8. The Qualifiers:

On earth as it is in heaven qualifies Petitions 1-3, *Hallow your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done.*

I pray that it be revealed *on earth* that God's nature is that of Our Father, the One who values each and every human being as a parent loves his/her child, and who provides for our needs. I pray for the coming of the fullness of God's rule *on earth*. And I pray that the means of bringing about this rule *on earth*, as well as the hallowing of God's name, be consistent with God's will, as opposed to the ways of the world.

Deliver us from evil qualifies Petitions 4-6 - *Give us this day our daily bread, Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, And lead us not into temptation.*

Evil in TLP is that which hinders God's intent for humankind and planet earth. Because *Us* refers to Jesus' church, not humankind in general, that which is evil has to do with my not being content with enough (Petition 4), or my not forgiving and accepting forgiveness (Petition 5), or my tempting God to do it my way (Petition 6).

Jesus does not say in TLP that I am evil or that anyone is evil, other than the devil. (Again, in the Greek New Testament Jesus prays that we be delivered from "the evil one.") He points out the reality that evil too often is an influence in my life. When it is, Jesus' church cannot say "amen" to my behavior, nor can others outside the church consider me a good neighbor. I need to be delivered from evil, or put right with God, because the reality is that we're all in this thing together.