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The Our Father Prayer

A Discipleship Roadmap in the Our Father

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Blessings

Louis

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A Discipleship Roadmap in the Our Father

Read: Matthew (6:9–13) and Luke (11:1–4).

1. Introduction: A New Way to Pray

The request from a disciple, "Lord, teach us to pray", was not a plea for a new liturgy but a recognition of the power and distinctiveness of Jesus' own prayer life. The Our Father, delivered in response, is thus not a mere incantation or a series of empty words to be memorized and recited. Instead, it is a revolutionary masterclass in communion with God, a comprehensive guide to a life of active discipleship. This report will unpack each petition of this profound prayer as a theological blueprint for spiritual formation, demonstrating its enduring relevance for believers today.

The Our Father fundamentally reorders human desire by placing God's agenda at its beginning and end, transforming prayer from a selfish monologue to a communal dialogue. It is a tangible and practical application of the principles of discipleship outlined in the Gospel of John, specifically the call to "follow" Jesus and, most importantly, to "abide" in Him. The Our Father provides a daily framework for this vital, continuous relationship, serving as the spiritual foundation that makes true discipleship possible.

2. Part I: The Foundation of Relational Prayer: "Our Father in Heaven"

The opening address of the prayer, "Our Father in heaven," is a profound statement that encapsulates the two essential truths about God that make genuine prayer possible. The phrase is an audacious invitation to intimacy, juxtaposed with a solemn acknowledgement of divine transcendence. This tension is the very bedrock of a mature prayer life.

The word "Father" conveys a deeply personal, familial relationship with God, allowing for a boldness and comfort in His presence. This title subverts the traditional expectations of how one should address the Creator of the universe, offering a sense of closeness that allows one to approach God "as if you were walking into your parents' living room". This is the immanent, or "near," nature of God. Yet, this intimacy is immediately balanced by the qualifier "in heaven." This phrase serves as a reminder of God's universal power and presence, placing Him as a sovereign Lord "high above all things". It is a recognition of His transcendent, "holy otherness" that is to be uniquely valued and respected.

The Our Father begins by compelling the believer to hold these two truths in tension. This convergence of the immanent and the transcendent is a spiritual and theological reality made possible only through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, who embodies both natures in one person. Without this foundational understanding, prayer can devolve into either a shallow, presumptuous request to a friendly deity or a fearful, distant obligation to an unapproachable sovereign. The Our Father corrects both errors, framing prayer not as a series of demands, but as an act of intimate communion with a powerful, benevolent parent.

This opening phrase is also a practical enactment of the call to "abide" (*menō*). In the Gospel of John, the initial encounter between Jesus and His first disciples centered on their question,

"Where are you staying?". The word used for "staying" or "abiding" (*menō*) evolves throughout John's writings from a physical lodging to a "permanent remaining" and a "vital union". It becomes the model for a mutual relationship where a believer makes Christ their "resting place" and Christ, in turn, abides with them. The Our Father provides the structure for this daily, deliberate choice to remain in His presence and to be "at-home" with Him and His will. This practice of "abiding" is not a passive state but a dynamic one, allowing God's "divine influence and energy" to be constantly at work in the believer. Thus, the first lines of the Our Father are not a casual greeting but an act of spiritual discipline that establishes the very condition for all subsequent prayer.

3. Part II: The Kingdom-Focused Petitions: A Divine Agenda

The first three petitions of the Our Father pivot away from our needs and desires to focus entirely on God's purposes in the world. This is a deliberate and transformative move that reorients the heart of the one who prays, training the disciple to align their life with the divine agenda before ever asking for personal provision.

"Hallowed Be Your Name"

To "hallow" a name is to set it apart as uniquely sacred, holy, and valuable. This petition is a powerful act of spiritual self-correction, as the human reality is that everyone "hallows" something, whether it be a person, a job, money, or reputation. The prayer deliberately and forcefully reverses this natural inclination. It forces the one praying to begin by placing God in the "place of ultimate value," knowing that anything less will inevitably lead to "shame and heartbreak". This petition is a direct challenge to the politicization of faith, which uses God's authority or name as a "blank check" for human decisions and activities, a practice that has historically led to scandal and discredit for the cause of Christ. The prayer requires a complete reordering of our affections, making us accountable for our actions and calling our lives to be an outward sign of our internal commitment to God's unique holiness. It is not merely a statement of praise but a spiritual discipline that restructures our desires and purifies our intent.

"Your Kingdom Come"

For many first-century Jews, the messianic hope was a fervent desire for a political Messiah-King who would liberate them from Roman oppression and restore the Davidic monarchy. Jesus' own disciples shared this expectation, longing for positions of power in His earthly kingdom. However, Jesus' kingdom was not "of this world." It was an "upside-down Kingdom" marked by self-giving love and suffering. When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are not praying for a political revolution or a global power shift. We are, as the research indicates, making a "cry of loyalty" for God's kingdom to advance and for the "overthrow of the kingdom of this world". This is a spiritual plea for God to conquer rebellious hearts, including our own, and for His heavenly will to break into our earthly reality. This petition fundamentally reorients the disciple's mission from external power struggles to internal spiritual transformation and the personal work of spreading God's rule "one disciple at a time". It is a prayer that makes us "traitors" to the world's kingdom and faithful citizens of God's.

"Your Will Be Done, on Earth as it is in Heaven"

The common interpretation of "Thy will be done" as a passive acceptance of an unfavorable fate, a prayer of resignation, misunderstands its true meaning. The ultimate example of this prayer is found in Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, who, in the face of the excruciating pain of the cross, prayed, "not my will, but yours be done". The purpose of God, the research notes, was accomplished "through the pain and suffering of the Cross". When we pray this petition, we are not asking for a spirit of defeat but for "triumph". It is a "battle-cry" that empowers our resolution to fight for what is right, noble, and true, even when it requires us to walk through difficulty. The prayer is an affirmation of a willingness to be a part of "bringing that heaven to Earth". This petition gives meaning to our struggles and allows us to find God's purpose even in the midst of trials, as seen in the example of the Apostle Paul, who found God's "power made perfect in weakness" through his "thorn in the flesh".¹⁸ It is a powerful antidote to a passive or resigned faith, transforming the one who prays into an active participant in God's redemptive work.

4. Part III: The Needs-Focused Petitions: Our Human Reality

Having aligned our desires with God's divine agenda, the prayer then turns to our most fundamental human needs. These petitions are not a whiny wishlist but a radical acknowledgment of our dependence on God for everything—spiritually, physically, and morally.

"Give Us Today Our Daily Bread"

The petition for "daily bread" appears on the surface to be a simple request for food, but it is far more profound. The research notes that "daily bread" represents everything a person needs to sustain their day-to-day life, from food and water to clothing and shelter. In a society that places a premium on self-sufficiency and long-term financial security, this petition is a daily spiritual discipline that confronts our individualism and acknowledges our complete dependence on God. The manna God provided to the Israelites in the wilderness is the perfect historical parallel. God provided just enough for each day, teaching them to trust Him daily and to "never say to yourself, 'I have achieved this wealth with my own strength and energy'". When they tried to hoard the manna, it rotted, reinforcing the lesson of moment-by-moment dependence on God's provision. This petition challenges the modern disciple to "let go of tomorrow's anxieties" and to live in a state of humble gratitude, recognizing that everything, even the most mundane sustenance, ultimately comes from the gracious hand of a loving Father.

"Forgive Us Our Debts, as We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors"

The term "debts" is a powerful metaphor for our sins against God, evoking a sense of a serious offense that requires a corresponding serious punishment. As a "gospel prayer," this petition is an acknowledgment that we stand before God as debtors, completely reliant on His grace for forgiveness.

The phrase "as we have forgiven" does not imply that our forgiveness of others *earns* us God's forgiveness. The research is clear that this would be a "no gospel at all" approach. Instead, our willingness to forgive others is a direct *consequence* and *reflection* of a

transformed heart that has already received God's extravagant grace. This petition serves as a litmus test of a disciple's spiritual condition: an unforgiving spirit reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the very grace that has cleared their own immense debt. The research provides powerful real-world illustrations of this principle in action, from the forgiveness of institutional debt in modern society to the astounding story of a woman in South Africa who adopted her husband's killer, demonstrating that true forgiveness, born from a life transformed by grace, is a "miracle" that frees both the one who offers it and the one who receives it.

"And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us from Evil"

This final petition is a call for divine assistance in the ongoing spiritual battle. The research clarifies that this is not a request for God to refrain from leading us into sin, for God "tempts no one". Rather, it is a plea for Him to grant us the grace to "recognize and resist temptation" and the power to "persevere along the path of holiness".

The prayer acknowledges our human frailty and our inability to resist the spiritual onslaught with our own strength. The petition is also a call for deliverance from a "personified evil, the Devil". It challenges the common human tendency to view evil as a purely external force, as the research points out that "the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being". Thus, the prayer is a request for deliverance from our own inner "wretchedness" as well as from the external spiritual adversary who "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour". It is a profound call to a life of vigilance and humility, acknowledging that our spiritual victory is found not in self-confidence but in a complete reliance on God's grace.

5. Part IV: The Concluding Doxology: A Return to Praise

The doxology, "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen," which appears in some versions of the prayer, is a critical final component of the masterclass. It is a powerful statement of faith that attributes all rule, strength, and honor to God alone. This concluding praise ensures that after God's kingdom advances, our needs are met, and we are delivered from evil, the disciple returns to the starting point, acknowledging that every victory and every provision was His alone.

This circular structure acts as a safeguard against spiritual pride, preventing us from taking credit for our own deliverance or our own spiritual growth. It teaches that the ultimate purpose of prayer is not to get what we want, but to align ourselves with the God who has already won. The doxology is the final and most important lesson in discipleship: to live a life that constantly points back to God's ultimate sovereignty.

6. Conclusion: Prayer as the Lived Reality of Discipleship

The Our Father, when understood as a comprehensive spiritual discipline, is far more than a memorized prayer. It is a daily practice that teaches the disciple how to live out the central themes of the gospel: audacious intimacy with God, radical alignment with His agenda, humble dependence on His provision, and an outpouring of His grace to others. It is the tangible response to the Johannine invitation to "come and see" Jesus for oneself. It is the means by which we "abide" with Him and allow our lives to be transformed by that intimate fellowship. As a result of this profound and transformative abiding, the disciple is, like Andrew and Philip in

John's Gospel, inevitably compelled to "bear witness" to the world, inviting others to "come and see" for themselves what they have found.

The Our Father provides the spiritual foundation that makes this life of true discipleship possible. It is a roadmap for the human journey back to a place of loving dependence on the God who is both transcendent King and intimate Father.

Petition	Core Spiritual Principle	Modern-Day Challenge	Call to Action/Mindset Shift
"Our Father in Heaven"	Intimacy with a Transcendent God.	The temptation to treat God as either a distant, impersonal force or a casual, demanding friend.	Cultivate a reverence for God's holiness while embracing the intimacy of a child with their parent.
"Hallowed Be Your Name"	The dethroning of idols.	Our tendency to make things like money, career, or reputation the most valuable thing in our lives.	Deliberately and prayerfully place God as the one uniquely valued above all else in our daily lives.
"Your Kingdom Come"	A call for a spiritual revolution.	The desire for a political or personal kingdom that aligns with our own will, not God's.	Pray for God to conquer rebellious hearts, starting with our own, and for His justice and peace to break into the world.
"Your Will Be Done"	Courage and triumph in suffering	Praying for a passive acceptance of fate in times of difficulty, rather than for strength to serve God through it.	Make our lives available to God's purpose, praying for the power to serve Him, even when it leads to suffering.
"Give Us Our Daily Bread"	Humble dependence on God's provision.	Our reliance on self-sufficiency, financial security, and long-term planning, which breeds anxiety and ingratitude.	Cultivate humility and gratitude by acknowledging our daily dependence on God for everything.
"Forgive Us Our Debts, as We Forgive Our Debtors"	The reflection of a transformed heart.	Harboring unforgiveness, which blocks the flow of divine mercy and reveals a misunderstanding of grace.	Consciously choose to forgive others as an act of grace, demonstrating that we have truly received God's extravagant forgiveness.
"Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us from Evil"	A prayer for vigilance and perseverance.	Overconfidence in our own ability to resist sin and the tendency to view evil as purely external.	Seek God's grace to protect us from doing evil and to grant us the strength to endure and resist temptation. ²⁷