

When Ye Pray

by

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' When thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber ...' (Matthew 6:6).

' When ye pray, use not vain repetitions . . . ' (Matthew 6:7)

' Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him' (Matthew 6:8)

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INTRODUCTION

IN HIS WORD the Lord teaches us how to pray. You may find prayers difficult, but learn to pray as Jesus taught, and your difficulties will fade away. His prayer is one of simple words and short sentences.

The little passages humbly used, bring us into the company of Angels; and the words become like opened windows, through which our Father pours out a blessing.

Much speaking is not required, but humility is, and so is innocence. To pray from our hearts as Jesus directs, is to use words that are innocent of self. It is to be as little children in the presence of our Father.

In this little book no comparisons are drawn between differing versions of the prayer, nor are any qualifying statements of the critics noticed. The attempt to tell something of its wonder and beauty is drawn rather from a lifetime's experience of its daily use.

All that is written here is from an ordinary layman's learning of the Lord.

WHEN YE PRAY

'When thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee'
(Matthew 6:6) (R.V.).

JESUS tells us what to do when we pray. First of all we must enter into the inner chamber, and then shut the door. But where is the inner chamber?

When I was a child it was the quietest room in the house. Later it was a cupboard in the office. Later still I found it was always at hand, wherever I might be.

We carry it with us, for it is the inner room of the house of the mind. The outer rooms are round about, and the outermost, are usually crowded with the busy thoughts of worldly life.

It is not always easy to find our way to the inner room. The outer, and outermost, are so often cumbered with feverish demands on our time. Yet it is the way Jesus teaches, and it is the way experience proves to be most effective. For however full our outer life may be, He may always be found in the secret place.

Having entered the inner chamber, we are to shut the door. We do this by putting away distractions from the love of self, and the world. Then we find a quiet and peaceful state. A place inhabited by precious and tender memories, and the presence of our Father in the midst. Now indeed we can pray in secret. We soon feel the atmosphere of His Presence, and sense His mercy and love.

Almost before we begin to speak. His recompense is open before us.

'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty' (Psalm 91, 1).

YOUR FATHER KNOWETH

'Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye' (Matthew 6: 8, 9).

THIS IS ONE of the best pictures we can have of our Father. He understands us. He knows all about us, and all our need. In our prayer to Him we are not talking to someone who does not appreciate our problems and sorrows but to our Divine Father, who knows everything about us.

If our Father did not know our need, it would be sad for us. We do not understand our hearts well enough to know what to say or to ask. Indeed, many of our prayers arise from self love, and if answered as we wish might bring us much sorrow and trouble. Our Father not only knows us but He also knows how it is best for us to pray. So He gives us even the words to say to use in talking with Him. As we are not heard for much speaking, only a few words are necessary. The manner of the prayer is short and simple. Simple words and little sentences.

Too many words confuse and darken. Life is hidden in small seeds. And the small seeds of this perfect prayer are full of meaning, both in themselves and in their order of sequence.

Because our Father knows our need, we are to pray in this manner. A manner that first lifts our thoughts to the Highest in heaven and ends with our own low estate, asking that we may be delivered from evil. Then finishing with the ascription to Him, of the Kingdom, and power, and glory for ever.

'O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me ... for there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord thou knowest it altogether' (Psalm 139: 1, 4).

OUR FATHER

'Our Father who art in heaven' (Matthew 6:9).

THE FIRST WORDS qualify all that follows in this divine prayer. In every sentence we are talking to our Father. Your Father and mine.

There cannot be a better way to pray for others or our loved ones. In the secret room of our minds we think of them, one by one, till they are all gathered together. Then, as it were, with our arms around them, we say: 'Our Father who art in heaven,' thus acknowledging our universal Father and our common need.

This first picture of the Lord to whom we pray is central in our faith. He is Wonderful, and a Father whose love and presence is real to us.

In this prayer all the teaching of Jesus is present. Learn to pray it, and love it, and you will need no other creed, and maybe no other prayer.

As we approach our Father in the secret place, we become increasingly aware that we really are his children. And this experience in turn, makes us more childlike in our attitude, and so more able to receive His blessings.

In His presence we find ourselves at the threshold of heaven; and so following the words 'Our Father,' we say 'Who art in heaven.' Thus our thoughts are introduced to our Father's home. But where is heaven? Not in outer space, where all things are natural. Heaven is not the terminus of creation, it is the beginning. It does not come with observation, it is as Jesus teaches within us. It is in His presence, in the secret place. In the very beginning of all we are, and can become. As we approach our Father we open a way from the world to heaven.

'Like as a Father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him' (Psalm 103: 13).

HIS NAME

'Hallowed be thy name' (Matthew 6:9)

HAVING GONE INTO the inner room and approached our Father, we say 'Hallowed be thy name.' What is our Father's Name? In the Divine Word you will find He has very many names, for names represent character or qualities of character. Every name of our Father represents some different aspect of His quality. But the outstanding name to most of us is Jesus, for it means Saviour. We read 'Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.' It is the name of our Father in human form among men, loving and saving.

It is hallowed because it stands for divine love, and divine provision for His people. And for seeking, saving, and healing the sad and lost. His word too, is to be hallowed, for it everywhere represents His name, in all the varying aspects of His love and wisdom. Indeed, our Father made the Word flesh by dwelling among us.

But his name is not hallowed by the mere expression of the lips but rather by the reception of His love in the heart and His teaching of truth in the understanding.

When we pray 'Hallowed be thy name' we are really asking that our lives may conform to all His name signifies. It is not hallowed by merely outside circumstances. Nor by ascetic or outwardly induced silences and rituals. But rather by a life so lived that, in all its activities, His love and teaching is deeply honoured and respected. For 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 7:21).

'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake' (Psalm 115: 1).

HIS KINGDOM

'Thy Kingdom come' (Matthew 6: 10)

AS WE HALLOW our Father's name, we ask that His Kingdom may come. What a wonderful thing it would be for all of us if it did come.

Kingdom means King-dominion. And this in turn means the domination of the King's laws. A Kingdom of any kind stands on the obedience of its people to its laws. In so far as the laws are disregarded the Kingdom falls.

Our Father's Kingdom is founded on our Father's laws of love, which are the eternal truth. In general, these laws are called His commandments. And they are summed up in two great commandments: love to God and love to our neighbour. Our prayer, then, for His Kingdom to come is a prayer for government by His commandments. By His laws, all of which regard God first, and the neighbour equally with self.

Such a Kingdom, ruled by such regulations, would transform our sad and troubled world, There would be total disarmament, and total freedom from fear. There would be no crime and no prisons. No want, and no misery. And all this change would come because we loved our Father by keeping His commandments (John 14, 21)

There is only one thing opposing the coming of such a happy Kingdom: it is self-love. Self on the throne instead of God.

It is good for us to pray for our Father's Kingdom to come, but it can only do so where men and women give it access- For at heart it is a kingdom of love, and never uses force. But it can come for you—if you like ! You cannot successfully force it on others, not even on your own family. But there is one person you can justly compel to receive it—it is yourself.

'Repent: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew 4, 17)

HIS WILL

'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6: 10)

'Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth' (Luke 11, 2)

OUR PRAYER CONTINUES from our Father's Kingdom to our Father's will. 'Thy will be done.' What is our Father's will? It is that all people should receive His love and come into the life of eternal happiness. It is His will that every lost child of His should be found and healed; that not one of them should perish. It is His will to forgive all of us and prepare homes for us in heaven.

It is His will that we should keep His commandments. For He says they that do so, live in His love and are His friends. It is His will that we should love one another, and forgive, and go on forgiving. And it is His will that we should open the door of our hearts, and let Him in to share life with us.

We pray for His will to be done. But we also pray that it may be done, as in heaven, so in earth. If we think of this carefully we may perhaps remember that heaven represents our inmost life, and the earth our outside life. It is sometimes much easier to intend well in our inner life than it is to bring our good intentions down into our earthly concerns. So the prayer is that as we do our Father's will in our spiritual life, we may also do it in our natural life. In all its busy daily activities.

To pray for the Lord's will to be done is to pray for a life of useful service, in which is the greatest possible happiness.

'Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.'
(Luke 12, 32).

DAILY BREAD

'Give us this day our daily bread' (Matthew 6: 11)

TO LIVE, we need food, and we need it continuously. But to live as the Lord wills we need spiritual as well as natural food. The bread of this world feeds the body. The bread of heaven feeds the soul.

Unless we feed on natural food, we have no strength to do our work in the world. Similarly, without spiritual bread we have no strength to live as the Lord wills. How can we resist evil temptations unless we are spiritually nourished with the bread of spiritual life? Or how can we forgive seventy times seven when a difficult neighbour offends us? We just cannot do so without the bread of heaven. And we need it daily.

But daily does not only mean a period of twenty-four hours, it means also a period of experience like a state of trouble, or a state of gladness. And this bread we pray for will not only give us sustenance for the succeeding days and states of experience; it will also give us eternal life. For it is the goodness of our Father's love that comes down from heaven to feed His children. And Jesus tells us that they who feed on this bread will live for ever.

The more lovingly we read about our Father in His Word, the more we shall know about this Divine food. And the more, too, we shall hunger for it. It is in the Word that Jesus brings the bread to us, and in the Word that He takes, and blesses, and is made known to us.

Our Father in Heaven provides the bread, and He asks us to pray for a daily supply.

'I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever' (John 6, 51)

OUR DEBTS

'And forgive us our debts' (Matthew 6: 12)

AS WE FEED on the bread our Father gives us, we become more conscious of our faults, for His bread is love, and love opens our eyes. And with open eyes we pray 'Forgive us our debts.'

Our Father loves to forgive. And if we love Him we shall love to forgive also.

What are our debts? The answer is found from our knowledge of the first great commandment 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' It is our love we owe our Father, not part of our love, but all of it; in so far as we do not give Him our love, we are in debt to Him. 'If ye love me,' we read, 'ye will keep my commandments.'

To love our Father means to love His qualities, His goodness, His wisdom, and His providence. It means to love Him in His Word, in His teaching and the revelation of Himself in Divine Human form.

Without our Father we can do nothing. All the life we have is from Him, and all our peace and happiness. In our Father's home there is enough and to spare. And all He asks of us is our love. When we withhold it we are in debt. It is the love of self that robs Him of our love, and piles up our debts.

If we ask our Father to forgive us, He will. But we will only be able to accept the forgiving, and be happy about it, in so far as we forgive, and pay our debts. But all our debts are summed up in the love we owe to Him and our neighbour.

'Father I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son' (Luke 15, 21)

OUR DEBTORS

'And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' (Matthew 6: 12)

BY FORGIVING OTHERS we are able to receive our Father's forgiveness. And if we love our Father we must forgive, or how can we keep the second great commandment 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' We owe love to our neighbour, and in so far as we withhold it we are in debt to him. And, similarly, by withholding love he is in debt to us.

Here, then, is some of the importance of this passage of the prayer. It is really a prayer asking that we may keep the commandments of love, first to our Father and secondly to our neighbour.

Just as we forgive others their debt of love and kindness to us, our Father is able to forgive our lack of love to Him. It is the merciful who are able to receive mercy and likewise it is the forgiving who are able to receive forgiveness.

Our forgiving of others must be of the heart, as well as of the lips. It must be continuous and become a permanent attitude of mind. An aspect towards others that looks at their good qualities and wants to excuse their faults. We must learn to forgive seventy times seven. As we do so we shall know while we pray that our Father is forgiving us. We shall know that He is accepting the little love we give Him and excusing our shortcomings.

Sometimes our friends' debt may seem too big to forgive, but how do we stand before our Heavenly Father? As we forgive, He forgives.

'O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desirest me: shouldest not thou have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?'
(Matthew 18: 32, 33)

TEMPTATION

'And lead us not into temptation.' (Matthew 6: 13)

TEMPTATION IS a problem. We don't like it, and often find it very difficult. It is good to pray, not to be led into it: the really unhappy thing we have to realize about temptation is that it is itself an evidence of evil in our hearts.

None of us are tempted to do something we dislike. If we are tempted to steal, it reveals dishonesty within. It is likewise with all other evils. An outside circumstance sometimes seems to cause the temptation, but it could not do so at all unless the evil were first in the heart (Matt. 15, 19)

All our Father does for us is from the goodness of His love. He could never lead us into temptation to evil. Nevertheless, He does sometimes appear to do so. The appearance arises from the circumstance that every step we take towards Him awakens the opposition of self-love. As long as we love ourselves first all the interests of self-importance and self-gratification will be on the alert to tempt us away from our Father.

But temptations prove that we are free to choose which way we will take. You may be going to do something, good or bad, you have never done before; immediately the opposite position arises in your mind and you know you are free to take either course.

What we need is strength in the moment of trial to resist hell. If we pray to our Father 'Lead us not into temptation,' we will resist, and not be led into its evil.

' Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' (Psalm 139: 23, 24)

EVIL

'But deliver us from evil' (Matthew 6: 13)

THE PRAYER BEGINS with our Father in heaven and ends with ourselves in evil. It is a guide not only for our praying but for all our serious thinking. The first consideration should be our Father in heaven, the last, ourselves.

We have prayed not to be led into temptation. Now we are praying to be delivered from evil, from whence temptation comes.

Perhaps few of us appreciate the horrible nature of evil. It thrives in self-love and self-importance. It destroys that in us which is truly human. It causes indulgence in pleasures that destroy body and soul. It robs us of delight and peace and hope. In appearance it is often most attractive but, in fact, it is full of disease and decay. All evils are related as members of one family. They are the foes of our personal household.

Our Father has taught us to pray 'Deliver us from evil,' and in doing so we acknowledge two things: first that we are in evil and secondly that He can save us.

In civil life when our house is on fire we are told to dial 999, then help comes to save us. In spiritual life when evil burns in our hearts, we are taught to call on our Father to deliver us. It is wonderful to be saved from a burning house, but it is everlasting life to be delivered from the fire of evil burning in the house of the soul.

Let us remember that our Father in heaven is kind to the unthankful and to the evil, and that if we ask Him, He will deliver us and set us free (Luke 6, 35.)

'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies' (Matthew 15, 19)

AMEN

'For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen' (Matthew 6: 13)

AS WE FINISH praying, our thoughts are resting only in our Father. The Kingdom is His, and He only has all power, and to Him alone belongs all the glory. Amen means confirmation of this truth.

It is our Father's Kingdom and will we have prayed for. It is His power that provides our daily bread and delivers us from evil. And all the glory of our changing life is His.

It is our Father who comes into the world to save us, and who teaches us how to pray. Our Father who reveals Himself to us in human form, and whose name is called Jesus. To know and see Jesus is to see our Father (John 14). We do not pray to our Father for Jesus' sake but for our own sakes. For Jesus is our Father, and is able to meet all our needs. For ever the Kingdom is His, and the power and the glory.

How different, and how much more beautiful our thinking of Jesus might be if we learned of Him. He tells us 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.' Why do we often prefer what we call our intelligence and the tradition and commandments of men?

Our own manner of praying is often so confused and so burdened with words. But we are not heard for much speaking.

Let us learn to pray as Jesus taught, in the secret place of our inner life. Let us acknowledge Him to be our Father, to whom alone belongs the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Then learning of Him, we will come daily nearer to His presence.

' Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord' (Psalm 150, 6)

Some Quotations for Meditation

THE EVERLASTING FATHER THE LORD'S NAME

'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9, 6)

THE GROWTH OF INNOCENCE

'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these' (Matthew 6: 28, 29)

A LOVING INVITATION

'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' (Matthew 11, 28—30)

IF!

'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love' (John 15, 10)

NONE ELSE

'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else.' (Isaiah 45, 22)

THE WAY OF PROVIDENCE

'Ye shall go forth with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.' (Isaiah 55, 12)

TEARS WIPED AWAY

' The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' (Revelation 7, 17)

THE LORD AND THE NEIGHBOUR

' The happiest life is from love to the Lord and from love towards the neighbour; because the Divine itself inflows into it: and the unhappiest life is from the love of self and the love of the world; because Hell inflows into it.' (Swedenborg)

NEVER!

' In heavenly joy there is never anything of pre-eminence over others' (Swedenborg)

THE LORD'S WORD

' The Word is more than any doctrine in the world, and more than any truth in the world,' (Swedenborg)

TRUE FREEDOM

'Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Teach me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be,
I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within Thine arms,
And strong shall be my hand'

(Matheson)

THE GREAT EXAMPLE

"Ah, loving Saviour,
Fain would I loving be,
In deep humility, Shun evil strife;
In word and action kind,
Gentle in heart and mind;
Through all my daily life
Grow more like Thee.
Ah, wisest Teacher.
Fain would I wiser be.
Fain I'd Thy goodness see,
Thy will to know;
In all I do and say,
Walk in Thy wisdom's way;
Through all my life to grow
Still more like Thee "

(John Hyde)

DIVINE DIRECTION

Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore ' (Psalm 16, 11)

THE HOUSE THAT IS ME

' Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it' (Psalm 127, 1)

WINDOWS OF HEAVEN

' Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.' (Malachi 3, 10)

' The more closely a man is conjoined with the Lord, the happier he becomes.' (Swedenborg)

' Be kindled, child; become God's candlelight' (Angelas Silesius)

HE, GIVEN SLEEP

"Sleep sweetly in this quiet room
O thou who'er thou art—
And let no mournful yesterdays
Disturb thy peaceful heart;
Nor let to-morrow mar thy rest
With dreams of coming ill.
Thy Maker is thy changeless Friend:
His love surrounds thee still.
Forget thyself and all the world,
Put out each garish light.
The stars are shining overhead—
Sleep sweetly, then. Good night!"

(Anonymous)

' When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: Yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.' (Proverbs 3, 24)

' I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety.' (Psalm 4, 8)

'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of God' (Matthew 5, 3)

OUR FATHER

"Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise "

(Whittier)

A PRAYER

' Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer ' (Psalm 19, 14)

TO THE LAND OF UPRIGHTNESS

' Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness ' (Psalm 143, 10)

SUBMISSION

' In order to make anyone blessed and happy the Lord wills a total submission' (Swedenborg)

"Ah, mighty Master,
Fain would I stronger be,
All sinful lusts to flee,
And self subdue;
Thus tread the tempter down,
Thus win a heavenly crown;
With but Thyself in view,
Be more like Thee '
(John Hyde)

VISION

' And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle, His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him. I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last,' (Revelation 1, 13—17)

' His servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads ' (Revelation 22, 4)