

The Prayer Code
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# 1 A PRAYER OF AFFECTION

"Our Father ..."

-MATTHEW 6:9

ow many times have those two words escaped your lips over the years of your own Christian experience? Hundreds? Thousands? They have become so familiar that we often rush through and skip over them in our quest to get to the more direct requests of this model prayer—"Give us . . . forgive us . . . deliver us." But take a step back for just a moment and think on those words—"Our Father." No matter who we might be, whether we have just begun the faith journey or have been walking this path for decades, we can all begin our prayer time with this foundation of true prayer—"Our Father."

I remember the day when I made the marvelous discovery, as a new believer, that I did not have to enter into prayer as some beggar cowering down at the back door, begging for a handout. I am God's own child and seated at His own table. This gives me confidence and even boldness to approach Him. Before we rush once again into the repetition of our Lord's Prayer, let's pause just a moment at these first two words.

#### AN UNSELFISH RECOGNITION

The foundation of true prayer is *built on an unselfish recognition*. He is *our* Father. In fact, a careful reading of this model prayer reveals the repeated use of these plural pronouns— *our* and *us*. So often we approach the Lord in prayer with a string of "I, I, I" or "me, me, me" or "my, my, my." When we pray as Jesus taught us, there are no singular pronouns, only plural ones. He is not just "My" Father; He is "Our" Father. To my earthly family I am an only child, but in the family of God there is no such thing.

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When we pray, "Our" Father, we are acknowledging that we are a part of a big family. Some are different in doctrine, race, culture, or social standing. But the family includes all believers. I have prayed this prayer in countries where believers were under intense persecution or where they were domi-

nated by caste systems, in Africa in open-walled churches under tin roofs, with Arab believers in Muslim countries, in Cuba with those still oppressed by a failed communist regime, in Israel with Jewish believers, and with my Black and Hispanic brothers and sisters in America. Saints in prayer all appear as one. This is what Jesus prayed for us in His high intercessory prayer when He prayed, "... that they

all may be one . . . that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21).

The next time you pray this prayer commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, stop at this first word and remember all that is behind it. He is "Our" Father. When we say, "Our Father," we are acknowledging that the true brotherhood of man is really in the family of God. This is the foundation of our praying, for true prayer is built on this unselfish recognition.

#### AN UNSHAKABLE RELATIONSHIP

When we say, "Our Father," we take a step further to acknowledge that the foundation of true prayer is also based on an unshakable relationship. The only way we can refer to Him as "Father" is if we have been born into His family. Many have the erroneous idea that we are all God's children. We are not. We are all God's creations, but we are not all God's children. The Bible is plain on this point. John said, "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). It is plain. Only those who have put their faith in Christ alone and have been born again into His forever family can pray, "Our Father."

As we read the Gospels, we discover that Jesus used the

word *Father* dozens of times in prayer. There is only one occurrence in the New Testament when He prayed without the use of this word. It was on the cross. Three times Jesus prayed from that instrument of execution from which He hung. The first time, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). The final time, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). But in between those two prayers, when darkness enveloped the earth, when He was bearing our own sin in His own body, is the only time He refrained from using the word *Father*. He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). In the act of bearing the sins of the world, He was separated from the Father so that we might be enabled and empowered to pray based on an unshakable relationship—"Our Father."

All true prayer is built on an unselfish recognition. He is *our* Father. And it is based on an unshakable relationship. He is our *Father*. These two words we have repeated for most of our lives form the very foundation of all our prayers. If we have come to Christ in faith, we are part of a large family and are God's own children, born again by faith in Him. So the real question is this: Can you pray, "Our Father"?

### **CODE WORD: FAMILY**

Today, when you talk to a family member, speak to your dad, or see a photo of him, let it be a reminder to you that you are a member of another family, a much larger one, the family of God. And remember, the true brotherhood of man is found in God's forever family, where we are more closely related to one another through the blood of Christ than to our own blood relatives who do not know Him.

## **CODE VERSE**

As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)