

BOLD TO SAY

Reflections on the Lord's Prayer

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—— INTRODUCTION ——

INTRODUCTION

Over and over again in the pages of the Bible, God shows us what love looks like in the good brown soil, the bright blue sky, the big yellow sun, and all that grows and creeps upon the earth. None of that is accidental. We are made of the dust of the earth and God's goodness keeps drawing us back to each other—back to the very basics of ourselves and our faith.

When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he keeps it simple. Jesus's model for how we ought to pray is a study in the struggle to keep God at the center of our busy minds and lives. If there ever was a centering prayer, the Lord's Prayer is surely one. From the first word to the last, we are reorienting ourselves and our lives back into God's goodness and will. It is a painfully honest, deeply human prayer.

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I can't tell you when I learned the Lord's Prayer, but I know my mother and father regularly prayed it with me. All I can tell you is that I can remember praying it for as long as I have known what praying was, prayed it in church as long as I have known what church was, prayed along with it at every pivotal moment of my life. I expect to meet Jesus with this prayer on my lips.

One of my previous church-lady lives included sharing communion with very old or very sick (and sometimes both) people. I also spent a great deal of time doing chapel with very small, very young children. Those two stages of life are not nearly as far apart as any of us imagine. The Lord's Prayer was a central focus of much of my liturgical life with both of these communities.

Cleo's hands were practically see-through by the time I knew her. She was a feisty firecracker of a lady with sparkly blue eyes who loved to tell me about the time she danced with Lawrence Welk. "The bubble machine smelled just awful, but that man...he could dance." She would puff it out in little chuffs and whistles, so tickled and trying so hard to conserve her breath. By the time she turned 85, Cleo's lungs were mostly rusted steel wool and chalk dust, so if she could muster up the wind to tell you something at full volume, you paid attention. And Cleo loved to say the Lord's Prayer at full volume. It cost her so much to do it. She would pant these short little puffs, and I would wait until she caught her breath

to offer her the bread and wine. She never missed the chance to pray, even when all she could do was move her lips along with the words. And she would hold my hand and squeeze it when we got to Amen.

Jackson's hands could not have been more different from Cleo's. They were usually full (or recently emptied) of something sticky and slightly warm. His lifelines were colored in by playground dirt, and his upper lip was stained with grape juice. Jackson looked like one of the round, angelic putti had flown down from the walls of the Vatican and landed smack in the middle of my morning children's chapel. He was angelic in appearance and built like a very small Mack truck. Jackson and Cleo probably weighed about the same and enjoyed all the same snacks. And like Cleo, Jackson loved to pray at full volume, if not louder. He was ardent in his prayer, eyes squeezed tightly, little biscuit hands clasped to his chest. I heard him ask God to "weed us not into ten stations, but delibber us from eagles..." and I had to choke back one of those laughing sobs that are gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Cleo was well aware of the weight of the words she was praying, and precious Jackson had only just begun to understand what words were at all. But the prayer Jesus gave us was one they both knew and loved.

I have prayed the Lord's Prayer my whole life, individually and in groups, sometimes paying rapt attention to every word and syllable, other times just stumbling and mumbling along, and sometimes just being still with the words in my head or coming from the voices around me. I knew it was a good

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prayer, maybe even the best prayer, but having received my early Christian formation in a tradition that placed a high value on spontaneous prayer, part of me worried that I was kind of cheating if that's all I did.

And then one night in 2007, in a church yard where I was a stranger leaning deeply into the hospitality of strangers and with a belly full of spicy hominy and pork stew called *pozole*, when the fatigue and joy of hard work and summer heat and Jesus's broken body and my broken Spanish all coalesced into my own private kind of Pentecost. I mostly knew where we were in the eucharist service, and as we transitioned into the Liturgy of the Table, I started to cry. By the time we got to the Lord's Prayer, I was stifling sobs. It was a moment of holy mystery and communion unlike any other I've had.

To be set right, to insist and ask that God's will be made manifest in our lives in a community that is bound together beyond language or custom, is a powerful event. It shook my world, and nothing has ever been the same.

When we began pulling the threads of this book together, the world looked very different. 2019 doesn't seem like so long ago, but sometimes the world moves on quickly, and we spend a significant amount of time catching our breath. In the weeks and months of quarantine that followed the outbreak of COVID-19, our lives radically changed. Efforts to keep each other safe and to protect especially vulnerable people in our communities required extreme measures. We had to learn how to do something none of us have much practice doing—being alone together.

Because God is always in the business of teaching us how to love each other and how to be love in the world, this prayer from Jesus's heart has been a way for us to be together in our separation from loved ones, work and school friends, and our worship communities. I can imagine that, as the disciples carried the Lord's Prayer in their hearts through the rest of their lives, preaching the Good News of God in Christ, they realized over and over again how much this prayer set them up to live simple, truthful, honest, and loving lives.

One of the most beautiful things about the Lord's Prayer is that it constantly reminds us of our place in community, of our connectedness, and of our dependence on each other. We place ourselves into the keeping of God's will rather than our own. We ask for enough to keep our bodies alive for just one more day, and we forgive one another. We recognize that all of us are tempted and that God's goodness and mercy is the only thing that can save us from all the trials we face, and we remind ourselves that God's sovereignty and glory and timelessness hold all of us together in a love that is deeper and wider than we could ask or imagine.

In the Episcopal liturgy of Holy Eucharist, we lead-in to the prayer with the words, "We are bold to say." This simple but profound phrase reminds us that this is a bold prayer, and we would do well to remember that. The Lord's Prayer is not just a nice set of words stitched on samplers or painted on chancels or memorialized in Tiffany glass windows. It's a deadly serious

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prayer and praying it with real intent will change your life. I know it has changed mine—and will continue to change me.

Indeed, working on this project about the Lord's Prayer changed my life—and not just because it required me to be mindful of this prayer in a different way than I'd been before. Writing about the Lord's Prayer and inviting others to do so is different than praying it with sweet old ladies or rowdy small boys, different than praying it during my own prayers or during staff meetings. What I have learned between the day the idea for this project emerged until the day it was complete could fill another book entirely. I thought I was planning a book about the Lord's Prayer, and that was gift enough. I had no idea that exploring this prayer would reveal wonders I didn't know to look out for, miracles of grace beyond my wildest dreams and farthest reckonings.

Like many of you, the Lord's Prayer is the prayer I pray when I don't know what to pray, when I can't sleep or concentrate, when things are coming hot and heavy and I need to center myself in God's goodness and boundless grace. Now that I'm fully middle-aged, I catch myself praying it at stoplights, when I have to turn around and go back to the house for something I forgot, in the shower when I start to rehash things that are better left in the delete bin, when it's all going in the right direction, and when it's all going straight to hell. Jesus says exactly what I ought to pray for, and his instructions to me have always been better than anything I could come up with on my own.

Every person who wrote for this book commented something to the effect of, "This was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be." Turns out that talking about this deeply beloved

prayer is more difficult than we might imagine. It's not for lack of words or desire—it's just that once you start, it's hard to shut off. It's like being in love and not being able to stop talking about your beloved. Every time you talk about them, you get all cotton-mouthed and flushed, and then the words start rolling out, painting a word picture of what love looks like, and you hope on hope that you don't sound like an overly enthusiastic teenager with a major crush.

I am deeply grateful for each of the stories our authors have shared, for their willingness to be deeply vulnerable and real before God and all of us reading along, and for their love for Jesus and his people. Each of them has something precious to offer you, the Church, and the very heart of Jesus. I hope that you will remember them in your prayers as you journey beside them in this book. I asked each of these people to spend a significant amount of time with the prayer itself and included some passages from the Bible to augment and illustrate some of the bits we might otherwise not notice. I also sent along a playlist of songs for our writers to listen to as they read, prayed, and wrote. Each author was given the opportunity to tell you about how this prayer has changed the way they live their lives, the way they see the world, and how they follow Jesus. Some draw deeply on the passages at the beginning of the chapters, but they all preach a holy and whole gospel of their own.

Each phrase of the Lord's Prayer is represented with a separate chapter. We've included the same Bible passages we gave to our writers at the beginning of each chapter, with the exception of Judges 6-7, which seemed a bit excessive to

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reprint. Please do read that extra portion, though. It will add to the flavor of the chapter. We hope that you will write notes and comments all over this book and maybe even fill up a journal or two along the way. Much like the Lord's Prayer itself, we hope this book will become a trusted companion on your own journey of faith.

The famous Texas bluesman and itinerant preacher Blind Willie Johnson recorded a song called "Sweeter as the Years Go By," written by Ohio hatmaker and prodigious hymn writer Lelia Norris. It's an old song and has long been in the public domain. The lyrics are about Jesus, but as I've worked on this project and listened to this song, it has come to define how I feel about the Lord's Prayer, too. It's also become a prayer for the love I hope is kindled or rekindled in you, as you spend time in these pages with Jesus and the prayer he taught us.

*Of Jesus's love that sought me, when I was lost in sin;
Of wondrous grace that brought me back to his fold again;
Of heights and depths of mercy, far deeper than the sea,
And higher than the heavens, my theme shall ever be.*

*Sweeter as the years go by,
Sweeter as the years go by,
Richer, fuller, deeper, Jesus's love is sweeter,
Sweeter as the years go by.*

*He trod in old Judea life's pathway long ago;
The people thronged about him, his saving grace to know;
He healed the brokenhearted, and caused the blind to see;
And still his great heart yearneth in love for even me.*

*Sweeter as the years go by,
Sweeter as the years go by,
Richer, fuller, deeper, Jesus's love is sweeter,
Sweeter as the years go by.*

*'Twas wondrous love which led him for us to suffer loss,
To bear without a murmur the anguish of the cross;
With saints redeemed in glory, let us our voices raise,
Till Heav'n and earth re-echo with our Redeemer's praise.*

*Sweeter as the years go by,
Sweeter as the years go by,
Richer, fuller, deeper, Jesus's love is sweeter,
Sweeter as the years go by.*

With prayers for peace and joy,

Rachel Jones
Editor of *Bold to Say*

———— CHAPTER 1 ————

Rend Your Hearts

The Word of the Lord

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy.

Between the vestibule and the altar let the priest, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare you people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the people, "Where is their God?"

—Joel 2:12-17

While they were eating, [Jesus] took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

—Mark 14:22-25

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name***

Miriam McKenney

Our Father in heaven

In 1995, Ann Arbor, Michigan, experienced one of the hottest summers in years. The temperatures rose to more than 100 degrees that July. It was the wrong time for the engine block to crack in my husband's Suzuki Sidekick, which meant he had to take my car to work in Livonia—thirty minutes away. My daughter, Nia, and I were home all day, alone together. She was perfect company, but at one-month-old, our conversations were mostly one-sided. Walking outdoors only broke out her entire precious little body in a heat rash.

The news on TV didn't help my postpartum depression. I felt trapped and alone all day, so I did what I always do when I don't know what to do. I called my dad.

"Hey, Dad, how's it going?" Our conversations always begin this way, and he always sounds glad to talk to me.

"HEY, keed, how're you doing?"

In our regular conversations, we'd talk and laugh, and he'd tell me what was going on at home with our family and at church. He always asked if I needed anything. If I had the courage to tell him, he'd help me with whatever it was. This time, I shared our car worries with him.

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The next time we talked, he announced that he and my mom had decided to help us buy a new car. I began to cry. I hated asking him for help, and I hated needing help. But Dad didn't care. At the end of all of our conversations, he said the same thing, without fail. "Always remember—you have a dad."

Dad and I were close from the very beginning. My mom loved to show me photos of Dad and me together—even from the time I was a little baby—and tell me stories about all the places we would go. "He took you everywhere with him and you always wanted to go." Photos help to retain memories, and I have a few distinct memories of the two of us riding in his blue Volkswagen Beetle when I was three.

One day, we were driving through our little town of Wayne, Pennsylvania, when one of the car doors flew open. I remember a typewriter sitting on the back seat flying out of the car. Dad pulled over and ran to the side where I was sitting. I vividly remember him in his clericals, leaning into the car to check on me. What I remember most clearly was his panicked face atop his white collar and black clergy shirt. We were both scared, but I simultaneously felt completely safe. Years later, I asked him about this memory, and he told me that the typewriter didn't fall out of the car. Kid memories often contain revisionist history, but I had remembered the important part. My dad showed me then, as he shows me often, that he loves me.

Dad made it clear to us as kids that loving God came first. He felt his call to the priesthood as a teenager, and his faith was palpable. Dad's faith was one of practice more than discussion, so lots of what he did in practical terms was a

mystery to me until I was much older. One of those mysteries was summed up in the prayer we had to memorize, one that I didn't understand—all I knew was that I had to be able to recite it by heart.

“Our Father, who art in heaven,” my brothers and I would begin, confidently.

“Hallow... halloweh... hallowed be thy name?”

I had no idea what I was saying. But that didn't seem to matter. Learning the words felt right. I remember being so proud of myself when I could say it without reading it in the Book of Common Prayer at church. Memorizing that prayer led to my memorizing many other prayers from the prayer book that I mostly didn't understand.

At eighty-three, Dad still loves to talk about church life, especially now that I'm involved in church work. Hearing God's call to ordained ministry so early in his life means he's been actively serving God for more than six decades. He has entered into a holy time of observance and reflection that not everyone lives to see. Of course, I called him to ask him about the Lord's Prayer.

“Let's start with Our,” he said. Our acknowledges our shared connectedness to our Creator. We are all children of God and when we pray to Our Father, we honor each other as siblings of the One who loved us into being.

Dad thinks the reason why this prayer has lasted so long is the phrase Our Father. This is a prayer that we pray together,

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even when we say it alone. We call on the God who is God to all who believe and all who don't. Our Father is simultaneously intimate and collective, as we subjugate ourselves to the position of a child, trusting in God's care. This can help heal some of the wounds you may carry if your relationship with your own father leaned closer to nightmarish than amazing. *Always remember...you have God.*

Most Saturday mornings at my house meant chores and gospel music. Andraé Crouch, Aretha Franklin, and Larnelle Harris sang to me about a Jesus who was a friend and confidant, a savior and close companion. Scripture text served as lyrics or inspiration, so while Jesus was a familiar friend, God was a strong deliverer, perfect provider, and protective shelter.

Your own father might have fallen short in offering you a deep and unfailing love, but God the Father loves you like the best possible father you can imagine—the one you want and need, who never leaves, and always, always loves you. By opening the Lord's Prayer this way, Jesus reminds us that God is not just his father, but our father, and that he's not only our father, but our Father whose Name is holiest of all holy names.

God dreamed and bore each of us into the world, and we belong to God. Our Father. Now, I don't claim to feel the same familiarity and closeness to God that I feel with my dad. Jesus leaves no room for doubt when he tells us to pray to our Father in heaven. I realize that some earthly fathers have died and are at rest in the hope of glory, so Jesus adds another qualifying

phrase to eliminate all doubt about the God to whom we should pray.

Hallowed be your Name

Words mattered at my house, and the Ten Commandments were not to be taken lightly. My brothers and I faced steep penalties for speaking disrespectfully to any adult—especially my parents. The way they defended each other is a blueprint for my parenting. My siblings and I had no time to breathe after slipping up and mumbling some snide side comment before the other parent unleashed a corrective reminder about how they weren't having that disrespect. And if they were alone at the time, the other parent chastised us later.

My dad corrected us on words and phrases, helping us to understand and keep the commandments. When we stumbled with the word “hallowed,” my dad explained that it meant special and holy. Both of my parents maintained a zero-tolerance policy with any form of slander or ugly talk that they referred to as “calling someone out of their name.”

Words matter. Names matter even more. Growing up, I was fascinated by names and the stories behind them. My name comes from my two godmothers, Miriam Hamblin and Gwendolyn Goldsby. Perhaps I grew to love names so much because my parents loved and respected my godmothers so much that they made me their namesake. When I worked as a shelver in the library, I read books of baby names, devouring

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them the way you'd read a novel. I found a blank hardcover notebook and made my own book of names, organized in alphabetical order by gender, and including origin and meaning. My three girls' names came from that book—and a few of their pets' names too.

How do you feel when someone says your name? Do you feel differently when a friend or family member says it? As I investigate the myriad names for God, it is clear that God has many names, each one representing a different attribute of God.

The second chapter of Joel reminds us of this multifaceted nature of God. The chapter begins with Joel speaking of the coming day of the LORD. Over and over again, the LORD God Almighty offers a path to return to right relationship.

When Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, he begins with Our Father. When Jesus speaks to his father, he does not call to Almighty God, ruler of all people in heaven and earth. Jesus calls on his father, the One who gives him life and with whom he has a close relationship. Just before his betrayal, Jesus prays to God at Gethsemane. Realizing his death is imminent, an anguished Jesus prays using the most intimate and personal name for God—Abba. Daddy, Papa, Baba, Da, Pops, Pa. Jesus calls out to his father with the ultimate term of endearment.

The name of God that we choose when we pray matters. In the Old Testament, we have many names from which to choose to suit our petition. Healing God, Strong God, Faithful God—we can pray with any or all of these names. The name Jesus tells us to use in prayer is Our Father, our creator. When

Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, he invites them to call God their father, too. Jesus extends that same invitation to us. Doing this cements our sibling relationship with Jesus and to each other.

When my girls were little, my mom bought them an audio cassette tape called *God's Top 10*. She bought three copies: one for her car, one for my dad's car, and one for us at home. She made sure my girls had a cassette player of their own to play it on. We all sang along to "God's name is holy, God's name is holy! God's name is holy, holy is his name!" Thanks to her, my girls understand that God's name is holy, even though they live in a time and a culture where God's name isn't treated as holy.

Living in a secular society where we disrespect God's name without thinking—from casual language (Jeez) and texts (OMG) to more direct profanity—makes it easy to transgress God's rules. In this prayer, Jesus reminds us how we should treat the name of our Father each time we say it. "Hallowed be thy name" has been forgotten. When people say Jesus Christ or OMG all the time, I don't think they truly realize what they're saying. We need to remember that God's name is holy. We have this intimacy and closeness with God, but it's not mundane or banal or everyday or casual. We must address God with the respect of a parent.

Focusing on the first two lines of the Lord's Prayer redirects our attention to the similarities and differences between our relationship with God and our relationships with our parents. Not all of us have good relationships with our parents

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for a variety of reasons, and that's nothing to take lightly. My mom and I had a fraught relationship during my teenage years, for many typical and a few not-so-typical reasons.

Our relationship with God might give us a framework for how we long to see our parents. When our parents don't live up to our expectations, it can affect how we relate to God. One of the reasons that this prayer can be healing is because, in it, Jesus and God the Father are showing us the example of beloved child and loving parent in an open, honest, and gracious relationship. If your dad called you names, wasn't present, didn't talk to you, didn't like you, or did things that caused you even deeper pain—it can be profoundly difficult to refer to God as Father. All his life, Jesus is aware that he will have to die. He teaches, preaches, and heals knowing this hard, bare fact: death is coming for him, and it's probably going to hurt a lot. For love of us, Jesus accepts the silence of his father. And for love of the Son, the Father refuses to let death win, refuses to let the holy Name of God be disrespected, and asserts the wide breadth of I AM into the awful silence of Good Friday. Thinking about this should make us want to work harder to always treat God's name the way we do when we pray the Lord's Prayer.

Dad and I were both English majors in college. We love books, learning, and most of all, words. When I was a kid growing up with him as my priest, his sermons didn't always make sense.

But I remember that he loved to teach through his sermons, explaining the nuances of particular words and phrases in scripture. I vividly remember one statement my dad made, “To the Hebrews, holiness is a big deal. The whole idea of the Ten Commandments and all of the do’s and don’ts in Leviticus is that if the Hebrews were God’s chosen people, if God was supremely holy and he called the Hebrews to be holy, they had to follow certain rules.”

Every generation looks at young people as rebellious rulebreakers. In my life as a parent, teacher, and youth minister—as an African American woman—I encounter extremely respectful young people and unbelievably disrespectful older adults. When I pray, I aspire to pray for both sets of people with the same level of love.

The Lord’s Prayer can help us with our civil discourse, inviting us to think more deeply about how we talk to each other and being as thoughtful in addressing our neighbors as we are in addressing God. When we cultivate an awareness of how we use God’s name, think of God, and regard God—with an attitude of holiness—we will be better equipped to deal with those made in the image of God, God’s precious and beloved children, our brothers and sisters.

Talking about the Lord’s Prayer with my father taught me a couple of things. First, just as my dad did more than forty-five years ago, this is the right prayer for parents to teach their children to memorize. It is the right prayer to pray when our own words won’t come, and even when they will. Second, it

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taught me that I will do anything for my father, no matter how I feel about him in any given moment.

He and Mom taught me what it means to respect your parents, whether I wanted to or not. They taught me to respect God and encouraged me to want that above all things. I learned at a very early age how to listen for God's response to my prayers, because my parents taught me that listening was a sign of respect.

They also taught and modeled to me God's abiding love: no matter what we do, no matter how far we stray from God's commandments and rules, we are invited to return. "Rend your hearts, not your clothes," God says. *Don't destroy your clothing in my name; destroy your heart. Fast. Cry. Return to me with all your hearts.* Everyone gets a chance to return to God, who awaits our return with open arms, like a father.

We strive to be children of God, chosen by God, and to seek God in each other. When we pray, we pray to our Father in heaven and to the Holy Spirit who resides in each of us. Our Father in heaven who loved us into being hears us and delights in our call. Our salvation rests in the Father and is facilitated by our brother Jesus, who teaches us to pray: *Our Father in heaven. Hallowed be your name.*