

EXPLORATIONS

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A Prayer of My Own

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The *Jeopardy!* category on an episode this past summer was “Dadjectives.” The “answer,” worth \$200, was: “Matthew 6:9 says, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven, [*This*] be thy name.’” The “this,” of course, is the word “hallowed.” None of the contestants knew it. One social media pundit called this a mistake “of Biblical proportions.”

For highly intelligent *Jeopardy!* contestants not to know the Lord’s Prayer seems a bit surprising. Still, it is not a prayer that is “taught” in high schools, colleges, or university. It is learned at home or in parochial schools or churches, or all three. It is central to the Christian religion. Some refer to it as a summation of the whole Gospel.

For me, the words are so well-known that saying them has often been less a prayer than a recitation. Then one day, a few years ago, I came across the version of the prayer in the Gospel of Luke. It is shorter than the prayer from Matthew, the one typically said at Sunday worship. It is the prayer Jesus gave to his disciples when they asked him, “Teach us how to pray.”

Father,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come.
 Give us each day our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins
 for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
 And lead us not into temptation.

With 17 fewer words than in Matthew, the brevity of the prayer in Luke spoke to me, and opened a doorway for reflection.

Hallowed be your name. Why do we hallow the name? Perhaps, as my college roommate once prayed, because there is *something* rather than nothing. Or, in the question posed by the philosopher Martin Heidegger, “Why are there beings at all, instead of Nothing?” The greatest mystery is not whether there is a God, or life after death. It is that we are *here*. Here, on a planet called Earth, which revolves around a star called a sun, in a galaxy called the Milky Way, which has 100 billion stars – that’s 100,000,000,000 – in a universe of – wait! – 100 billion galaxies. On the planet Earth is the *only known life in the universe*, human or otherwise. “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (Psalm 8). (Continued)

Your kingdom come. What is the coming of the Kingdom? It is not the end times. It is now. The Kingdom is “in the midst” of us or “within you” (Luke 17). But am I living in it?

Give us each day our daily bread. Asking to receive the bread, but always with thanksgiving. Lack of gratitude, wrote St. Ignatius in a 1542 letter, is “the cause, beginning, and origin of all evils and sins.”

For we also forgive everyone who sins against us. Forgiving, yes, but also not judging. “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged” (Matthew 7). The parable of the Prodigal Son, as I read it, is not about forgiveness but the absence of judgment. The son who had squandered his inheritance returns home in remorse and his father runs to greet and welcome him home, rejoicing that “my son had been lost, and now he is found.”

Lead us not into temptation. The flip side of “leading not,” is “leading to,” a prayer to follow the Way. And to do so with “cheerfulness,” a word taken from a collect in *The Book of Common Prayer*: “. . . that having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks.” Asking God, finally, to go with me on my journey.

As these thoughts began to take shape, I recalled the prosody of the opening lines of Jackson Browne’s song *Blue and Black*:

In the calling out to one another
In the sound of the waves and the cries
In the fragments of the songs
In the murmuring of the city in the distance

and decided I could shape my own prayer to a similar rhythm:

Father,

In the hallowing of the Name
 for there is something rather than nothing
In the coming of the Kingdom
 in my life
In the receiving of the bread
 with thanksgiving
In the forgiving of the sins
 without judgment
In the following the Way
 with cheerfulness.

Go before me, be with me, and remain after I have gone.

Postscript: A year ago, in June 2022, the magazine *America* featured a piece by Nathan Schneider discussing some of the variations of the Our Father penned by people throughout history as a way of making the prayer their own: Tertullian, Dante, Francis of Assisi, Benjamin Franklin, and Mary Baker Eddy, among others. “Try it,” Schneider suggested. “Start with the old Our Father you know and change as many words as you can, keeping the meaning but speaking from your own voice. Allow yourself to speak to God with the many voices you have within you.”

Joe Gill is President of the Board of Trustees of Listening Hearts Ministries and a coauthor of Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community.

LOVE MY ENEMIES???**Suzanne Farnham, Founder
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Jesus says it succinctly: “Love your enemies.” As I try to live this out, it is no easy task. Enemies abound at home and abroad. Violence and vitriol turn up everywhere: war, mass shootings, random killing, threats on the lives of solid citizens performing their civic duty. Emotions—particularly negative ones—seem to rule the day.

This has become a quest for me—a search for empathy and peace within myself. Martin Luther King Jr. provides a profound insight:

Violence may murder the murderer, but it doesn't murder murder. Violence may murder the liar, but it doesn't murder lies; it doesn't

establish truth.... Violence may go to the point of murdering the hater, but it doesn't murder hate. It is always a descending spiral to nowhere. This is the ultimate weakness of violence. It multiplies evil and violence in the universe. It doesn't solve any problems.

Agape love is quiet; it is calm; it comes from deep within. That is what I seek as I try to love my enemies. The journey continues.

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;
Al-le-lu, al-le-lu-ia!

These words of Karen Lafferty, the second verse of the hymn “Seek Ye First” (adapting Matthew’s Gospel), bolster my confidence that the Lord who is Love and Truth Incarnate is within us and will carry the day. Amen and thanks be to God.

Suzanne Farnham, an Executive Program Associate, is the founder of Listening Hearts Ministries, a coauthor of the Listening Hearts series of books, the original architect of the Listening Hearts programs, and serves on the Board of Trustees. She has been leading programs from coast to coast for more than thirty years.



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people the practice of spiritual
discernment through prayerful listening
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*God's mysterious threads combining,
All our choices, good and ill,
God, the graceful weaver knits us,
In new ways by Love's own skill — Suzanne Farnham and William W. Rich
from the Listening Hearts SONGBOOK, p. 31*

Seeking My Enemies

“Love your enemies” Jesus said.
To which my heart responds,
“who are my enemies?”

“Pray for those who persecute you”
the Lord continues—
but who are those who persecute
me?

My homeland has not been
invaded
by an occupying army
though many cannot say that.

I am not being oppressed
for my race, gender, or sexuality
though this world is full of such
evil.

My heart breaks for those
under the yoke of persecution
in its many forms.
Does that make their oppressors
my enemies?

It has been said that
“you are your own worst enemy”
so are my true enemies within?

“Who are my enemies?”
If I have to ask, then
my privilege is immense indeed.

May the Spirit be present
with each of us
and with each of our enemies
to comfort us
or to convict us
or both.

– Mike Croghan, November 2023