So, Jesus said to his disciples, “When you pray, say: Father” (v. 2). Or “Our Father in heaven.” Over time, the prayer evolved into the version we use today, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Prayer is personal, creating a connection to the God who is as close to us as a loving parent. But God is also our Father *in heaven*. God rules eternally from an infinite spiritual realm, compassionately caring for those who live in this finite physical world. These words capture perfectly how God is both with us and beyond us. “Our Father” is God right here, as close as a loving parent. “In heaven” is God out there, in God’s infinite, almighty, divine majesty. Both aspects of God are needed, and in prayer we connect with the God who is both with us on earth and beyond us in heaven.

Jesus completed the line, saying, “may your name be revered as holy” (v. 2). We say, “hallowed be thy name.” The word “hallowed” is an old-fashioned word, which can lead to some confusion. There is the story of the pastor speaking with some kids. He asked, “Does anyone know God’s name?” One little boy raised his hand and answered, “It’s Howard.” Surprised, the pastor asked, “How do you know God’s name is Howard?” “From the prayer,” the boy responded. “Our Father, who art in heaven, Howard be thy name.”

Whether you say, “revered as holy” or “hallowed,” the meaning is clear: Jesus wants God’s name to be held in the deepest respect. To revere God’s name is to treasure the essence of who God is. To “hallow” the divine name is to honor and love who God is. When we pray these words, we are saying that we want God’s holiness in our lives.

Novelist and pastor David Williams wrote a book, *The Prayer of Unwanting: How the Lord’s Prayer Helps Us Get Over Ourselves — And Why That Might Be a Good Thing.*3Williams knows we have lots of desires: success, safety, wealth, health, love. We often use prayer to ask for these things. Williams asks us to consider how the Lord’s Prayer offers us the opportunity think more about God and less about ourselves. When we say, “Father, may your name be revered as holy,” we are not asking for earthly health or wealth or success, but for heavenly holiness. There is a lack of holy awareness in the world, even among Christians. So, in this line of the prayer, Jesus invites us to let go of our earthly anxieties and gaze at God’s holiness. To hallow God’s name is good for us, it grounds us. To revere God’s name positions our life within God’s purpose. To respect God’s name in prayer creates a safe and happy space for us to talk with God.

The prayer continues its God-centered focus with, “May your kingdom come” (v. 2). Some versions add, “Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.” When we pray these words, we are asking for the powerful reign of God to take root on earth. We are hoping for God’s will, not *our* will, to be done. Jesus brought this prayer to life on the night before his death, when he prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done” (22:42). Jesus put God’s purpose ahead of his own desires.

In *The Prayer of Jabez*, the case is made that praying can release God’s favor, power, and protection in our lives. It is okay to ask for God’s favor, power, and protection in prayer; but The Lord’s Prayer is a different kind of prayer, turning our focus around. The Lord’s Prayer aligns us with God’s will instead of our own desires. Jesus knows that true happiness comes from a focus on God, instead of on us. *God’s* kingdom come; *God’s* will be done.

Jesus did not say, however, that we should *never* ask God for what we need for life. “Give us each day our daily bread” (11:3), he prays. This phrase helps us sort through the differences between needs and wants. This petition asks God to give us what we need for today, knowing that God will take care of tomorrow. Learning to find peace with lesser stuff is a mark of growing spirituality.4 Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us today our daily bread.” He didn’t teach us to pray, “Lord, give us enough to make us happy.” Jesus teaches us to ask for contentment, not happiness; what we need, not our wildest dreams fulfilled.

‘Forgive Us Our Debts as We Forgive Our Debtors’ is a tougher petition because forgiveness is not a natural human attribute. We are not as innocent as we might think, especially when we are exposed before God. Jesus spoke Aramaic, a “cousin” of Hebrew. Neil Douglas-Klotz went back to the original Aramaic to see what we can learn from the original version of the Lord’s Prayer. What he found deepens, enriches, and clarifies the meaning of the prayers, showing them for the metaphysical, mystical experiences Jesus intended them to be.

Douglas-Klotz says, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” translates into: Erase the inner marks our failures make, just as we scrub our hearts of others’ faults. I love the image of scrubbing our hearts of other’s faults. Notice the subtlety here. Sin also translates as accidental offenses or tangled threads. The bigger harm is the judging of actions and forgetting the divinity of ourselves and others. In our Oneness, there is no us vs. them. In our Oneness, there is just one Heart.5 Here we recognize our own shortcomings first, and then ask for help in letting go of the shortcomings of others.

‘Lead Us Not Into Temptation’ (v. 4) checks our heart’s desire. Anyone who thinks they can easily overcome any temptation needs to think again, which why ‘deliver us from evil’ is essential. Daily bread, forgiveness of sin, and avoidance of trials and temptations are all legitimate needs. God wants to give us what we need. The challenge for us is to understand the difference between our needs and our wants, and to accept that God will give us what we need, not necessarily what we want.

Jesus went on to tell a curious story about a midnight request for bread to illustrate how we should ask for what we need. A man needs three loaves of bread to entertain a guest, so he goes to his friend’s house and makes the ask. The man with the bread says, “Do not bother me, the door is already locked” (v. 7). But “even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship,” said Jesus, “because of [the man’s] persistence [the neighbor ]will get up and give him whatever he needs” (v. 8). The message is to pray with persistence.

Then Jesus adds, “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you” (v. 9). The good news is that God will respond to our asking, our searching and our knocking. God is not unwilling to give us what we need. To paraphrase the Rolling Stones, “You can’t always get what you want, but if you pray sometimes, you might just get what you need.”

How do we know this? Simple, said Jesus. “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish?” Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion?” (vv. 11-12). *Of course not*.“If you, then, who are evil,” said Jesus, “know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (v. 13). God is a good parent. We can trust our prayers will be answered, and our needs met.

The Lord’s Prayer is not meant to be a one-time prayer. Jesus intended us to speak it repeatedly as a regular discipline. Prayer is more like daily athletic training than a dash to the finish line. We must nurture the connection to God. God wants us to be happy. God wants to reduce our stress. God wants to fill our lives with meaning. We can get to this happy place by reaching out to God in prayer.

Prayer: O God, you love us like a good parent and are present in every aspect of our existence. May your nature become known and respected by all. May your joy, peace, wholeness, and justice be the reality for everyone as we live by the Jesus Way. Give us all that we really need to live every day for you. Forgive us for our failures as we forgive others for their failures. Keep us from doing those things which are not of you; cause us always to be centered on your love. For you are the true reality in our now, and in all our future. In Jesus name, we pray*.* Amen.

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**The Happiest Place on Earth**

Sunday, July 27, 2025 [Luke 11:1-13](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+11%3a1-13&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Experts say that if you want to be happy, it is important to move around. Exercise releases endorphins, the hormones that relieve pain and stress, as well as serotonin and dopamine, two more happiness hormones. Just 10 minutes of movement a day is enough to boost happiness levels.1 Researchers also find a strong link between mental health and being outdoors. So, if your work requires you to get outside and move around, you are probably going to be happy. Farming, logging, and forestry have the highest levels of self-reported happiness. They also have the lowest levels of self-reported stress.2

These studies reveal trends about happiness *at work*. But what makes us happy in our *free time*? Sports, exercise, and recreation come in at number two on the happiness list. No surprise there. All of them involve moving around, which releases happiness hormones. A lot of joy can come from hiking, swimming, cycling, or playing pickleball. But here is the real shocker: the number one activity on the happiness list is (wait for it!) spiritual practices! Spiritual practices make people happier than sports, exercise, recreation, volunteering, eating, drinking, socializing, or traveling.

Four surveys, conducted between 2010 and 2021, asked people how meaningful certain activities are to them, and how happy, sad, stressed, and tired they feel when they do them. The activities are graded on a six-point scale. At the low end is personal care, with a score of 2.8. The most meaningful and happiness-inducing activities are religious and spiritual practices like praying or worshipping or singing, with a score of 5.1 out of 6. The surveys also looked at locations and found that churches are ranked as some of the happiest places on earth, with a score of 5.2. (Take that, Disney World!) Wondering what spaces rank lowest? Banks (3.8).

The gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was praying “in a certain place” one day, perhaps in his happy place, doing something that made him happy. When he finished praying, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (11:1). This disciple wanted to get better at prayer so he could enjoy the happiness and stress relief that comes from praying well. Jesus agreed, because he wanted his disciples to pray in a way that drew them closer to God, aligned them with the will of God, and gave them a sense of happiness and peace that cannot be found anywhere else. Jesus wanted them to find the happiest place on earth. He wants the very same for us.