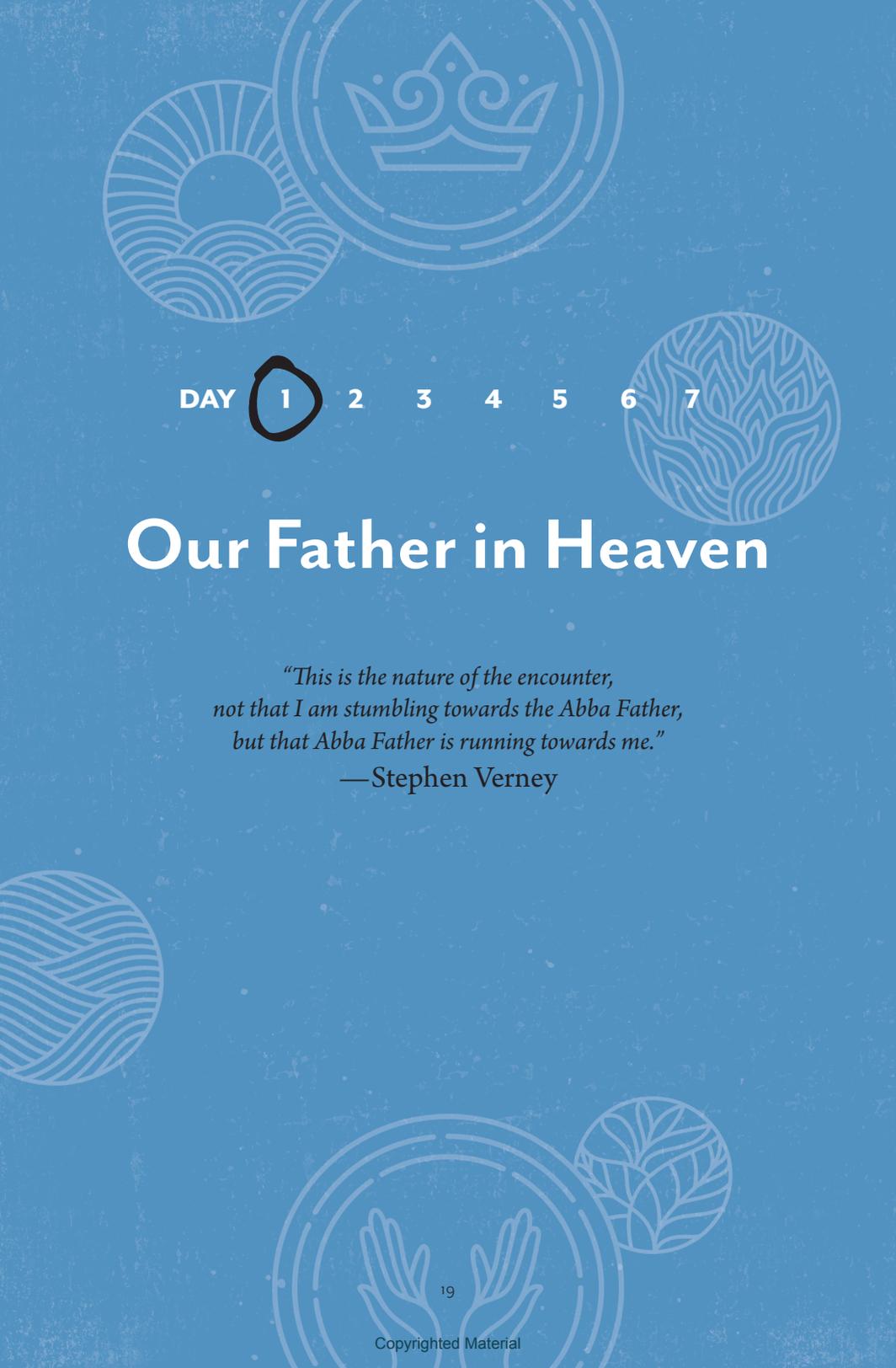


This beautifully designed book is inviting and effective. Each day explores a new petition in the Lord's Prayer and reveals the prayer's importance and impact. It's a perfect resource for anyone exploring the Christian faith or learning to pray.

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Our Father in Heaven

*“This is the nature of the encounter,
not that I am stumbling towards the Abba Father,
but that Abba Father is running towards me.”*

—Stephen Verney



PRAYER IS NOT ONE-WAY. IT IS TWO-WAY.

Think for a moment of the ways you picture prayer. Is it the penitent reciting the rosary? Is it monks spinning a prayer wheel? Is it the faithful bending low on prayer mats?

Though they may evoke powerful images, ritual incantations and relentless repetition are indications of “one-way” prayer. Prayer is not only about us getting through to God. Prayer is about God getting through to us so that we can discover His fatherly love for us. When we begin by praying “Our Father,” we are asking that we might come to know God better.

Our prayers fail if they are just one-way. Theologian Martin Luther once said, “Few words and much meaning is Christian; many words and little meaning is pagan.”² The prayer Jesus teaches us is two-way. In two-way communication, we look for a reply when we speak, and we come to realize that God is eager to know and enjoy us. As we grow in our comprehension of who God is, we begin to have comfort, freedom, and confidence in talking with Him. We gain assurance that we are heard by Him and that He will answer and give us what we need.

WE ARE ADOPTED—CHOSEN—BY OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Several years ago, friends of mine named Stan and Lori Helm adopted their son Nicholas from Russia. By the time I met him, Nicholas was a beautiful little boy, full of life with curly auburn hair. It was hard to imagine the life he had left behind in the unsanitary orphanage, where he lived in ill health and covered in sores. He had seldom been held.

I said to Stan, “Wow. Nicholas just won the adoption lottery with you and Lori.”

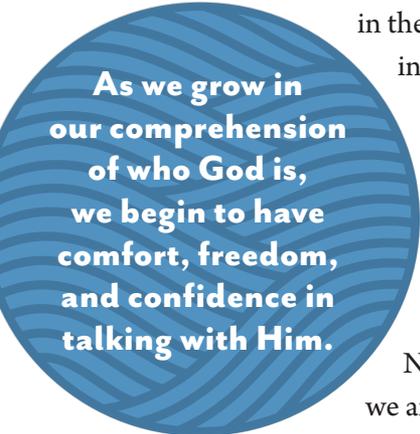
Without a blink, Stan replied, “No, John. You’re wrong. *We* won the lottery. No one in the world could be happier than we are to adopt him into our family.”

His words struck me. It made me think about “sonship” with God. He is our adoptive Father. Could it be that God is just as thrilled as Stan and Lori?

THE NAME “FATHER” GETS GOD’S ATTENTION

My children are the only ones who use “Dad” when addressing me. In fact, it’s the only name they use. If one of them calls me “mister,” they probably won’t get my attention. Unless I’m watching a hockey game, “Dad” gets through to me every time.

It is the same with God. We can try praying to a “higher power,” we can meditate on the “ground of being,” or we can study the “inner light.” I doubt we will command God’s attention with these generic phrases. We get God’s full attention when we call Him by His favorite name—“Father.”



As we grow in our comprehension of who God is, we begin to have comfort, freedom, and confidence in talking with Him.

In the same way, when Jesus prays to God, He calls Him “Father.” Although there are seventy-two names for God in the Old Testament, and several more in the New Testament, every time Jesus addresses God, He calls Him “Father.”

“Father, I thank you that you have heard me.” (John 11:41)

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.”

(Luke 22:42)

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

(Luke 23:34)

HEAVENLY ADOPTION MADE POSSIBLE

How, then, do we gain the incredible privilege of calling God “Father”?

Simply this: When we trust in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life, He confers upon us His own royal sonship status. By adoption, we become true sons and daughters of God. This means God views us the same as He views His only Son—along with all the benefits and access to Him that Jesus has. In his letter to the Galatian Christians, the apostle Paul explains this in dramatic terms:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal. 4:4–7)

Not only should this take our breath away, it is the key to all effective prayer. In prayer we now call God “Abba”—an

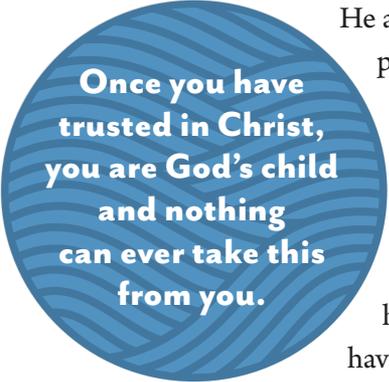
affectionate term a Jewish child uses to say “daddy.” We are able to leave behind our orphan aloneness and rest in the eternal “Daddy-ness” of our God.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT COMES TO PRAYER

When you address God in this way, you are able to come to Him in freedom. You no longer have to plead your good works to earn your way in. Once you have trusted in Christ, you are God’s child and nothing can ever take this from you. As the writer of the book of Hebrews said: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

When you talk to God, you no longer have to do penance and beat yourself up for your sins. You are forgiven the second you confess. God bears no grudge and remembers no sin.

He allows you to leave behind the rituals and put on the full joy of being His child.



**Once you have
trusted in Christ,
you are God’s child
and nothing
can ever take this
from you.**

I think of our granddaughter Kaiya. When she comes into our home, she doesn’t sit in a corner hiding, waiting for us to notice her—she runs up and seeks our attention. From her perspective, we have nothing more important to do and

have been waiting for her all along. This is her privilege as our granddaughter. Kaiya can ask for anything she wants. We might say no because we love her and know what is best for her, but we would never ignore her, no matter what she asks.

When I pray “Our Father,” I know I experience the results of having such a perfect Father. I learn to receive and rest in the presence of God—where I belong. I know I can confidently

come to Him. He will never be too busy. My Father in heaven will never ignore me. I can humbly ask Him for anything I need. He is eager to listen. He is able to answer.

HE IS OUR FATHER "IN HEAVEN"

There are many weak and neglectful fathers in the world. But God, dwelling in the eternal reality of heaven, is the original perfect and changeless Father—"from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph. 3:15). He will never abuse, neglect, or use you. His love for you will never corrupt or diminish.

"OUR FATHER" IS THE FIRST REQUEST OF THIS PRAYER

If it were up to us, we might want to jump right into prayers of confession—just to get rid of a bad conscience. We might start by crying out, "Help, Lord! I am drowning here. I need You now!" But Jesus teaches us to bond with God as Father, and if we start solidly with "Our Father," the rest of our prayer will be transformed.

As we pray each request of Jesus' prayer, we keep in mind that we are coming before a kind and generous Father. We ask boldly, because we know He is not offended. Teresa of Avila once said, "You pay God a compliment by asking great things of Him." Jesus said, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Confident and effective prayer begins with "Our Father."

We start here. We can go no further until we know Him as Father. This precious truth should be carried into all our requests.

CONCLUSION

Remember Nicholas?

Stan and Lori went to Russia one last time to finish the adoption procedure. After finishing the paperwork, Stan stepped into the room and saw Nicholas in his orphan environment. He was covered in scabies—a bright red rash caused by small parasites. He had blisters on the bottom of his feet, the palms of his hands, and all over the inside of his mouth. He reeked. The orphanage did not have money for diapers, so he was often left in his own excrement.

With his voice breaking, Stan told me, “I just wanted to hold him. I wanted to comfort and heal him. But more than anything else, I wanted Nicholas to know just how much Lori and I love him.”

What a beautiful picture of God’s adoption of us. He sees us in the orphanage of the world. With a breaking heart, He notices the scabies of our discontent, the blisters of our unhappiness, and yes, the stench of the sin we have too long remained in.

Rather than reject, despise, and judge us, He embraces us. He heals, cleans, and forgives us in His grace.

He adopts us to be His sons and daughters.

And He takes us home to live with Him forever.

Now we call Him “Daddy.”





Prayerful Pondering

DAY

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

1

How do you picture prayer—as a religious ritual/routine or as a two-way dialogue?

2

How do you feel about relating to God in a personal way?

My Personal Prayers

DAY 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Borrow the prayers that express what is in your heart, and add your own.

TO FATHER GOD TODAY IS MM/DD/YY

PRAY SPOT Work Home School _____

PATTERN OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

PRIORITY KNOWING YOU IN A PERSONAL WAY

REQUEST SHOW ME YOUR LOVE SO THAT I MAY TRUST AND KNOW YOU

MY LIFE

WHEN I THINK OF CALLING YOU FATHER:

I'VE THOUGHT OF YOU AS IMPERSONAL OR DISTANT _____

I'VE TREATED YOU AS A MAGIC GENIE, ONLY COMING TO YOU WITH WISHES _____

I AM FEELING EXCITED. AMAZED. UNSURE. AFRAID

_____ _____

_____ _____

THAT YOU WANT THIS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH ME. _____

My Personal Prayers

DAY 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

- SHOW ME WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU'RE LIKE _____
- OPEN MY HEART TO EXPERIENCE YOUR LOVE IN A WAY THAT I CAN UNDERSTAND _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

MY GRATITUDE

FATHER, THANK YOU FOR:

MY RESPONSE

NEW REVELATIONS OR THOUGHTS, HEART CHANGES I FEEL FROM YOU, OR STEPS I FEEL COMPELLED BY YOU TO TAKE:

... in Jesus' Name, Amen

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