

THE LORD'S PRAYER  
(GOD IS IN RED, AND THE ONE WHO IS PRAYING IS IN BLUE)

Man, I'm so tired. It's been a long day. I'm really looking forward to hitting the sack.

(Slaps forehead) Oh, darn it, I haven't said my prayers yet. (Sigh). Sometimes it's really hard being a Christian, what with Jesus wanting me to pray when I'd rather just close my eyes and go to sleep.

Oh well, I'll just get it over with. . . "Our Father who art in heaven."

Yes?

Don't interrupt me. I'm praying.

I know you are. And you called me.

Called you? No, I didn't call you. I'm praying. Now please, shhhh. I want to get this done so I can get some sleep.

"Our Father who art in heaven—"

There, you did it again!

Did what?

Called me. You said, "Our Father who art in heaven." Well, here I am! What's on your mind?

Is this some kind of joke? When I pray, I'm the one who does the talking and you're the one who does the listening. But you're speaking to me.

This isn't what you wanted? You don't want me to speak to you when you pray?

Not really. I mean, praying to have a conversation with you really complicates things. It's kind of stressful, to think you're actually listening to my prayers and responding to what I say.

Oh, I see.

When I say my prayers for the day, I don't mean anything by it. It just makes me feel good, kind of like fulfilling a duty. That's all I want when I pray—to feel good. I don't want any strings attached.

Hmmm. Okay, if that's the way you feel. But since I'm here already, do you mind if I hang around for a while and listen?

(Hesitantly) I'm not sure.

Please?

I guess it's okay. But don't you have somewhere else to go, or someone else's prayers to listen to?

Right now there's nowhere I'd rather be than here, and no one else I would rather be listening to than you. So go ahead and pray. Pretend like I'm not even here . . . you know, like you usually do when you say your prayers.

Suit yourself. (Clears throat) "Hallowed be Thy name."

Hold it right there. What do you mean by that?

By what?

You said, "Hallowed be Thy name. What does that mean?"

It means . . . it means . . . good grief, I don't know what it means. How in the world should I know? It's just part of the prayer. (Pause. Clears throat) So, what does it mean?

It means, "Honored, holy, wonderful."

That makes sense. I never thought about what "hallowed" meant before. Thanks.

No problem. But sorry, I interrupted you. Please continue.

"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Are you sure about that?

Of course. Why wouldn't I be?

Because that's going to take some work on your part. My kingdom is going to come someday, but I want some help on your part to make it happen.

You want my help?

Yes. You and all my other children. You know the old saying, "Many hands make light work"? I've taken that to heart. If every child of mine did their part to help usher in my kingdom, it would be here like that. (Snaps finger) So, what are you doing to make it happen?

What am I doing? Ummmm . . . nothing, I guess. But why do I need to? I mean, it's your kingdom, right? Personally, I think it would be great if you were in control of everything here on earth just like you're in control up there in heaven. Then things would be better. In case you hadn't noticed, we're kind of in a mess down here.

Yes, believe me, that hasn't escaped my attention. But I don't have control over you or anyone else, do I?

No. You've given us freedom.

Tell me, what have you done with your freedom?

(Pause. Then, a little embarrassed) Well, I go to church.

Nice, but that isn't what I asked you. I have given you freedom. And my intention is for you to use it responsibly and try to do the right things with it. I want you to freely and joyfully live a godly life. Is that how you use your freedom?

Yes.

Really? What about your temper? You've got a problem there, you know. And then there's the way you spend your money—all on yourself. And what about the kind of books you read and the TV shows and movies you watch?

Now hold on just a minute! Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of the rest of those people at church!

Excuse me? I thought you were praying for my will to be done. If that's ever going to happen, it needs to start with the people who are praying for it. Like you, for example.

Okay, you got me. I guess I do have some hang-ups. Now that you mention it, I could probably list quite a few of them.

So could I.

I haven't thought about it very much until now, but I really would like to quit some of the things I do that you're probably not happy about. I would like to, you know, be free of all the stuff that holds me down and prevents me from being closer to you.

Good. Now we're getting somewhere. We'll work together, you and me, to make you the best possible person you can be. I just know you will make me proud.

Look Lord, it's good to talk to you and all, but can we finish up here? This bedtime prayer is taking way longer than it usually does.

Sure. Carry on, then.

"Give us this day our daily bread—

You should cut out the bread. You're overweight as it is, and I worry about your health.

Okay, with all due respect, Lord, you're starting to rub me the wrong way. Here I am, doing my religious duty by praying, and all of a sudden you break in and remind me of all my shortcomings. I didn't invite you here.

Actually you did invite me here, when you started to pray.

True enough, I guess. But I'm not used to praying this way—with you listening and responding to what I say.

Get used to it, because this is the way prayer is supposed to happen. You're not talking to the ceiling, you know; you're talking to me. Praying is a mutual conversation between us. But prayer can be a dangerous thing.

How?

You just might get what you ask for and find out it's exactly what you don't need, or get what you didn't ask for and have your life turned upside-down.

You've got my head spinning, Lord. The kind of prayer you're talking about is more than I signed up for.

(Chuckles) Feeling like you're in over your head, huh? Well, it's too late to stop now, so you might as well go on.

I'm scared to.

Scared? Of what?

Of what you're going to say to me if I keep going. I know it will be something I don't want to hear.

Try me.

Okay. "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

What about your friend Ann?

See? I knew it! I knew you would bring her up! Forgive Ann? Why, Lord? She's told lies about me and spread stories that aren't true. She never paid back the money she borrowed from me. I don't want to forgive her. I want to get even with her!

But what about your prayer, and how it talks about forgiving and being forgiven?

I . . . I didn't mean it.

Well, at least you're honest. But it's quite a load you're carrying around, isn't it—all that bitterness and resentment?

Yes, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even with her. Boy, have I got some plans for her. She'll wish she had never been born.

(Gently) You're wrong. You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet, it's bitter and poisonous. Think about how unhappy you are now because of what Ann did. Vengeance will only make you unhappier. But I can help you with that.

You can? How?

Forgiveness is the key. I'll give you the strength to forgive Ann. Then I'll forgive you, and all that hate and sin will be Ann's burden, not yours. As far as you're concerned, the problem will be solved.

You know, Lord, you're right again. You tell it like it is. Even when I don't want to hear it, what you say is always for the best. And more than I want revenge against Ann, I want to be right with you. But it's going to be really, really hard to forgive her. Give me a minute, would you?

(Silent pause, then a big sigh)

Okay, here goes. I . . . I forgive Ann.

There, you did it! Great job! I'm so glad you decided to forgive. I know it wasn't easy, but it will be worth it in the end, I promise. So, how do you feel right now?

Hmmmm. Not bad. Not bad at all! In fact, I feel pretty great! Like a big, heavy stone was lifted off my chest. You know what? I don't think I'll be so uptight when I go to bed tonight. I haven't been getting much rest lately, you know.

Yes, I know. But I think you're in for some sweet dreams tonight. Now, would you like to finish your prayer?

Yes, Lord.

Go ahead. I'm listening.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

That's a very wise request, and I promise to do what you ask. But I have something to ask of you, and I ask it in love. Don't put yourself in places and situations where you're more likely to be tempted.

What do you mean by that?

You know what I mean.

(Brief pause. Then, guiltily) Yeah, I do.

Okay, go ahead. Finish your prayer.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Do you know what would bring me glory and please me very much?

No, but I want to know, Lord. I want to make you happy. I've made a mess of things at times, but now I really want to do your will. So tell me . . . how do I make you happy?

You just did.

THE END