

## OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN

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*Lesson: Matthew 6:5-15*

Have you ever thought about what it is you are really doing when you pray? When you kneel down, bow your head, fold your hands, and pray, you are talking to the Lord! You are telling Him something, or perhaps asking Him for something. And you hope that the Lord will hear what you are saying and will answer your prayer.

Now, if you say something you don't really mean, do you think the Lord will listen to you? No, He won't. Think about this—if someone did something nasty to you, then said, "Oh, I'm sorry I hurt you; I won't do it again," but kept on being nasty and saying he was sorry, you would know that he really didn't mean what he said. And so you wouldn't believe him, would you? Or, if a person made many promises but never kept them, then you wouldn't believe his promises, would you? You know what he is saying, but you don't listen because you know that he does not mean what he is saying. And it is almost as if you do not hear him.

So, too, the Lord cannot listen to you or hear you unless you mean what you saying. Of course, He knows what you are saying, but He also knows what you are *thinking*, because He knows everything. And if you are talking or praying to the Lord, but you don't mean what you say, or if you are thinking about something else while you are praying, then the Lord cannot listen to your prayer. The prayers that are heard by the Lord in heaven are those that come from your mind and heart. The things you secretly desire, the things you want more than anything else—those are the things that you are really praying for, no matter what you may say with your lips. And it is those things—that you really, secretly want—that are heard by the Lord.

The Lord said that "all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). Do you think that this means that the Lord will give you everything you want? Suppose you were to ask for something that would be bad for you, or would hurt you? The Lord wouldn't give you anything that would hurt you or keep you from going to heaven, any more than your mother or father would give you something harmful just because you wanted it. The Lord answers only those prayers which ask for what is good for us. So He said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

Now the Lord knows what is good for us much better than we do ourselves. As He said, “your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). Our Heavenly Father knows all the things we need. Then why should we ask Him for these things? Why should we kneel down and pray to Him? Does the Lord need our prayers?

No, the Lord does not need our prayers. But *we* need to pray to the Lord, for this is the only way that we can be made ready to receive the blessings of heaven that He wants to give us. If a tree or flower could not stretch out its leaves and petals toward the heat and light of the sun, it could not grow, and it soon would die. So, too, the Lord can give us His gifts and make us happy only if we open our minds and hearts to Him so that He can come in with the warmth of His love and the light of His wisdom and be received. When we turn to Him in prayer, we open our minds and hearts to the Lord.

How, then, should we pray, and what should we ask for from the Lord? One of His disciples asked the Lord this while He was on earth. He answered them in this way: “In this manner, therefore, pray.” And then He gave them the beautiful prayer, which begins, “Our Father who art in heaven,” and which ends with the words, “For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever” (see Matthew 6:9-13). This is called the Lord’s Prayer. The angels say this prayer every day, and we should say it too. There are other prayers which are good for us to say, but the Lord’s Prayer is the best of all because the Lord Himself gave it to us.

There are so many wonderful secret things hidden in this prayer that even all the angels in heaven will never know *everything* there is to know about it. But it is important that each of you should try to learn it and keep on learning as much as you can about it. As you do this, you will be learning more and more about how to pray. You will be learning how to turn your mind and open your heart toward the Lord. In this way you will be making yourself ready to receive the blessings and the happiness of heaven. And you will be like those disciples who watched the Lord praying, and when He stopped, one of them said, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Amen.