

The History of the Lord's Prayer

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It began upon a mountain when Jesus presented to a multitude words which have become known as "the Lord's Prayer." Later his disciples asked, "Teach us to pray," and He said, "When you pray say, 'Our Father...'"

In the following years, nay centuries, that prayer has been held sacred by hundreds of millions, being recited daily in private homes and in church services in different countries throughout the world.

I used to visit Holland, conducting services all in English—except for the prayer. When we prayed we said, "Onze Vader." In France I led the prayer with the words, "Notre Pere."

I was stationed in London and occasionally walked near Paternoster Row. That's the place where previously one could buy special strings of beads called "paternosters." They were for use in saying prayers, keeping track of the number of times you repeated the words of that prayer which begins "Our Father" or in Latin, "Pater Noster."

Latin was the first language into which the prayer was translated from the original Greek. There was no English language when, in 400 A.D., St. Jerome wanted to put the prayer into the "common language" or "vulgate." He produced the Latin version, which is still significant today.

By the year 1380, there was a language you might recognize as English. John Wycliffe produced a version of the Lord's prayer, using the Latin, not the original Greek. You can make out the meaning of Wycliffe's version even though the words seem strange. Father is "Fadir." Heaven is "heuenes." Earth is "erthe." Give is "geu." Deliver is "delyvuer."

More than a hundred years after this, the first English versions appeared, which were taken, not from the vulgate, but from the original Greek. Tyndale and Coverdale did the groundwork in the 1500s, which led eventually to the King James Version of 1611. From this, and the Book of Common Prayer, we have the version used by most English-speaking people today.

Some have held this to be the most precious set of words we know. I believe its holiness goes even beyond what people realize.

Here is what one theologian testified about it: "As often as I have recited the Lord's Prayer I have had the plain feeling of being raised toward the Lord, as though I was being uplifted."

He felt an inflowing into his mind and heart and exclaimed at "how boundless are the things contained in each detail of that Prayer."

That is the testimony of Emanuel Swedenborg. In his book “Heavenly Secrets” (or *Arcana Coelestia*) he spoke of saying the Lord’s Prayer morning and evening and noticing the way it opened his mind.

He writes: “This happened so that I might discern clearly that the contents of that Prayer were filled out with details from heaven.”

He sensed in that prayer a blessed feeling. “And what was amazing, the things flowing in have varied every day. From all this I have been allowed to know that the contents of that Prayer hold more within them than the whole heaven is capable of understanding.”

A prayer containing treasures beyond the very wisest people and yet suited to the use of little children!

For Swedenborg also testifies that when a very young child says the Lord’s Prayer the angels of heaven are moved with joy.

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