Jesus taught His disciples to pray by uttering a prayer. While some have taken this prayer—the Lord’s Prayer—as a kind of incantation to be recited on cue, it is better viewed as a template. In this most famous prayer, Jesus was providing His disciples with categories that they could use to construct all of their future prayers.

The prayer opens with the words, “Our Father, which art in heaven.” This marvelous phrase sets the tone for all the petitions that follow. In these syllables we learn whom to invoke when we pray and, by implication, in what attitude the invocation ought to be made.

Our first prayer is for others who as yet are in bondage. We thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast given them the spirit of bondage and made them to fear. We are glad that they should be brought to feel the evil of sin, to feel the perfection of Thy law, to know something of the fiery nature of Thy justice, and so to be shut up unto salvation by grace through faith. But, Lord, let them not tarry long under the pedagogue, but may the schoolmaster with his rod bring them to Christ.

Lord, cure any of Thy chosen of self-righteousness; deliver them from any hope in their own abilities, but keep them low. Bring them out of any hope of salvation by their own prayers or their own repentance. Bring them to cast themselves upon Thy grace to be saved by trusting in Christ.

Emancipate them from all observance of days, weeks, months, years, and things of human institution, and bring them into the glorious liberty of the children of God that Thy law may become their delight, Thyselves become their strength, their all, Thy Son become their joy and their crown. We do pray this with all our hearts.

Lord, deliver any of Thy children from quarreling with Thee. Help us to be always at one with our God. “It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good,” and blessed be His name for ever and ever.

God, bless our country, and the sister country across the flood, and all lands where Thy name is known and reverenced, and heathen lands where it is unknown. God, bless the outposts, the first heralds of mercy, and everywhere may the Lord’s kingdom come and His name be glorified.

Glory be unto the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.
For Isaiah, the fatherhood of God has little to do with the choices or faithfulness of His people. Indeed, God is Father at just the time when they are unclean and fading like a leaf, when their righteousnesses are as filthy rags and their iniquities bear them away like the wind. His faithfulness is what matters, not theirs. When no one calls on His name or rises up to take hold of Him, He is still their Father. He hides His face and consumes them because of their iniquities, yet He is their Father. For Him to be Father is a matter of His choice, His fidelity, His perseverance, and His grace.

From the lofty height of His dwelling in heaven God looks down. From His holy throne of glory He beholds His people. Among them is Isaiah the prophet, a man of unclean lips who dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips. He hears Isaiah cry out, “Oh, that You would rend the heavens! Oh, that You would come down! At Your presence the mountains will melt like water boiling over a fire. You have done terrifying things before, and You can do them again. Do not wait until we are deserving. Put away Your anger and forgive our sins!”

The opening words of Jesus’ prayer reverberate with Isaiah’s cry to God: “Our Father, which art in heaven.” This is the very sentiment that Isaiah expressed, and in nearly the same words. Surely the disciples recognized the allusion. If so, then they would have understood that God is Father of those whom He has chosen to redeem, and He redeems those whom He intends to rule.

Even so, God’s people find their assurance in His fatherhood. The true God is not the God of the deists, lifted up and exalted, but ultimately uninterested in the welfare of His people. He is not only a God who looks down from heaven, but a God who has come down from heaven. He has entered the world to redeem His people. He will enter the world once more, and then the mountains will melt like water boiling over a fire. He will shake both earth and heaven, so that those things which cannot be shaken might remain.

The ultimate answer to Isaiah’s prayer will be the new heavens and the new earth, just as he described in the next chapters of his prophecy. By the same token, a straight line can be drawn from “Our Father, which art in heaven,” to “Thine be the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.” Someday, God’s sovereign rule will be made clear to the entire universe.

The awful majesty of God would be unapproachable if He Himself did not open the way. This He has done through the blood of Jesus, consecrating a new and living way through the veil and into the holy of holies. We who are His children have been granted boldness and commanded to draw near.

So without cringing, but with a sense of awe and joy, we pray, “Our Father, which art in heaven.”

Prayer IX: Glorious Liberty
from Prayers from Metropolitan Pulpit
Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892)

OUR Father, we bless Thy name that we can say from the bottom of our hearts, “Abba, Father.” It is the chief joy of our lives that we have become the children of God by faith which is in Christ Jesus, and we can in the deep calm of our spirit say, “Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as in heaven.”

Lord, we thank Thee for the liberty which comes to our emancipated spirit through the adoption which Thou hast made us to enjoy. When we were in servitude the chains were heavy, for we could not keep Thy law; there was an inward spirit of rebellion; when the commandment came it irritated our corrupt nature and sin revived, and we died.

Even when we had some strivings after better things, yet the power that was in us lusted into evil, and the spirit of the Hagarene was upon us; we wanted to fly from the Father’s house; we were wild men, men of the wilderness, and we loved not living in the Father’s house.

O God, we thank Thee that we have not been cast out. Indeed, if Thou hadst then cast out the child of the bondwoman Thou hadst cast us out, but now through sovereign grace all is altered with us. Blessed by Thy name. It is a work of divine power and love over human nature, for now we are the children of the promise, certainly not born according to the will, or of blood, or of birth, but born by the Holy Ghost through the power of the Word, begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, children of the Great Father who is in heaven, having His life within us. Now, like Isaac, we are heirs according to promise and heirs of the promise, and we dwell at home in the Father’s house, and our soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and our mouth shall praise Thee as with joyful lips.