

St. Matthew 6:9

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven ... “

FATHER’S FAREWELL

After your bedtime prayers, what would like our Father in heaven to say:
“Good-bye? ... or ... Good night?”

Maybe we should back up a minute and ask a different question. What do you think God is doing when you pray? Listening? Where is he listening? Somewhere out there in the distance, beyond the stars, insulated from the noise down here by choirs of harping angels huddled in padded clouds? Some people think God is ...

- ▶ Sitting in a divine rocking chair, stroking his long, white divine beard somewhere on cloud nine ...
- ▶ Strolling down Heavenly Way, wearing a long, white divine robe and a shiny golden crown on his head ...
- ▶ Standing in front of a galactic throne, surrounded by a gazillion angels making so much divine noise he can’t hear our human cries for help, or our meager melodies of praise in worship.

Unfortunately, most people think our Father in heaven wants nothing more to do with us, except to keep that dreaded judgment day appointment at the end of days. That explains why hellfire-and-brimstone preaching is indelibly etched into the minds of millions of people looking in from the outside in the world of religious tradition. Sinners in the hands of an angry God expect nothing less than a divine “Good-bye” when they see God through the condemnation of the Law. When one of our own religious icons in American history – *Jonathan Edwards* (1703-1758) gave his farewell ... well, hang on to your pews! From the pulpit at the First Church in Northampton, Massachusetts ...

Dear children, I leave you in an evil world, that is full of snares and temptations. God only knows what will become of you. This the Scripture has told us that there are but few saved, and we have abundant confirmation of it from what we see. This we see, that children die as well as others. Multitudes die before they grow up, and of those that grow up, comparatively few ever give good evidence of saving conversion to God. I pray God to pity you, and take care of you, and provide for you the best means for the good of your souls, and that God himself would undertake for you to be your heavenly Father, and the mighty Redeemer of your immortal souls. Do not neglect to pray for yourselves. Take heed you be not of the number of those who cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God. Constantly pray to God in secret, and often remember that great day when you must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and *meet your minister there*, who has so often counseled and warned you.

July 1, 1750 after being voted out as the pastor

Let's go back to our original question. When you've said your prayers just before you turn in, what would you like our Father in heaven to say:

“Good-bye? ... or ... Good night?”

Your answer will reveal something about the nature of your faith because prayer is the outstretched arms of a little child reaching for his Father's help, the critical cry of a child's voice piercing the ears of his heavenly Father, the child's only hope for relief and redemption from his Father who loves and cares for him. What will your Father say:

Good-bye ... or ... Good night?

Dr. Langdale of New York tells of a devoted businessman who was struck by an automobile and hurried to a hospital. Doctors informed him that he had about two hours to live. His faith was implicit in the goodness of God in his life and in a future life in heaven. To him death was only a gateway leading to the presence of God and to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His family was hurriedly called to his bedside, and as he embraced each one he had a parting word.

To his **wife**, he said, “Beloved, you have been the dearest woman in the world to me. Through sunshine and shadow we have walked together. You have been my inspiration in all that I have undertaken. And many times I have seen the Spirit of God shining in your face. Good night, my dear. I will see you in the morning. Good night.”

To his oldest **daughter**, he said, “Mary, you are our firstborn. What a joy you have been to your father. What a fine Christian you are! Good night, Mary dear. Good night.”

To his oldest **son**, he said, “Will, your coming into our home has been a true blessing. What a fine man you have become. You love and seek to serve the God of your father. Continue to grow in every Christian grace and virtue. Good night, Will.”

To his **other son** who had fallen under evil influences of the world and had grievously disappointed his father time and time again, he said, “Charlie, you were a promising boy, but somewhere along the way you took a different path. You have not followed the Savior. And yet, I still love you, Charlie. God only knows how much. Good-bye, my son. Good-bye.”

Charlie seized his father's hand.

In tears he cried out, “Dad, why did you say ‘Good night’ to the others and ‘Good-bye’ to me? His father answered, “Son, I will meet the others in the morning because our Lord has promised a blessed reunion in heaven for all those who believe in him. But I have no hope of seeing you there. So, it is ‘good-bye’ Charlie.”

His son fell on his knees at the bedside of his dying father. He cried out in agony and prayed that God in heaven would forgive him all his sins and make him a new man in Christ. “Do you mean it, Charlie? Then, it's good night, my son. Good night.” In a moment, the father was gone.

When I was growing up I didn't get everything I wanted, but my Dad made sure that I got everything I needed. When he came home he was tired after a long day at work, but never too

tired to let me know how much he loved and cared about me and the rest of his family. He would hug me. He would lift me high into the air – when I was little. Or just pat me on the shoulder – when I was bigger. He would ask me about school, sports, and sometimes give me a special surprise – usually a small toy from the store that he picked out just for me. He made sure I had a place to live, food to eat, and clothes to wear. But the greatest gift he gave me should come as no surprise to any of you. He gave me a Bible. He taught me to open it and read it. He told me about Jesus -- what he did on the cross and how he rose from the dead to take away my sins and give me eternal life. He told me that God loved him, too. That’s why he made sure we all gathered together in the hallway for prayers before bedtime. The Lord’s Prayer was his favorite. Then he would see us off to bed and give us our --

FATHER’S FAREWELL.

“Good night,” he said. “Sleep well. I will see you in the morning.”

The day before November 23, 1986 seemed like any other Saturday afternoon. I washed my Dad’s car and parked it in his driveway. I knew he would be surprised to find it there when he and Mom returned home later that evening. Sure enough, he called me around seven. We spoke for a time, unaware that by next morning he would be in heaven. I can still hear my --

FATHER’S FAREWELL.

“Good night,” he said. “Sleep well. I will see you in the morning.”

May God our heavenly Father hear us when we pray.

In Jesus’ Name,
A M E N

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