

“Father in heaven”

By Scott Harrup

Jesus' prayer can be yours as well

On monthly breakfasts, Dad and I visit a local restaurant and settle in for an hour or so of easy conversation. It's our tradition. The waitress knows us well enough to skip the coffee for Dad and refill my cup two or three times.

Imagine our reaction if a total stranger suddenly arrived. Let's say the guy two tables over comes and sits with Dad and me and even calls my father "Dad" as if he were family.

I'd half expect Rod Serling to materialize. "Obie and Scott Harrup just sat down to breakfast on what appears to be a typical Saturday morning. But this is no ordinary restaurant, and their family circle is about to include an unexpected visitor ... from the Twilight Zone."

Cue some of that unmistakable music. You get the picture.

Yet, when it comes to God, our Heavenly Father, that sort of scenario goes on all the time. And God wants it to be that way.

Think about it. Jesus is God's Son, the "one and only Son" mentioned in John 3:16 (NIV). But God has issued an awesome invitation.

He wants you and me to join His family, to be His children — brothers and sisters of Jesus His Son. Those who accept this invitation are "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). Too many people know nothing

about God's gracious offer. Even Christians are prone to forget their identity within God's family. Easter Sunday is a wonderful day to be reminded.

Easter means family

Becoming part of God's family does not mean we become God, or little "gods." Jesus is uniquely God with His Father and the Holy Spirit. But the Father/Son relationship in the Trinity models how our Heavenly Father desires to relate to us.

Jesus drew no distinction between His relationship with His Father and the relationship of any other child of God. Jesus' death and resurrection made such a family connection possible.

On that first Easter morning, the resurrected Savior told Mary Magdalene, "Go ... to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 17:20).

Jesus wasn't speaking metaphorically. He viewed His disciples as brothers, true members of His family. He was about to return to a Father and God who was lovingly connected to Him and to them.

Even before His death, Jesus taught His disciples what it meant to belong to God's family. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, His model prayer began with the simple address, "Our Father."

As a child of God, your prayers have immeasurable power.

Easter means answered prayer

It staggers the mind to realize God listens to His earthly children's prayers with the same attention He gave to each of Jesus' prayers. Consider Jesus' promise: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father" (John 14:12,13).

But our experience includes many prayers we believe God has not answered. We can't understand why we're waiting for something to happen in response to Prayer A, B or C. At such times it's a good idea to review why we prayed in the first place. Too often our "family communication" does nothing to further our "family values."

James said it this way: "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:3).

God is not schizophrenic. He isn't split between a holy personality and some alternate personality that automatically fulfills every prayer request, no matter how self-serving or even sinful.

Jesus' perfect track record for answered prayer was a result of His perfect track record for intimately relating to His Father. "I and the Father are one," He said (John

10:30). Jesus lived out that relationship in obedience. "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (John 5:19).

Obedience, then, identifies every true child of God. "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother," Jesus said (Matthew 12:50).

Each of us must encounter Jesus Christ as our Savior to establish a relationship with our Heavenly Father. That is the beginning. But the life of the Christian is a journey where God's highest purpose becomes our focus each day.

When we seek God's best, He responds in love far surpassing any human father's. "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11).

What an awesome promise from your Heavenly Father to you.

I'm passing on the tradition of father/son breakfasts. Austin is 6. He and I sit together quietly a lot of mornings before I come to work and he goes to kindergarten. It doesn't really matter what we say.

He knows I'd give him the world. **tpe**

SCOTT HARRUP is senior associate editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.