

**The Our Father... Sept. 2011**

*Talk for AA Retreats*

The **Our Father** has been used in the AA Program since its inception. It is a prayer addressed to our Higher Power. I would like to give some reflections on this beautiful century's old prayer phrase by phrase and sometimes word by word.

In trying to explain this prayer I will *at times* refer to the context in which it was given. The Our Father was given by Jesus to his disciples who asked him to teach them to pray. You don't have to have any kind of a belief in Jesus in order to understand how a first century Jewish person would interpret the prayer that Jesus gave to his followers. I just want to try to point this out. It might help in your understanding and praying this prayer. If this helps you, all well and good. If it doesn't help, take what you need and leave the rest.

**Our...** AA is a "we" Program, not an "I" Program. This is reflected in our prayer. So often while drinking we isolated or were in our own little world – when drinking alone or when taking up space in a bar. So often we were in bondage to self – our world was all about "me." How often was it about "poor me," "poor me," "poor me," "pour me a drink?"

*(How often were we consumed by self centered fears and resentments and anger?... "Me, me, me!" Many times our individualistic and self-centered culture merely enhanced our selfishness. "It's all about you" scream too many commercials. "Have it your way... and supersize it!")*

This reminds me of a story – a short story.

An Autobiography in Five Short Paragraphs

1. *I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost. I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.*
2. *I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in. I can't believe I'm in the same place, but it isn't my fault it still takes a long time to get out.*
3. *I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in. It's a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault I did not get out immediately.*
4. *I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.*
5. *I walk down a different street.*

Now in the Program **we** learn that instead of it being about *me* falling into that hole again and again, it's all about "us" helping each other get out of that terrible "hole."

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**We** learn to be honest and communicate with our sponsor so that he or she knows what's going on in the neighborhood of our head.

**We** learn how to live a more healthy and virtuous life from others in the Program too. Our life really does become “about us,” not about me falling repeatedly into that life-threatening “hole.”

### **Father...**

Some folks come into the Program who have a hard time believing in God... listen to Bill's words in the **Big Book**, page 12:

*When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me, I didn't like the idea. So my friend Ebby made what then seemed a novel suggestion. He said, “Why don't you choose your own conception of God?”*

*That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered for years. I stood in the sunlight at last.*

Can we believe in a Higher Power... a power greater than ourselves?

Regarding our belief in a Higher Power, on page 26 the **Big Book** describes our belief in the reality of electricity. We don't see it. But we know it's there. We experience its effects.

The same with God... we in the Program have experienced the effects of a power far greater than ourselves in our lives. We have turned our lives over to this power. Many of us, if not most of us, choose to call this higher power God.

In the **Our Father** we take another step. We call this God *our Father*.

Our God acts toward us like a good and loving father. If we never had an experience of a “good and loving” father this prayer might seem difficult. Why use this term “Father?”

Here is an instance where I would suggest that it might be helpful to go to the source of this prayer.

Who taught people to pray the Our Father? The simple answer is... Jesus. Whatever you think of Jesus, we know that Jesus experienced God as a loving Father. As a matter of fact, it seems that the Aramaic term Jesus used for Father was “Abba,” which is best translated as “Daddy.”

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*I am reminded of a time years ago when I was visiting my nephew Joe. We were walking in his back yard under a tree when suddenly his 4 year old son Marc jumped out of a branch above us into Joe's arms, happily calling "daddy" as he jumped. We didn't know Marc was in the tree branch. But Marc was sure that if he jumped from the branch his "daddy" would catch him. Thank goodness Joe did. Then Joe suggested to Marc that he give his dad more warning next time!*

Total loving trust in his "daddy." That's what Jesus had. And he taught his disciples to call God "daddy," "Father."

One of the most popular stories that Jesus told was that of the Prodigal Son – or rather, that of the Prodigal Father who would not give up on his lost son and welcomed him back into the household and threw a big party upon his return. That's how Jesus talked about God... God the loving, prodigal Father, who forgives us and welcomes us home... even if we have a hard time forgiving ourselves.

### **Who art in heaven**

Our Father is in heaven. What is heaven? Where is that? I remember years ago hearing that the first Russian cosmonaut, Yuri Gongonon, announce that he had traveled into the heavens and did not find God there.

So where is "heaven" wherein our Father dwells?

Once again we look at the Our Father as a first century Jewish prayer. For the Jews of this time the "heavens"... the skies, the stars and other heavenly bodies, were above the earth. They were harmonious, beautiful and orderly. They could also be awesome and fearful. They showed us God's beauty and sovereignty. Though God was near at hand to us and we could pray to God, God was also as distant as the "heavens". God dwelt out there, above and beyond us... as did God's angels. God was transcendent and yet heard our prayers.

Thus the image... God's court and throne were in God's "heavenly" dwelling place.

### **Hallowed be thy name**

What is God's name? How do we call our higher power?

Many people today do not know how to name God. Many people today are mute before God, hardly knowing how to talk to God. So many of us were mute before God in our drunkenness. Maybe we prayed a fox hole prayer...

*O God, I'll never drink again if you get me out of this mess.*

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*O God, I promise I'll drink less if you bring my family back to me.*

*O God, help me keep this job, please.*

I am a firm believer that any prayer is better than no prayer.

But so many people don't know how to talk to God.

In bondage to self,

encased in self-centered fears,

run around by resentments and anger,

burdened with an inflated ego which still can't control our world,

always wanting it my way...

How does such a person pray to God when they are the center of their lives?

### **Hallowed be thy name...**

"Hallowed" means "holy."

Once again, in first century Palestine where this prayer originated, God was *holy*... *hagios* in the Greek New Testament language in which the Our Father is handed down to us.

Hagios meant that God was other, separate from the profane, every day world. God was mysterious, powerful, and terrifying... But God's infinite glory fills the earth and God was the joy and strength and support of God's people. God is demanding, but also capable of pardon and forgiveness.

God's name is holy. God's name is not a small name, but a glorious name.

*(Read the book of Revelation, chapter 4.)*

We live in a culture that thinks of God differently.

### **The Christian Century Magazine...Aug 10,'10**

Many Christians and especially younger adults and teen Christians have been infected with a limp image of God... Sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Denton call it *Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism*. Here are its main tenets:

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- A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.
- God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
- The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about yourself.
- God is not involved in my life except when I need God to solve a problem.
- Good people go to heaven when they die.

This is a banal version of God... bland and uninspiring. It's a god that's nice to have, like a bank account – something you have in case you need to draw from it in the future. This is the type of God kids have been taught. Kids are left thinking only nice thoughts about their God.

We “teach” our kids how to play sports. We “teach” our kids how to score well on SAT tests. We don't teach them a strong God.

Do we come to our God on our knees, even if we are God's sons and daughters and even though our God is a loving Father?

Can our God make demands on us?

What demands does our God make?

### **Thy Kingdom come...thy will be done**

What is God's Kingdom? Is it a place?

Once again we must take a look at the Our Father in the context of first century Palestine and in the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus saw himself as ushering in God's kingdom. In Mark's presentation of the story of Jesus we hear Jesus say at the beginning of his preaching and teaching ministry:

*This is the time of fulfillment. The reign (kingdom) of God is at hand. (Mk 1:15)*

Wherever Jesus brought healing, forgiveness, love and care... there was God's Kingdom. In Luke's presentation of the story of Jesus we hear these words of Jesus:

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me... He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners... (Lk 4:18)*

In Jesus' understanding this was a coming of his Father's kingdom. This was God's reign. This was God's will.

God would not leave our world unredeemed.

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God was the Prodigal Father... God was the Good Samaritan.

Jesus would have us imagine a world healed of its brokenness.

“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done...” is a prayer.

But we also have to work the prayer, we just can’t pray it.

In the stories of Jesus we see Jesus working the prayer.

Now apply this to AA, regardless of your view of Jesus.

“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done...” is our prayer, and we work our prayer, we just don’t pray it.

God’s Kingdom is where healing takes place in the rooms.

God’s will is for our broken world to be restored, one day at a time...

Can we imagine a renewed world?

My friends, we are that renewed world... We’re not perfect, but we are in the process of being renewed and transformed... and of helping others to be renewed and transformed... God’s kingdom has not come in its finality... God’s kingdom is in the *process* of coming...

We’re a part of that coming. We’re in the process of working our prayer that we say each day – **or** we’re not doing our part for God’s kingdom. We’re not doing God’s will.

And don’t forget Step 12 – we’re to bring God’s kingdom and God’s will into our entire lives... what a challenge, what a calling. We are to be blessings in the lives of other, and not curses!

God depends on us... God trusts us... God loves us.

Now... let’s act like God’s sons and daughters, God’s kids!

Let’s keep going...

### **On earth as it is in heaven...**

Our Father’s loving will is praised and adored in God’s heavenly court. Now we ask that it be done here, on earth.

What would it look like if Our Father’s will were done here on earth as it is in heaven?

Two images...

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### **Image**

*A description of heaven and hell...*

*Hell... a group of people sitting shoulder to shoulder around a cooking pot of delicious smelling stew. They look beaten and haggard, and are hungrily trying to get at the stew to eat it. To each of their right forearms is attached a long handled large spoon for dipping into the stew and feeding themselves. However, because they are shoulder to shoulder they don't have enough room to swing the long handled spoon from the pot to their mouth. They are getting in each other's way. They are angry at each other, they're cursing and swearing at each other since no one can get the delicious smelling, appetizing stew to his or her mouth. As a result they are angrily starving. That's hell.*

*Heaven... A group of people is sitting around a cooking pot of delicious, aromatic, appetizing stew. They are sitting shoulder to shoulder, and each of them has a long handled large spoon attached to their forearm for feeding. They are well nourished, happy, enjoying each other while they eat. As you watch their conviviality you notice one difference between them and the first group, which makes all the difference in the world... This group is using their large spoon to feed each other, rather than struggling to feed themselves... there is plenty to go around, and they are enjoying each other while they feast.*

### **Image**

The gates of heaven and the gates of hell...

Imagine with me: me at a bar, me with a drink, me at a party, me drinking alone, me isolating...

*The gates of hell open...*

What comes forth? For one thing, the four horsemen the Big Book talks about: terror, bewilderment, frustration and despair.

What else comes forth? The "Seven Deadlies" gallop forth: envy, greed, arrogance, sloth, lust, anger and gluttony .

What else comes forth? (See the handout: The tree of alcoholism)... there emerges from hell's gates insecurity, fears, resentments, hostility, self-pity, remorse, misery, rejection, drunk driving, lost jobs, broken homes, jail, and insanity.

Imagine a meeting of AA...

*The gates of heaven open...*

What comes forth?... Healing, forgiveness, kindness, gratitude, love and care.

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What else comes forth? The principles of our Program: honesty, hope, faith, courage, integrity, willingness, humility, brotherly love, justice, perseverance, spiritual awareness and service. (See the handout: the tree of sobriety.)

Does anything else come forth: prudence and justice... virtues which help us to discern and live God's will.

This is our Father's will on earth, as it is in heaven.

### **Give us this day our daily bread**

What is bread?

First thing we might notice is that this is a petition. We're asking our Father for something.

Petition reminds us that we are not self sufficient, in total charge of our ship, suffering from what Bill W calls big-shot-ism, blinded by *prideful* self confidence. (**Twelve and Twelve**, pp 91-92)

I once heard a man brag that he was a self made man... I figured he was one of the finest examples of *unskilled* labor I had ever met.

In the petitions we ask our Father for help...

Daily bread... obviously we ask for the material food which we need this day... we remember how blessed we are to have something to eat and we ask for its continued presence.

Is there any other meaning to this petition?

Once again let's place it in its first century Jewish context. Bread is more meaning than simple "bread". Jesus' hearers would immediately have remembered God feeding their ancestors with Manna during the desert journey... manna to give them strength for their journey thru the desert. What do we need for the journey of our daily lives to help sustain us?

In a wide sense that could also be the food we ask for... the gifts and virtues which flow forth from God's throne when the gates of heaven open.

### **Forgive us our trespasses**

Forgiveness... what is that all about?

### **Forgiveness**



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Awhile back a person came to me for confession and said she had not been to confession for a year. Then she said that her sin was anger. That was all she said. I asked her if that was getting better or worse. She said it was the same.

If you went to a doctor and said your arm was hurting he would ask you where the hurt was and suggest you try to describe the pain. Was it a lot of pain or a little bit of pain? How long have you had this pain? He would probably examine your arm and he might suggest you get an x-ray of the arm. The question would be, "What is causing the pain and what to do about it?"

The woman in confession was unwilling to give me any more information. She just wanted absolution and be gone. Is that what God's forgiveness is all about? How can the divine physician begin the healing process if we are not willing to open our hurting heart and guilty conscience?

Can you and I readily admit that we are sinners and in need of healing? How have we sinned? Do we realize that our sin offends God and not just other people?

In the Jewish religion God is angered by the way people hurt other people; by the way our sins hurt people...

... listen to Jeremiah the prophet preaching to Israel about how their sinfulness offends God...

*Thus says the Lord... Your crimes have prevented these things (God's blessings), your sins have turned back these blessings from you. For there are among my people criminals; like fowlers they set traps, but it is men they catch. Their houses are as full of treachery as a bird-cage is of birds; therefore they grow powerful and rich, fat and sleek. They go their wicked way; justice they do not defend by advancing the claim of the fatherless or judging the cause of the poor. Shall I not punish these things? (Jer 5:25-29)*

Who of us can say that we have not hurt people? But we say it so blithely!

But God knows the truth about us.

But there is another side to God... Jeremiah points to God's love for us...

*God says... Is Ehpraim not my favored son, the child in whom I delight? Often as I threaten him, I still remember him with favor. My heart stirs for him. I must show him mercy, says the Lord. (Jer 31:20)*

We must never make light of our sins as if God's mercy and forgiveness are cheap.

As we approach God's light we begin to see the truth of darkness.

As we experience healing we begin to see the depth of our sinful infections... the residue of our guilt and the ache of our sinfulness.

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As we approach the Truth we begin to recognize our need for honesty in asking for healing.

This need not cause us depressive guilt or paralyzing anguish... because we begin to grasp the depth of our Father's love and care for us.

Now we begin to recognize the depth of our sinfulness.

Now we begin to understand the forgiveness we experience. This forgiveness takes time to heal us of our sinfulness. Give time time. Don't rush it. It is not cheap grace. But it *is* grace! We begin to see that our world is full of grace.

And... we begin to forgive ourselves... God helps us to forgive ourselves.

### **As we forgive those who trespass against us...**

Once we begin to experience the depth of God's forgiveness of us, we can grow in our forgiveness of others.

Sometimes it's hard to forgive someone...

How we think about him or her?

The images we use influence us.

If we image someone as an enemy, a dirty rotten scoundrel, a mean spirited, manipulative, self centered dirt bag – if that's our image, how will we treat that person?

If we image that person as a broken human being who himself or herself suffers much from their chosen behavior and way of acting and if we follow the suggestion of the Big Book and pray for that individual – that individual might not change, but we will change and hopefully not be too angry and resentful ourselves. At the very least we will pray for that person even if we have to avoid them.

This reminds me of a story...

### **Rabbi Story... When Does Day Come?**

*A Rabbi once asked his students how they could tell when night had ended and the day was on its way back? "One Student asked, "Could it be when you could see an animal in the distance and tell whether it is a sheep or a dog?"*

*"No," answered the teacher.*

*Another asked, "Could it be when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it is a fig tree or a peach tree?"*

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*"No," answered the teacher.*

*"Well then, what is it," the pupils demanded.*

*"It is when you look at the face of any man and woman and see that she or he is your sister and brother, because if you cannot do this, then no matter what time it is, it is still night."*

*What is our image of our higher power? Can we begin to call God "Our Father?"*

*And if God is our Father, then we are sons and daughters of God... think about that! How can we withhold forgiveness from our sister or brother?*

*Which reminds me of another story...*

### **A Child of God...**

**A seminary professor was vacationing with his wife in Gatlinburg , TN. One morning, they were eating breakfast at a little restaurant, hoping to enjoy a quiet, family meal. While they were waiting for their food, they noticed a distinguished looking, white-haired man moving from table to table, visiting with the guests. The professor leaned over and whispered to his wife, 'I hope he doesn't come over here.' But sure enough, the man did come over to their table.**

**'Where are you folks from?' he asked in a friendly voice.**

**Oklahoma ,' they answered.**

**'Great to have you here in Tennessee ,' the stranger said. 'What do you do for a living?'**

**'I teach at a seminary,' he replied.**

**'Oh, so you teach preachers how to preach, do you? Well, I've got a really great story for you.' And with that, the gentleman pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with the couple.**

**The professor groaned and thought to himself, 'Great ... Just what I need .....another preacher story!'**

**The man started, 'See that mountain over there? (pointing out the restaurant window). Not far from the base of that mountain, there was a boy born to an unwed mother. He had a hard time growing up, because every place he went, he was always asked the same question, 'Hey boy, who's your daddy?' Whether he was at school, in the grocery store or drug store, people would ask the same question, 'Who's your daddy?'**

**He would hide at recess and lunch time from other students. He would avoid going into stores because that question hurt him so bad. 'When he was about 12 years old, a new**

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preacher came to his church. He would always go in late and slip out early to avoid hearing the question, 'Who's your daddy?'

But one day, the new preacher said the benediction so fast that he got caught and had to walk out with the crowd.

Just about the time he got to the back door, the new preacher, not knowing anything about him, put his hand on his shoulder and asked him, 'Son, who's your daddy?'

The whole church got deathly quiet. He could feel every eye in the church looking at him. Now everyone would finally know the answer to the question, 'Who's your daddy?'

'This new preacher, though, sensed the situation around him and using discernment that only the Holy Spirit could give, said the following to that scared little boy.. 'Wait a minute! I know who you are! I see the family resemblance now; You are a child of God.'

With that he patted the boy on his shoulder and said, 'Boy, you've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it.'

'With that, the boy smiled for the first time in a long time and walked out the door a changed person. He was never the same again. Whenever anybody asked him, 'Who's your Daddy?' he'd just tell them, 'I'm a Child of God.'

The distinguished gentleman got up from the table and said, 'Isn't that a great story?' The professor responded that it really was a great story!

As the man turned to leave, he said, 'You know, if that new preacher hadn't told me that I was one of God's children, I probably never would have amounted to anything!' And he walked away.

The seminary professor and his wife were stunned. He called the waitress over & asked her, 'Do you know who that man was -- the one who just left that was sitting at our table?'

The waitress grinned and said, 'Of course. Everybody here knows him. That's Ben Hooper. He's governor of Tennessee!'

No matter what our past looks like, when we pray the Our Father we hopefully realize that we are sons and daughters of our God. Those we find it hard to forgive are also our Father's sons and daughters.

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I would refer you to the Monastery website where I have posted further reflections on how we can exercise forgiveness...

[www.catholic-church.org/stpaulsmonastery](http://www.catholic-church.org/stpaulsmonastery)

### **Lead us not into temptation...**

What tempts us?

What is a temptation?

Our culture seldom talks about “temptations.” When it does it’s usually to invite us to “Go ahead, give in, enjoy... you deserve that candy bar, that good bottle of Scotch, that nice looking woman, that day at the Track or the Casino... that extra money from cheating on taxes... Don’t worry about these... *temptations*. Don’t be so hard on yourself. Who you going to hurt if you give in? You deserve it!

The fact that you’re “giving in” might hurt your family... the fact that you can’t afford it... the fact that you’ll get drunk AGAIN... the fact that you really don’t deserve it... heh, what’s temptation anyway... don’t live in a straight jacket... if it feels good, do it.

What tempts you? What beckons you? What other addictions are you attracted to? – after all, we are addictive characters.

I remember my first sponsor when I came into the rooms in NY. He told me the story that he came into the Program years before with a group of other men who became buddies. They began to move thru the Steps and there was friendly competition among them in moving thru the Steps. A problem arose. My friend’s sponsor would not let him move into Steps 6 and 7. For months. My friend pleaded with his sponsor. His sponsor kept on saying, ”You’re not ready.” Finally my sponsor asked his sponsor, “Why am I not ready?” His sponsor asked him, “Are you still gambling?”

The light went on! The heavens opened! My sponsor finally got it. His gambling was an addiction, just like his drinking. He had to be ready to humbly ask God to remove this addiction too. That was his “temptation.”

### **“Lead us not into temptation.”**

What is your temptation? How are you not fulfilling God’s will in your life?

**“Thy will be done on earth...”** and in my life.

**But deliver us from evil...**

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Once again... what evil do you need to be delivered from? In Bill W's **Twelve and Twelve** he refers to the Seven Deadly Sins... They are evil. Evil is whatever destroys sobriety and peace of mind... whatever hinders our love of God and hurts others. That's why the seven sins are called "deadly."

What are they? Envy, greed, arrogance, lust, anger, sloth and gluttony.

I will talk a little about these tomorrow morning....

### **For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever...**

This final segment of the Our Father is called a "doxology"... a praise of God. If we look at the very beginning of the Our Father, "hallowed by thy name," "holy is thy name," is also a prayer of praise.

Praise of God is in reality recognition of God's power and goodness and graciousness.

In realizing that our life does not revolve around ourselves and in yielding ourselves to our higher power and to God's will...

in letting God take over our lives – Step Three – (**Big Book p.** ),

in seeking to do God's will in our lives – Steps 10 and 11 –

(**Big Book p.** )...

in all of this we are submitting ourselves to God's way and not ours...

Thus the Our Father begins and ends with a doxology... a praise of Our Father.

We are leaving go of our imperial ego, our imagined greatness, our wanting to be in control all of the time... what Bill W calls Big-shot-ism.

In placing our lives in Our Father's hands we are letting go of the idolatries of our culture – the belief that "stuff" can make us happy, or power or sex or fame.

These things are ok in themselves, but too much of them can easily lead to self-will run riot...

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to the idolatry of consumerism when what we consume consumes us.

God is our higher power, not Stuff.

We are not into American Idol!

We don't have to be in control all of the time.

We can accept our brokenness and not deny it... this reminds me of a story...

*Once in a far off kingdom there was a precious diamond, the largest ever known, hundreds of carats in weight, brilliant, flawless and perfect in every way.*

*People from all around came to the kingdom to admire its famous diamond. The king and his subjects were rightfully proud of the diamond.*

*Then one day a servant of the king burst into his chambers with terrible news. The diamond now had a crack in it. The king rushed to see this tragedy and was stuck speechless at the sight. The entire kingdom mourned.*

*The king then sent out word that he would pay a king's ransom to anyone who could fix the diamond.*

*Many diamond merchants and diamond cutters came from near and far, but no one would dare touch the diamond – they pronounced that the crack could not be mended without destroying the entire diamond.*

*Then one day an elderly gentleman appeared who told the king that he could fix the diamond. If the king would allow him to take it home with him he would return it lovelier than it had been.*

*The king looked a long time at the old man, then told him that he would not allow the old man to take the diamond home with him, but he would allow him to work on it in a basement room of his castle, and he would give him food and drink while he worked, and a handsome payment if he was successful. The old man accepted the offer of the king.*

*After a month in the closely guarded basement room of the castle the old man came to the king and announced the diamond was ready to be displayed.*

*The king invited all of his subjects into the large courtyard of the castle for the unveiling of the refurbished diamond. The old man pulled the covered diamond on a wagon into the courtyard, then unveiled the diamond for all to see.*

*Everyone gasped, and the king was beside himself – with joy. For now the diamond was more stunning and attractive than ever. The old man had carved the diamond into a beautiful and*

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*delicate rose, and the crack had now become the stem of the rose. Everyone cheered and rejoiced. The old man had indeed saved their precious diamond.*

God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Do we think this is ?

For this we praise our God... **For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever...**