

# OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN: LORD'S PRAYER INTRODUCTION

Pastor Michael Jarick

Have you ever been asked to make a speech at an important occasion like a wedding or a funeral? How did you go about preparing your speech? Did you just sit down and write it? Did you decide to wing it? Or did you approach someone you knew who was good at writing speeches and ask them what you should say?

Imagine that person came back to you the next day with a fully prepared speech written out word for word. Would that make your speech a good one? Maybe, but not necessarily! When they are someone else's words they might not sound natural when you say them. It might even sound a bit fake, because the words and expressions are different from the way you would normally speak.

If you really didn't know what to say, a much better way for them to help you would be to give you an outline, a pattern for you to copy, which will help you to express what you want to say, using your own ideas and words.

This is exactly what Jesus did with his disciples. The disciples wanted to pray to God. They knew that they needed to pray, but they didn't know how to go about praying. In Luke 11:1 they ask "Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus replied, "When you pray, pray like this...", and he taught them a prayer that we now call the Lord's Prayer.

As well as providing a wonderful set of words for us to pray, I'd like you to consider that the Lord's Prayer also provides a very helpful outline or pattern for us to follow. My address this morning is the first in a series of 8 addresses looking through the petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

My intention is that this will help you as you pray to God, first by having a good understanding of the Lord's Prayer itself, which we rattle off every Sunday; and second, by using the model or pattern of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer to make your own prayers more of a blessing to you.

I'll give you an example of what I mean by an outline or pattern. After the introduction, the prayer starts with 3 petitions about what God wants: "Hallowed be *your* name, *your* kingdom come, *your* will be done..." Only then does Jesus address our needs and wants. This pattern helps us to see that it is not all about us. It stops us from being selfish and self-centred.

We can easily remain like an untrained child, so completely wrapped up in what we want, that we forget what God might want. We can be so busy telling God what we think that we don't stop to listen for what he might be trying to say to us.

The Lord's Prayer puts God at the centre, where he belongs. Then we can go on to the things that are a bother to us: "Give *us* this day our daily bread. Forgive *us* our sins. Lead *us* not into temptation, but deliver *us* from evil..."

The first of these three petitions is about our present needs – daily bread. The second is about past sins. The third is about our future welfare. So these three petitions take our entire lives, past, present, and future, and lay them before God.

There is another pattern we can see in these petitions. When we pray about our daily bread, we think of God the Father, who created and preserves us. When we pray for forgiveness, we think of Jesus, God's Son and our Saviour. When we ask for help with dealing with temptation and in facing evil, we think of God the Holy Spirit, who is our guide and helper along life's way. So the pattern of the Lord's Prayer brings us face to face with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When we pray, we begin by giving God his proper place. Then we take our past, present, and our future to the Triune God.

Let's turn now to the opening words of the prayer. When Jesus began by addressing God as Father, he was using a concept that was dearly loved by the Jews. In Deuteronomy 14:1 we read "You are the sons of the Lord your God." In chapter 32:6 it says "Is not the Lord your Father, who created you?"

Since God was their father, they were assured that he was near them to hear and answer their prayers. Even though he lived in the highest heaven, yet because he was their father, he was present in the smallest and poorest house, and close to the simplest of hearts. Since he was their father, he would be merciful when they returned to him in repentance.

But if there was such a strong tradition of God as father, did Jesus actually add anything new when he began his prayer with "Our Father"? You bet he did!

Let's look at some Old Testament passages about the nature of God. In the story of Job, Job's family is killed. Then all his property is taken away. Then he is struck down with a horrible disease. Since he was a godly man, he can't understand how God would allow this to happen to him. So, he challenges God.

God responds, "Who are you to question my wisdom with your ignorant empty words? Were you there when I made the world? Job, have you ever in all your life commanded a day to dawn? Have you any idea how big the world is? Answer me if you know. Do you know the laws that govern the skies? The list goes on!

God may have been father to the Jews, but there remained a sense of distance between him and his children, a boundary that Job had crossed when he dared to challenge God in his need to find answers for his suffering.

In contrast, the New Testament uses the word "Abba" a number of times. When he is desperately praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus addresses his father as "Abba". St Paul writes in Galatians 4:6 that we can use this same word.

“Abba” is the familiar, affectionate, and personal word that a young child would use for their loving dad. Some scholars think that “daddy” is an even better translation.

When Jesus was born of Mary, he transcended the distance between God and his people. The Son of God became a man. Another boundary that separated God and humanity was bridged when Jesus suffered pain and death. The all-powerful God knows hunger, thirst, weakness, exhaustion. He feels rejection, grief and sorrow. His blood is shed. He feels the sting of death.

Far from being isolated, detached and distant, God is like the waiting father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The father abandons all dignity as he hitches up his clothes and runs to embrace the son who dishonoured him and squandered his inheritance, and who now comes back as a beggar, because he hasn't got anywhere else to go.

During the American Civil War, a young soldier in the Union army lost his father and older brother in the Battle of Gettysburg. He decided he would go and see the president and ask if he could leave the army and go back to the farm to help his mother and sister plant their spring crops. He was given special permission to go to Washington to plead his case.

When he arrived at the front gate of the White House, he asked the guard if he could see the president. The guard replied, “Don't you know that there is a war going on? The president is very busy. He doesn't have time to see you. Now go away!”

So, the young soldier left very disheartened. He went to a park nearby and sat on a bench. While he was wondering what to do, a little boy sat down and said, “What's wrong?” The soldier spilled his heart out to the little boy. The boy listened and then said, “I can help you, soldier!”

He took the soldier by the hand and went to the front gate of the White House. Apparently, the guard didn't notice them, because he didn't stop them. They marched up to the front door, and walked straight in. They walked past government leaders and generals, and no one said a word. The soldier couldn't understand it at all.

Finally, they reached the oval office. The little boy didn't even bother knocking on the door. There, behind the desk, was Abraham Lincoln with the Secretary of State, looking at the battle plans laid out on the desk. The president looked at the boy and then at the soldier and said, “Good morning, Todd. Can you introduce me to your friend?”

Todd Lincoln, the son of the president said “Daddy, this soldier needs to talk to you.” The soldier put forward his case, and his request was granted. He was allowed to return to his mother and sister.

Hear these words from Ephesians 2:13,14,18a “But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... For through him we have access to the Father.”

Before I conclude, a brief note on the first word of the introduction to the Lord's Prayer. We pray “Our Father” not “My Father”. Just as the word “Father” makes clear our

relationship with God, the word “our” settles the relationship we have with the people around us today in church and with Christians all around the world. If God is our Father, then those around us are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

“Our Father”: we could almost stop there, not needing to go any further, for here we have spelled out with these two words our relationship with God and with the people around us. Here God encourages us to believe that he is truly our Father and we are his children. We are therefore to pray to him with complete confidence, just as children speak to their loving father. Amen.