

The LPG

Heavenly Father

December 6, 2020

Welcome to where we're turning to Jesus and learning to pray ... the LPG way!

LPG stands for the Lord's Prayer Guide.

Do you ever struggle to put your thoughts into prayers? It's common. It's normal. But it's a problem that needs to be solved by each of us ... with our Father's help. And that's where Jesus comes in with the Lord's Prayer, which, contrary to popular belief and long standing tradition, isn't a prayer. It's a prayer **guide**. A prayer **pattern**. A prayer **generator**. A prayer **memory aid**.



The disciples didn't say, "Teach us *a prayer*," they said, "Teach us *to pray*." (Luke 11:1) And Jesus didn't *pray* it, He *taught* it – not as a prayer to recite, but as **a way to pray to avoid religious repetition**. (Mat 6:7) Because, that's what His boys were struggling with and babbling their way through, three times a day, under their prayer blanket, or tallit, reciting the 10-minute, 18-part, thrice daily, Amidah: a beautiful, Scriptural, spiritual, yet mechanical, prayer.



We've been scrutinizing the instructions and warnings that Jesus gives with His template for talking to God. Templates like this were known in Jesus' day as **Index Prayers** – a practical way to convert scattered thoughts into thoughtful words. The irony is that many today pray the Lord's antidote *mechanically*. Now, the LPG *should* be prayed *as is* – because it must be memorized – but then, it's intended purpose and function is to be **prayed**, and **paused**, and **personalized**.



Each concise, easily memorized segment sparks and inspires thoughts and desires we might otherwise easily overlook, and forget to say, and fail to discuss with our Dad. The simplicity of the LPG is deceptive; but *if* we follow it as Jesus taught it we'll never pray the same way. Because, **the LPG is a spiritual thought organizer**. It's an index on which to hang our **deepest needs**, and **darkest secrets**, along with all our **tears** and **fears** and **hopes** and **praise**. And so ...

In *this manner*, therefore, pray: 'Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.' –
Matthew 6:9 NKJ



We just blew through three segments! Jesus opens by emphasizing the closeness that God *himself* desires with us. **He wants to be approached first and foremost on an intimate basis**; the way a small child – whose father just happened to be a king – would jump onto his lap to say, "I love you!" It's nice to know that **prayer isn't just for us, it's also for Dad**. Know why?

He seeks godly offspring. – Malachi 2:15 NKJ

And He wants to be greeted with childlike affection. **It's like a verbal hug.** We're encouraged to call Him Abba, (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6) like Jesus did, (Mk 14:36) which is the equivalent of Daddy or Papa.

And so, you **PRAY**: "Our Father", and then **PAUSE** to ask yourself how you can best express, not childish, but childlike affection to our devoted Dad. Then you **PERSONALIZE** it: "I love you Dad / Daddy / Papa. Mornin' Abba. Pa. Pops. Etc. Though I don't recommend "etcetera". What feels most natural to you? "Nothing! It's weird to call Him Dad." So true. And even more so for Jesus young disciples. The disciples didn't think of our Father on such intimate terms (and it hindered their prayers and relationship). So, can you? Do you? **Are you on such intimate terms with Dad?**



Thanks (or *no thanks*) to King James, **many believers grow up thinking Dad prefers formality.** But I wouldn't have wanted *my* kids to say, "We beseech thee to bestow thy allowance." *That's* weird.



Notice how Jesus places personal ownership in there? This is the sweet "our" of prayer! **He's ours!** *He* belongs to *us*, just as *we* belong to *Him*, in the way a child possesses the heart of a loving parent, and vice-versa. **We own His heart ... if we've given Him ours.** *Everyone* is His child by creation; but as you know, **there's more to being a dad than creating a kid.** After we're created we must be connected. And there's just the one connection.

To all who received [Jesus], to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born **[again]** of God. - John 1:12-13 NIV



But why do you suppose Jesus includes Dad's address in His temple? Well, "in heaven" is a reminder of our Papa's place ... *and ours.* But **"in heaven" isn't about His location** — God's retreat in the sky — **it's about His sovereign, transcendent authority.**

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My *throne*, — Isaiah 66:1 NKJ

First and foremost is relationship, but a close second is reverence. And so, before we enter any further into our prayers, **we must strike a balance between intimacy and authority.** You often hear that Jesus *remade* God's image as an affectionate Father. Not true. Jesus came to reveal, not to remodel. 750 years earlier, the prophet Isaiah was striking the same balance.

Look down from *heaven* and see from your *lofty throne*, holy and glorious. ... *You are our Father* ... — Isaiah 63:15-16 NIV

He's on a holy and glorious, heavenly throne, as the almighty, all-knowing Authority, whose fiercest foes *only* exist by *His* will, within *His* perfect plan, for *His* children's eternal best. Our Papa-God is fearsome, awesome, and then some! And so, you **PRAY**: "our Father *in heaven*", and then **PAUSE** to ask yourself how you can best express your understanding that He's above all and in full control, and your respect for His absolute authority.

Then you **PERSONALIZE** it: Almighty. All-knowing. King of kings. Lord of lords. I Submit. I Surrender. I Bow. And I worship you above all other powers and authorities.



I love C.S. Lewis' balancing act in a line relating to Aslan the lion (from: The Magician's Nephew): "They were terribly afraid it would turn and look at them, yet in some [strange] way they wished it would." Well, **God may be fierce, but He's not a force**. He's *not* a distant, detached, impersonal power. He's our Father ... in heaven. Fatherly and fierce. Relationship and reverence.



So, Jesus reminds us, for a right relationship, to *fear* the Father we *love*; because, **Dad is all-personal and all-powerful and no-nonsense**. For instance, John and Jesus were best friends. But John got a glimpse of the Lord's heavenly glory, and says:



His eyes were like blazing fire. ... His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. **[How do you think you'll react?]** - Revelation 1:14-17

It used to be a compliment to be called "God *fearing*". Now **we tend to over-focus on our Father's "softer side"**. And when we do, we begin to see Him as a harmless old softy on sin (and our relationship and prayer life suffer). So **don't confuse "Father God" with "Uncle God"**. That goes both ways. If we don't balance His intimacy and authority we'll see Him as either an "indulgent Dad" or a harsh judgmental "Sir".

Do *you* tend to stress one aspect of His nature over the other? **All softness produces liberalistic self-condoning**. And we'll fail, to our own detriment, to notice how alarmingly and powerfully He opposes our sin. On the flip side, **all fierceness produces legalistic self-condemning**, and we'll fail to find the joy of our salvation, or to feel the forgiveness our Father so freely offers.

God is love. And, **love is something more fierce than kindness**. Kindness wants to numb pain or alleviate suffering. A kind vet will shoot a horse. But love is deeper. More complicated. **Love longs to help face the pain and walk through it**. Kindness cares only that pain is removed, *not* that healing is attained, or righteousness achieved. **Kindness is what you show to the neighbor's kid** – while you put up with 'em. **Love is what you show your own**. And it often causes your own to get upset. "Why can't you treat me like you do the neighbor's kid?" "Because you're mine."



People mostly want a soft lion. A doofy lion. A kindly Santa God who grants forgiveness and dispenses mercy without demanding growth or change. But **that's a desire for less love and power, not more**. So which tendency *do* you tend to lean toward? Dad doesn't want us terrified. Just awe-struck. Confident, but not complacent.

We were made to be safely afraid of Dad. I've never had trouble fearing a loving Father. Not because of a *prayer* blanket, but a *monster* blanket. 55 years ago, Pops would cover himself and crawl on the floor and try to catch me as I jumped from couch to chair. I was simultaneously terrified of Pop's power while secure in his loving protection.

I didn't fear harm; I was just joyfully overwhelmed by power! So, thanks in part to this blanket, I have it pretty easy enjoying *and* fearing our fierce *and* loving Father. Monster love. Fearsome. Awesome. And then some.



But a whole lot of believers have a huge barrier when it comes to connecting with our Heavenly Father. Know why? Earthly fathers! For many, “Father” is synonymous with **hostility, rejection, and abuse**; and we feel **repulsion** and **rage** and **scorn**. Bad dads distort our perception of God; because we all tend to project the weaknesses of our earthly dads onto our heavenly Dad.



Was *your* father **unreasonable** or **unpleasable, unreliable, unconcerned, unpredictable, or unjust**? We need to undo what they've done by realizing and verbalizing that God isn't *like* a father ... He *is* the Father! He's not even a reflection of all that is *good* about fathers – just the opposite. **All that's good about fatherhood is a dim reflection of Dad!** But *in* fatherhood's *most* inspiring and gracious moments, it *is* the essence of our Dad. Fundamental to His nature. Unique to His relationship with creation. **Our God is the gold standard of good dads.**



He's the One and only *genuine* definition of “Father”. But, what's the One and only genuine definition of *Him*? Or should I say, “Who?” Because, Jesus said:

If you really knew Me, you would know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him. **[To the degree, that is, that you know Jesus]** – John 14:7 NIV

Do you think maybe you ever unconsciously project any of your earthly father's traits onto your heavenly Father? *Well ...*

This, then, is how you should pray: “**Our** Father **[the Father of all]** **in heaven** **[whatever kind of defective dad had down here didn't do so good; SO], hallowed** **[holy; set apart; differentiated]** be **Your** name,” – Matthew 6:9 NIV

Know who the Jews of Jesus' day hallowed as their father?



“Abraham is our father,” they answered. – John 8:39 NIV

God the Father was referred to as the God of (Father) Abraham. And even though Abraham had died 2,000 years before, most Jews saw their salvation as an entitlement based on their father Abraham's faith. And this really perturbed John the Baptist.

Do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. – Matthew 3:9 NIV

And, it greatly perturbed Jesus.

“If you *were* Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do the things Abraham did.” – John 8:39 NIV

For instance:

Abraham believed *God*, and it was accounted to *him* for righteousness. And *he* was called the *friend* of God. – James 2:23 NKJ

I didn’t read you *everything* Isaiah wrote about our Father in heaven. He said:

Look down from heaven and see from Your lofty throne, holy and glorious. ... *You* are our Father, though *Abraham* does not know *us* ... *You*, O LORD, are our Father – Isaiah 63:15-16 NIV

And the Amidah begins by calling out to “the God of Abraham” – which Jesus replaces with “our Father in heaven”. **Not remaking. Reminding. Revealing.** And basically saying to **stop praying to someone else’s God!** Everyone was under their shawl riding father Abraham’s coattails to God’s throne. **The relationship must be between you and our Father**, not you and *Abraham* or *anyone else* and our Father. Remember Jesus’ warning just before the LPG.

Pray to **your** Father ... then **your** Father ... will reward **you**. – Matthew 6:6 NIV

After all, before Abraham was, He Am!

Let’s pray ... *together*:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. – Matthew 6:9-13 NKJ