

# Heavenly Father

## *Balancing Authority and Intimacy*

June 18, 2023

*Today we honor our dads and our Father!*

**Ever project your down-here dad onto your up-there Father?** It's common. It's normal. And it's a problem that needs to be wrestled with by *each* of us ... with our Father's *help*. Which is 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**. Because Jesus didn't teach His boys "what" to pray, but "how" to pray. Cuz the boys didn't say, **"Teach us a prayer."** but, **"Teach us to pray."** (Lk 11:1)



Cuz they'd been raised to recite the **Amidah**, an 18-part, 10-minute, thrice-daily, beautiful, Scriptural, but mind-numbingly mechanical prayer. And so, **Jesus didn't pray the Lord's Prayer, He taught it** – not just as an incredibly concise and well-edited *Amidah* – which it *is* – but **as a way to pray to avoid religious repetition**. (Mt 6:7) And apparently to get something off His chest that must've been really bothering Him about the boys, saying:



When you pray, do *not* keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do *not* be like them, for your *Father knows* what you need *before* you ask Him. [Right? You don't need to inform Him] *This, then, is how you should pray*" – Matthew 6:7-9 NIV



And this, then, is *why* Jesus needed to offer a 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 Lord's prayer *should* be prayed *as is* – because it must be *memorized*. Because each easily memorized segment *sparks* and *inspires* thoughts and desires we might otherwise easily overlook and forget to say, and fail to discuss with our Father. So for it to *serve* its *intended purpose* and *function* we must **pray** and **personalize** and **pause to listen** to the Lord.

**His prayer is deceptively simple** – but in no way *shallow*; and *if we use* it as He *taught* it our prayers will deepen every day. Because **our Father's prayer is an effortless index** on which to hang our deepest needs, and darkest secrets, along with our *tears* and *fears* and *hopes* and *praise*.

[And so] "In this *manner*, therefore, pray: 'Our Father in heaven'" – Matthew 6:9 NKJ



Jesus opens by emphasizing the closeness God *himself* desires. Our Father 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!" And **this prayer isn't just for us, it's also for our Father**. Know why? Well, *you may seek Him*, but:



*He seeks godly offspring.* – Malachi 2:15 NKJ



And He wants to be greeted with childlike affection. And being Father’s Day, I thought we could use a little refresher on the first line of the Lord’s prayer. So you **pray**: “Our Father” and then **personalize** it with – not *childish*, but – *childlike* affection for our Father. And then **pause** to hear what *He* has to say to you. **Are you already on such intimate terms?** If *not*, don’t worry if it feels *weird* at first. Jesus’ own *disciples* didn’t think of our Father on such intimate terms; and it hindered their *prayers* and their *relationship*. Hence the Lord’s *antidote*. And thanketh to King James and his “thee”s and “thou”s, **many believers grow up thinkething our Father prefers formality**. But who wants *their* kids to say, “We beseech thee to bestow thy allowance.” *That’s* weird. And look how Jesus places personal ownership in there? This is the sweet “our” of prayer! Because **He’s all ours!** in the same way a child possesses the heart of a loving parent, and vice-versa, **His heart belongs to us, just as ours belongs to Him**. Especially if you’re a prodigal come home! That father literally *runs* to that reunion. Of course, *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 gotta be connected**. And there’s just the *one* connection.

To all who received [the true Light], 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 ... but born **[again]** of God. - John 1:12-13 NIV

So why does Jesus includes His address in His template? Well, “in heaven” isn’t really about His *location* (God’s house in the sky) as much as it’s about His *sovereign, transcendent authority*.

**[For]** Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is My *throne*” – Isaiah 66:1 NKJ

So *first* and *foremost* is *relationship*, but right on its heels is *reverence*. Because we must **strike a balance between our Father’s intimacy and authority**. It’s often said that Jesus *remade* God’s Old Testament image into an *affectionate* Father. *Not true*. **Jesus didn’t come to save God’s image ... He is God’s image!** (Col 1:15) And as such, **He came to reveal, not to remake**. Because the *point* the prophet *Isaiah* was making 750 years *before*, was all but *lost*.

Look down from *heaven* and see from Your lofty *throne* ... **[For]** You, O Lord, *are* our *Father*, our *Redeemer* from of *old* is Your *name*. – Isaiah 63:15-16 NIV

Well there’s “our Father” in “heaven” (as a “throne” of authority) whose hallowed “name” is “our Redeemer”, whose foes exist by *His* will, within *His* plan, for *His* children’s eternal *best*. John and Jesus were best *friends*; but when *John* got a *glimpse* of His *heavenly* Redeemer-Father, he says:



His eyes were like blazing fire ... His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. ... I fell at His feet as though dead. Then He placed His right hand on me and said: “Do not be *afraid*.” – Revelation 1:14-17 NIV

How do you suppose *you’ll* react when *you* see Him *face to face*?

Well, maybe we should start preparing for that moment by **praying**: “in heaven”; and then **personalizing** it, like: “I gladly bow and joyfully submit cuz, I know that I know, You’re the only One in full control.” And then **pausing** to consider what His throne of *authority* is *saying* to you.



Because Jesus tells us, for a right *relationship* with *reverence*, we must:

Consider therefore the *kindness* and *sternness* of God ... *kindness* to you, *provided* that you *continue* in His *kindness*. – Romans 11:22 NIV



I love C.S. Lewis’ balance with Aslan in *The Magician’s Nephew*, saying “They were terribly afraid it would turn and look at them, yet in some [strange] way they wished it would.” Well, **our Father may be fierce, but He’s more than a force.** Cuz **He’s our fearless and fearsome Friend.**



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.**

And that goes *both* ways. If we don’t balance His *intimacy* and *authority* we’ll see Him as either an indulgent uncle or a harsh, intolerant, force of nature. So, **which aspect of His nature do you tend to overemphasize?** Because, **too much softness produces liberalistic self-condoning**, and we fail, to our own *detriment*, to realize how *alarmingly powerfully* He *opposes* our *sin*. On the flip side, **too much fierceness produces legalistic self-condemning**, and we fail to find the *joy* of our *salvation*, or to *feel* the very real *forgiveness* our very *loving* Father so *freely* offers. Truth is:



God is love. [That’s not how He’s defined; it’s how love is! And therefore] Whoever lives in love lives in God, [the Father] and [Father] God in them. – 1 John 4:16 NIV



And, **love is something more fierce than just kindness.** Kindness wants to numb pain or alleviate suffering. Which is why a *kind vet* will *shoot a horse*. But love is *deeper*. More *complicated*. And often involves *suffering*. Because **love longs to help face the pain and walk through it.** Kindness cares only that *pain* is *removed*, *not* that *healing* is *attained*, or *maturity* *achieved*. **Kindness is what you show to the neighbor’s kid as you tolerate ‘em. Love is what you show your own.** And it often *upsets* your *own* kids: “Why can’t you treat me like you do the neighbor kids?” “Because *you* are *mine*.”



People mostly want a soft, toothless, doofy ol’ lion. A Santa-sugar-daddy who tosses out forgiveness like parade candy, **dispensing grace without demanding growth.** But here’s the rub: **that’s a desire for less love, not more.** So which tendency *do* you tend to lean toward? Our Father doesn’t want us *terrified*. Just *motivated*. **Confident but not complacent.** Cuz our Father is *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! Because **we project their faults and flaws onto our flawless Father.** Which is why it's important to honor the godliness of our down-here dads. But even *good* dads distort our perception of God. **Was your father ever unreasonable or unreliable?** Of course he *was!* It's just a matter of extent. So give him a break. It's Father's Day. And he's only *human*. And we need to realize and verbalize that **our Redeemer isn't like our father ... He is our Father!** He's not even a *reflection* of all that's *good* about fathers; just the *opposite*. **All that's good about fatherhood is still a dim reflection of our Father!** (1 Cor 13:12) But, *in* fatherhood's most *inspiring* and *gracious* moments, it is the *essence* of our Heavenly Father. And *that's* what we honor on *Father's Day*.

**Our God is the gold standard of good dads.** Because, *He's* the one and only *genuine* definition. But what's the one and only *genuine* definition of *our Father*? That'd be the #1 Son, who said:

If you really *knew Me*, you would *know My Father* as well. – John 14:7 NIV

For unto us a Child is born, [though He has no beginning; and] unto us a *Son* is given ...  
And [guess what] *His* name will be called ... Everlasting Father – Isaiah 9:6 NKJ

Have we not all *one* Father? Has not *one* God created us? – Malachi 2:10 NKJ

For by [the *Son*] *all* things were *created* – Colossians 1:16 NKJ

[For, as He said] “I and My Father are one.” – John 10:30 NKJ

Yet for us [who believe that] there is *one* God, [who is] the Father, *of whom* are all things ... *and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom* are all things – 1 Corinthians 8:6 NKJ

[Cuz, like He said] “He who has seen *Me* has seen the *Father*” – John 14:9 NKJ

So, how *often* do you think *you* unconsciously project your down-here dad's bad traits onto our Father? I suppose the answer for all of us is: too often. So, *this then*, is *how* we should *pray*:

“Our Father [the all-loving Father of all, on the throne] *in heaven*, [because of the defects our down-here dads all had] *hallowed* be *Your* name” – Matthew 6:9 NIV

If we think of God as a *religion*, a distant *force*, or a *drill sergeant*, we can't *truly pray*, “Our Father”. And if we think of Him as an *ol' softy* and *disregard* His *absolute authority*, we can't *truly add*: “In *heaven*”. Cuz we're here to *hallow* a *perfectly balanced Parent*: our *Maker-Redeemer-Dad*.

Is He *not* your *Father*, your *Creator*, who *made* you and formed you? – Deut 32:6 NIV

[So] Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it. – Mark 10:15 NAB

[So] Acknowledge *and* take to *heart* this day that the *Lord* is *God in heaven above* and *on the earth below*. [And] There is no *other* [truly heavenly Father]. – Deuteronomy 4:39 NIV