

Angela Pound

Lord's Prayer

Your will be done

There is a story that goes like this: A little girl was playing in her backyard one sunny afternoon when she noticed a bird struggling to fly. Its wing was hurt, and it couldn't get off the ground. She rushed to the bird's side, gently cradling it in her hands, and ran inside to show her father.

“Dad, the bird is hurt. What should we do?” she asked, her voice full of concern.

Her father looked at the little bird and then down at his daughter. “We'll take care of it. We'll give it what it needs—some food, some water, and maybe even a little time to rest. But it's important to remember: a bird can only fly when it's strong enough. We can't force it, but we can be here to help it heal.”

The little girl, with her father's gentle guidance, made a small nest for the bird in a box. She and her father took turns caring for it, making sure it was safe and comfortable. Weeks later, the bird's wing had healed, and one bright morning, it took flight, soaring into the sky. The little girl

watched with wide eyes, her heart full of joy.

This reminded me of an incident in my childhood, and while not exact, it did include my dad and a bird. We had this “breezeway” we called it, in between our house and our garage. While it had a roof so that we didn’t get rained on going from the car to the house, the wind could still come through as it wasn’t blocked in. Well, birds loved to fly into this area and then struggled to get out. You see, it had a skyline window that they would think they could go up to and be free from the space they were in. Well, one day a hummingbird got stuck up there and you could tell it got itself tuckered out. Dad didn’t like to see any animal get hurt or suffer, so I remember we went and got something like a broom handle and gently helped it down out of the space, as scared as it was, and it went to the clothesline, where it rested for a very long time to get it’s strength back, before it

Just as the father cared for the bird, tending to its needs with patience and love, and my dad wanted to make sure nothing happened to the hummingbird so too does our Heavenly Father care for us.

In the Lord’s Prayer, when we say “Our Father,” we are acknowledging that God is not distant, but near. He is the one who tends to us, helps us heal, and gives us strength when we are weak. He doesn’t rush us or expect us to be perfect, but He is always there, guiding us, loving us, and

waiting for us to soar again.

Jesus, in His famous Sermon on the Mount, teaches His disciples how to pray. We often begin with these words, “Our Father in heaven...” but have we paused to reflect on the profound implications of calling God *Father*?

This is a shift from how some viewed God in Jesus' day — distant, awe-inspiring, and almost unknowable. Prior to the time of Jesus, God was regarded as someone remote and august in His demeanor. He sat in the high and holy place, and was viewed as a stern judge behind the hard, harsh bar of the Law. Throughout the Old Testament account He is referred to as Yahweh, the name which dared not be spoken for fear of offense. Fewer than 7 times is He even referred to as a father, except indirectly and rather remotely. Yet in the first four gospels, Jesus, casting aside all restraint, speaks of God as Father more than 70 times. He teaches the disciples to pray, our father. Jesus invites them and us into a deeply personal relationship with God, one marked by affection, trust, and a shared family identity. The whole concept is wonderful and filled with incredible love.

In his treatise *On the Sacraments*, Ambrose of Milan stresses the significance of being able to call God “our Father,” but he also notes the dangers involved, “When you call God, ‘Father’ as a child does, do not think that this is a privilege that you have above others. Only Christ can claim

God as his Father in that privileged sense. The rest of us have him as Father jointly. Christ was begotten by God, while we on the other hand were created.” A reminder that it is not just my father, but our father.

The Greek “Father” (pater) probably translates the Aramaic Abba. Use of this intimate term for God (similar to how we would use the word “Daddy” was virtually unparalleled in first-century Judaism. Abba was frequently used in the church to address God. Abba was one of the few Aramaic words that the church continued to use even as the Gentiles began to outnumber the Jews in the church.

This one word at the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer - the first word in the original Greek and in many other languages --- has far reaching consequences not only for the manner in which we conceive of God, but also for how we understand our own identity and for how we behave throughout life. I believe, that even more than the label Father, Jesus, by using the word Father, was saying, “you, you are a child of God, don’t forget this in your walk of life, don’t forget this about your identity.” Addressing God as “Father” has important implications not only for our relationship with God but also for our mutual relationships, which I spoke to of last week. If we are actually children of the same Father, we are all sisters and brothers.

As Augustine once said, “Without any distinction among ourselves, we all say, “Our Father.” Such goodness! The

emperor says it and so does the beggar; the slave says that and so does his master. All say jointly: “Our Father, who art in heaven.” By this they declare that they are siblings for they have a common father. Therefore, let not a master scorn having his slave as a brother --- a slave whom the Lord Christ has taken as his brother.”

Many people, however, have only known harsh, hard fathers, if they’ve known them at all. The tragedy is that in ascribing the title to God as our Father, we sometimes unconsciously transfer to Him all those attributes associated in our minds with our human fathers, not deliberately, but none the less, something that is done. Far too often we ascribe to God in heaven all the weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, failings and inconsistencies of our very unpredictable human fathers.

The metaphor of God as father has its limitations. The image of God as Father can be useful in that it points to a God who gives us life, who protects us, and who provides for our needs. It also speaks for a personal God who relates to us as people. But if we take this image in the sense that God is more like an earthly father than a mother, or in the sense that an earthly father is to have authority over the family in the same way that God has authority over creation, we are wrong. Earthly fathers (and mothers) should take God as a model of parental love, a love that God is constantly pouring out upon his sons and

daughters. God is not only like the warrior defending his people but also like the hen gathering her chicks. God is at once both a father and more than any earthly father, both a mother and more than any earthly mother. When the Greek New Testament uses a masculine plural noun, its meaning may also include women. References to God as “Father” may also be understood as references to God as “Parent,” though parent often can feel impersonal and usually not emphasize the love and care of a mother or father, and so we have God, as our Father.

If we are to appreciate who God is, if we are to grasp His essential love and goodness, if we are to understand even a little of the wonder of His winsomeness, if we are to know the strength of His integrity and reliability, then we must see God as Jesus saw Him. And how was this?

In John 14, Jesus is comforting his disciples after predicting his betrayal and Peter’s denial of him. Jesus states that “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Whoever has seen me, has seen the father. We only need to look to Jesus to know God as father. Jesus tells people what God is like, he shows people what God is like, but I would say most importantly, Jesus is what God is like. Jesus reveals God, our father, through his very being.

The Old Testament speaks of God as a Creator, King, and Judge, but Jesus reveals a deeper, more intimate aspect of

God's nature: love The term "Father" invites us into a relationship, more important than keeping the law, or anything else, is this relationship and how we maintain this relationship.

It assures us that, no matter what we face, we have a secure place in God's love. It's an invitation to approach Him boldly in prayer, knowing that we are not approaching an impersonal force, but a God who loves us beyond anything we can ever imagine. His care and concern and affection for us are not dependent upon His moods or our good behaviour. His love is constant and unconditional. Look to the cross. He Himself was willing to pay the penalty for our misdeeds. When we approach God, our Father, we are drawing close to Him who completely understands us. This is so comforting and consoling. It is unfortunate that the great majority of human difficulties arise because we do not fully understand each other or ourselves. This is why we are so often hard on ourselves and so harsh in our judgment and censure of others. But this is not the case with the infinite, all-knowing God, our Father. For he knows our makeup and understands why we are as we are. He has a much more generous and forgiving attitude towards us than most of us have to ourselves or to each other.

In calling God "Father," we recognize His authority. A father, a mother, or parent, in the traditional sense not only loves but also disciplines, teaches, and leads.

When we address God as our Father, we are acknowledging His rightful authority in our lives. It's a reminder that prayer isn't just about making requests; it's about submitting ourselves to God's will, trusting His wisdom over our own. In calling God "Father," we are affirming that He is to be the rightful ruler and sovereign of our lives. As Spencer says in his book, *The Father and The Feminine: Exploring the Grammar of God and Gender*, "Jesus' address to God as Father provides the avenue of rebuke against patriarchal meanings in a culture that still gravitates to patriarchy. The Trinity encourages life to be shaped by mutuality and reciprocity not hierarchy, and different pathways of language, whether motherly language or Sophia language, can further reiterate the unconditional love of God where conventional figures have been misused. God uses the masculine to challenge the masculine. God uses female language as well, but God is beyond all language and gender, ultimately. The characteristic behavior of God is described with a diversity of descriptions and that these descriptions, whether fatherly or motherly, are not referring to God's gender but rather to God's goodness and love. We see this with the metaphor of God as Father. This metaphor is important (though not exclusive, given what we saw of female imagery) to how God communicates to an ancient patriarchal culture that worshiped the "father of the gods" and whose families were ruled by a patriarch."

In a world where earthly fathers fall short in their roles, the heavenly Father is perfect. Jesus says in Matthew 7:9-11, “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 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!”

The Father we pray to is generous beyond measure. He wants to bless His children, not just with physical provisions, but with spiritual blessings — peace, joy, and ultimately, eternal life with Him. When we approach God as “Father,” we are reminded that He is not only willing to give, but He delights in giving us what is best for us, even when we may not understand what that is at the time.

The very act of calling God “Father” reminds us of who we are. As children of God, we have a new identity. In John 1:12, it says, “Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”

Being a child of God means that we belong to His family. We have a new status and a new purpose. We are heirs to the kingdom of God, and that inheritance is secure in Christ. When we call God “Father,” we not only affirm His role but also our role as His beloved children. This should shape how we view ourselves and how we live our lives — with dignity, confidence, and purpose, knowing we belong

to the God, Father, the one true God.

If you have children you understood that by giving life to beings that are of you, they were also going to be separate individuals. While they might be similar to you they would have their own personalities, make their own decisions, and choose their own paths. They would not always obey you and quite possibly someday cause you great pain. But despite this, you decided to have a child. This God of ours who is love has decided to create other realities in addition to Godself. This other reality is a sign of a love so amazing that we have been given the power to follow God's direction as well as to reject them. At one time or another we all rebel against our creator God whom we pray, Our Father.

Sometimes, the best way to build a relationship is through vulnerability and persistence in love. In relationships, the real power comes from this kind of deep, unwavering connection. It's a reminder that love, when it's genuine and constant, can be a transformative force, capable of carrying us through the toughest times. In other words, God's love for humans is similar to - although far above - the love one might have for their child. This similarity includes the desire to see them grow freely and fully in spite of the danger --- and perhaps even the certainty - that they will somehow be disobedient.

As we reflect on these truths, let us not take lightly the

privilege of calling God “Father or Mother,” for we are all made in the image of God. This language is an invitation to intimacy, a recognition of His authority, a reminder of His generosity, and an affirmation of our identity in Christ among many other things.

I’m going to end by reading you a compilation of paraphrased Bible verses from Genesis to Revelation that are presented in the form of a love letter from God to you, called Father’s Love Letter, and I’m not sure who put it together. This message of love has been experienced by millions of people around the world, and has been translated in over 125 languages. Let this knowledge shape your prayer and your life, to approach God with confidence and humility, trusting in His good plans for you as your Father.

Read the letter: