



CHATTING TO DAD

A few years back, Josh and Abi bought me a great book for Father's Day: *Children's Letters to God*, a collection of kids' prayers: some of them amusing; some of them heartbreaking; and some of them quite profound. E.g.:

Dear God, I want to be just like my Daddy when I get big but not with so much hair all over. Sam.

Dear God, did you really mean do to others as they do to you, because if you did then I'm going to fix my brother. Darla.

Dear God, I keep waiting for spring but it never come yet. Don't forget. Mark.

Dear God, I read the Bible. What does begat mean? Nobody will tell me. Love, Alison.

Dear God, here's a poem. I love you because you give us what we need to live but I wish you would tell me why you made it so we have to die. Daniel (age 8).

Dear God, thank you for the new baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy. Joyce.

To be honest, most grown-ups pray like Joyce! Because we tend to look at prayer like we're shopping online, and when God doesn't deliver or gets the order wrong, we ask, "Why?"

This is nothing new, which is why Jesus' disciples came to Him with this request:

"Rabbi, teach us how to pray."

Matthew 6:9-13

In response, Jesus does what several 1st century rabbis were doing: He gives them – and us – a prayer-template.

What does it tell us? That we can pray about everything!

But it also, I think, highlights what matters most to God:

1) There's praise (vs9). Who is this prayer about? God! And from the start we're told 3 things about Him: 1) He's our Father (even in the OT, God is referred to as *Avā* or 'Dad' – meaning we are sons and daughters of the King of the Universe!); 2) He's 'in the heavens' (as in the whole of space and time, which means He knows it all, before we even pray); and 3) He's holy (both Greek and Aramaic words mean 'set apart' – so God is the greatest Dad there is!). How we view God affects how we relate to Him.

2) There's priority (vs10). We know that one day Jesus will come again and establish His Kingdom, and we should certainly pray for that event (as a focus for our lives). But we also need to realise that, in a sense, that Kingdom is already here – in us / in our midst. And God wants that Kingdom to impact the world around us, too. I don't know about you, but too often, when I pray, what I'm really saying is: "Lord, let my will be done." Jesus is saying, "It's not about your will, it's about the Father's."

3) There's provision (vs11). In most cultures bread is a staple part of a diet: a necessity, not a luxury, i.e. live a simple life, and pray for your needs, not greeds (though sometimes only God can tell the difference, and we need to acknowledge that). You'll also notice there are 3 words missing from the Lord's Prayer: I, me, my. Instead, you find we, us, our. Jesus has called us to be a family, and so we pray for the needs of *others*, not just *ourselves*. And that might mean being used to make this a reality.

4) There's pardon (vs12). Sin and debt are linked – in fact, the Aramaic word for 'sin', *khoba*, literally means 'debt' – so when we sin, we 'owe' God an apology; when He forgives us, He tears up the I.O.U. But Jesus also includes a reminder for us to forgive each *other*, too: "As we forgive our debtors ..." (and if we refuse to forgive others it's a sign we haven't fully grasped how forgiven *we* are – hence vs14-15). This whole point was rammed home on the cross, when Jesus prayed: "Father, forgive them ..."

5) There's protection (vs13a). We all have weaknesses, and we all have an enemy who wants to exploit them. Even so, temptation itself is not necessarily a negative – because when we resist it, we confirm our love for God. So perhaps what Jesus is saying is: "Don't allow us to be tempted to a point that damages our relationship with You." But as with the previous points, this can be an empty prayer if we don't mean it. So, pray that you will! And remember, God will *always* provide a way out.

6) There's praise (vs13b). The prayer ends as it begins – with God (it's missing in the oldest copies, but is present in the majority Byzantine text, and quoted as early as the 2nd century AD): "For Yours is 1) the kingdom (God's the only one sitting on the throne of the universe – so pray!); 2) the power (God's the only one strong enough to change the course of history – so pray!); and 3) the glory, or beauty (God's the only one deserving of our worship, praise, adoration – so pray!)." It's all about *Him*.

Now words and structure matter. But Jesus' prayer is about more than just that. It's about a relationship with our heavenly Dad. And (gasp) Freud was right –

We need it!

My Dad

To end on, here's a fantastic poem by Steve Turner, entitled *My Dad*:

*My Dad's bigger than your Dad.
My Dad's as tall as the moon;
As strong as the wind; As wide as the sky.
You should see my Dad. He's got stars in His fists;
He bends rainbows on His knee;
When He breathes, clouds move.*

*He's good is my Dad.
You can't scare Him with the dark;
You can't scare Him with guns or sticks;
He makes bullies say sorry, just by staring.
Big green monsters fall asleep on His lap;
Ghosts start haunting each other.*

*My Dad's been everywhere,
But He says He likes the world.
"Earth people are fun," He says.
My Dad knows more than teacher; He knows everything.
He knows what you're thinking,
Even when you try and trick Him
By thinking something else.*

*If you tell a lie,
My Dad says He can tell by the look on your face.*

*My Dad's the best Dad ever.
I say I love Him a million times a million times
a million times a million trillion.*

*My Dad says He loves me
A billion trillion times more than that!*

My Dad likes to love. My Dad made the world.