

The Lord's Prayer unplugged

A wealth of ideas opening up the prayer in ten sessions



Lucy Moore

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Teach us to pray



Peter nudged John. ‘So what’s Jesus got that I haven’t?’ he asked. John thought a moment. ‘You mean, apart from him being the Son of God and you being a hairy fisherman? We-e-ll, you spend the night sleeping and Jesus spends the night praying. I guess that’s one difference.’

Peter thumped the upturned boat he was sitting on. ‘I do pray,’ he declared, tugging his fist painfully out of the hole he’d made. ‘At least,’ he amended, sucking a splinter, ‘I pray when it’s stormy.’

‘Or when the mother-in-law gets one of her fits.’

‘At least, I try to pray.’

‘At least, I would pray if I knew how.’

‘OK, so I don’t pray.’

James and Andrew were listening while they mended their nets. They put down the tangle of rope. ‘I pray,’ said Andrew, thoughtfully. ‘But, oh, I dunno. I wouldn’t say I know what I’m doing. Not really. Not like Jesus does.’

‘He prays like I fish,’ agreed James.

John nodded at a distant figure coming towards them. ‘There he is, coming back now. ‘Why don’t we ask him how to pray?’

‘Hang on,’ said Peter, holding John back with a hairy hand the size of a paddle. ‘What if he won’t let me be his friend when he finds out I can’t pray?’

John thought, *I should think Jesus knows that already.* But he didn’t say anything.

Peter carried on: ‘What if he says I have to stay up all night like him? What if he says I’ve got to talk in posh words? What if he says I’ve got to burble on like them Pharisees do? I can’t be doing with that.’

‘When did you ever hear Jesus talk in posh words, eh, Peter?’ asked James.

‘Yes, but... praying, James... that’s not like talking...’ But at that moment Jesus reached them and leaned comfortably along the sun-warmed wood of the boat.

‘Ask him,’ muttered John.

‘No, you ask him,’ muttered Peter.

‘What’s up?’ asked Jesus. John stared at the birds circling overhead and whistled

tunelessly. James and Andrew were suddenly very interested in the net again. Peter took a deep breath.

‘Lord, you know John the Baptist taught his friends to pray...?’

‘Yup?’

‘Could you... would you...?’ Peter looked at Jesus in desperation. ‘Oh Lord, you know what I want, you always do. So why are you making me say it?’

‘Go on, spit it out, Peter. I love it when you ask me for something.’

‘Wewantyoutoteachustoprayer!’ Peter blurted out.

Jesus grinned. ‘Good start!’

James and Andrew dropped the net and looked at Jesus expectantly. John sat nearer.

‘None of your religious stuff, though,’ interrupted Peter, jumping to his feet and wagging a warning finger. ‘Just something easy to remember—something we can say on the boat when the fish aren’t biting, or first thing in the morning, or before we go to

sleep. I do need a lot of sleep,’ he added, before Jesus could bring in the all-night prayer idea.

Jesus nodded.

‘And nothing too posh, either,’ warned Peter. ‘Or long. Or boring. Or...’

Jesus waited peacefully.

Peter stopped. And sat down again. ‘Well, Jesus, you’re the expert.’

‘Pray like this...’. Jesus thought for a moment, then the words came out like jewels, each settling in just the right place to make a prayer as bright as a necklace.

‘Father, help us to honour your name. Come and set up your kingdom. Give us each day the food we need. Forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone who has done wrong to us. And keep us from being tempted.’

Peter stared. ‘Is that it? Even I can pray that.’

‘It’s a good start,’ said Jesus. ‘And talking of the food we need, I could really use some breakfast. Last one down the baker’s is a wet sandal.’

Introduction

The Lord's Prayer has to be the ultimate in all-age worship—simple, straight from the Lord, easy to learn, full of down-to-earth requests with huge theological echoes; as valid if we take it at face value as when we try to wrap our minds round the massive kingdom vision that shines out in every phrase.

And it's all about relationships. It comes from Jesus and his friends talking together, and gives us a form of words to talk with our dear Father God together—because it is a 'together' prayer: '*Our* Father... give *us*...'. Adults and children, new Christians and old, Christians from all traditions, Christians down the centuries who are now with the Lord and those of us alive on earth today, we can all pray this prayer together with sincerity and integrity.

When we pray Jesus' prayer, we can look through Jesus' eyes for a moment. It gives us Jesus' snapshot of God the Father, the loving holy parent who longs to provide us with what we need, to help us in good times and bad and to work with us to bring his kingdom of justice, peace and love to every corner of the world.

It gives us Jesus' snapshot of the people he knows we can be—loving, grateful, living in a community of generosity, forgiveness and trust, working together with God and each other to bring about this kingdom of justice, peace and love.

Fewer and fewer schools are praying this prayer regularly. Fewer and fewer children are growing up knowing it by heart. We've got to pass this prayer on to the next generation. Some of them will pray it regularly and come to own it as it becomes part of who they are. Others may need it as a first aid kit, because when they feel lost and lonely in a dark world, or when their hearts are bursting with joy, they may need a form, a set of holy words rich with the resonance of goodness and wholeness, to express what this world gives them no words for. Just as soldiers in the World Wars prayed the Lord's Prayer as a default setting when they were too exhausted to find their own words, so we need to

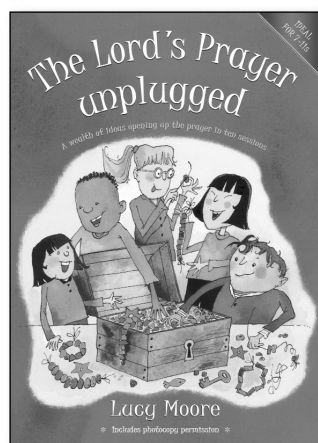
give our children this fall-back prayer for all seasons.

Interestingly, a good proportion of the children I ask about the prayer prefer the 'old-fashioned words' to the modern ones. Reasons given include 'I know it better', 'I like the words better', 'They're proper old words from the Bible from the old days', and 'It's got better punctuation'. I halted my enquiries at this point. As long as the language helps communication, let's face it, does it really matter which form is used?

This book aims to help children explore the Lord's Prayer and to own it for themselves. On the way, there may be times of fun, of noise and creative chaos, of quiet and stillness, of sights, sounds, smells and tastes as we meet with God through all our senses, our intellects and our hearts. We should be opening up as many questions as we answer, as the aim is to turn the prayer from a parroted meaningless series of words into a never-ending box of delights that grows as we grow.

It's written for KS2 children—the 7 to 11 age group—but will stretch happily either way a few years. There are oodles of different activities at different levels, so it could be used as a church group course or in school RE or assemblies. As the emphasis is on learning through fun, it would also be a good basis for a holiday club.

Using The Lord's Prayer unplugged



The Lord's Prayer breaks up into ten phrases, so this book gives you ten sessions. In each session there are activities to help children explore what that phrase means. And rather than getting too theological about the inner meanings of the last word of the prayer,

the final chapter not only looks briefly at what 'Amen' means but gives lots of suggestions for looking at the Lord's Prayer as a whole. You might want to glance at this session first so that you can use some of the ideas on the way.

In each session you'll find a variety of suggestions for ways of digging deeper into the Lord's Prayer.

There is a *Quiet space* in each session (see below for details). This could be a whole session in itself: it concentrates firmly on one phrase of the prayer and invites the children to spend time wondering about it in order to go deeper into it.

There are also plenty of suggestions for groups who prefer a more activity-based approach, with ideas for ice-breaker games, making Bible connections, praying, making and drawing.

As I am the ultimate in lazy leaders, I've tried to include plenty of ideas that take very little preparation and don't require you to assemble thousands of obscure ingredients each week.

Don't try to do everything in each session unless you are SuperTeacher of SuperGroup, and even then... You may not want to do an activity from every section every week: that's fine. A group may well enjoy simply doing the *Quiet space* wondering or just a craft, or maybe there will only be time for a prayer. Choose with care and prayer the ideas that suit your children and your space,

time and budget limits. Enjoy time to talk with and listen to the children in your group, rather than bombarding them with never-ending busyness. No thunderbolts will fall if you don't get through the whole whack. Trust me on this.

What's in each session?

Get your bearings

This part is for you, the leader/facilitator/teacher/pressganged 'you need only do it for a week, honest' volunteer. It summarizes a little of what that week's section of the prayer is about and gives a bit of background.

Why not decorate your space...

Colour and visuals are important for all of us, especially children. You might want to set the scene by decorating your space in a different colour each session, and this section gives you some ideas of what to use. These colours are then picked up in the final chapter, in the *Godly Play* Lord's Prayer. Of course we won't be wallpapering the room a different colour every week, but it doesn't take long to throw in a few objects which help create an atmosphere and give children something to talk about. If you're from certain church traditions, it can also help to introduce the way liturgical colours are used in church. And it's fun.

Quiet space

You may want to use one or two of these questions just to open or close the session, but the *Quiet space* could be a whole session on its own, based

on Jerome Berryman's *Godly Play* scheme. If you're using it as the whole session, set out art and craft materials and equipment in advance so that they are readily available to the children. You might like to put out a selection of coloured and white paper, card, paint, brushes, crayons, pencils, felt-tips, modelling clay, playdough and so on, with appropriate means of keeping surfaces clean—newspaper or plastic sheets, with wiping-up cloths at the ready.

Lay out some or all of the objects suggested on an attractive cloth or low table that helps the group to see them as 'set apart', and sit the group around the objects in a circle.

Spend some time with the group looking at the objects and talking about what is there. Then use the objects to open up the phrase of the Lord's Prayer by asking some of the wondering questions. Try not to impose your own ideas on the group, but listen actively to their insights. Welcome silence—a lot can be happening inside that doesn't surface in noise or talk.

After the wondering questions, ask the children what work they would like to do. Encourage them to use the art materials you have set out, in whatever way is right for them. Bring the group back together after their work time. This would be a good time to say the Lord's Prayer together, share something to eat or show what has been created.

Ice-breakers



These are games, activities, quizzes—enjoyable ways to set the scene and introduce the theme of the session.

Puppets



There's a short puppet sketch outline in each session which could be a good link through the weeks. There are no scripts to learn, just a 'plot' description. It picks up on a situation in which children might find themselves. Practise it beforehand with a glove puppet and a sympathetic audience (I find the dog is perfect), so that you can manage confidently without notes.

Bible exploring



The Lord's Prayer has echoes all through the Bible. In *Bible exploring* we pick up on the theme of the day both in the Lord's Prayer itself and in other stories or passages elsewhere in the Bible. There's a mixture of activities from challenging dramatic scripts for older children to act out to easy-to-understand storytelling suitable for any age.

Extra ideas



Little nuggets of activities for those fill-in moments, and interesting facts.

Prayer



Here you'll find different ways of praying on the theme of the session, again ranging from word-based prayers to action prayers, from shouting praise to stillness and reflection.

Songs



Some suggestions for songs on the theme. You should find them in books such as *Mission Praise* (MP), *Junior Praise* (JP), *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* (SHF) and on CDs such as Kingsway's *Lovely Jubby*.

Craft and art



Different levels of craft activity from the dead simple no-preparation-needed to the complex—but mostly dead simple.

Ongoing wall display

At the back of this book you'll find templates for each session, which you can photocopy, enlarge or simply cut out for the group to decorate to build up a wall display of the Lord's Prayer.

As you're trying to build up a whole picture of the Lord's Prayer, make time to pray it together every week. And try to recap on the work of previous weeks—reinforcement of stories, colours and symbols can only help.

So an hour's session might consist simply of *Quiet space*: wondering, individual response work, coming back together to say the Lord's Prayer and sharing something to eat. Or it might run something like: ice-breaker game, wondering questions, Bible story, prayer, craft.

I started this project rather unwillingly, as the Lord's Prayer always seemed a bit of a closed

book—gabbled through too fast to make much sense of in church services, and too much part of those church services to think about praying it on my own. A friend, who is much holier than I am, told me once: 'I decided to pray the Lord's Prayer really slowly and think about what each bit means.'

'Oh yes?' I said.

'Yes. I started at the beginning, but an hour later I was still on "Our Father" so I haven't got to the end yet.'

After working on this book, I know what he meant. Plugs away... here we go...

Our Father in heaven



Get your bearings

Jesus opens his famous prayer by telling us how to relate to God. 'Abba' is what a child would have called her father. 'Hello, Daddy' is the level of familiarity Jesus uses. Perhaps for adults 'Dear Father' gets across the implication of both intimacy and respect. Jesus invites us to chat to God in complete trust and openness, knowing that he's delighted to listen to whatever we have to say. He also asks us to say it together—'our Father...'. From the very start we are together with God and with each other.

These days, for too many children, the image of a father is an unhelpful one or even something completely foreign to their own experience. It is tempting to shy away from the image completely.

But should we assume that all the fathers Jesus knew in Nazareth were paragons of virtue? Did all the families in Nazareth have two parents? It's likely that Jesus knew what it was like to lose a dear father, as Joseph probably died before Jesus did. For those children who have what we might consider a good father figure, is even that person always a perfect role model? Of course not! All human parents inevitably fall short of God's perfect parenting. And shouldn't we be showing God the Father as the great parent that many children have been denied? For these reasons, and because Jesus wasn't afraid to tell us to call God 'Dad', we should explore the image sensitively but confidently.

The Bible has many more images that show God as a caring, nurturing source of life and security, including maternal images.

Why not decorate your space... GREEN?

Green is a colour of growth and life, which fits in with the idea of God as a parent who gives life to and brings up his children. Another image relating to nurture and guidance that Jesus uses to describe God is that of a shepherd—and green is the colour of grassy fields where sheep are safe and well fed.

You could roll out fake grass on the floor and use green balloons, cushions, pot plants, leafy branches or vases of flowers. Camouflage nets or football nets are often green and make an instantly effective backdrop.

Quiet space

Possible objects and pictures for focus:

- A variety of pictures of fathers, mothers, grandparents, prime carers
- A football
- A recipe book
- A shepherd and sheep
- A hen and chicks
- A baby
- Squares of coloured felt
- A light
- A globe
- A heart
- A cross

Lay out the objects and pictures for focus.

Say, 'Today we're thinking about the start of Jesus' special prayer—Our Father in heaven.'

Select some wondering questions from the list below. Ask the questions slowly and meaningfully, leaving space for reflection.

- * I wonder which colour felt you would choose for 'Our Father in heaven'?
- * I wonder which object or picture you would choose to go with 'Our Father in heaven'?
- * I wonder what picture is in your mind when you pray this part of the Lord's Prayer?

- * I wonder what words you choose to start your prayers with?
- * I wonder why Jesus put this into the Lord's Prayer?
- * I wonder if it reminds you of any people Jesus met?
- * I wonder how God feels when we call him 'Father'?
- * I wonder which object or picture he would choose to go with us?
- * I wonder if we could leave out this part of the Lord's Prayer and still have all the prayer we need?
- * I wonder what you like best about this part of the Lord's Prayer?
- * I wonder how you would pray this part of the Lord's Prayer with just your hands?

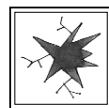
Spend a moment thinking about how we talk to God our Father in our hearts, or out loud, or with our hands.

Take the square(s) of felt that the children have chosen and the pictures or objects they chose and place them on display for the rest of the session.

Either choose from the activities below or give the group the opportunity to do their own work to explore this part of the prayer based on the wondering questions. Supply art and craft materials if you choose the second option.

Ice-breakers

Father Abraham



Sing the action song 'Father Abraham has many sons' as an energetic warm-up. The words of the verse are:

*Father Abraham has many sons
Many sons has Father Abraham.
I am one of them and so are you.
So let's all praise the Lord!*

Then, at the end of each verse, everyone calls out one of the phrases in the order below and, during

the next verse, waves, swings or shakes that limb. The actions are added on verse by verse until everyone is waving both arms, both legs, nodding their head, and turning around: the final 'sit down' comes as something of a relief!

Right arm / Left arm / Right leg / Left leg / Nod your head / Turn around / SIT DOWN!

As everyone collapses, say that today you're thinking about the idea of all Christians having one father—that we're a family together with not only Abraham as our great-great-great-great- (and so on) grandfather, but also with God as our great father in heaven.

(If the girls complain that they're not sons but daughters, you can either say that 'daughters' doesn't scan, or you could explain that in Abraham's time it was the sons who inherited everything from their father and, in that way, we're all more like sons than daughters. Or you could say, 'Glad you noticed. Let's sing "daughters" every other verse.')

Names

You'll need a family tree or a multi-generation photograph of your family.

Talk about the people in the photo or family tree and what relationship they all have to each other. For example, I'm married to Paul. My children are Arthur and Judith. My parents are Les and Jen. Jen's parents are Eric and Mary.

Then ask what these people might call each other. For example, what would I call Les? What would Judith call Paul? What would Arthur call me? What would Jen call Eric? Suggest very formal names like 'Papa' until the children agree that you would call your father something like Dad or Daddy.

Say that Jesus says we can call God, our heavenly father, just the same thing that we call our dads.

Puppets

You will need a glove puppet.



Have a chat with your glove puppet. The gist of the situation is that you tell the children you're very upset because your puppet is hiding, won't speak to you, won't even look at you. You (with the children's help) manage to persuade him to tell you what the matter is: he's scared of talking to you as he's found out you're such an important person because... (find a reason why you might be important—your job, your role in the church, the fact that you're a grown-up, so big...) He's worried he might have to make an appointment to see you, or fill in a form, or that you won't think he's worth bothering with.

You reassure the puppet (with the children's help) that you really want him to chat to you, because you love him very much. You love spending time with him—just like God loves us to spend time chatting to him, as Jesus tells us in the start of the

Father Abraham

Composer: Unknown

♩ G G G C G/D D D D D7 [End] G Repeat as necessary D.S.

Lord's Prayer. He even tells us to call God 'Daddy'!

Your puppet ends up happily chatting in your ear, snuggled up to you.

Bible exploring

Passages about *Our Father in heaven*



- The prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32)
Jesus' story shows how loving and forgiving God our Father is, whatever we do.

- Jesus' teaching on prayer (Matthew 7:7–12)
We think about what it means to ask a loving parent for what we need, not a machine or a committee.
- One family (Ephesians 3:14–15)
Paul writes about the whole Christian family being joined together under God the Father, and we think about the character of that heavenly father.

The prodigal son

LUKE 15:11–32

As we wonder what sort of a father God is, we can look at Jesus' story of the prodigal (meaning 'recklessly wasteful') son. You could ask the group to decide, as they hear the story, whether it is more about the son or the father.

The version below is clearly based on Jesus' original, but as you tell it, the group needs to fill in the details for you to make it their own version: these opportunities are shown in the text in bold.



Everybody loved Super Sausage! Super Sausage was the lovable cartoon hero of a whole range of books, TV programmes, computer games... **Anything else?**

There was all sorts of Super Sausage merchandise. There were Super Sausage lunchboxes, Super Sausage duvet covers, Super Sausage pencil cases... **What else was there?** All in all, the Super Sausage empire was making lots and lots of money.

Now the man behind Super Sausage was not only the richest man in the world, but he was also the kindest, nicest, most generous person you could ever meet. Think of the nicest person you know... **Who is it?** Well, if it's possible, this man was even nicer than that! He loved Super Sausage, he loved his



work, but more than anything he loved his two children, Sam and Sidney. He used to show them round the factory and say, 'One day, my sons, all this will be yours.'

Both boys worked for their dad. But the boys were very different from each other. Sam was a very hardworking lad... **What time do you think he got to work in the morning?** That's right! **And did he stop for a coffee break? A lunch break? A tea break?** That's right! **And what time did he work till at night?** Yes, you're right—Sam worked really, really hard.

But Sidney was a different kettle of fish. Sidney was a complete slob... **What time did Sidney get up in the morning?** Yup. **And how long was his coffee break? His lunch break?**

His tea break? And do you think he worked right up to the time he was supposed to? That's right—he hardly did any work at all!

One day, Sidney was even more fed up than usual... **What was he doing in his office?** OK, well, he stopped doing that and he got up and he climbed the stairs up to his dad's office and he said, 'Dad! I'm fed up! Gimme my share of the factory now. I want to go off and enjoy myself for once.'



How do you think his dad felt? **What might he have said?** Well, what he actually said was, 'Here you are, Sidney, take your share of the business.'

How do you think Sidney showed how happy he was? Yes, after he'd done all those things, he ran down the road, dashed into a bank, sold his shares, realized he was a multi-millionaire and went on a shopping spree... **What did he buy?**

And with all these things in his brand new suitcases, he flew in his new helicopter to the Big City and booked himself into the best hotel... **whose name was ...**

Then he ran down to the bar and shouted to all the people there, 'Hey everybody! The drinks are on me!' And suddenly he found he had hundreds of new friends! Sidney wanted to

show them how much he liked them being his friends... **so what do you think he did for them?**

They had a marvellous time for weeks doing all these exciting things. But then one day, Sidney said to his friends, 'Um, can anyone lend me a fiver? I've run out of money.' **And did his friends help him out?** Absolutely not! **What did they say to him?** And they all left him.

Poor Sidney was all alone with no money and he had to sell all the lovely things he'd bought, to pay his bills. And he had nothing to eat! He had to find a job quickly to earn some money.

But because he'd been such a slob at school, he couldn't find any job except a really horrible dirty smelly one... **What do you think it was? What sort of things did he find to eat? What was the worst thing about it?**

Well, while he was doing this terrible job, suddenly he came to his senses. 'What am I doing here?' he said to himself. 'Back at my dad's factory, no one has to do such a terrible job.' **And what did he decide to do?** Yes, he decided to go home to his dad. **Was he happy to be going home? Was he worried by anything?** Yes—he said to himself, 'What is my dad going to do to me when he finds out I've wasted all that money?'

Meanwhile, back at the factory, Sam and Sidney's dad was anxiously looking out of his window across the city, as he did every day, to see if his son was coming home at last. And then he saw Sidney! **How do you think he felt?**

He ran down the stairs and belted down the roads across the city until he got to his son... **Did he tell Sidney off for wasting all that money?** No, he felt so sorry for him, he flung his arms round him and gave him a big cuddle.

'Oh Dad, I'm sorry,' said Sidney. 'I've been so bad. I'm not good enough to be your son.'

And did his dad agree? No! He shouted to his workers to fetch some clean clothes (Sidney was still a bit nifty) and told them to get some food ready for a party to celebrate Sidney's return... **What sort of food did they cook?**

When big brother Sam realized what was going on, was he pleased to see his brother again? No, he was furious. He stomped up to his dad and he grumbled, ‘Dad, I’ve worked all this time and you’ve never even given me a bag of crisps! And this slob comes home after wasting all your money and you throw this big party for him! It’s not fair!’

‘Dear Sam,’ said his dad. ‘You’re always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to party because your brother was lost and now he’s found! Hip hip hooray!’

You could use some or all of these questions:

- What words would you use to describe the dad in this story?
- Can you think of a time when you were surprised because you thought you’d get told off and you got a cuddle instead?
- Why did Jesus tell this story?

There is a text message version of the parable to decode in *The Gospels Unplugged*, also published by BRF, which older children may enjoy.

Jesus’ teaching on prayer

MATTHEW 7:7–12

In the Lord’s Prayer we see Jesus telling us to call God ‘our dear Father’ or ‘Daddy’. We also see the idea of a parental relationship in Jesus’ other teaching on prayer. Jesus shows his listeners how unthinkable it would be for a human dad to play jokes on his children or put them in danger when they ask him for what they need—so how much more ridiculous it is to think that God, our perfect heavenly Father, might treat his children so badly!

In this silly sketch, we introduce the idea that we are in a relationship with God, not a formal mechanical set-up.

The children may like to read and perform the script. Then you could suggest that they make up their own scene—they could use the same idea of

somebody trying to get something that they need, and having to do all sorts of ridiculous things to get it. (Perhaps they need help with homework or a drink of water, or something from a high shelf.)

Talk about how silly that would be when all you have to do is ask the person who looks after you to help.

After the sketch, you could look at Matthew 7:7–12 together. Remind the children that Jesus is speaking these words to his friends and crowds of people who had come to listen to him on a mountainside.

You could ask the children to put the passage in their own words.

Is God more like a slot machine or a parent? Why?

I need my tea!

Characters: Joe and Izzy

Props: pen and paper, table and chair

Izzy is sitting writing at the table.

JOE: What are you doing?
IZZY: I’m filling in this form.
JOE: What for?
IZZY: ‘Cos that’s what I have to do.
JOE: What do you mean?
IZZY: Look, I’m hungry!
JOE: So...?
IZZY: So I need to fill in a form.
JOE: Why?
IZZY: To get my tea!
JOE: Why do you have to fill in a form to get your tea?
IZZY: ‘Cos that’s the way it works, dumb! I fill in the form, then I go and wait in the queue to get it stamped.
JOE: But...
IZZY: Then when it’s stamped, a secretary takes it to the committee...
JOE: Really?
IZZY: And if the committee aren’t in the mood, they all shout ‘NO! GO AWAY!’ into a loudspeaker. It’s very embarrassing.
JOE: Um. Yes, it would be.

IZZY: But if the committee agree that the form's OK, the secretary brings it back.

JOE: And...?

IZZY: And I put it in that machine and I press the button...

JOE: Yeah?

IZZY: And if I've done it wrong, a custard pie flies out and hits me in the face.

JOE: Oh dear.

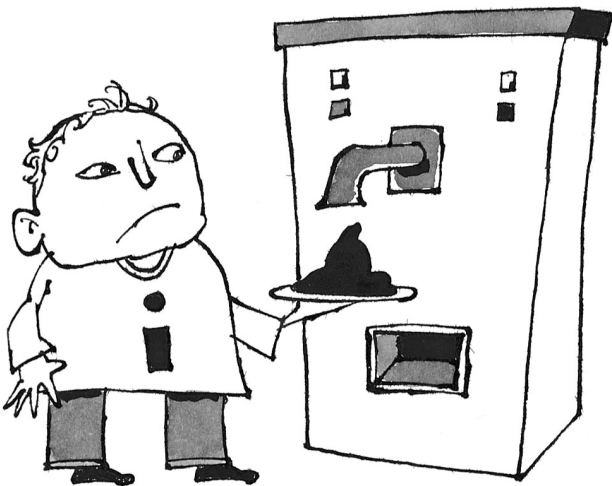
IZZY: But if it's all filled in just right, the machine prints out a little slip of paper...

JOE: Mmm?

IZZY: And I take the little slip of paper and I go to the other machine and I feed it into the machine and I wait and the other machine whirrs a bit...

JOE: And?

IZZY: Well, if something's gone wrong or if the engineer's in a bad mood, sometimes it gives you a plate of cowpat.



JOE: Oh dear.

IZZY: But if you're lucky, and if I've filled in the form right and I haven't done anything wrong, and the engineer's feeling happy, and if he's not too busy and if everything's working as it should...

JOE: Yes?

IZZY: Then I get my tea, of course!

JOE: Oh. It seems a bit... well, difficult.

IZZY: What do you do when you're hungry, then?

JOE: I just ask my dad...

IZZY: And?

JOE: And he gives me my tea.

IZZY: What? Just like that?

JOE: Yeah. He's my dad!

One family

EPHESIANS 3:14-15

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. (NIV)

Say that when Jesus starts his prayer by calling God 'Dear Dad', he's saying something very important about how we can see God.

All of us have somebody who looks after us. We all know what it's like to be cared for. But Jesus says that God is our Father in heaven—he is like our parents when our parents are at their very, very best! Peter Graves, in his book *Living and Praying the Lord's Prayer* (BRF, 2002), quotes six-year-old Michael, who, when asked why we call God our father, replied, 'Because when your dad's his very goodest, he's just a little bit like God.'

We're going to imagine now what the very best parent ever might be like.

You'll need large pieces of paper—for example, wallpaper backing roll, pencils, coloured pens.

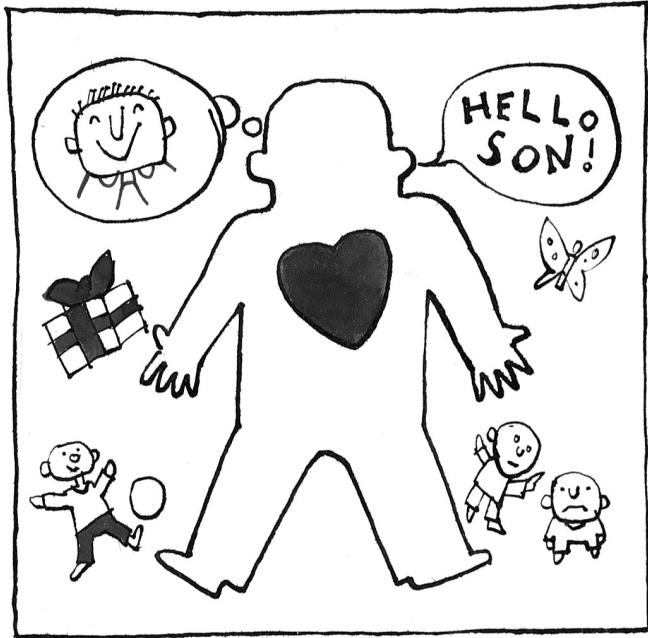
This activity is done in pairs, named A and B.

Ask the pairs to imagine the Best Parent Ever. A lies down on the floor, on top of the paper, and B 'sculpts' them—puts A's body in the position called 'The Best Parent Ever'.

Now B draws round A in pencil so that there is an outline of a person on the paper when A gets up. Label this outline 'Best Parent Ever'. Roughly where the heart is, draw a heart shape.

The pairs could then do some or all of these activities together.

- Go over the outline in colour. What colour or colours will you use for Best Parent Ever?
- What expression would you draw on their face?
- What pattern would you draw on their hands?
- If you could draw one object to give them, what would it be?



- Round the outside of the Best Parent Ever, draw what sort of things that parent might do (for example, give enormous presents, play football with me...). You might like to introduce the idea here that you're not thinking about your best friend, but about a parent—might there be some things you would need a parent to do that a best friend wouldn't do? (For example, telling you off when you do something wrong.)
- Inside the outline, draw pictures of things to show what the parent is like. (For example, if you think the Best Parent Ever is strong, you might draw a tank or a mountain; if you think they're gentle, you might draw a butterfly.)
- Draw a speech bubble coming from their mouth. In it, write something they might say.
- Draw a thought bubble coming from their head. In it, write or draw something they might be thinking.
- In the heart shape, write or draw what you think is dearest to them—what or who they love best in the world.

Display all the outlines around your meeting room. Give the group some time to go round and look at them all. Then, if it is appropriate, you might like

to ask the pairs to talk about their pictures, explain difficult parts of them or say what they like about other pairs' ideas.

Say 'If Jesus asks us to call God "our Father in heaven", what do you think God our Father is like?'

Extra ideas

The good shepherd

JOHN 10:11–18; PSALM 23; LUKE 15:3–7



The shepherd of the flock is a picture that is closely related to the idea of God as father to his people. The children could act out the story of the lost sheep, or improvise a scene showing the difference between the good shepherd and the hired hand. There is a rap version in *The Gospels unplugged*.

God our mother

PSALM 17:8; ISAIAH 66:13; HOSEA 11:1–4

All the above passages are interesting examples of God's love described in very maternal terms.

Happy families

After playing the card game, you could hold up one of the completed families at the end of the game, and ask what the children of that family would call their father. If the group suggest 'Dad' or 'Daddy', get them to laugh by challenging them and saying things like, 'Would they really? Are you sure? Wouldn't they call him "Sir" or "Your Lordship" or "Magnificent One"?'

Other silly ideas for formal names are 'Sire', 'Oh Esteemed Ancestor', 'He Who Must Be Obeyed', and silly abusive or casual ones might be 'Oy you', 'Slave', 'Whatsyername', 'Fatface'. Keep challenging your group to say why the children would call him Daddy or Dad, until everyone has got the idea that your suggestions are either terribly formal or terribly rude. The children call their father 'Daddy' because they want to show him that they're very

close to him and also that they want to please him, not be rude to him.

Say that today you're looking at what Jesus tells us we should call God when we pray to him.

Father says...

Play 'Simon Says', but instead of the commands being obeyed only when you start the command with 'Simon says', they should be obeyed only if you begin them with 'Mum says', 'Dad says', or any other names for parents (Mama, Papa, Mumsy, Pops, Daddikins—they can be as silly as you like). You might like to ask the group at the end what difference it makes to call someone 'Father' or 'Daddy'. Jesus broke new ground in prayer by calling God 'Abba'—Aramaic for 'daddy'—instead of the very formal 'father'.

Prayer

Response prayer



Here is a prayer to say together, a leader (perhaps an older child) saying the line and all joining in on the response.

- LEADER:** Please join in with the words 'Thank you for your love'.
Our father in heaven:
- ALL:** Thank you for your love.
- LEADER:** You're the strongest, kindest dad we could ever imagine.
- ALL:** Thank you for your love
- LEADER:** You give us our life.
- ALL:** Thank you for your love.
- LEADER:** You give us families at home and at church.
- ALL:** Thank you for your love.
- LEADER:** You give us arms to hug with.
- ALL:** Thank you for your love.
- LEADER:** You show us the right way to live.
- ALL:** Thank you for your love.
- LEADER:** You love us even when we make you sad.
- ALL:** Thank you for your love.

- LEADER:** You love us more than we can possibly imagine.
- ALL:** Thank you for your love.
- LEADER:** Our Father in heaven
- ALL:** Thank you for your love. Amen

Picture prayer

You'll need backing paper, double-sided sticky tape, and pictures from magazines showing people caring for someone else (or for something else)—pictures of parents holding children's hands, school crossing patrols, farmer with animals, child with a pet, children hugging, nurses and patients and so on.

Put all the pictures out on the floor or table and ask the children to look through them, then to choose the one that most reminds them of the way God looks after us. Put some double-sided tape on the back of the pictures they choose.



As they stick their chosen picture on to the backing paper one by one, they might like to explain why they chose it. You could ask if it reminds them of any stories in the Bible that they've heard.

Finish with a prayer along the lines of: 'Dear

heavenly Dad, we love you so much for being... (use the words the children have used as they talked about their pictures). Help us to remember that whatever we do and however old we get, you will always love us just as much as you do now.'

Story prayer

Remind the children of the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11–32). Ask them to imagine that they are the son who has come home to his dad, and it's the moment in the story when the dad gives him a big hug and welcomes him back home. Imagine the father turning to smile at you and asking, 'What did you miss most about being with me?' Ask the children what they would say. Turn any suitable answers into a prayer, thanking God for these wonderful things that we enjoy about being with him.

Songs about God as our Father



Father God, I wonder (MP 128)
 Father in heaven (SHF 712)
 Abba Father (MP3)

My God is so big (JP 169)
 Father, I place into your hands (MP 133)
 Father, we adore you (MP 140)
 He's got the whole world (JP 78)
Lovely jubbly (Kingsway CD, Doug Horley)

Craft and art

Church family tree

You'll need the outline of the family tree photocopied from the template on page 113, and pens.



Using the outline, children can fill in and decorate a 'Christian family tree', with God as the father of us all. They can fill the spaces with people in the church family who are special to them.

Three-dimensional tree

You'll need a branch; a flowerpot and soil; card leaf outlines; hole punch; gold string; felt tips.

Again, picking up on the idea of a family tree, the group (or individuals) could secure a large branch in a plant pot and draw members of the church family on to individual leaf-shaped cards. Punch a hole in the cards and thread gold string through the hole, then hang them from the 'family tree'. You could write a sign to attach to the 'trunk' saying 'God is our Father'.

T-shirt decorating

You'll need plain T-shirts, fabric pens or paints and an iron and ironing board (if the pens need ironing to fix them).

Get the children to think of a positive word they can put in the gap: 'You think I'm.....? I take after my dad.' (Or 'I take after my mum.')

Suggestions are cool, strong, tough, gorgeous, brilliant, cuddly, a super-hero, a mega star. They can write their sentences on their T-shirts in fabric pen, perhaps half on the front (You think I'm cool?) and half on the back (I take after my dad). And of course they can add appropriate decoration. The activity reinforces the idea of having the same traits as our parents, just as Christians grow more like God.

Ongoing wall display

The picture today is of a parent hugging a child. You will find the template on page 123.