

In March I became a proud grandfather to this lovely baby, Savannah Kay, our first grandchild:



I was told that people will know if I am a good parent, when they see how our grandchildren behave – there’s much at stakes here with this granddaughter!

My grand dad – left home/China and worked in Cuba when he was quite young. Since I was sent away from home when I was a teenager, I didn’t really get to know my father until the last few months before he passed away. While there’s no question that my dad loved the Lord and cared for our family, “distant and disengaged” would accurately describe our physical and emotional relationship; this might well be an intergenerational, paternal pattern since he was sent away from home when he’s a teenager.

So I am pretty sure that my understanding of “fatherhood” was distorted by my own experience with my earthly father; this probably had influenced how I perceived God as a distant, detached, disengaged, and disinterested authoritarian.

A good, good Father – that’s who our God is! Do you believe that? Do you really, really believe that and have experienced His goodness?

This morning we begin proper our series on the Lord’s Prayer, “Pray Like Jesus”, and look especially at the very first word of the prayer that emphasizes the character of God:

“**Father** of us (**Πάτερ** ἡμῶν)/Our Father in heaven ...”

Why didn’t Jesus use “Our Infinite, Eternal, Almighty Creator and Lord of the Universe in heaven”?

So what kind of Father is God like? Why should we pray to Abba Father? How should we pray to Him?

If we have a quick survey of how the bible generally describes God as Father, we would find that God is the perfect Father who ...

- has compassion on all his children (Ps. 103:13)
- created humankind (Dt. 32:6)
- carries His children in his arms (Deut. 1:31),
- delights in His children (Prov. 3:12)

- teaches/instructs His children (Prov. 1:8; 4:1)
- provides what His children need (Matt. 6:25-34)
- gives them good gifts (Matt. 7:7-11)
- welcomes little children (Matt. 18:10)
- offers them true bread (Jn. 6:30)

God is called the Father over **150x** in the four Gospels; the Aramaic term, **Abba**, is rarely used but communicates **an intimate personal relationship**.

**“Abba” is a cry of identity,**

**and a declaration that we belong to God’s family, chosen and adopted by God the Father.**

The story of God’s people being delivered out of Egypt, i.e., the Exodus Event, is the significant cultural and religious backdrop of the term “Abba”:

“This is what the Lord says: Israel is **my firstborn son.**” (Exodus 4:22)

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called **my son** out of Egypt.” (Hos. 11:1)

So when Jesus taught the disciples to address God as Abba, He is underscoring this heart-warming truth about God:

**Abba hears the cries of our hearts.**

“Then the Lord told him, “I have certainly **seen** the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have **heard** their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers.” (Exodus 3:7)

Abba Father heard the children’s cries of distress, though they might not think otherwise because of His apparent silence and indifference in the past 400 yrs.

Remember that ***God’s apparent silence doesn’t mean His absence*** and that ***he is working out His purpose “in His time.”*** (Cf. Eccl. 3:1-11)

Abba “in heaven” doesn’t mean that God is distant but that ***He is enthroned as King in the unseen realm, veiled from our eyes, yet very close at hand.***<sup>1</sup>

Here in Ex. 3 we have a picture of a warm, tender, caring, attentive and loving father who is close by and knows what’s going on with His children, instead of a father who is distant, cold, aloof, scary, uncaring and unapproachable.

God’s hearing the cries of distress expresses His great love toward His children – He acknowledges, values, and attends to His children.

A story was told about a tourist who observes a devout Jewish man praying at the “Wailing” Wall in

<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, p. 257.

Jerusalem. When he finishes, the tourist asks, “What do you pray for?”

The man responds, “I pray for righteousness ... for the health of my family ... for peace in the world, especially in Jerusalem.”

Then the tourist asks, “Are these prayers effective?”  
The Jewish man replies, “It’s like talking to a wall.”<sup>2</sup>

Abba is not like a wall – He is here with His children; His “silence” and apparent passivity doesn’t mean that He is not aware of what’s going on in our lives or how we are feeling inside - He listens and hears the cries of our hearts:

“The Lord is like a **father** to his children, **tender and compassionate** to those who fear him. For he **knows** how weak we are ....” (Ps. 103:13-14)

Even when His children are going through what they consider the toughest, gruelling moments situation when they don’t even know what to say or how to pray, there’s the most encouraging news:

“<sup>15</sup>you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, ‘Abba, Father’ ... <sup>26</sup>**the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness ... prays for us with**

**groanings that cannot be expressed in words ...** <sup>27</sup>in harmony with God’s own will.” (Rom. 8:15, 26-27)

God’s Spirit intercedes for us and makes sure that our cries and yearnings are aligned with God's will and purpose, when we are speechless!!”

How then should we respond to this truth about Abba?

Tell God who hears the cries of our hearts how you feel with confidence and comfort because, as His children, you have ***open access to, total acceptance of, and full attention from our Abba Father.***

No bribe needed.

No mask required.

No performance necessary.

No bargaining exchanged.

When you are discouraged, make this your breathe prayer:

***“Lord, help me to be still and know that you are God.”***

(cf. Ps. 46:10)

The amazing thing is that Abba doesn’t just listen but He kicks into action and responds in appropriate manner as well as at the most opportune time:

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Philip Yancey, *Prayer*, p. 116.

## Abba frees us from bondage.

When Moses was 80 yrs. old – when he had enough “experience and training” - God drew his attention with the burning bush, appeared to him in the desert, and commissioned him to lead His people out of Egypt.

“So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them ... into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey ...”  
(Ex. 3:8)

God breaks the chains of slavery and delivers them from Pharaoh the Slave-Driver;

He delivers them by His supernatural, miraculous acts;

He leads them – through Moses and Aaron – out of Egypt, provides for their needs, and guides them toward the Promise Land.

The issue is not that God doesn't want to liberate His children - the challenge is twofold:

- Moses' **reluctance** (cf. Ex. 3 – I can't do it and not good enough; who am I that the people would listen to me? Send someone else, please!) [***So it isn't God's reluctance to act but maybe our reluctance to respond!***]

- and the Israelites' **regret** in having left Egypt (cf. complaint, complaint, complaint - no water, no food, facing people of the land, etc. – It's more predictable and better off in Egypt than going through the wilderness!) [***So maybe we are like the Israelites who want a god-made-in-our-image and acts in our own whims and desires!***]

This scenario reveals more about why they were stuck in Egypt in the first place:

their desire to be in control and influence of external circumstances – it's their lack of trust in God's promises and power manifested in their rebellious spirit that held them back in slavery!

In the Exodus story, God responded to their cries, intended and acted to liberate them from their bondage;

in the NT, God's world liberating and restoring work was accomplished in Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection.

We are reminded in God's word:

“For he has rescued us **from** the kingdom of darkness and transferred us **into** the Kingdom of his dear Son ...” (Col. 1:13)

Just like the Israelites, many of us today fail to trust Abba's promises and timely provision, to access His liberating power because of entrenched mindset, rebellious attitudes, unhealthy emotions, and unwholesome habits which we are not willing to give up and are thus imprisoning ourselves.

***God shows up but we sign off!***

How then should we respond?

We have to make a decision; make this your daily prayer commitment:

***Lord, I choose life and blessing.***

***Set me free to live today as you intended.***

Or you can pray the Lord's Prayer, phrase by phrase, each week to center your day moment-by-moment in the presence of God. Why don't you go to Cornerstone webpage and download The Lord's Prayer Guide:

[www.cornerstonechurch.ca/lordsprayerguide](http://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/lordsprayerguide)

God knows what's best for His children; it would be cruel to set His people free but fail to train and equip them to use their freedom in an Abba-honouring way, to worship other gods, or to succumb to anti-Abba influence.

So in the wilderness ...

God guides the way with pillars of clouds and fire by day and by night,

instructs them with His moral precepts as resources for their growth in their love for Him and their neighbours as well as moral compass to discern what's good and evil.

But when His children fall, fail and refuse to live in accordance to their faith commitment ...

**Abba exercises tough love.**

Freedom doesn't mean licence to do anything we want:

we are redeemed to ***be free in doing God's will;***

it's doing what is ***right and righteous,***

as ***by-product of God's abundant love*** in character transformation.<sup>3</sup>

Abba is caring enough to confront and discipline every wayward child, as seen in the story of the Golden Calf (Ex. 32).

<sup>2</sup>Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness ... **humbling you and testing you to prove your**

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<sup>3</sup> cf. Heb. 13:3-11

**character ...** <sup>5</sup> Just as a parent disciplines a child, the Lord your **God disciplines you for your own good.**” (Deut. 8:2-5)

In disciplining His child, God is not the enemy – He doesn’t hate His child; He loves him/her!

***The opposite of love is not hate; it’s indifference.***

**Elie Wiesel**

Abba’s exercising tough love – discipline – is not meant to punish and inflict more pain and grief but to instruct and shape His people in His love for ***community impact and mission effectiveness***:

“... <sup>4</sup>You know how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, **you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth ...** <sup>6</sup>**And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.**” (Ex. 19:4-6)

In obedience God’s children live out their identity as God’s set-apart people to reflect His glory and as kingdom-priests bringing God’s presence in their midst wherever they go, blessing and drawing others closer to Him!

So, Abba’s tough love is **not** intended for ***sin-management but love-manifesting and life-giving, equipping and training*** His children to enter into the Promise Land, thus ***preparing and shaping*** them to partnering with Him in ***co-creating the future!***

If so, this should be our regular prayer to our Father in heaven:

***Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.***

***Melt me, fill me, mold me, use me.***

***Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.***

Conclusion: Clement of Alexandria (2nd century theologian) describes prayer as keeping company with God. When we pray “Abba Father” we are engaging in an interactive conversation with God about what we and God are thinking and doing together (cf. *Spiritual Formation Bible*, p. 520.)

You can take the opportunity to learn more about this by joining The Prayer Practice (semester group)

<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/prayer-practice/>