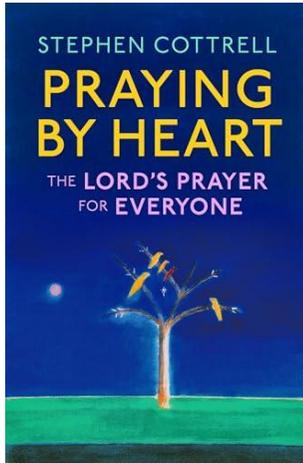


## Week One

### Part One – ‘Our Father in Heaven’



#### Summary of the Preface:

Stephen Cottrell introduces the book's purpose: to help readers move beyond simply reciting the Lord's Prayer and instead explore its profound meaning for daily life. He emphasizes that the Lord's Prayer is not just a set of words to memorize, but a guide for living—a “manifesto for the heart” that can transform individuals and communities if truly embraced.

Cottrell explains that the book will unpack the prayer phrase by phrase, making its

## Key ideas

*‘The Lord’s prayer tells us who God is, how we can relate to God, how we can align ourselves with God’s purposes for the world, and what we should ask for and hope for.’*

*‘...Even today, many people know this prayer by heart...Knowing something ‘by heart’ is an interesting English expression...It means we have memorised something. We can recite it without needing the text in front of us.*

*But could it be more than this? Could it mean that these words and what they convey have moved from the head to the heart.’*

significance accessible for both those familiar with it and those encountering it for the first time.

## **Summary of Part I – "Our Father in Heaven"**

*'The first two words of the Lord's prayer are a revolution in the way we think about God and the way we think about ourselves.'*

### **Jesus the beloved Son**

- We share God's fatherhood with Jesus. Jesus shares it with us.
- Jesus at his baptism was affirmed by the Father as 'the beloved.' In God's expression of his great love for Jesus, he is saying something to us:
  1. God tells us that Jesus is God's Son.
  2. God tells us that Jesus is God's beloved.
  3. God tells us that Jesus is the one in whom God is pleased.

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*'The promise of the Christian faith, and therefore the promise to those who say this prayer, is that the three things that God says to Jesus, God also says to us.'*

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### **Jesus called God 'Father'**

- Roots to addressing God as 'Father' can be traced back in Old Testament in terms of God's fatherhood of Israel (cf. Ps 103; Hos 11.1; Is 63.16; Ex 4.22)
- Jesus pulls on these 'strands' of the Jewish tradition. He uses Aramaic word *Abba* (Dad/Daddy) as a child uses to speak to their loving father – expression of trusting and accepting familiarity.

## God the strength and goodness of fatherhood and the love and wisdom of motherhood

- Just because Jesus addresses God as 'Father' does not mean that God is male. God who is outside of the space and time in which we live and

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*'God became human in the particular specificity of Jesus, whose gender was male, and who in turn uses the male language of 'Father' to describe his and our relationship with God. But God is not male.'*

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- exist, is neither male or female.
- We call God 'Father' in continuity with the tradition that comes from Jesus himself. But there is also a long tradition of referring to God as 'Mother', not only in Scripture but in the theological expression of the Church (cf. St. Anselm & Mother Julian of Norwich).
- The use of language is pastorally important to consider when people have difficulty in addressing and thinking of God as 'Father': eg. those who have had abusive or difficult relationships with a 'father figure', including their biological father (or even the absence of such an experience).

## 'The motherly father'

'This is a delightful way of seeking to capture in prayer the type of God that we speak about when we call God 'Father'. He is not proposing, and neither am I, that there should be any change to the Lord's Prayer. But I hope that most pastors and priests will want to be aware of how loaded and troublesome some words can be for some people through absolutely no fault of their own.'

- Perhaps a helpful expression is speaking of God as ‘the motherly Father’ (quoted from Stephen Cherry – *‘Thy Will be Done’*).

### **We, too, the beloved of God**

- To be invited to pray to and address God as ‘Father’ is a wonderful invitation into a loving relationship. St. Paul in Romans reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. God delights in us and believes in us in the same way a parent delights and believes in their children.

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*‘And like the very best relationship between a parent and a child...there is nothing about it that is transactional. It is not if you behave in the way I expect you to, I will love you, so that the love is turned into a reward, and therefore not really love at all. It is **I love you because you are.**’*

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### **Our – The Beautiful Challenge of Belonging**

The Lord’s Prayer is a call for unity, especially unity amongst Christians.

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*‘Not my God or your God.*

*Not my Father or your Father.*

*Ours.*

*...whether I liked it or not, that everyone else who said this pray **was** my sister or brother. We belonged to each other.’*

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- The Lord's Prayer is not only a school for praying, it is a school for living out the Christian life. *'God is teaching us how to pray, which is about how to live our lives in communion with God and in communion with each other. By giving us this particular prayer, and by its repetition so that it dwells deeply within us, God is teaching us how to live.'*
- The Lord's Prayer should change us, challenge us and transform us. We should not pray this prayer if we are not prepared to be changed.
- The Lord's Prayer demands perseverance in our discipleship of Christ. *'We persevere, knowing that the God who loves us is the God of mercy and justice; the God who holds before us the high ideal of a Christ-like life is the God who knows we stumble and fall...we keep saying this prayer, because by the Holy Spirit praying within us, these words change us, and our lives begin to demonstrate the things we learn. God will truly be our loving Father. We are God's children.'*

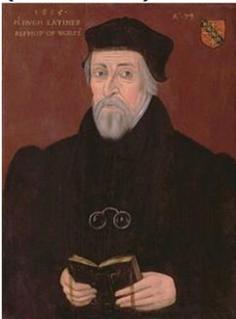
## Right prayer shapes right living

*'...the Lord's Prayer is a pattern for life, not only a pattern for prayer. Right praying, we discover, shapes right living. We learn this prayer by heart and our hearts are changed.'*

## First Sermon on the Lord's Prayer – 'Our'

He saith not 'my' but 'our'... This word 'our' teacheth us to consider that the Father of heaven is a common Father; as well as my neighbour's Father as mine; as well as the poor man's Father as the rich; so that he is not a peculiar Father, but a Father to the whole church and congregation, to all the faithful. Be they never so poor, so vile, so foul and despised, yet he is their Father as well as mine... When I pray, I pray not for myself alone, but for all the rest: again, when they pray, they pray, not for themselves only, but for me: for Christ hath so framed this prayer, that I must... include my neighbour in it. Therefore, all those which pray this prayer, they pray as well for me, as for themselves, which is a great comfort to every faithful heart, when he considereth that all the church prayeth for him.'

**Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worcester & Reformation Martyr  
(1487-1555)**



### **Questions for Reflection:**

- When did you first learn the Lord's prayer and from whom?
- What does it mean for you to think of God as Father?
- What does it mean for you to think of God as *our* Father?
- In what ways can you live out the Lord's Prayer in your daily life?

### **Personal Reflection:**

- 1. What does the Lord's Prayer mean to you?*
- 2. How do you experience belonging in your faith or community?*
- 3. What does it mean to you to have direct access to God?*
- 4. How do you balance intimacy and awe in your relationship with God?*
- 5. How can you live out the Lord's Prayer each day?*
- 6. What words or images help you connect with God?*
- 7. How might this prayer inspire change in you or your community?*

## **Lenten Course – Next Sessions:**

- Week 2 – Part Two: ‘Three Hearty Praises’ on Thurs 5 Mar: St. Matthew's, Warehorne @ 7pm
- Week 3 – Part Three: ‘Three Humble Requests’ starting with ‘give us today our daily bread’ on Thurs 12 Mar: Church of the Good Shepherd, Hamstreet @ 7pm
- Week 4 – Part Three cont: ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil’ on 19 Mar: St. Martin's, Aldington @ 7pm
- Week 5 – Part Four: ‘For the kingdom, the power and glory are yours now and forever’ on Thurs 26 Mar: St. Mary Magdalene, Ruckinge @ 7pm