

It starts young, without any syllables or conscious thought even. It begins as a cry to make right what is wrong.

To change a dirty diaper, to fill an empty stomach, to bring comfort after a scary dream.

As the years go on, nothing changes. You limped home after a bad fall on the park and your knee needs to be cleaned up and bandaged. You whispered “I don’t want to go to school” because the other kids aren’t nice, and avoiding the situation altogether seems the only solution to you. You reach out when you need help with long division questions, when you want to try out for the soccer team but need to practice first, when the family is moving and you’re nervous and need to be assured that everything is going to be okay.

But is there a time limit on when you can reach out and ask for help? There shouldn’t be! When you’re in your 20’s or beyond and debating a job change or a big move, or when you learn your expecting a baby and don’t know the first thing about raising a little one, or when you go through heartbreak or get fired or begin losing loved ones, by all means you should be able to pick up the phone or walk down the street and ask the ones who have gone before you and been there already.

Now, as a caveat, I know that not all of us quite so readily go looking for help and advice, but to some extent we all seek it out—it’s only natural and it’s healthy. And I am aware that this is not everyone’s relationship with their parents—to those whose parents weren’t there for them for whatever reason, in place of mom and dad, feel free to insert in this image an aunt or uncle, a teacher, a friend’s parent, or whoever you know you could call when life gets hard.

It is good that we have those we can reach out to when the path seems unclear, when we don’t have the strength to persevere.

But what right does a baby have to cry for help, a toddler to knock on the bedroom door in the middle of the night, or a grown adult to call mom and dad for advice on mortgages and relationships? The answer doesn’t fall on you at all. It does not depend on the person reaching out in the slightest. It is all based off of the mother, the father, the caring person picking up the phone. They have stepped into the role as caregiver, and as such they have made the commitment to care and love unconditionally. They won’t do it flawlessly, but this is the vocation they’ve undertaken. So whether you’re an angel of a child coming to ask for a bandage or whether you’re a rampaging headache asking for

help cleaning up your own mess, you ought to be able to go to the one who loves you for help. Your cry for assistance ought not fall on deaf ears.

Now it's one thing to ask parents that can sit beside you and walk you through the trials of trigonometry and taxes, but the exact same thing is even truer of God even if you can't see Him or directly hear His voice or feel His hand on your shoulder

There's not a conundrum that you encounter that you can't take to God. There is not a single problem that you find yourself in, or even create for yourself, that you can't place before the One who created you. And it has nothing to do with how good you were this year, this week, or even this day, this hour.

As Jesus was teaching His disciples to pray, commanding them to do so even, He begins with a simple address. "Father." With such a simple word He manages to take all pressure off your back to prove yourself worthy of being heard, let alone cared for. But as He places the word "Father" on their lips, He isn't simply giving them a different word for creator, the One through whom they have existence and thus He ought to care for those He's brought into being. No, He is foreshadowing the adoption that is about to take place as He steals from them their sin and rebellion on the cross, cancelling their debt, as Paul writes, and putting off their worldly flesh, dying and rising into Christ the Son through baptism.

The Colossians, and you, and the disciples, have received Christ and now walk in Him. We pray to God the Father just as Jesus His only Son does because we have been baptized into Christ and live all our days within Him, clothed in Him and even filled with Him. So in spite of our sin, our rebellion against our creator that ought to close His ears and His hands towards us, we may be confident. When we say "in the name of Jesus, amen" we truly mean "because of what Jesus did for me, for the sake of your promises to Him, and not because of anything within me, hear me Father, amen."

It sounds simple, and even instinctual, that we can turn to One stronger than us for help. It's probably because we live our lives doing just that, so we're trained from day one to trust that someone will be there to take care of us, but it's honestly preposterous that we would presume to even knock at God's door asking for bread.

Look at our Old Testament lesson and see just how mad it is to petition God with our desires.

Abraham was chatting with God. Just minutes before, it seems, he and his wife are promised a son in their old age by these three angels, one of them seeming to be the Lord Himself, and yet he doubts and his wife laughs but God persists in His promise. Then Abe continues for a little walk and talk with the Lord and His compatriots and they fill in the old guy with insider knowledge. Sodom is about to be engulfed in judgment because of their evil. And it's not just because they sit around and think terrible thoughts and hurt themselves. No, we learn a chapter later that they act out their terrible desires and they don't care who they hurt. They deserve what God is sending their way. Yet doubt-filled Abraham has the audacity to go back and forth with God about sparing these selfish people. Abraham's prayer, ultimately is for the sake of his nephew Lot and his family. But he, we learn, is no righteous example either.

"For the sake of 50 righteous men, Lord, will you spare the whole town?"

Abraham does what I would never pastorally advise. Normally I'd say, offer the prayer and entrust it to the Lord and wait. Rinse and repeat But Abraham begins bartering. And it works. He's a good business man, working the price down in small increments—typically 5 righteous persons down each time. And God agrees. He agrees to spare the city that has offended Him and is genuinely about to seek to harass and defile His angel friends. If there are 10 righteous ones found, He will have mercy on them all.

And the Lord's Prayer is just as outlandish.

Everything we pray in it is good and right and holy, but the fact that we are the ones that pray it, and that the Lord hears it and answers it, it doesn't make sense. We are complete hypocrites as the words exit our lips because in one way or another we work against the very words we pray. We ask God's name to be hallowed but with the same lips we deceive and curse and even misuse God's name. We pray that God's kingdom would come while we lavish in this sinful world and neglect to bring about His good kingdom in our words and deeds. We pray for daily bread while we neglect to trust in Him, hoarding our wealth instead while others go hungry. We pray for forgiveness, for ourselves and others, while we constantly dive back into sin, while we begrudge having to forgive others. And lead us not into temptation—we pray this in the same day that we will seek out the very temptations that will entice us to sin.

Why should God listen to these perfect words coming from our lips? Even as children of God, why should He answer us because He ultimately knows that these are half-hearted, only partially genuine requests at best? Quite

earnestly, we could find a million reasons why the God of the universe ought not listen to our prayers. Our sin has severed the relationship and we cannot repair it. It is by mercy alone that God listens and concedes to Abraham, just as it's mercy alone that Jesus places this prayer in the lips of the disciples.

It's mercy that sent God's own Son from the heaven's above to live in the perfect faith that we ought to, to spend His life in prayer, trusting that God would answer His every petition, caring for Him according to the Father's perfect will. And it is because of Jesus' perfect life, His perfect prayer, that we may be certain that we are seen and heard and cared for.

Abraham's prayer points us to a prayer of Christ's. The old guy looking, desperately hoping for as few as 10 righteous ones in Sodom, and for their sake God is willing to withhold His wrath. They're not found though, and except for by God's patience, even Lot and his family would've been consumed.

But in that area was found one righteous, one that refused to rebel against the Father and wouldn't think of harming His neighbour. One whose love was endless, flawless. As Jesus went to the cross, He knew He was the righteous one by whom all of humanity could be spared, and so from His throne of agony He prays "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." For the sake of the Righteous One, spare them from your wrath.

So your record of debt is cancelled, your rebellion undone and your reunion with the Father completed. Now you pray in and through Christ as a baptized child of God, certain that you can take your cares and concerns, your fears and your gritudes, even the random thoughts that cross your mind, you can take them all to Him knowing that He will hear and answer as He knows best. You can even take preposterous prayers to Him, like for healing, for the forgiveness of sins for you and others, for the kingdom coming into the life of your family and your community, that daily bread would be supplied in every nation, that the world would be spared of judgment because of Christ and all may come to faith. Because you are in Christ, pray. You have been commanded by your Lord to pray, and you have been promised that it will be nothing but blessing to you and your community and your world. So as the morning arrives and the evening approaches and as needs arise through the day, be rooted in Christ your Lord and take it to the Father in prayer.