



**Progressive Christianity  
Study Series**

**Study Number 007**

**The Lord's Prayer – Unpacked and Remixed!**

**Michael Dowling**



## PREAMBLE

This study is a reflection on the famous prayer which Jesus is said to have taught his disciples, when one of those disciples asked him, “Lord, teach us how to pray” (Luke 11:1-4). The prayer he taught them is also recorded in Matthew 6:9-13.

This prayer is still used today, some 2,000 years later.

For some people, the prayer continues to have deep meaning.

For others, however, some of the language employed can be challenging, or even a barrier between the person who is praying and God. Some of the words of the Lord’s Prayer (e.g. *Father, Heaven, Kingdom*, and even the word *sin*) may, in 2024, *literally* get in the way of faith in God for some people. And this, I believe, is the antithesis of what Jesus sought in teaching the prayer.

This study explores the verses of the Lord’s Prayer, examining the literal words, reflecting on what Jesus may have been getting at in using these words, and how that deep meaning might be “mapped” onto new words that better resonate with our modern-day understanding. The study ends by presenting, side-by-side with the Lord’s Prayer, a Lord’s Prayer “Remix Version” for your further reflection.

## UNPACKING THE VERSES OF THE LORD’S PRAYER

### *Our*

This opening word may well be the most significant in the entire prayer.

Critically, the prayer doesn’t begin with “*My* Father...” but, instead, with “*Our* Father...” Whilst the prayer may be prayed by individuals, it is *corporate* in its nature.

When an individual offers the prayer, it is offered not merely on behalf of themselves, but rather on behalf of a “group” of which they are only one member. This deepens, very significantly, the *relational* aspect of the prayer. Not only is the *prayer* in relationship with the *prayee* (“God the Father”), but they are also in relationship with the group which corporately offers the prayer.

There is something quite beautiful about this collective, communal, relational aspect to the Lord’s Prayer. It contrasts with the individualistic “personal salvation” approach to faith which is common in some understandings of the Christian Faith: Is such-and-such an individual “saved” through “saving faith in Jesus”?! The Lord’s Prayer is in no sense a prayer about *me* and *my* relationship to God (*my* daily bread, *my* sins, others sinning against *me*, delivering *me* from evil), but instead is about *us* and *our* relationship to God (*our* daily bread, *our* sins, others sinning against *us*, delivering *us* from evil).



As relational and connected is the “Our” in “Our Father,” there is, of course, the risk of us “tribalizing” the “Our Father.” We can claim ownership of *Our* Father, who is *our group’s* Father, but certainly not *your group’s* Father! How ecumenical are we willing to be in our use of the Lord’s Prayer? Do we see “Our” as extending to our group, but not to the Christian members at the other end of the conservative-progressive spectrum? Might we one day come to see “Our” as extending to the members of other denominations, other religious faiths, the

entire human family, and perhaps even the non-human life with whom we share this planet Earth? How *wide* is the “Our” in the “Our Father”?

### *Our Father*

Jesus referred to God as “Father” or *Abba* in Aramaic, which might be translated something like “Daddy.” It is a term of real intimacy. It is also quite extraordinary. In this prayer, Jesus is addressing the Creator of the Universe, the Creator of all things, seen and unseen, and using the term “Father” or “Daddy”! Some might argue, “Well, traditional Christian theology asserts that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, and hence, in some sense, ‘God,’ so it’s hardly surprising that Jesus uses a term of intimacy in addressing God!” In response to this, I point out that Jesus *doesn’t* say, “Look, fellas, this is how *I* address God but, of course, none of *you* should be so bold as to address the Creator of the Universe in this manner!” Far from it. Jesus invites his disciples to *also* use this same intimate form of address: When *you* pray, remember that God is *your Father*! As Jesus relates intimately to God, *so too* should the followers of Jesus relate intimately to God.

#### *Father.*

That has rather an *anthropomorphic* ring to it, doesn’t it?

We humans, made “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27), take the concept of God and shape it (*morphe*) into our own human image (*anthropos*), thereby returning the favour!

The human biblical authors certainly seem to have created God in their own human image. The biblical authors took the trouble to create a God with all our *nasty* human tendencies, such as pettiness, vindictiveness, judgementalism, tribalism, vengefulness, and murderous and genocidal rage, as well as our *nice* human tendencies toward love and compassion. The biblical God is, in many ways, an amplified reflection of *ourselves*.

#### *Father.*

That has rather a *patriarchal* ring to it, doesn’t it?

Hardly surprising, given the patriarchal culture in which Jesus grew up.

Quite naturally, God was perceived as being masculine, when authority and power in the culture was held by men; this is no surprise at all.

*If you are male*, just think for a moment how women must have felt over the centuries, and to this day, about the assertion that God is *male* (“*Father*”), not female. Consider the disenfranchising effect that this theological gender bias has had on half the human population. A less-than-cheery Bible verse for women is:

<sup>7</sup> For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God, but woman is the reflection of man. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, man was not made from woman but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Neither was man created for the sake of woman but woman for the sake of man (1 Corinthians 11:7-9).

The more patriarchal churches have been keen to point to the above verse to justify second-class status for women, including the non-ordination of women as ministers. They seem pleased to forget the counterpoint to this verse from Genesis:

So God created humans in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).

#### *Father.*

That has rather a *biological* ring to it, doesn’t it?

In the biological realm, a *father*, and a *mother*, produce offspring.

I think it has something to do with penis and vagina, sperm and ovum.

In one of the traditional creeds of the Christian Church, we hear that Jesus was *eternally begotten* of the (Heavenly) Father. As we contemplate the use of the biological terms – father and son – when applied to God and Jesus, how much sense does this make? A Divine Penis and eternally generated Divine Sperm?! A common understanding of God is that God is *immaterial*. God is *not* comprised of *matter* as is everyday stuff such as rocks and plants and humans. *If* God is immaterial, then so too is God *non-biological*, calling into question the use of the biologically-grounded term “Father.”

I am reminded of the unforgettable line by one of my theology lecturers, in responding to a classroom squabble about the pros and cons of male imagery around God:

“Let’s get clear about something. *God is not a bloke with kids!*”

*The intimacy of relatedness.*

Despite its many limitations – anthropomorphic, patriarchal, biological – there is a kernel perhaps worth retaining from the word “Father.” Father speaks not only of *intimacy*, but also of *relatedness*. The absolute *wonder* of praying to a God beyond time and space (more on that in a moment) in a way that is *intimate*, and which recognises our *relatedness* to this mind-boggling Ultimate Reality.

***in heaven***

Okay, we seek to pray to this mind-boggling Ultimate Reality which is, nonetheless, intimately related to us. Where exactly is this Ultimate Reality that is beyond anthropomorphism, beyond patriarchy, beyond sex and gender, located?

In *heaven*.

Sorry? *Where?*!

In *heaven*.

Eyes glaze over.

Big sigh.

Much as we have progressed, very considerably since biblical times, in our scientific understanding of the nature and size of the universe, we can still regress, if only unconsciously, to imagery around heaven that is the butt of cartoonist humour.

*Our Father in Heaven...*

Oh yeah, old bloke, beard, sitting on a throne, somewhere above the clouds.

No, that’s *silly!* That’s not *my* image of God!

*My* image of God is...hmmm...it’s hard to convey.

A God who *isn’t* a person, but who, nonetheless, relates to us *personally?*

Hard to picture this God.

It’s much easier to picture anthropomorphic images of God, however ridiculous.

*Upgraded understanding?*

Oh yeah, above the clouds is the upper atmosphere, then space, the sun and other planets, the hundred or so billion stars that make up our Milky Way Galaxy, and then the trillion or more galaxies contained in the four-dimensional spacetime of our observable universe.

So, God, an *immaterial* God, is *beyond* this spacetime bubble we call our universe; that is, God transcends both space and time as well as transcending materiality. And this God is responsible for the continuous unfolding of complexity from the potentiality in the moment of the Big Bang.

We really shouldn't pat ourselves on the back when it comes to our greater understanding of God, compared with our biblical ancestors in the faith. Sure, we may have an upgraded understanding of the workings of the natural world and of the large-scale structure of the universe, but to say that we understand God any better than our biblical ancestors is a stretch: God, beyond the clouds, was beyond our biblical ancestors; God, beyond our immense spacetime universe, is beyond *us*. God *remains* as transcendent to our understanding as God ever was: God *continues* to elude our grasp.

The more that science uncovers about the workings of the natural world, the more stunned we become. And in 2024, even though science knows so much more than it did 2,000 years ago, there is so much it does not know. Indeed, it is fair to say that science does not even know what it does not know, let alone what it can never know.

From galactic superclusters to the elementary particles of which they are comprised...  
From the extraordinary complexity of a single bacterial cell to the interconnected wonderland of a forest ecosystem...

From mere matter to the living world assembled from it...

From mere life to conscious, prayerful life that ponders its Creator...

...we modern humans continue to fall back in awe at our intimate connection to the wonder and the mystery of what is behind it all, an Ultimate Reality we label "God."

Our Father in Heaven	Our Ultimate Reality, ever-present, yet beyond our gaze. Our Intimate Reality, Source of all connection and meaning.
----------------------	--

### ***hallowed be your name***

#### *The Idea of The Holy*

This is the title of a famous and influential book by Rudolf Otto. In it, he explores what is meant when we describe God as "holy." Moral perfection is one aspect of God's "holiness," but Otto describes another critical aspect of the holiness of God: the "wholly otherness" of God; an otherness perceived not through reason or sensory stimulation, but through an experience he termed the *numinous*. Our experience of "The Holy" or "The Numinous" is where we are "*in the presence of that which is a Mystery inexpressible, and above all creatures.*"

#### *Hallowing God's name...*

There are two very contrasting takes on "the name of God."

One is that of the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW).

I had a doorstep conversation with a JW one day in which he confidently asserted that unless I prayed to God as "Jehovah God" then Jehovah God wouldn't hear or answer my prayer. Simply praying to "God" wouldn't do, because Jehovah God wasn't going to listen to me! Jehovah's Witnesses, according to them, possess the true knowledge about God's Name.

The other, contrasting take, is that of adherents to the Jewish faith.

In the Hebrew Bible, what Christians call the Old Testament, whenever you see the all-capitalised word LORD, this is a placeholder for the Hebrew's personal name of God, sometimes transliterated into either the all-caps English YHWH, or else *Yahweh* (the JW's different pronunciation yields *Jehovah*). When a Jewish person reads the Hebrew text version of YHWH, they sound out the word "Adonai" which means "LORD." A Jewish person will

not sound out what they consider to be the holy, unutterable name of God, because to sound it out would be, for them, an impudent assertion that they have some control or possession over God and God's holy name.

What *differing* perspectives!

The JW perspective is one of *arrogant possession* of God's name.

The Jewish perspective is one of *humility* before the unutterable reality of God's holy name.

*Taking God's name in vain.*

There is a biblical injunction against this: it is one of the ten commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name (Exodus 20:7).

The punishment for someone blaspheming, or taking God's name in vain, or misusing God's name, is severe.

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the blasphemer outside the camp, and let all who were within hearing lay their hands on his head, and let the whole congregation stone him" (Leviticus 24:13-14).

*Really?!*

Is God really so insecure that God requires humans to stick up for God and punish those deemed to have dishonoured God's name?!

I much prefer M. Sott Peck's take on blasphemy.

Blasphemy *isn't* cussing God's name.

Blasphemy is, on a much more profound level, *misusing* God's name.

Blasphemy is, for example, a televangelist condemning immorality by others whilst cheating on his wife and fleecing his flock of their hard-earned money.

*What's in a name?*

God, Adonai, LORD, Yahweh, Jehovah, Holy One, Alfie, Fred.

*Who cares* what God's name is, anyway?!

God's Name is a *pointer* beyond itself.

God's Name is a *placeholder* for the Mystery of Mysteries.

God's Name is *shorthand* for whoever or whatever is behind everything that is.

God's Name is a *reminder* that everything we are, everything we experience, everything that has ever or will ever exist, is dependent upon that to which God's Name points.

The theologian Paul Tillich asserted that describing God as "a Being" amounts to a *category error*. Conceptualising God merely as a "Great Being" or "Super Being" is to place God in the same category as other *beings*. Instead, God is the indefinable reality that makes possible anything at all, that makes possible everything that is, including all beings. The name "God" points to that which is behind the forces and the laws of nature, behind the fundamental particles which comprise all beings, behind the connectedness of all things. God is, to use Tillich's language, *not* a Super Being, but rather, *The Ground of All Being*.

Are we mindful, as we engage in our daily activities, just how special is the existence we share? Are we mindful of the wonder that we are actually here at all, in the first place?! In the magnificent words of Denise Levertov, in her poem *Primary Wonder*.

Days pass when I forget the mystery.  
Problems insoluble and problems offering  
their own ignored solutions

jostle for my attention,  
 they crowd its antechamber  
 along with a host of diversions,  
 my courtiers,  
 wearing their coloured clothes; cap and bells.  
 And then  
 once more the quiet mystery is present to me,  
 the throng's clamor recedes:  
 the mystery that there is anything,  
 anything at all,  
 let alone cosmos, joy, memory,  
 everything, rather than void:  
 and that, O Lord, Creator, Hallowed One,  
 You still, hour by hour sustain it.

Hallowed be your name	May we be mindful that we live this life on the Holy Ground of Your Being.
--------------------------	---

*your kingdom come  
 your will be done,  
 on earth as in heaven*

#### *Kingdom and Kings*

We have, once again, the whiff of patriarchal worldview in the air!

Jesus is the *King* who will usher in God's *Kingdom*.

King. Kingdom. Throne.

But...I'm a *republican*, not a monarchist!

When we speak of the Kingdom of God and Jesus as King, there is the strong tendency, once again, to anthropomorphize. We think of the Kingdoms of this earth and apply the concept to "The Kingdom of Heaven." We think of the Kings of this earth, and we apply the notion of kingship to Jesus.

Kings and Kingdoms are *powerful*.

Kings and Kingdoms are *glorious*.

How much more powerful and glorious must be the *Kingdom of God* and *Jesus as King*?!

And yet...Jesus, who spoke endlessly about the Kingdom of God, was an impoverished, itinerant preacher who never sat on a throne, and who was executed by the Kingdom that was the Roman Empire.

#### *The Good News of the Kingdom of God – please explain!*

In the synoptic gospels, Jesus spoke a lot about the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:14-15)

Christians are indeed supposed to proclaim this Good News to the world!

It's unfortunate, therefore, that Jesus...never actually said what *it* is!

That's right: Jesus never actually explained what the "Kingdom of God" was, nor the "Good News" of it!

Go on, head off to the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke) and report back to me when you find a clear and unambiguous description from Jesus about what the “Good News” is, and what the “Kingdom of God” is. *It's not there.*

According to Jesus, the Kingdom of God...*is like*: a mustard seed, yeast, a hidden treasure, a net, and so on; he used a host of metaphors, but no clear and unambiguous explanation.

Hmmm...that makes it tricky proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, doesn't it?!

Our zealous evangelical brothers and sisters will exclaim, with horror, “But, *of course* we know what the Good News is! The Good News is that Jesus came to die on the cross to save us from our sin!”

My short-form response is: “*Crap!*”

My long-form response is given, in agonising and excruciating detail, in the Lenten Study series *Questioning Our Grip on the Cross*.

(see: <https://blackwooduc.org.au/downloads/studies/lentenstudy2022/>)

*What might the Good News of the Kingdom of God actually mean?*

Jesus spoke of a different way of relating to one other.

Jesus spoke of a kingdom where the first would be last, and the last first.

Jesus spoke of a kingdom where to be great, one needed to be the servant of all.

Jesus spoke of a kingdom where the poor in spirit are blessed.

Jesus spoke of a kingdom where we might love each other as we love ourselves.

Jesus spoke of a kingdom where we might love even our enemies.

Critically and paradoxically, Jesus said this:-

If you cling to your life, you will lose it, and if you let your life go, you will save it.  
(Luke 17:33 New Living Translation)

The Greek word translated as “life” is not *bios* (for biological life) or *zoe* (for divine life), which are used in other contexts. Rather, the Greek word used is *psyche*, from which we get the English words, *psyche* and *psychological*. If the author of the Gospel of Luke had been a Freudian, he might well have translated the verse into English this way:

If you cling to your *ego*, you will lose it, and if you let your *ego* go, you will save it (i.e. you will save your *real* life).

Here's my particular take on the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

Be aware, it is a take based on my own particular bias, so...*it's not gospel!*

A kingdom...

... where the last will be first.

... where the truly great are those who don't seek to be great.

... where the poor in spirit (possibly the poor in *self-will*) are blessed.

... where the capacity to love each other, even enemies, as ourselves, is exercised.

This is a very different kingdom to the kingdoms and the ways of this world.

The kingdoms and the ways of this world are, in the main, self-asserting, rather than self-denying; they are arrogant rather than humble; they are individualistic rather than other-focussed.

On a deep level, the way that the human “kingdom” often operates is based upon an *illusion*: the illusion of separateness, of disconnectedness.

Two illustrations will suffice.

The first is our human attitude to the natural world.

The human kingdom has operated, for so long, as if it is *separate from, apart from*, the natural world, and can therefore dominate and exploit it. The utter folly of living out of this illusion has resulted in a myriad of environmental disasters, with climate change being top of the list. The deep realisation that we humans are, instead, an integral part of a living planet, a *biosphere*, seems to be a lesson long in the learning.

The second is the disconnected individualism so prevalent, particularly in our Western world. Unbridled capitalism. Greed. Selfishness. Consumerism. Income and wealth inequality. Technological toys for some. Homelessness for others. Indifference to the plight of the disadvantaged. Living in isolated social media “bubbles.” Polarisation of one “tribe” against another.

*Maybe, just maybe*, the Kingdom of God, about which Jesus spoke, stands in opposition to the illusion of separateness and disconnection. Maybe the Kingdom of God is the potential and the promise of a world that expresses the reality of our interconnectedness:- where humanity truly sees itself as a part of, rather than apart from nature; where self-focus becomes other-focus; where self-aggrandisement is replaced by self-forgetfulness; where the assertion of individual will is replaced by a desire to discern the will of all; where a realisation finally dawns that our deepest identity lies not in our individuality, but in our connection to each other through an Ultimate Reality, which is at the same time transcendent and yet closer than our breath.

Perhaps *this* describes the reality of God’s “Kingdom.”

Perhaps us coming to realise *this*, at the core of our being, individually and collectively, represents coming to do God’s will on earth, as in heaven.

your kingdom come your will be done, on earth as in heaven	May your Reality become our reality. May your Will and Desire become our will and desire.
--	--

***Give us today our daily bread.***

Movie: *The Life of Brian*

The crowd, at a distance, is struggling to hear Jesus’s words as he gives the Sermon on the Mount.

*What did he say?*

“I think it was ‘Blessed are the cheesemakers.’”

*Ahh, what’s so special about the cheesemakers?*

“Well, obviously, this is not meant to be taken literally. It refers to any manufacturers of dairy products.”

Of course, man does not live on bread alone.

We need more than just bread for a balanced diet!

We need *bread* and broccoli, beans and bananas, chicken and...*cheese*, don’t we?

It is worth pointing something out, even if it’s obvious.

*Everything* that we eat, and I mean *everything* we eat, derives from a living source, either plant or animal. With all our clever technology, we don’t “make” *anything* that we eat; we simply process into food these living sources of sustenance from the biosphere, living sources upon which we are utterly dependent. In that mythological Garden of Eden, the mythical first

couple were provided with everything they needed in the way of food: it was all there for the taking. In the non-mythological reality of our modern world, we humans are provided with everything we need in the way of food: it is all there for the taking but, sadly, some take more than their share, and more than they need, leaving others with less than they need.

Of course, man does not live on bread alone.

Nope. Man, and woman, do have additional needs.

But not that many needs.

Food and water. Clothing. Shelter. Safety. Security. Love. Friendship. Family relationships. Health. Meaningful work. Self-respect. There's probably more, but maybe not many more.

The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, in Article 25, the following:-

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

In our world, many do not have these essential needs met; *it shouldn't be too much to ask for*. In our world, some have all their essential needs met, *plus every conceivable desire*.

Addressing this mismatch, between the “haves” and the “have nots,” needs to be an indissoluble part of the prayer “Give us our daily bread.”

Above and beyond the providence of being placed upon a living planet, with abundant resources, are we *really* expecting *God* to feed us, to give everyone their daily bread?! Where is *our* responsibility to those who do not have their essential needs met? Once again, how wide is the “our” when we pray for *our* daily bread?

Our prayers for others always need to occur in an *Echo Chamber*. When we look to the heavens, in prayer, and cry out, “Help them!” this cry should echo back to *us*: “Help them!” God echoes back, challenging us with what *we* can do for others. Our assistance to others takes many forms, including random acts of kindness and giving to charitable organizations. But, if we are ever to move beyond token donations to the impoverished, perhaps we need to ask whether, when we pray “give us *our* daily bread,” we might ever acquire the collective will to reverse the disgraceful income and wealth inequality which so tarnishes our world?

Give us today our daily bread	May our essential needs be satisfied.
-------------------------------	---------------------------------------

***Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.***

*Sin*

A powerful argument can be mounted to abandon the word “sin” altogether.

Whilst there are contexts in which it could, conceivably, still be used with care, the word carries such baggage, through association with two problematic aspects of its use.

1. Its use as a word has become associated, in the minds of many, with religious people who employ the word or variants of it, to negatively label others. It has become associated with moralizing and judgementalism by religious people:

“It's a fallen, *sinful* world!”

“We need to condemn *sin* in the world!”

“We need to call *sinner*s to repentance!”

Such moralizing by Christians might be more effective if the morals of Christians themselves were to improve. It is hard to take seriously Christian moralizing about sin when one looks at the chequered history of Christian morality: religious bigotry and hatred directed against many different minority groups, including LGBTQIA+; religious persecutions and wars; the systemic cover-up of institutional child sexual abuse; the regular falling from grace of hypocritical preachers and evangelists who have long publicly condemned “sinners.”

As a result of such negative associations with the word “sin,” so many people, quite understandably, simply switch off when they hear it used.

2. Its use as a word has also become associated with particular doctrines, such as those espoused by proponents of Fall-Salvation theology, a theology which asserts that all our troubles on Earth, from human violence to disease to natural disasters, are due to our corrupted and sinful human nature, resulting from a literal first couple (“Adam and Eve”) taking a literal forbidden fruit, in a literal garden, having been tempted by a literal talking snake, thereby obliging an All-Loving God to punish us all in hell for eternity, a situation saved by God accepting the perfect human sacrifice of his only Son on the cross.

Is it any wonder that “sin” has become a problematic word for so many, when it is associated with a theology so morally repugnant and intellectually bankrupt?

Perhaps, as we explore this verse of the prayer, we need to be on the lookout for a word less loaded with baggage than “sin,” a word so deeply associated with moralizing, judgementalism, and an infantile theology which in no way speaks to the realities and challenges of human life.

*Forgive us our sins*

*as we forgive those who sin against us.*

These seem to be *coupled*: We should *forgive*...as we are *forgiven*.

St. Francis’s prayer, which illustrates *other*-focus as opposed to *self*-focus, suggests that the *other*-focus of forgiving facilitates the *self*-focus of being forgiven:-

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;  
 where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
 where there is injury, pardon;  
 where there is doubt, faith;  
 where there is despair, hope;  
 where there is darkness, light;  
 and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,  
 grant that I may not so much seek  
 to be consoled as to console;  
 to be understood, as to understand;  
 to be loved, as to love;  
 for it is in giving that we receive,  
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
 and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

*Sin against whom or what?*

The Lord’s Prayer beseeches God to forgive *our* sins as we forgive those who sin against *us*.

What appears to be a given is the sinning of others against *us* and, presumably, our sinning against *others*. Yes, we human beings do tend to harm each other, don't we?

We human beings also tend to harm our natural, living world, using it for our own ends.

Perhaps it could also be said that we humans "sin" (as in "missing the mark") when we fail to be, either individually or collectively, all that God calls us to be.

Why do we humans "sin"?

Why do we harm each other and the natural, living world?

Why do we often fail, as individuals and collectively, to live up to our God-given potential?

The author of the Letter of James had this to say about sin:

No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But *one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it*; then, *when desire has conceived, it engenders sin*, and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death (James 1:13-15).

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your *cravings* that are at war within you? You *want something and do not have it*, so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts (James 4:1-2).

Craving, of course, is *self-focussed* in its essence, rather than other-focussed.

And, according to James, it is our *craving*, our unchecked desires, that leads to "sin."

Elsewhere, Jesus said:

<sup>39</sup> If you cling to your ego (*psyche*), you will lose it; but if you give up your ego (*psyche*) for me, you will find your true life (Matthew 10:39; translation mine).

*Clinging to our ego...*

When we cling to our ego, we operate out of the delusion that we are our ego, with all its insecurities, fears and desires.

When we cling to our ego, our delusional thinking leads to craving.

When we cling to the incessant desires and insecurities of our ego, these inevitably come into conflict with the incessant desires and insecurities of others. We can see this most obviously when we observe *amplified* egos, the sort of insecure, fragile, craving egos possessed by tyrants and despots, who are prepared to kill, to wage war, to invade other countries to satisfy their insecure cravings. As we lower the ego amplification, we can still recognise, readily enough, the insecurities, the self-focussed cravings, at times, in those we encounter in our daily lives: their need for approval; their need to win the argument; their tendency to ignore the needs of others. We may, however, have more trouble recognising *our own* insecurities, *our own* craving for what we want, *our own* aversion from what we do not want, *our own* ego-driven self-focus.

Some five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the Buddha had a similar diagnosis of the human condition, the human condition which has led, and continues to lead, to so much misery on our planet: our self-focussed, delusional thinking, which leads to craving what we want, and our aversion from what we don't want. This, according to the Buddha is the cause of the "*unsatisfactoriness*" of existence.

How might the world be different if the delusion of self-focussed, egocentric identity was dispelled (if we "lost ourself" in order to "find ourself") and instead every human being was

*satisfied* simply by their essential needs being fulfilled? Might there then be less “sin” in the world?

*Forgiveness from our sins: Is this what we really need at the deepest level?*

When we genuinely forgive *someone else*, it can be deeply healing for *us*, because we can finally let go of the corrosive poison that’s been flowing through us; forgiving *someone else* is, most certainly, a gift we give to *ourselves*. However, being forgiven ourselves, for a wrong we have committed against another may, or may not, be deeply healing for us, depending on whether or not we have genuine remorse for what we have done. *If* I have genuine remorse for what I have done, this can lead to “repentance.” Repentance is another word with unhelpful baggage, but means, in essence, to turn around, to commit to a change of heart and mind, to commit to not doing such a thing again. If I am simply forgiven, without this forgiveness being accompanied by a change of heart on my part, it is a *cheap* forgiveness indeed.

There are various forms of “cheap forgiveness” I can receive.

I can, if I want cheap forgiveness, go to the confessional, tell my “sins” to another, be offered forgiveness, pray my five Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys, be absolved from my “sins,” thereby allowing me to go off, with a clean slate, to “sin” once again, with no change of heart evidenced or necessarily required on my part.

I can, if I want cheap forgiveness, accept Jesus as my Lord and Saviour, thereby having his righteousness imputed to me, so that even though I remain “sinful” at my core, I am accounted “righteous” on a celestial register, regardless of whether or not I continue to “sin.”

Perhaps we should set our sights higher than *cheap* forgiveness.

Perhaps we should aim for *costly* forgiveness.

Perhaps we should yearn not merely to be forgiven for the wrongs we have done, but to be *transformed* into the person who does not desire to commit them.

Perhaps God is more interested in *who we are becoming* than how many or how few sins we have on some celestial scorecard.

Do not be conformed to this age, but be *transformed* by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

Whilst we may desire forgiveness for ourselves, perhaps our deepest transformative need is to surrender the harmful desires which bring about our need for forgiveness in the first place.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us	May we surrender our harmful desires, as we forgive those whose harmful desires intrude on our essential needs.
--	---

***Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.***

An alternative translation of “save us from the time of trial” is “lead us not into temptation.”

*Lead us not into temptation*

God doesn’t need to “lead us” into temptation.

The Spirit of God didn’t need to “lead” Jesus into the desert to be tempted.

As per the Letter of James verses above, “God tempts no-one, but one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it.”

Temptation is all around us.

Temptation is present is a myriad of guises, in a myriad of contexts.  
 The temptation to be less than we are called to be.  
 The temptations which are harder to resist when we are in *a time of trial* (stress).  
 The temptations which, if indulged, are harder to resist next time around.  
 The temptations which, if indulged, can be self-destructive, and also harmful to others.

*Save us from the time of trial*

Is this truly a realistic request to make of God?!

We *all* experience trials in life, without exception.

That is simply how life operates.

Perhaps the most realistic thing we can pray for is that we will not be crushed by the trials of life: that, in the inevitable times of trial, we will draw strength from our own resilience, from others and from God; in order that that we might retain, even in those times of trial, what Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl called the “Last of the Human Freedoms.”

“Everything can be taken from a person but one thing: the last of the human freedoms. The power to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances; to choose one's own way.” (Viktor Frankl, Holocaust survivor, *Man's Search for Meaning*).

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.	May we not be pushed beyond the limits of our endurance. May we not be drawn into self- destructive and hurtful ways.
---	--

***For the kingdom, the power,  
 and the glory are yours  
 now and for ever. Amen.***

*The Kingdom*

Kingdoms come. Kingdoms go.

The Roman Empire was a mighty Kingdom for hundreds of years; but it didn't last.

So many kingdoms of the Earth rule by a certain kind of power: *ego-driven, coercive power*.

So many kingdoms of the Earth are fuelled by a particular emotion: *fear*.

In stark contrast: the upside-down, back-to-front realm of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God, ruled by a certain kind of power: *graceful, invitational power*.

The Kingdom of God, fuelled by a particular emotion: *love*.

The interconnected, relational realm of the Kingdom of God.

Invisible to the gaze, yet closer than our breath.

*The Power*

We can be mightily impressed by power.

The power of nature on this Earth: cyclones, tornadoes, volcanoes.

The power of nature in the cosmos: the nuclear furnace of the sun, the power of supernovae.

What of the Power behind all power?

What of the Power of the Ultimate Reality – whom some call “God” – behind all power?

*The Glory*

The glory and the wonder of the natural world.

The glory of the Grand Canyon, of Victoria Falls, of Mount Everest.

The glory of this universe...

...a universe staggeringly beyond us mere humans.

Staggeringly beyond us in *timescale*: 13.8 billion years of cosmic evolution.

Staggeringly beyond us in *size*: 92 billion light-years across the observable universe.

Staggeringly beyond us in its *complexity*: with its black holes, dark matter and dark energy.

Faced with the glory of such a staggeringly ancient, large and complex universe, to employ the words of the psalmist:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
<sup>4</sup>what are humans that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them? (Psalm 8:3-4)

*And yet, sit for a moment and consider...*

According to some scientists who research the origins of life, the emergence of life on Earth, some 3.7 billion years ago, may be such an unlikely event that, even in this staggeringly ancient and immense universe, it may have occurred *only once*, here on the *Earth*. If true, this has immense implications.

It makes the *Earth* special; and it makes *humans* special.

This *living* planet Earth is connected in time and space to this ancient cosmic history.

In humanity, *the universe has become self-aware*.  
In humanity, the universe contemplates *existence and meaning*, and its *Creator*.

How glorious and wonderful is the entire God-Breathed Fabric of Reality, of which every living thing on this Earth, including every human being, is part! Even the tiny glimpses of wonder that we are given are enough, at times, to simply take our breath away, we who are part of this ever-unfolding wonder.

So now then...let us contemplate the Glory of the Ultimate Reality *behind all this glory!*

The interconnected, unfolding wonder of the Kingdom of God!

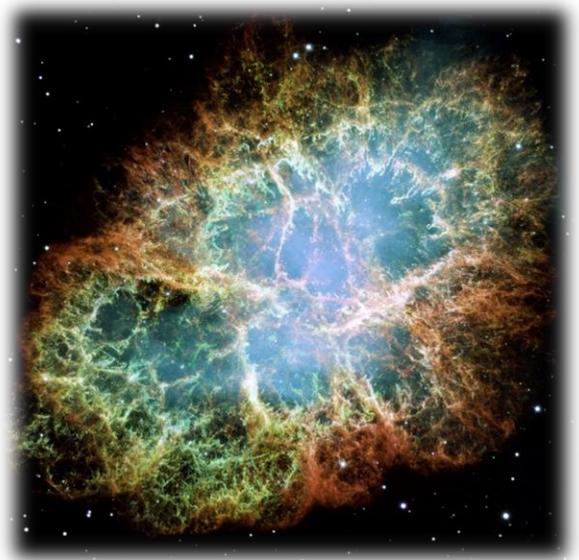
The Power of God!

The Glory of God!

Words eventually fail me.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.



For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

You weave together the very fabric of creation;  
and invite us to be willing threads of meaning.  
Yours is the interconnected,  
unfolding wonder,  
the power and the glory,  
now and forever  
Amen.

## The Lord's Prayer and the Lord's Prayer Remix Version

### LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

### LORD'S PRAYER REMIX VERSION

Our Ultimate Reality,  
ever-present, yet beyond our gaze.  
Our Intimate Reality,  
Source of all  
connection and meaning.

May we be mindful that we live this  
life on the Holy Ground of Your Being.

May your Reality become our reality.  
May your Will and Desire  
become our will and desire.

May our essential needs be satisfied.

May we surrender our harmful desires,  
as we forgive those whose harmful  
desires intrude on our essential needs.

May we not be pushed beyond the  
limits of our endurance.  
May we not be drawn into self-  
destructive and hurtful ways.

You weave together the very fabric of  
creation; and invite us to be willing  
threads of meaning.  
Yours is the interconnected,  
unfolding wonder,  
the power and the glory,  
now and forever  
Amen.