



Let's pray: August 2022

How can we pray well as we head into this new month?



I'm the eldest of four. Shortly after my youngest sibling was born, I drew a picture in school that showed me with my parents in the garden, next to our house with a tree on one side. It sounds sweet, but the words I wrote under the picture said, 'Mummy, Daddy and me. My little sisters and brother are behind the tree because I didn't want to draw them.'

It could have been that I just didn't want to draw three extra people on that day (art is still not a great strength of mine) although it's possible that somewhere deep down I was imagining a world where my three siblings were (quite literally) out of the picture!

How would you have drawn your family when you were younger? Who would you have included or left out? I know that any of my children would include the dog in a picture of their family, but my husband would not.

When you were a child or teenager, what did you imagine your family would look like when you were a grown-up? Did you have a clear idea of who would be in it, whether you'd have children or not? Has it turned out the way that you thought or hoped it might?

If I asked you, 'who's in your family', who are the people you would include? Where would you draw the line – those who live in your home, extended family, 'aunties' and 'uncles' who are not biological relatives but consistently present? Maybe yours is a blended family? Maybe, like mine, there's a whole lot of different DNA in the mix, but there's something deeper that unites us as a unit?



Family is God's idea. We are made in the image of a relational God – Father, son and Holy Spirit, relating perfectly to one another.

Early in Genesis, God says that it is not good for people to be on their own. Our creator made us to function at our best in healthy relationships with one another.

The story of the Bible that begins with us being formed in the image of a perfect, relational God, continues as God brings together the people of Israel, in essence, a big family of people. These people were enslaved for generations in Egypt by Pharaoh, separated from one another and unable to function in family or community as they were designed to. When God moved miraculously and Pharaoh let Israel go, they were freed from slavery but also freed to become part of family and live in community again. As the people left Egypt and the generations who were raised in slavery died, many were left without biological family, and in much of the law that followed, the framework that God sets out for people to live best within focused around making sure that everyone had somewhere to belong and where they're cared for, especially those most in need.

God's family isn't closed, small or with restricted access. It's not limited by a DNA connection, where or when someone was born or their family background.

**Sing to God, sing in praise of his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before him—his name is the Lord.
A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out the prisoners with singing.
Psalm 68: 4-6**

The picture of God, consistently throughout the Bible, is of One who becomes what people need, because of His great love for us. The lonely, those without stability and protection are not just noticed but are lovingly placed in family.



What difference could it make if we re-imagined 'family,' expanding our understanding of the word so it meant a place that was never full, with room for more, regardless of difference, diversity or challenge?

Maybe the picture you drew as a child of your future family is now a reality. Maybe you're not where you thought you might be or what you hoped for now has changed. What might it look like for you to re-imagine family?

Could you reach wider, think bigger and consider growing your family through fostering, adoption or supported lodgings? Are there ways that your family could do life more closely or offer even more intentional support to other families in your community who could do with a wider circle around them?

Whatever your story to this point, in all the highs and lows and the ones to come, God's best plan for all of us, is family – to be and live and function in community with others.



Reflective prayer idea

Let's pray today that our families and homes would be places of hospitality and welcome.

Let's use some of the Lord's prayer, found in Matthew 6, to frame how we pray;

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

- Take time to thank God for who He is; sovereign, creator, faithful...
- Thank God that He is our Father in Heaven, that He's 'abba' and invites us to draw close.
- Thank God for His design for family.

Lord, we thank you today that you're the God of Gods and Lord of Lords, yet you choose to draw close to us, to invite us into a close relationship with you. Lord, your name is holy. Your ways are holy and you invite us to live in a way that is holy. Help us Father to re-imagine family in a way that brings glory and honour to you. Amen.

Write some of the names for God and their meanings, and stick them up and display them somewhere – on the wall, on your fridge, or spread across the floor. Invite people to add their own words of praise, creating a display of thankfulness at who God is and what He has done.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

This is Jesus inviting us to dream and pray big prayers, calling us to pray for and believe that things here could and were designed to reflect how it is in Heaven.

- Prayerfully consider what 'as it is in heaven' could be like – use Revelation 21 as a starting point. Consider the gap between that and 'on earth' and use that to fuel your prayers for what you long to see here of His kingdom and His will.
- Pray for the children who are waiting for a safe and stable home. Pray for the right foster carers, adoptive parents or supported lodgings hosts to step forward and for the best matches to be made.
- Pray for all children with an experience of care as they journey to understand their story. Pray that they would experience 'family', even as they journey to accepting the harder parts of their story.

Almighty God, we thank you for your design for how we should live and the way it draws us closer to one another and to you. We long to see your best for families here on earth as it is in heaven, with no child or young person without a place to call home or without adults alongside them cheering them on. We long to see a world where children, young people and families experience less mourning, fewer tears, less pain and grief, and we ask you to show us our part to play as we long for it on earth, as it is in Heaven. Amen

Take some time to draw your idea of 'family.' Start with the people (perhaps animals too!) who come quickest to your mind. Notice the space left on the page, and pray about how you could fill that space. Continue to draw, considering how you could show welcome, hospitality and care by re-imagining what we understand the word 'family' to mean and encompass.

Give us today our daily bread

This is Jesus teaching us to ask for what we need.

Right across the UK, there is a need for more foster families who can care for children and teenagers.

- Let's pray for numbers to increase in all the nations of the UK, and for the right people within our churches to step forward.
- Pray for the children who are waiting for permanence because of this shortage. Pray that each of them would find a home of welcome and safety.
- Pray for all those children and young people with an experience of care, that they would have what they need to grow, learn, laugh, build healthy relationships and achieve their hopes and ambitions.

Father God, it breaks our hearts that there are so many children and young people who don't have the family, safety and consistency that you created us to have. We come to you on behalf of the children who are waiting, on behalf of those waiting for a family and home to call their own for as long as they need it, and we dare to ask for homes for each one of them. We know that as your people, you invite us to play our part so as we ask, we pray that you would show us what our part is, and give us what we need to respond in obedience. Amen.

Draw a wall with bricks marked out, leaving enough space for to write words in each separate brick. Consider what things you'd want every child to have and write some of them on a brick – food, shelter, safety etc. Pray that every child in the UK with an experience of care would have each of those things. Use the wall to inspire you to pray big prayers.

