

I am going to start with a challenge not a question today – I'll give you a subject and you have to come up with as many Dad-jokes as you can within a minute. Your subject is cheese, don't be mousy or too caerphilly, off you go.

It is said that Dad-Jokes are the very worst. I am now a father of three. And I am a vicar and in my experience, vicars have some of the worst jokes going. My poor poor children hit with a triple whammy. Sometimes I hear something and I just have to let it marinate for a minute until I can find a way to make 'bark' of a tree and bark of a dog into a joke...my long suffering wife rolls her eyes and my children...well sometimes they chuckle despite themselves but sometimes they'll say, that was disgusting. The middle one makes sick noises if they're really bad.

Why do I do it? It's basically because I want to make my kids happy. To see them laugh, brings me joy because at a basic level, I love my kids. It is a great privilege to be a Dad. It is a basic level of relationship – we all have a Father – whether good, bad, absent or unknown, we all come from somewhere, we all have an origin story. And when Jesus is asked, how should we pray...the basic term he uses is 'Father'.

Now for some of you that term is really loaded, actually really difficult. Many have very difficult relationships with their Dads, I am a child of divorce and living between houses, with step-parents and all that, so I know a bit about that trickiness that comes with the term Father. And in a weird way, so does Jesus. All of his life, rumours about his origin would have swirled around him...he knows some strange family dynamics, its not like Mary and Joseph's house was a nuclear family. Now sometimes the response to this complexity is to change the title, so some prefer using 'creator' 'maker' or just 'God'. Yet Jesus doesn't do that, when he says this is how you address God, he uses the term 'Father'. Let's slow it down a bit more. In Greek that 'pater' like paternal or paternity but we know Jesus spoke mostly Aramaic and he uses the term 'abba'.

One of the weird questions I get asked is how shall I address you? My full title is Rev. Dr Nicholas Griffin. If you want to write to the Archbishop to complain about how uncomfortable our pews are then you write to The Most Reverend and Right Honourable the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury...ahem. When people ask me, what shall we call you, I say, Nick. Because when you ask that question, you're saying – what is our relationship here? The title of address reflects the relationship. Jesus does not use maker or creator, though they are true, no in prayer Jesus uses 'Father'. When we talk about a 'relationship with God' this is primarily what we're talking about – Jesus gives us access to knowing God, not just as some kind of distant far off important fellow but as Father. And this relationship is the basis of our prayer life. When you pray, say 'Father'.

Now a lot of you've been in church for a long time and have heard endless sermons. It's common to say that the term 'abba' is equivalent to our term

'Daddy' or 'Dad'. It makes a great sermon but it's not really accurate to the history of the term; Christians are called 'children of God', 'children of the Father' but they are not called to be childish. It is an intimate term but one that is mixed with respect and love. The relationship model we need to have in mind is the one between Jesus and the Father, Son and Father. It is deeply loving, and yet respectful and obedient – not my will but yours. For we are given access to God the Father, by and through God the son; we are drawn into that body of Christ that by the power of the Spirit gets to know the Father.

This sermon begins a new series on prayer that will run the whole way through the Lord's prayer. Jesus teaches us how to pray. And what I've tried to convey today is that first and foremost prayer is about relationship with God. That is the basis of all Christian life. Not being nice, not big beautiful castle buildings but relationship with God, knowing him as Father. But how does this actually work, what do we mean?

I want to suggest that this relationship needs to work on three different levels that are similar to human relationships too.

First, here's a challenge – got your phone on you? If you're married – what was the last text you got from your spouse? If I read to you my text messages from my beloved, they were quite different from when we were teens. Now we text about whether we've run out of dog food or picking up the kids. Is all the romance gone? No. It's just that in life, you need to regularly communicate bits about what's going on in your life. The bible says pray continually but it also encourages you to do other stuff. It's not like you can only be a Christian if you're a monk. So it's putting prayer into ordinary bits in your life. Ordinary communication – sometimes called arrow prayers – just shot one up – or you build it into parts of your daily routine, on something you do everyday making a moment of prayer. Saying grace before a meal is a basic one but making coffee and giving thanks, or seeing an ambulance and praying into that situation. That's the first level – ordinary communication.

Second, there is the regular communication. You can have that first level of communication with the local shopkeeper or someone you meet walking the dogs- hello! Nice weather! As you keep walking. But would you call it a deep relationship? In normal life, most couples that break up have stopped talking to each other. It's not that they don't organise lifts or picking up milk, it's that they stopped asking about each other's day, being interested in what the other is interested in. Spending time listening together. This needs to find a routine of some sorts. For some people that's a quiet time model, for others they use apps like lectio 365 or the CofE Daily Prayer. The important bit is to do it; to actually spend time in prayer.

Lastly, relationships need times of intimacy too. For married couples that is obvious but in other relationships it's there too. Watching a film snuggled up on the sofa or doing an activity together with the family is a type of intimacy. With our relationship with our heavenly Father, we need these times of prayer and praise gathered up with the wider body of the church. There are times whether in communion or in praise music – I can just be caught up with the presence of God,

grateful for simply being together with God. They can't be forced but we can make ourselves open to the presence of God sometimes that fill the tank up and keep us going.

St Georges, I am so excited by this journey of prayer we're going to start together; if you ask yourself the question, how do I pray, which of these three areas do you most identify with and which one do you think, yeah maybe I can grow in that way.