

Creative idea

For praying for fathers in the UK

For most of us, the role of our fathers in our lives – whether present or absent, positive or negative – has had a fundamental impact, strongly shaping our identity, opportunities and perspectives. And sadly, fatherlessness is increasingly a huge problem in the UK and an underlying factor in many of the issues facing young people today. Fathers in our nation – whatever their circumstances – need our prayers.

This resource has been designed to be used in either small group or service settings, in which individuals can take their time to read and pray through each section at their own pace. You might also like to start and end the session with a time of corporate thanksgiving for, and blessing on, fathers generally, and so we've also included some suggestions for this too.

As always, please also feel completely free to adapt this session to your own specific setting – it's better to work through the sections in order, but you don't have to, nor do you need to do each one if you're short on time!

Praying for fathers

Equipment needed: pens, paper, a copy of this sheet for all participants, a small handful of coins for each participant, Bibles for everyone, and a copy of the Father's Love Letter for all participants (you can find the text for this here: <http://www.fathersloveletter.com/text.html> or as a PDF version here: http://www.fathersloveletter.com/Media/FLL_singleA4.pdf)

Opening session of thanksgiving

Take some time together to give thanks to God for his fathering love – for example you might do this by:

- singing some hymns or songs that praise God the Father (or listening to a relevant worship track such as *The Father's Song* by Matt Redman or *Child of God* by Kathryn Scott); or
- reading out some Scriptures that refer to God as Father such as Isaiah 64:8, Psalm 139:13-18 and Matthew 6:9 (or any others you know of); or
- having a time of open or silent prayer to give people an opportunity to thank God for his fathering love for them, and their experience of it in their lives.

As individuals

Find a place in the room you are comfortable in – all you need is a pen, some paper, a copy of the Father's Love Letter, a small handful of coins, and a Bible in case you want to look any of the references up.

1. The perfect Father

- a. Read the Father's Love Letter
- b. Take your time over each line and slowly process your response to each statement
- c. Thank God for his love for you, and ask that he would continue to reveal his perfect fathering love to you – and that you would not only accept it, but be able to flourish in his purposes and plans for your life.

2. The earthly Father

- a. Think of all the men in your life who have had a significant positive impact on you (they might be your own father, other family members, friends, teachers, work colleagues...)
- b. Jot down their names on your piece of paper
- c. When you've finished your list, go back through it one by one and as you read each name, pause and pray specific prayers of blessing and thanksgiving for them
- d. If there are things that are difficult, painful or disappointing about your own father or fatherly figures in your life, lift these to God, knowing that he is the perfect Father who understands and cares.

3. The absent Father

- a. A Centre for Social Justice report in 2013 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-22820829>) stated that there were 1million children in the UK growing up with no contact with their fathers – a figure that is increasing by 20,000 a year – and that 3million have only very minor contact. The report also highlights how the absence of fathers is directly linked with higher rates of teenage crime, pregnancy and disadvantage. Some parts of the UK's towns and cities have even been described as "men deserts".
- b. In 1 Corinthians 4:14, Paul says "There are a lot of people around who can't wait to tell you what you've done wrong, but there aren't many fathers willing to take the time and effort to help you grow up.' (*The Message*) – pray for these fatherless children, and ask that they may have men in their lives who choose to take the time and effort to help them grow up.
- c. Malachi 4:6 talks about God turning the hearts of parents towards their children – pray for these absent fathers to allow God to soften their hearts towards their children, and where possible, to be reunited with them, choosing to invest in them in love.

4. The broken Father

- a. Consider these statistics (from <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk>, <http://www.stress.org.uk/Stress-at-work.aspx>, and <http://www.theguardian.com/society/nhs>):
 - i. 17% of men have been treated for mental health issues, and 10% for depression (although it's thought that these statistics under-represent the reality as men are less likely to report, or accurately report, their condition to their GP);
 - ii. Men are more likely than women to have an alcohol or drug problem. 40% of men consume alcohol at 'hazardous' levels, and 9% are classed as "alcohol dependent". Almost 75% of people dependent on cannabis and 69% of those dependent on other illegal drugs are male;
 - iii. Suicide is the most likely cause of death for men under 35, and men are three times more likely to commit suicide than women;
 - iv. In England 24% of men are classed as obese, while 65% of men are classed as either overweight or obese;
 - v. Stress affects 1 in 5 of the working population, and is now the biggest cause of sickness in the UK.
- b. Spend some time praying for fathers who are struggling in any of these ways – both generally and any you know personally.
- c. Look back again at the Father's Love Letter you read for section 1 – as you re-read the verses, pray that all men who feel broken and lost may receive God's love and be restored.

5. The burdened Father

- a. Many men want to “provide” for their families – however, with the recent recession, higher levels of unemployment and rising living costs, this can be a huge burden. And there’s still a lot of shame associated with not being able to give your family what they want or need;
- b. Hold the coins in your hand – imagine how it must feel to know that your family is relying on you to pay the bills but you know you can’t.
- c. Pray for all fathers weighed down by financial burdens – and that in their distress, they would not only turn to God, but also to family, friends and the local church community for help.
- d. Pray also for church credit unions and organisations like CAP who can help families in this situation.

6. The lost Father

- a. Men currently make up only 35% of church membership. In the last 20 years, 49% of men under 30 left the church – and if the current rate of loss continues, men will have all but disappeared from the church by 2028! Interestingly, research from the US also shows that if the father is a Christian, 93% of families follow him into becoming Christians, whereas if it’s only the mother, this % lowers dramatically to 17% (Statistics from: <http://www.whychurch.org.uk/gendergap.php>)
- b. There are many opinions given for why the church has seen this sharp decline of men in church – however, whatever the reason, it’s clear there’s a real need to pray for the Church in the UK to reach men. Spend some time praying for the UK Church to communicate the message of the Gospel clearly and relevantly to men, and for blessing on all men-focused outreach projects and events (either specific ones you know or general).
- c. Pray too for men who have walked away from church or who have never been – and again, you might want to jot down the names of men you know who fit these categories – pray that God would reveal to them his fathering love and surround them with godly men who show that what it means to be a true disciple living freely and fully for Jesus.
- d. Finally, an absence of men in the church means an absence of spiritual fathers for the younger generations in the way that Paul mentored Timothy and called him his “true son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2). Pray for older men in the church to step up into this role of “spiritual father” in godly ways and for younger men starting to come to church to be mentored and supported, so that in time, they may do the same for others.

7. The potential Father

- a. Think about the boys and young men that you know – again, jot down their names if that’s helpful.
- b. Read 2 Kings 6:15-17 about how Elisha prayed for his young man servant to see and know the might of God, and to not be afraid.
- c. Pray for each of the boys and young men on your list – each one a potential father in time – pray for them to be gentle, wise, strong and loving, and above all to know the power, might and love of God.

Closing session of praying blessing on fathers everywhere

To finish, say this prayer out loud together:

Father God thank you for your perfect fathering
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Shepherded and nurtured; disciplined and challenged
So I can flourish in your purpose and plan for me
And bear my Father's image more fully still.

Father God thank you for your perfect example –
I praise you because you show all fathers how to love;
To shepherd and nurture; discipline and challenge
So their sons and daughters can flourish in this world as you have planned,
And carry your presence to all they meet.

Father God bless all fathers today
With wisdom, with patience, with courage
And above all with love for their children.
Father God bless all children today
With openness to correction, with eagerness to learn
And above all with love for their fathers.
Father God bless all who are fatherless today
Surround them with godly men to teach, affirm and guide
And above all to love with the love of a father –
In your strength. Amen.