

A Biblical Study based on the Words of the Lord's Prayer.

Probably the most common prayer known today is the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew 5: 9 -13 it reads as follows:

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

In studying this prayer, every word is significant. Let us look at the verses in this prayer in detail. Let us tie them in with the teachings of the Bible. In particular let us look at what some of the words mean and or what they imply. I usually quote from the New King James version and sometimes, if the grammar is not too outdated, from the King James version. These are word for word translations. If I use the NIV or some other thought for thought translation, I will specify. The prayer starts with the words "Our Father." In the original Greek the order is reversed it reads "Father our." What do these words signify?

Lesson 1: Our Father

a) Our

We pray "our Father", not "my father" in this prayer. Jesus has us include others in our prayer. We do not pray just for ourselves, but also for others. God is not just my father alone, but I belong to a family of believers who support me and with whom I can pray together. That is one reason we have our weekly prayer meetings as a congregation. There is a very special promise in the Bible when we bring a shared burden to the Lord in prayer. It is found in Matthew 18:19-20. Jesus promises:

Again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

I remember planning to go away to school when I was 19. Unlike today, at that time, trains were less expensive than planes. I was to take a two-day train ride to get to my destination, but I needed some more information to establish whether I should attend that school or not. I did not want to take the two-day trip and then discover I had best come back home again. Consequently, I asked my mother to pray with me. Jesus had promised that if two agree on earth that the Father in heaven would hear our petition. I still remember the joy of receiving a letter about two days before my departure with exactly the information I needed. It was an answer to our prayer.

I remember a particular summer in which my mother was in the intensive care unit in the hospital. My daughter had come home, because she was told if she wished to see her grandmother once more while she was yet living, she should not delay. Otherwise there was no guarantee. Meanwhile saints all over the country were praying for my mother. God answered those prayers. Mom made a miraculous recovery. During my mother's three week stay in the hospital we had at least 4 answers to specific needs. God answered many of our prayers. We were not alone in petitioning "our" Father for help. There were others praying with us and for us.

The word "our" implies that we are not alone, but together, in serving the Lord.

The word "our" is personal. It is a possessive adjective. It indicates that God is not only "the Father", or perhaps "a father", but he is also and in particular "my father". He is "our father" and we belong to him and he belongs to us. We can come to him for he is ours. If he is our father, then this indicates a relationship with him.

Not just anyone can phone up the Prime Minister of Canada, or the King of Sweden, or the President of the United States and expect to be able to speak with them. However, if the son of the Prime Minister, or the daughter of the King, or the child of the President wants to speak with their father, they have access, unlike someone from the general public who cannot say they want to speak to their father. Likewise, we can come to God in prayer at any time day or night. He loves us and cares for us because he is "ours".

Unfortunately, we know of fathers here on earth that do not have a loving relationship with their children. They are not faithful in loving and caring for their children. However, God is the perfect father. Even if you had an earthly father who let you down, you can pray "our Father in heaven", because God will never let you down. He loves you and will never leave you if you ask him into your life and if you go through life with him. He is the faithful Father.

When we pray "our Father", we also think of others and pray for others, because we say "our," which is plural. When asked by a lawyer what the greatest commandment is, Jesus said to him,

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt 22:37-39).

In the words "our Father", we recognize that Jesus includes both God and our neighbour. These words are linked with the greatest commandment and the second which is like it. Jesus says: ***On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matt 22:40).*** Can we say that in the first two words of the Lord's prayer we have all the Law and the Prophets implied? Sure. In the first two words of the Lord's Prayer, all the Law and the Prophets are implied. We can call this the law of Christ. The law of Christ is to honour God and think of and assist others. The Bible says: ***Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. (Gal 6:2).*** The Apostle Paul teaches us to include everyone in our prayers. He writes,

Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour (1 Tim 2:1-3).

Let us pray for one another, let us pray together, let us pray for others. Let us learn from Jesus and from the Lord's prayer.

But perhaps someone is asking: "Who exactly is my neighbour?" Who exactly is included in this "our"? Perhaps the disciples thought of their group when they prayed "our Father". The Jews in Jerusalem may have thought "our" means the people of Israel. Actually, the lawyer asked Jesus exactly the same question.

But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:29-37).

There is so much opportunity to be a good neighbour in our neighbourhood, in our city, and in our communities. However, this "our" also includes our families. The Bible says:

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:8).

In Luke 16: 19-31, Jesus relates the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate. The rich man did not fulfil his duty to the poor beggar, nor did he show the love and compassion that God expected him to. I sometimes feel that we in the West are the rich man, and our brothers and sisters in Africa and the underdeveloped countries are Lazarus. I feel convicted that there is so much more that we could be doing. Jesus says:

And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).

But he also says:

Then He will answer them, saying, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (Matthew 25:45).

In summary, this word “our” is a great blessing to us. We are not alone. We have a great God and Father who loves and cares for us. We have a family of believers supporting us. We are part of a spiritual family. It is our family. We have the privilege of praying together and for one another. However, the word “our” also shows us great opportunities and obligations. We are not to think of or live for ourselves but for others. Christ came to serve and give his life for us. We are to follow his example.

Questions for Part a) Our

1. Why did Jesus teach us to pray “our Father”, not “my Father”?
2. What difference would it make to leave out the word “our” and just pray “Father”?
3. What else does the word “our” imply?
4. How does the great commandment in Matthew 22:37-39 relate to the words “our Father”?
5. How does the story of the good Samaritan in Luke 10: 29-37 relate to this?
6. What other lessons can we learn from the first word in the Lord’s prayer?

Addendum:

Here is more information on the answer to prayer when mom was in intensive care:

Shortly after her 80th birthday, mom was admitted to hospital with blood poisoning. While in the hospital she suffered a stroke. Then her heart did not work correctly anymore. It did not take long until she was in the intensive care unit at McMaster Hospital. This was shortly before McMaster became a Children’s Hospital. My daughter, who worked for Ontario Pioneer camp up near Huntsville was told to come home. The doctors said if she wanted to see her grandmother alive one more time, she had better come now. Mom fell into a Coma. The intensive care doctor told us not to let her be resuscitated, when her heart stops, because he said even if she came out alive she would not be able to live a normal life again and her quality of life would not be worth living anyway. My wife had been taking a course in Cape Cod, and after mom had been admitted into hospital, my wife was asked to come home because mom looked like she wasn’t going to make it. So my wife flew home. Shortly thereafter I went by car to pick up the rest of her belongings in Cape Cod. On the trip back to Ontario I was driving, weeping and screaming out to God, “Lord, please give me one more year with my mother. Even if I have to nurse her, please give me one more year.” Not long after that the family was in the hospital and Nancy went in to see mom, whom she knew was in a Coma. Nancy said, “Hi.” And mom opened her eyes and said, “Hi, Nancy.” Nancy, came out to the waiting room all excited and said that mom had opened her eyes and spoken to her. A miracle happened. Instead of one more year, the Lord gave me three more years with my mother. Mom got so well that she would still drive into Toronto weekly, all by herself, using the 401, and getting off at Dixon Road. Glory be to God. It was not until three years later, after more setbacks that she passed away.

b) Father

i) In the context of the Lord's prayer, it is good to remember that the word "Father" does occur in isolation since the possessive adjective "our" precedes it. We should not overlook this modifier. We have already observed that in the words "our Father", we recognize that Jesus includes both God and our neighbour. These words are linked with the greatest commandment and the second which is like it. We cannot get to the Father if we do not include the "our". That is we cannot please God if we have hatred in our hearts for others. John writes:

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:15).

In reality, if we wish to have access to the Father, we need to have peace with our brothers and sisters. The "our" must necessarily precede "Father", since Jesus himself says in the sermon on the mount:

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24).

In other words you cannot properly pray to the Father without your heart and actions acknowledging the "our" that precedes it.

ii) If God is our Father then we belong to a family, His family. In Ephesians 3:14-15 we read:

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

If God is our Father, it also implies that only he is our Father. A Father can have many children, but a child cannot have many fathers. And if there are many fathers, then not every father is "our" father. Our characteristics give a hint as to who our father might be. In John 8:41 & 44, Jesus said to those who were seeking to end his life:

You do the deeds of your father . . . You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.

The spiritual title "Father" should be reserved for God alone. Jesus says:

you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven (Matthew 23:8b-9).

That is why, unlike the Catholic Church, we do not call our pastors, "father", but brother or sister, since ***you are all brethren***. When the Greek word "adelphoi", or brethren, is used it is not

gender exclusive, in other words sisters may also be in the group addressed as “adelphoi”. When, on the news, I hear the pope referred to as the “Holy Father,” I cringe. That borders on blasphemy. Only God alone is the “Holy Father”.

iii) If God is our father and we are his children, we must exhibit his characteristics. My dad had one ear that was round on top and the other ear that had a tip at the top with a dent below it. My mother asked my dad, why his ears were that way. Dad answered that as a child his mother always laid him on one side when she put him to bed, and that is why one ear was dented. Well, when I was born, one of my ears was round on top and the other one had a tip at the top with a dent below it, and my mother did not always lay me on one side when she put me to bed. Why then? Because I inherited characteristics from my father.

In like manner if we are God’s children, some of his characteristics will be evident in us. Peter writes:

but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Jesus said:

“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. (John 8:42)

John claims:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3).

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God (1 John 3:9).

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14a).

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit (1 John 4: 13).

In Galatians 5:22-23 we read about those characteristics that we will display if we are part of God’s spiritual family. ***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*** In the verses preceding the fruit of those who are not from God is shown. And Jesus says: ***You will know them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:16)***

iv) We know that everyone has a longing for God, even if they do not know what it is that they long for. Blaise Pascal talks about a God-shaped vacuum within us that only God can fill. And, even those people who are alienated from God, have some of his characteristics because He is the creator of us all and although not displaying the fruit of the Spirit, because they are not his spiritual children, they have certain characteristics that God has given them.

For example, God is righteous, and so we have in us a knowledge of right and wrong. We have a conscience. Paul says that even heathens who have never heard the gospel have this:

for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them (Romans 2:14-15).

We know that even primitive cultures practice religion. There is a knowledge of a higher being innate in humankind. God is eternal and all people have a soul that continues to live, even when it is separated from the body when the body dies. ***The dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).*** God is spirit and according to Genesis 2:7, he gave us this breath of life.

God is all-knowing, and he has given us the ability to know, to reason, to think, to use logic and make conclusions.

God is all-wise and everyone has wisdom. We do not possess God's ultimate qualities, however many of our characteristics are a limited reflection of his, because in a specific sense He is the Father of all.

v) If God is our Father, then we are not the product of blind evolutionary chance, but we are his creation. The Bible says ***So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:27).***

Natural Selection is a mechanism that God has placed in every species for its survival. In this sense we see micro-evolution all around us. However, even micro-evolution is governed by the laws of genetics. Yet for macro-evolution to take place, there is just not enough time from the beginning of the universe until now, nor does the second law of thermodynamics allow it.

In his booklet, *Creation or Evolution*, Winkie Pratney writes: "There is just not enough time to build ordered structures on the level of the complexity of Man." "In 10 billion years, there are only 10^{17} seconds." "If all the necessary atoms were put together and jostled at a consistent reaction rate so that they combined correctly and in the right sequence, one a second, there is just not enough time, even beginning at the origin of the universe." We are a complex of 10^{23} , so that even if a progressive mutation took place every second instead of every few million years, there would still not be enough time.¹

In Lee Strobel's Book, *A Case for a Creator* we read "that is why a code is needed to "build" the human. However the complexity of the DNA code gets us right back to the complexity problem. And all this concerns only the arrangements of the right sequence. You still have dead matter.

¹ Pratney, Winkie. *Creation or Evolution?* (Edmonton, AB: Youth With a Mission, 1971), page 6.

How to achieve life from non-life is still another issue altogether. No theories, other than it just happened, have been put forward that have any scientific basis.”²

vi) As Father of his family, God cares for his children. He provides for our needs.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning (James 1:17).

God is good. On earth there are good fathers, average fathers and also bad fathers that are not loving or do not fulfill their obligations. God is perfect in his goodness. Spiritually God has provided all we need through the plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Physically, if the earth rotated slower or faster, if the sun were closer or farther away, if Jupiter did not have the mass it has, and orbit as it does, if the atmosphere was different, we would not be able to survive on planet earth. Everything is fine tuned for life on earth. Also, the properties of the universe are very fine tuned. If water froze or became gas at a different temperature, if hydrogen did not have the properties it has, if the properties of fire were different, we could not exist. “Rees maintains that six numbers in particular govern our universe and that if any of these values were changed even very slightly things could not be as they are. For example, for the universe to exist as it does requires that hydrogen be converted to helium in a precise but comparatively stately manner – specifically, in a way that converts seven one thousandths of its mass to energy. Lower that value very slightly - from 0.007 percent to 0.006 percent, say – and no transformation could take place: the universe would consist of hydrogen and nothing else. Raise the value very slightly to 0.008 percent – and bonding would be so wildly prolific that the hydrogen would long since have been exhausted. In either case with the slightest tweaking of the numbers of the universe as we know and need it would not be here.”³ According to the big bang theory these properties of the universe were all fixed in the first seconds of it coming to be. It seems more like the universe was created according to a plan, rather than blind chance, perhaps like the evolving of a child from infancy to adulthood which happens according to each individual’s DNA present at birth. God is the engineer of these plans. They are programmed for our needs.

vii) As Father, God knows us. He knows our problems. He knows who we are. He knows how we are. I have two daughters. I know them well. I do not know the children of my friends as well or in the same manner as I know my own children. In like manner God knows us, and cares for us. He made us and knows us better than we know ourselves. He looks out for us.

As our Father, God loves us. What is more, God not only loves, but the Bible says: ***God is love (1 John 4:16b)***. Listen to what God himself says:

Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you (Isaiah 49:15).

My own dad said good-bye to his parents when he was taken away from them by the Germans during the Second World War. He never saw his parents again. However, this Bible verse from

² Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), Chapter 8/9.

³ Bryson, Bill. *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. (Canada: Random House of Canada Limited, 2004), page 6.

Isaiah was a comfort to him. It was the verse read at his baptism. He had a heavenly Father, who took care of him even after the war.

As Father of his family, God has the Authority. We are to give him due respect as Father. Let us come into his presence with reverence and glorify his name. He is Father, worthy of utmost respect. God is good.

viii) Make note of the next point. Since Jesus calls God his Father, and teaches us to call God, Father, Jesus makes himself our brother. He once more humbles himself, as we read in Phillipians 2:5-9. By teaching us to pray “Our Father,” Jesus includes us in his family and indicates that he wishes to walk beside us, and share our fellowship, our joys and also our tears. Indeed, he has promised to be with us every day until the end of this age (Matthew 28: 20).

Questions for Part b) Father

1. What does the word Father imply?
2. Why does Jesus teach us to call God, Father?
3. If God is our Father, what does that say about us?
4. Why do we call our pastors, brother or sister, and not father?
- 5 What characteristics of our Father do Christians exhibit?
6. How do we know that we are not the product of blind evolutionary chance?
7. What evidence is there that the universe was designed according to a plan?
8. How do we know that God cares for us?
9. What should be our attitude towards God, our Father?
10. Jesus calls God, Father, and teaches us to call God, Father. Why is this significant?