

A Revolutionary Teaching

Praying into the “Our” of Our Father

By David Chotka

We say it without thinking much about it.

In fact, we say the words as a rote memory prayer to close the Wednesday prayer meeting or the small group time. If you are in a liturgical tradition, it is likely that you say it every time you gather for worship. In fact, if you are a believer at all, you have probably uttered these words:

Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be Your Name . . .

Yet when Jesus said it, every heart in earshot snapped to attention. When they heard Jesus pray and call God “Father” in the way that He did—using the homespun word a child would use to address his dad—they would have been perplexed at first, and then concerned. You see, they would have had to choose one of three ways to respond:

1. *Follow Him*—as He had to be the Messiah,
2. *Test Him*—to determine whether He might (or might not) be the Anointed One, or
3. *Kill Him*—as a heretic who falsely dared to lay claim to the Messianic role.

In fact, Jesus’ family showed up to “get Him out of Dodge.” They were concerned that He had utterly lost His mind (see Mark 3:21). In an early healing account, the text tells us that the leaders in the temple had had enough of this “blasphemy”:

For this reason [the Jews] tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18).

Yet we pray it regularly, and don't give it much thought.

Bold Declaration

Intrigued by texts like the John 5 and Matthew 6 passages, diligent scholars in the last century decided to investigate the phenomenon around this title for God.

In 1962, an eminent German New Testament scholar published a summary of his extensive research on the title used by Jesus for God in almost every prayer—"Father" ("Abba" in the Lord's native Aramaic). That scholar, Joachim Jeremias, spent years examining every extant prayer in the history of Judaism, in all the Hebrew Scriptures, in the Rabbinic literature, the Dead Sea scrolls, the commentaries, the Targums, and comments in what was known as the Mishnah.

After thoroughly examining every kind of Jewish literature, this scholar discovered a singular truth: that before Jesus of Nazareth arrived on the scene, no one, *not one single person* in all the flow of Hebrew history, had dared to call God by that name.¹

To clarify, before the arrival of our Lord into the flow of human history, there were 14 biblical texts that pointed to God using the imagery of God as "Father,"² though most of those instances were analogies, and a few passages that implied God was the father of Israel. Here is a typical one:

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. . . (Psalm 103:13).

Here the compassion of the Lord is compared to a father's care, yet God is not directly called "father." There are a few

places in which God is addressed as “the father of the nation,” or as the father of Israel as a people together. Yet in all of these, there is a collective understanding, not that God was the dad to a person, but that God caused the nation to be born—the Creator of the collective group of people that God called Israel.

And then Jesus showed up and called God “Father.”

The Anointed One

Now, anyone in the time of Jesus who prayed this way was staking out a claim that He was in fact the Messiah—the One spoken of in scattered texts throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, Psalms 2 and 89 respectively, whose future actions were summarized in Ezekiel 37: This would be One from the line of David, who would raise up a mighty, resurrected army of all Israel’s righteous dead, who would see them infilled with the Spirit. This One would retake the land of Israel from any conquering power and would reign in equity and justice on the throne of His father David.

This was in harmony with texts which foretold that there would be an “anointed one” born of the line of David. God would raise up a Messiah, an Anointed One. Here is a portion of Psalm 89:19–20, 25–29:

Once you spoke in a vision, to your faithful people you said: “I have bestowed strength on a warrior; I have raised up a young man from among the people.

I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him. . . .

I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers. He will call out to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.’ And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. I

will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.”

When Jesus (born of David’s line) called God “Father,” He was laying claim to that role! Christian faith holds that He was in fact the One. Historically, in the Gospels the response was varied:

1. Some followed Him.
2. Some tested Him.
3. Some killed Him.

Then God raised Him from the dead, setting our future into motion.

Our Invitation to Our Father

We know He was the Messiah—and could call God His Father. But why did He tell *us* to pray, saying, “Our Father”?

Pay attention to the first word—“our.”

Romans 8:12–17 tells us that when we are born of God, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit, and tells us that we are born of God. The experience of that union is that we cry out “Abba, Father.”

The “our” in “Our Father” does not merely refer to us “thinking pleasant thoughts of being attached to all Christians everywhere.” The “our” refers to the believer being co-joined to Jesus’ very being. His Spirit is imparted and becomes our indwelling Spirit. And Jesus’ Messianic privilege of calling God “Father” gets imparted, transferred over to us!

Jesus prayed “My Father.”

We, joined to Him, say “Our Father.” That means “Jesus and me in holy union, crying out to God together.”

What belonged only to Jesus has now been conferred, conveyed over to us.

The “our” means “my inner spirit being merged with the very Spirit that belongs to Jesus the Son.” Because we have received the Spirit of the Son Jesus, we have received the ability of God the Son to call God “Father” by obtaining entrance into His relationship with God.

The believer saying this prayer begins by affirming this declaration: “I dwell in Him and He dwells in me! Together, we address God as ‘Our Father.’”

Two astonishing benefits flow through that inconceivable union:

1. We receive Jesus’ very ministry—the extension of His calling to us, to win a lost world to saving faith, and
2. We receive Jesus’ very Spirit, *who then prays through us “with groanings too deep for words”* (Rom. 8:26, esv) to reshape the earth into the image of Jesus Christ our Lord!

The Lord’s Prayer is a summary of Jesus’ magnificent teaching, a rallying cry that commands us to enter into His relationship with God to pray into everything that was central to His mission.

It is an incredible prayer.

¹“We can say quite definitely that there is *no analogy at all* in the whole literature of Jewish prayer for God being addressed as Abba.” Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (SCM Press: Norwich, Great Britain, 1967), p. 57.

²See Deuteronomy 32:6; 2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 22:10, 28:6; Psalm 68:5, 89:26, 103:13; Isaiah 9:6, 63:16, 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4, 31:9; Malachi 1:6, 2:10

DR. DAVID CHOTKA is the founder and director of Spirit-Equip Ministries and serves as the chair of Alliance Pray! (C&MA Canada). He is a published author, conference speaker, and a prayer mobilizer. David has served as a lead pastor for 30-plus years and has written extensively on The Lord's Prayer. For his teaching on the entire Lord's Prayer, purchase *Power Praying*.