

The prayer Jesus taught us

Lesson 2 - Our Father in heaven

1 Introduction

The prayer is deeply meaningful. It isn't a magic formula, an 'abracadabra' which plugs into some secret charm or spell. It is something we can mean with our minds (though it will stretch our thinking) as well as with our lips. It implies strongly that we humans can and should use our ordinary language in talking to the cCreator of the universe, and that he wants and intends us to do so. It implies, in other words, that we share with the one true God a world of meaning which he wants us to explore.

N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part One*, Chapters 1-15 (SPCK, 2004) pp. 56-57

The early church solemnly entrusted this prayer to the baptismal candidates for use as their first prayer after baptism. The Lord's Prayer really is the First Creed, which unites the holy catholic church all over the world.

Frederik Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1 The Christbook, Matthew 1-12* (Eerdmans 1987) p. ??

Prayer begins with a demonstration of our belief in God and a blessed act of faith at the moment when we say, 'Father, who art in heaven.' For we are thereby both adoring God and demonstrating our faith, and this form of address is the result.

Tertullian, *On Prayer* 2.1

Hindus would pray: Our Father who is us

Muslims cannot pray Our Father. Sacrilege!

New Agers pray: Our Father who is in us

Atheists pray: Our Father who does not exist but I am angry at you!

Racists pray: Father of only those who are like us

2 God is a Father

2.1 Is God a man?

Calling God "Father" does not mean that God is masculine. God is beyond the categories of gender, of masculine or feminine. None of our descriptions of God is adequate. God, who is "in heaven", whose name is holy, cannot be fully known by us.

2.2 God is Father of Israel

God is first of all the father of the people of Israel. It deals here with a divine paternity which is generally unique in its kind, connected as it is to the historical events involving the people of Israel. God is the father of Israel because God had created by means of

election and covenant, an existence for Israel which thus became the firstborn child of God, God's very own people (Ex 4,22-23; Dt 32,6-8). There are two components in God's paternity: authority and love.

God is also the father of individuals who have a close relationship with Israel. This involves eminent persons such as the king or the Messiah (Ps 89,27; 2Sam 7,14; Ps 2,7). On the paternity of God for the individual, the authors of the later books of the Old Testament worked towards a change of perspective, i.e. towards greater universalism. Each human being may become a child of God, indeed it is a reality if he/she is holy and faithful to God (Sir 23,1-4; 51,10; Wis 2,13.16.18; 5,5; 14,3).

<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/pater/excursus.html>

Even when God saved Israel from Egypt, he spoke to them as a Father. Moses had to tell Pharaoh: "Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." (Ex. 4:22-23)

When we turn to the Old Testament, we find that God is only seldom spoken of as father -- in fact only on fourteen occasions, but all these are important. God is Israel's father, but now not mythologically as procreator or ancestor, but as the one who elected, delivered, and saved his people Israel by mighty deeds in history. This designation of God as father in the Old Testament comes to full fruition, however, in the message of the prophets. God is Israel's father. But the prophets must make constant accusation against God's people that Israel has not given God the honor which a son should give to his father.

A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father. where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts. (Mal. 1:6; cf. Deut. 32:5-6; Jer. 3:19-20)

And Israel's answer to this rebuke is a confession of sin and the ever-reiterated cry, "Thou art our father" (Isa. 63:15-16, 64:7-8; Jer. 3A). And God's reply to this cry is mercy beyond all understanding:

"Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? . . . Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord." (Jer. 31:20)

Can there be any deeper dimension to the term "father" than this compulsive, forgiving mercy which is beyond comprehension? When we turn to Jesus' preaching, the answer must be: Yes, here there is something quite new, absolutely new -- the word *abba*.

Joachim Jeremias, *The Lord's Prayer* (Fortress Press, 1964) and online on <https://docslide.com.br/documents/exegesis-jeremias-joachim-the-lords-prayer.html>

2.3 Father - or daddy?

From the prayer in Gethsemane, Mark 14:36, we learn that Jesus addressed God with this word, and this point is confirmed not only by Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. [We] examined the prayer literature of Late Judaism -- a large, rich literature, all too little

explored. The result of this examination was that in no place in this immense literature is this invocation of God as abba to be found. How is this to be explained? The church fathers Chrysostom, Theodor of Mopsuestia, and Theodore of Cyrrhus who originated from Antioch (where the populace spoke the West Syrian dialect of Aramaic) and who probably had Aramaic-speaking nurses, testify unanimously that abba was the address of the small child to his father. And the Talmud confirms this when it says: "When a child experiences the taste of wheat [i.e., when it is weaned], it learns to say abba and imma ["dear father" and "dear mother"]." Abba and imma are thus the first sounds which the child stammers. Abba was an everyday word, a homely family-word, a secular word, the tender address of the child to its father: "Dear father." No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner. Jesus did it always, in all his prayers which are handed down to us, with one single exception, the cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46); here the term of address for God was prescribed by the fact that Jesus was quoting Psalm 22:1. Jesus thus spoke with God as a child speaks with his father, simply, intimately, securely, childlike in manner. But his invocation of God as abba is not to be understood merely psychologically, as a step toward growing apprehension of God. Rather we learn from Matthew 11:27 that Jesus himself viewed this childlike form of address for God as the heart of that revelation which had been granted him by the Father. In this term abba the ultimate mystery of his mission and his authority is expressed. He, to whom the Father had granted full knowledge of God, had the messianic prerogative of addressing him with the familiar address of a child. This term abba is an ipsissima vox of Jesus and contains in nuce his message and his claim to have been sent from the Father.

Joachim Jeremias, *The Lord's Prayer* (Fortress Press, 1964) and online on <https://docslide.com.br/documents/exegesis-jeremias-joachim-the-lords-prayer.html>

The baptismal candidates had gone down into the waters, died, come up into newness of resurrection-life, and the first thing they do is to cry out jubilantly, exultingly. 'Abba, Father!' They are in the family! [...] Jesus, the Son par excellence, used the word Abba. The Spirit enables us to use it. So we approach the Father with confidence. 'We are bold to say Our Father, as the ancient liturgies had it.

Vivienne Stacey, *Reflections on Surah Fatiha and the Lord's Prayer* (1986), online on <http://docplayer.net/35129619-Reflections-on-surah-fatiha-and-the-lord-s-prayer.html>

Now let us look at parts of this prayer in greater detail. Abba = "Father" is the Aramaic word Jesus used ("Daddy"). See Mark 14 v.36. Cf Romans 8 vv 15,16; Galatians 4 v6. The word Abba passed into the vocabulary of the early church to describe the relationship between God and the believer. The believer becomes a partaker in the divine nature (2 Peter 1 v.4; 1 Peter 1 vv3,23)

Vivienne Stacey, *Reflections on Surah Fatiha and the Lord's Prayer* (1986), online on <http://docplayer.net/35129619-Reflections-on-surah-fatiha-and-the-lord-s-prayer.html>

When Moses approached God on Mount Sinai, he heard a voice saying, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." An infinite chasm separates us from the transcendent God. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus invites us to draw near to God who is beyond human understanding, who dwells in mystery, who is all holy. We can call God "our Father".

<https://www.missionariesofprayer.org/2010/03/lords-prayer/>

To call the sovereign God "Father" was something generally common for Jewish worshippers. Jesus does refer to God as "abba" is commonly known, however this phrase does not mean "daddy" as is popularly thought.

Exegesis of The Lord's Prayer Matthew 6:9-13, online on <http://nilnisiverum.blogspot.nl/2010/11/exegesis-of-lords-prayer-matthew-69-13.html>

The word 'father' carries stronger connotations of authority than we in the west associate with the word. The father is the one responsible for the child: he is the child's progenitor and so its guardian, provider, and head. The word, therefore, has elements of strength in it beyond its obvious tenderness.

Frederik Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1 The Christbook, Matthew 1-12* (Eerdmans 1987) p. ??

It begins with the word of intimacy, Father. In the Aramaic Jesus spoke, that would be 'Abba', Jesus' own characteristic address to God. Nobody had ever addressed God like that. The word was used by little children of their daddy. And Jesus, who alone had that intimacy or relationship with God as his dear daddy, gives his true disciples the right to come in on the same level of intimacy, and call God Abba.

Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew* (IVP, 1988) p. 100

The second gospel gives us a taste of what Jesus meant when he addressed God with the expression 'Abba' (Mk 14,16). It is an Aramaic word used as a form of courtesy towards an elder, and moreover it became adopted in the language used by children in a family, even if they were grown-up, when they addressed the father. By calling God "Abba", Jesus manifested the unique relationship between himself and God, and at the same time showed the familiarity, the fidelity, the reverence, the availability which he enjoyed. No prayer, whether ancient Jewish, liturgical or private has ever ventured to address God as "Abba".

<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/pater/excursus.html>

According to the apostle, "as long the heir has not reached his majority, he differs little from a servant, though he be lord of all. He remains under tutors and governors until the time of his maturity appointed by his father." But the "fulness of time" consist of our Lord Jesus Christ coming among us, when those who desire it receive adoption as sons, as Paul says in these words: "For you have not received the spirit of bondage in

fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!’

Origen, *On Prayer* 22.2

2.4 Through Jesus

The Qaddish while using a third person singular address, Jesus uses a second-person address to God as “Our Father” and then with the continuation to petitions. However, throughout the rest of the gospel Jesus will speak of his relationship with the Sovereign Father as distinct from others relationship with God. When Jesus is praying to God he will often refer to Him as “my Father” and when he speaks of God he refers to him distinctly as “my Father”.

Jesus demonstrates his unique usage of “my Father”; while covenant children are children of God, there is a distinct, unique relationship between Christ and God the Father. The ontological relationship the Son has with the Father is what is distinguishing. Covenant children have a relationship with the Father which comes through the mediated representation of Jesus and not on their own. The worshipper is only able to call the Father their Father by grace.

Christ calls the Father his because He is his Father by nature whereas He is ours by grace.

Exegesis of The Lord's Prayer Matthew 6:9-13, online on <http://nilnisiverum.blogspot.nl/2010/11/exegesis-of-lords-prayer-matthew-69-13.html>

The one son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, hath taught us a prayer; and tho He be the Lord Himself, as ye have heard and repeated in the creed, the only Son of God, yet He would not be alone. He is the only Son, and yet would not be alone; He hath vouchsafed to have brethren. For to whom doth He say: “Our Father which art in Heaven?” Whom did He wish us to call our Father save His own Father? Did He grudge us this? Parents sometimes, when they have gotten one, or two, or three children, fear to give birth to any more lest they reduce the rest to beggary. But because the inheritance which He promised us is such as many may possess and no one be straitened, therefore hath He called into His brotherhood the peoples of the nations; and the only Son hath numberless brethren who say, “Our Father which art in Heaven.” So said they who have been before us; and so shall say those who will come after us. See how many brethren the only Son hath in His grace, sharing His inheritance with those for whom He suffered death. We had a father and mother on earth, that we might be born to labors and to death: but we have found other parents, God our Father, and the Church our Mother, by whom we are born unto life eternal. Let us then consider, beloved, whose children we have began to be; and let us live so as becomes those who have such a Father. See how that our Creator had condescended to be our Father!

St Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount*, sermon 7

Jesus includes us in His Sonship. Although He is Son by nature, we are all children of God by the grace of adoption. The emphasis, again, is on the personal nature of this Fatherhood to us, the intimacy of its nature. The emphasis in Scripture is not on a universal Fatherhood of God through creation, but on a saving and personal relationship with Him who is our Father by adoption through the Spirit.

<https://dailyexegetisis.blogspot.nl/2011/09/our-father-in-heaven-lords-prayer.html>

“Father.” This shows that the prayer is for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from faith in whom no one can come to the Father. (John 14:6)

Besides being the Father of Jesus Christ, God is also Father of Christians in every sense. This is not purely a natural phenomenon - everyone is a child of God -, but it is an eschatological gift in Christ. It has its origins from God who has prepared us to conform to the image of His Son so that he may become the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Rom 8,29), and has given in our hearts the Spirit of His Son which cries out: Abba, Father (Gal 4,6). God has chosen us to be His adopted children through Jesus Christ (Eph 1,6). The Holy Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are children of God (Rom 8,16) and we who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, awaiting the adoption as children to be complete and definitive (Rom 8,23). In the meantime, it is through faith that we actualize our divine sonship. "All of you are children of God through Christ Jesus" (Gal 3,26). Whoever has received the Word, has been given the power to be a child of God, to those who believe in his name" (Jn 1,12).

William Hendriksen, *Luke, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids 1978) p. 609

The whole people of Israel was seen as the one son of God. We know, of course, that Mathew present Jesus as the true Son of God, quoting Hosea in his Gospel: Out of Egypt I have called my Son. By being attached to the true Son of God, we become sons of God and we can address God as our Father.

<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/pater/excursus.html>

The final point, and the most astonishing of all, however, has yet to be mentioned: in the Lord's Prayer Jesus authorizes his disciples to repeat the word abba after him. He gives them a share in his sonship and empowers them, as his disciples, to speak with their heavenly Father in just such a familiar, trusting way as a child would with his father. Yes, he goes so far to say that it is this new childlike relationship which first opens the doors to God's reign: "Truly, I say to you, unless you become like children again, you will not find entrance into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 18:3). Children can say "abba"! Only he who, through Jesus, lets himself be given the childlike trust which resides in the word abba finds his way into the kingdom of God. This the apostle Paul also understood; he says twice that there is no surer sign or guarantee of the possession of the Holy Spirit and of the gift of sonship than this, that a man makes bold to repeat this one word Abba, dear Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Perhaps at this' point we get some

inkling why the use of the Lord's Prayer was not a commonplace in the early church and why it was spoken with such reverence and awe.

Joachim Jeremias, *The Lord's Prayer* (Fortress Press, 1964) and online on <https://docslide.com.br/documents/exegesis-jeremias-joachim-the-lords-prayer.html>

With Jesus, biblical revelation of the divine paternity enters a new phase. God is the father of Jesus Christ and the father of Christians.

It is not rare to find in the Pauline letters the expression 'the father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 15,6; 2Cor 1,3; 11,31; Eph 1,13; Col 1,3). On the other hand, Jesus never says 'Our Father' but 'My Father and your Father' (Jn 20,17) distinguishing between 'my Father' (Mt 7,21) and 'your Father' (Mt 5,16).

The self-consciousness of Jesus' sonship is very clear in the Gospels (Lk 2,49; Mk 13,32). He frequently declared himself to be sent by the Father (Jn 3,17.34; 5,23.36.37; 6,44.57 etc...). Jesus also affirmed his preaching the words of the Father (Jn 3,34; 12,49-50; 14,10) and fulfilling the work of the Father (Jn 5,19.36; 9,4).

The gospels contain several prayers of Jesus. But only Mk 15,34 invokes 'God': 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?'. But this cry of the Crucified One is a citation from Ps 22,2. All the other prayers begin with 'Father'; from the joyous cry (Mt 11,25-26) to the invocation during the agony at Gethsemane (Mt 26,39.42), to the entreaty on the Cross (Lk 23,34.36).

<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/pater/excursus.html>

But what matters of deep moment are contained in the Lord's prayer. How many and how great, briefly collected in the words, but spiritually abundant in virtue, so that there is absolutely nothing passed over that is not comprehended in these our prayers and petitions, as in a compendium of heavenly doctrine. [...] The new man, born again and restored to his God by His grace, says "Father," in the first place because he has now begun to be a son. "He came," He says, "to His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in His name." The man, therefore, who has believed in His name, and has become God's son, ought from this point to begin both to give thanks and to profess himself God's son, by declaring that God is his Father in heaven; and also to bear witness, among the very first words of his new birth, that he has renounced an earthly and carnal father, and that he has begun to know as well as to have as a father Him only who is in heaven, as it is written: They who say unto their father and their mother, I have not known you, and who have not acknowledged their own children these have observed Your precepts and have kept Your covenant. Also the Lord in His Gospel has bidden us to call "no man our father upon earth, because there is to us one Father, who is in heaven." And to the disciple who had made mention of his dead father, He replied, "Let the dead bury their dead; " for he had said that his father was dead, while the Father of believers is living.

St Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer* 9

3 God is a good Father

Not all people have good feelings when they think of a father because their own father was awful, or a very bad reflection of how God wants all fathers to be. That is why it is important to see that we address God as Father in heaven. That means, our thoughts are drawn up to the Ideal Father, the perfect one. He is the example for how Fathers should behave. He is not called Father because he resembles earthly fathers, he is not like a father, but he is called Father because he is the archetype of Fatherhood, first in his relationship with Jesus Christ his Son, and via Jesus, also for us. He is the example. If only all of our earthly fathers reflected him more than we would find it so much easier to know God, to believe in God, as our Father in heaven.

As we address Him as Father, we also know that we do not have to beg. We do not need to do hard work to convince God to give us what we need. He is a Father and it is the pleasure of a Father to bless his children.

We are so used to the term 'Father' for God, that we forget easily how comforting this is. If he would only be 'in heaven', he would be distant and scary perhaps. But he is also a good Father.

3.1 So we can approach him with confidence

The most significant Greek legend of the gods is the legend of Prometheus. Prometheus was a god. It was in the days before men possessed fire; and life without fire was a cheerless and a comfortless thing. In pity Prometheus took fire from heaven and gave it as a gift to men. Zeus, the king of the gods, was mightily angry that men should receive this gift. So he took Prometheus and he chained him to a rock in the middle of the Adriatic Sea, where he was tortured with the heat and the thirst of the day, and the cold of the night. Even more, Zeus prepared a vulture to tear out Prometheus' liver, which always grew again, only to be torn out again.

That is what happened to the god who tried to help men. The whole conception is that the gods are jealous, and vengeful, and grudging; and the last thing the gods wish to do is to help men. That is the heathen idea of the attitude of the unseen world to men. The heathen is haunted by the fear of a horde of jealous and grudging gods. So, then, when we discover that the God to whom we pray has the name and the heart of a father it makes literally all the difference in the world. We need no longer shiver before a horde of jealous gods; we can rest in a father's love.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* Vol 1 Chapters 1-10 (Saint Andrew Press, 1977) pp. 200-204

3.2 So we can trust the universe we live in

It settles our relationship to the seen world, to this world of space and time in which we live. It is easy to think of this world as a hostile world. There are the chances and the

changes of life; there are the iron laws of the universe which we break at our peril; there is suffering and death; but if we can be sure that behind this world there is, not a capricious, jealous, mocking god, but a God whose name is Father, then although much may still remain dark, all is now bearable because behind all is love. It will always help us if we regard this world as organized not for our comfort but for our training. Lessing used to say that if he had one question to ask the Sphinx, it would be: "Is this a friendly universe?" If we can be certain that the name of the God who created this world is Father, then we can also be certain that fundamentally this is a friendly universe. To call God Father is to settle our relationship to the world in which we live. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew Vol 1 Chapters 1-10* (Saint Andrew Press, 1977) pp. 200-204

It also settles our relationship with the universe. We will be stuck with many questions and problems about the misery and pain in the universe, but we know that at the heart of all, there is a Father. Theodore Lessing, the German philosopher, used to say that if he could ask the Sphinx one thing, it would be: "Is this a friendly universe?" If we know that the one who created the universe is Father to us, we can be sure that this universe is good.

3.3 So you do not despair about yourself

Knowing that God is a Father also takes away our negative view of ourselves. We know our own hearts, thought, deeds. It is so easy to despise ourselves. The heart knows its own bitterness and no-one knows our unworthiness better than we do ourselves. But we matter to God; we are his children and he loves them.

If we believe that God is Father, it settles our relationship to ourselves. There are times when every man despises and hates himself. He knows himself to be lower than the lowest thing that crawls upon the earth. The heart knows its own bitterness, and no one knows a man's unworthiness better than that man himself.

Mark Rutherford wished to add a new beatitude: "Blessed are those who heal us of our self-despisings." Blessed are those who give us back our self-respect. That is precisely what God does. In these grim, bleak, terrible moments we can still remind ourselves that, even if we matter to no one else, we matter to God; that in the infinite mercy of God we are of royal lineage, children of the King of kings.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew Vol 1 Chapters 1-10* (Saint Andrew Press, 1977) pp. 200-204

3.4 It creates freedom for us to serve him

He gives us his own glory to us. He raises slaves to the dignity of freedom. He crown the human condition with such honour that surpasses the power of nature. He brings to pass what was spoken of old by the voice of the psalmist: "I said, you are gods, and all of you children of the Most High." (ps 82:6, 81:6 LXX) He rescues us from the measure of slavery, giving us by his grace what we did not possess by nature, and permits us to call God "Father, as being admitted to the rank of sons. [...]"

He commands us therefore to take boldness and say in our prayers, "Our Father". We, who are children of earth and slaves and subject by the law of nature to him who created us, call him who is in heaven, "Father". Most fittingly, he enables those who pray to understand this also. Since we recall God "Father" and have been counted worthy of such a distinguished honour, we must lead holy and thoroughly blameless lives. We must behave as is pleasing to our Father and not think or say anything unworthy or unfit for the freedom that has been bestowed on us. [...] The saviour of all very wisely grants us to call God "Father", that we, knowing well that we are sons of God, may behave in a manner worthy of him who has honored us. He will then receive the supplications that we offer in Christ.

Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke*, Homily 71

He wishes himself to be called Father rather than Lord, so that he may give us great confidence in seeking him and great hope in beseeching him. Servants do not always demand what they want nor even always seek with a good conscience things that are righteous. Frequently servants do not consider what pertains to the benefit of their master but to their own benefit. Hence they do not always deserve to be heard. Sons however always make petition because they seek with good conscience what is righteous. They do not consider first what is for their own good but what is for the good of their father. Hence they always deserve to be heard. If you believe yourself to be a son of God, seek those things that are advantageous for you to receive and that it behooves him to bestow. However if you always seek from him carnal and earthly things, you are setting yourself a difficult or impossible task. How would those things benefit you who don't have them, which everywhere he admonishes you to scorn if you did have them?

Anonymous, *Incomplete work on Matthew*, Homily 13

3.5 It gives us responsibility

But how great is the Lord's indulgence! How great His condescension and plenteousness of goodness towards us, seeing that He has wished us to pray in the sight of God in such a way as to call God Father, and to call ourselves sons of God, even as Christ is the Son of God, -a name which none of us would dare to venture on in prayer, unless He Himself had allowed us thus to pray! We ought then, beloved brethren, to remember and to know, that when we call God Father, we ought to act as God's children; so that in the measure in which we find pleasure in considering God as a Father, He might also be able to find pleasure in us. Let us converse as temples of God, that it may be plain that God dwells in us. Let not our doings be degenerate from the Spirit; so that we who have begun to be heavenly and spiritual, may consider and do nothing but spiritual and heavenly things; since the Lord God Himself has said, "Them that honour me I will honour; and he that despises me shall be despised." The

blessed apostle also has laid down in his epistle: "You are not your own; for you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear about God in your body."

St Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer* 9

4 God is our Father

The Lord's Prayer is a family-affair. It is to our common Father. It is worth noting that there are no singular pronouns in this prayer. No I, me or mine, writes Barclay. It is in the plural. We together talk to our Father. Prayer is something we do together in the first place.

If we have needs, problems, issues, we pray together to God. But even when we pray alone, we are aware that we do so as part of God's worldwide family. And we have no right to ask anything of God that would harm other people of the family of God. No-one can claim a special relationship with God over someone else. We stand in an equal relationship with him.

When we address God, we address him on behalf of the other children too. And sometimes, when I cannot pray, your pray for me by saying, our Father. I am part of your prayers if you do this. And when you are in a bad period and you cannot pray, worry not too much. Our prayers to God carry you through.

The Lord's prayer plants a democratizing time bomb in culture; it is both a leveller and elevator.

Frederik Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1 The Christbook, Matthew 1-12* (Eerdmans 1987) p. 296

If we believe that God is Father, it settles our relationship to our fellow-men. If God is Father, he is Father of all men. The Lord's Prayer does not teach us to pray My Father; it teaches us to pray Our Father. It is very significant that in the Lord's Prayer the words I, me, and mine never occur; it is true to say that Jesus came to take these words out of life and to put in their place we, us, and ours. God is not any man's exclusive possession. The very phrase Our Father involves the elimination of self. The fatherhood of God is the only possible basis of the brotherhood of man.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew Vol 1 Chapters 1-10* (Saint Andrew Press, 1977) pp. 200-204

Before all things, the Teacher of peace and the Master of unity would not have prayer to be made singly and individually, as for one who prays to pray for himself alone. For we say not "My Father, which art in heaven," nor "Give me this day my daily bread; "nor does each one ask that only his own debt should be forgiven him; nor does he request for himself alone that he may not be led into temptation, and delivered from evil. Our prayer is public and common; and when we pray, we pray not for one, but for the whole people, because we the whole people are one. The God of peace and the Teacher of concord, who taught unity, willed that one should thus pray for all, even as

He Himself bore us all in one. This law of prayer the three children observed when they were shut up in the fiery furnace, speaking together in prayer, and being of one heart in the agreement of the spirit; and this the faith of the sacred Scripture assures us, and in telling us how such as these prayed, gives an example which we ought to follow in our prayers, in order that we may be such as they were: "Then these three," it says, "as if from one mouth sang an hymn, and blessed the Lord." They spoke as if from one mouth, although Christ had not yet taught them how to pray. And therefore, as they prayed, their speech was availing and effectual, because a peaceful, and sincere, and spiritual prayer deserved well of the Lord. Thus also we find that the apostles, with the disciples, prayed after the Lord's ascension: "They all," says the Scripture, "continued with one accord in prayer, with the women, and Mary who was the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren." They continued with one accord in prayer, declaring both by the urgency and by the agreement of their praying, that God, "who makes men to dwell of one mind in a house," only admits into the divine and eternal home those among whom prayer is unanimous.

St Cyprian, On the Lord's Prayer 9

This once again takes away hatred, quells pride, casts out envy and brings in the mother of all good things, charity. By inward prayer the inequality of human things is thwarted. It shows how nearly equal are the king and the poor person in all those matters that are most indispensable and of greatest weight. Behind those closed doors before God, we are all equals.

Chrysostom, The Gospel of Mathew, Homily 19.4

It is worth noting that there is no singular pronouns in this prayer; they are all plural. It begins with OUR Father, When we pray we must remember that we are part of God's worldwide family of believers. We have no right to ask for ourselves anything that would harm another member of the family. If we are praying in the will of God, the answer will be a blessing to all of God's people in one way or another.

Warren Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary Volume 1, p. 26

When Jesus gives us the right to call his Father by the address 'our father', he is passing on something of his own priceless relation to God. This is Jesus' greatest gift in the Lord's Prayer. Without much celebration, in this simple text, believers are adopted into the family of God. [...] The OT also referred to God as Father, usually in expressions such as 'like a Father' (yet see Isa 63:16, 64:8 NEB). For Jesus, God is not simply like a Father, behind whom stands a more awesome God. God is Father. [...] The 'our' means we belong and are at home. It is a possessive pronoun meaning that God the Father owns us, yet gives himself to us so that He is ours and we are his. In the simple 'our' is the joy of the whole Gospel. [...]

The word "our" is significant, because it turns even individual prayer into prayer for others. [...] The our teaches that when we address the Father we address him for the rest of us, too.

Frederik Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1 The Christbook, Matthew 1-12* (Eerdmans 1987) p. ??

5 In heaven

God's omnipotence is hidden in the title and reverence portrayed as the kingdom citizen approaches the holy throne. The Father's location is in heaven emphasizing His sovereignty over all of creation.

While being encouraged to come before their King, it is paramount to acknowledge their position in light of God.

Praying to God, the worshipper is calling to the Father in the name of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit soliciting all at once.

This Father is not only our God - he is also the God of the whole cosmos. He inhabits the heavens. This against new agers who think that they should pray to our Father in us, or hindus who think that they should pray to our Father who is us. There is a crucial distinction between God and us; he is almighty, holy, transcendent.

He is in heaven. This shows that he may be a Father - but he is also high and lifted up. Holy and almighty. "It is very easy to cheapen and sentimentalize the whole idea of fatherhood of God, and to make it an excuse for an easy-going, comfortable religion. "He is a good fellow and all will be well". [...] It is Our Father in heaven to whom we pray. The love is there, but the holiness is there too."

Exegesis of The Lord's Prayer Matthew 6:9-13, online on <http://nilnisiverum.blogspot.nl/2010/11/exegesis-of-lords-prayer-matthew-69-13.html>

[These words] remind us of the holiness of God. It is very easy to cheapen and to sentimentalize the whole idea of the fatherhood of God, and to make it an excuse for an easy-going, comfortable religion. "He's a good fellow and all will be well." As Heine said of God: "God will forgive. It is his trade." If we were to say Our Father, and stop there, there might be some excuse for that; but it is Our Father in heaven to whom we pray. The love is there, but the holiness is there, too.

We must never use the word Father in regard to God cheaply, easily, and sentimentally. God is not an easy-going parent who tolerantly shuts his eyes to all sins and faults and mistakes. This God, whom we can call Father, is the God whom we must still approach with reverence and adoration, and awe and wonder. God is our Father in heaven, and in God there is love and holiness combined.

They remind us of the power of God. In human love there is so often the tragedy of frustration. We may love a person and yet be unable to help him achieve something, or to stop him doing something. Human love can be intense--and quite helpless. Any

parent with an erring child, or any lover with a wandering loved one knows that. But when we say, 'Our Father in heaven,' we place two things side by side. We place side by side the love of God and the power of God. We tell ourselves that the power of God is always motivated by the love of God, and can never be exercised for anything but our good; we tell ourselves that the love of God is backed by the power of God, and that therefore its purposes can never be ultimately frustrated or defeated. It is love of which we think, but it is the love of God. When we pray Our Father in heaven we must ever remember the holiness of God, and we must ever remember the power which moves in love, and the love which has behind it the undefeatable power of God. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* Vol 1 Chapters 1-10 (Saint Andrew Press, 1977) pp. 200-204

We have heard whom we ought to call upon and with what hope of an eternal inheritance we have begun to have a Father in Heaven; let us now hear what we must ask of Him. Of such a Father what shall we ask? Do we not ask rain of Him to-day, and yesterday, and the day before? This is no great thing to have asked of such a Father, and yet ye see with what sighings and with what great desire we ask for rain when death is feared—when that is feared which none can escape. For sooner or later every man must die, and we groan, and pray, and travail in pain, and cry to God that we may die a little later. How much more ought we to cry to Him that we may come to that place where we shall never die!

St Augustine, *Sermon on the Mount*, sermon 7

Third, this God is not a man-made idol. He is the living God who dwells in 'heaven'. N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, Part One, Chapters 1-15 (SPCK, 2004) pp. 58-59

Let the new people, therefore, who are called to an eternal inheritance freely employ the word of the New Testament and say, "Our Father who art in heaven," that is, the place where holiness and justice reign. For God is not contained spatially. The heavens may be in a sense 'higher' created bodies of the world, even while remaining created, and so cannot exist apart from some spatial location. But do not think of this spatially, as if the birds are nearer to God than we. It is not written that "the Lord is closer to tall people" or "nearer to those who live on high hills". For it is written, "The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit", namely, close to those who are humble.

Augustus, *Sermon on the Mount* 2.5.17

6 Pray only to the Father?

Perhaps we should pray only to the God and Father, to whom even our Saviour himself prayed [...] and to whom he taught us to pray. When he heard 'teach us to pray', he did not teach us to pray to himself but to the Father by saying, "Our Father in heaven as so forth."

When the saints give thanks to God in their prayers, they acknowledge through Christ Jesus the favours he has done. If it is true that one who is scrupulous about prayer should not pray to some one else who prays but rather to the Father whom our Lord Jesus taught us to address in prayers, it is especially true that no prayer should be addressed to the Father without him.

Origen, *On Prayer* 15.1-2

Our Lord so frequently spoke to us of God as Father. He even taught us to call none on earth father, but only the one we have in heaven. Therefore when we pray to the Father, we are following this command. Blessed are they who recognise their Father! Remember the reproach made against Israel, when the Spirit calls heaven and earth to witness, saying: 'I have begotten sons and they have not known me.' (Jes 1:2) In addressing him as Father we are also naming him God, so as to combine in a single term both filial love and power. Addressing the Father, the Son is also being addressed, for Christ said: 'I and the father are one.' Nor is Mother church passed over without mention, for the mother is recognised in the son and the fathers it is within the church that we learn the meaning of the terms Father and Son.

Tertullian, *On Prayer* 2.2-6

It isn't only here but throughout Scripture that worship and prayer is addressed to the Father (occasionally to the Son and very rarely is it to the Holy Spirit). This moves the corporate body to know that when one is addressed all are called on. It is the entire Godhead that is invoked in the prayers addressed to the Father. In this Matthean pericope however, it can reasonably be concluded God the Father of Jesus is addressed.

7 New Exodus

The Lord's Prayer is the "true Exodus" prayer of God's people. Set originally in a thoroughgoing eschatological context, its every clause resonates with Jesus' announcement that God's kingdom is breaking into the story of Israel and the world, opening up God's long-promised new world and summoning people to share it. If this context is marginalized — or regarded as of historical interest only (because, for instance, as some would suggest, the Parousia did not arrive on schedule) — the prayer loses its peculiar force and falls back into a generalized petition for things to improve, albeit still admittedly to God's glory. [...]

Jesus' own address to God, it appears, regularly included "Father." Though the Aramaic word *Abba* is only found in the Gospels in the Gethsemane narrative at Mark 14:36, there is a broad consensus (1) that Jesus indeed used this word in prayer, and (2) that the notion of God's fatherhood — though, of course, known also in Judaism — took central place in his own attitude to God in a distinctive way. So when the prayer

given to his followers begins with “Father” (Luke 11:2) or “Our Father” (Matt. 6:9; cf. *Didache* 8:2-3, which also begins “Our Father”), we must understand that Jesus wants them to see themselves as sharing his own characteristic spirituality — that is, his own intimate, familial approach to the Creator. [...]

In highlighting echoes from the Exodus tradition in the Lord’s Prayer, we must begin, of course, with “Father”: “Israel is my son, my firstborn; let my people go, that they may serve me” (Exod. 4:22-23); “When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos. 11:1). Calling God “Father” not only evokes all kinds of associations of family life and intimacy; more importantly, it speaks to all subsequent generations of God as the God of the Exodus, the God who rescues Israel precisely because Israel is God’s firstborn son. The title Father says as much about Israel, and about the events through which God will liberate Israel, as it does about God. Jesus’ own sense of vocation, that of accomplishing the New Exodus, was marked principally by his awareness of God as Father. Now in the Lord’s Prayer he invites his followers to consider themselves Exodus people. Their cry for redemption will be heard and answered. [...]

[At] its heart the Lord’s Prayer is an invitation to each Christian to share in the praying life of Jesus himself. The early Christians were very conscious of Jesus’ exalted presence before God’s throne, where his constant task is to intercede on behalf of his people (cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24). The Lord’s Prayer, therefore, by uniting Jesus’ people with their Lord in the prayer that formed the inner core of his own life, brings about the situation where those who pray it are even now, whether they realize it or not, “seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6; cf. Col. 3:1,3).

N.T. Wright, *The Lord’s Prayer as a Paradigm of Christian Prayer*, pp 132-154 in R.L. Longenecker (ed), *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (Eerdmans 2001)