

**“LORD TEACH US TO PRAY”**  
**OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN**  
**Ephesians 1: 3-6**

*Please review this week’s catechism question.*

## INTRODUCTION

Circle two of the following words that best describe your prayer life:

Planned Frustrating Irregular Distracted Faith-filled Regular

Joyful Unstructured Intimate Effective

Why did you pick those particular words?

What are the greatest hindrances to your praying more and better?

I know two things about us when it comes to prayer. First, we don’t pray as much as we know we ought to pray and most of us probably feel guilty about it. Second, we want to pray more and better, but we aren’t really sure how to go about it. This study is the first in a seven part series to examine what is commonly called “The Lord’s Prayer”. Our aim throughout this study is to grow in our prayer lives. We all want to pray more and pray better.

Read the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Jesus tells the disciples this is how they are to pray. However the prayer is not about how, it is a list of what to pray. What conclusion can we draw from Jesus’ showing us how to pray by telling us what to pray? What would Jesus say is the greatest hindrance to our praying more and better?

*The basic point here is this: You will pray more and you will pray better when you want what God wants to give you. The greatest hindrance to prayer is that we already have what we want, without prayer. We don’t want what God wants to give. Most people view prayer as if they have to convince a reluctant deity to give them what they want. Therefore, prayer becomes for most a form of bribery or*

*manipulation or barter. We are trying to talk God into giving us what we want. We are seeking to use God to give us what we love rather than asking our loving Father to give us what he loves to give to his children. What God loves to give his children is the content of this prayer. Jesus, by telling us what to pray is showing that we are not in control and that prayer is not about gaining control over God or our lives. Rather, prayer is entering into what God is doing in the world. It is asking our Father to do what he wants to do which, as every good child knows, is the best thing for us.*

In this study we will concentrate on the preface to the prayer, which is: “Our Father in Heaven.” We are going to organize our study around three questions: What does it mean to pray to a God who is a Father? What does it mean to pray to a God who is “our” Father? What does it mean to pray to a Father who is “in heaven”?

## STUDY

### ➤ **What does it mean to pray to a God who is a Father?**

Turn to Ephesians 1:3-6 to consider what it means to call God, Father.

#### 1. According to v. 3, of whom is God the Father?

*Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

#### 2. According to v. 5, how does he become our (believers’) Father?

*He adopts us through Jesus Christ. He is the Father of Jesus and he is the Father of all who are adopted by means of (through) their relationship with Jesus. You might want to ask the group to notice how often “in Christ” language appears throughout vv. 1-14 (9). All the benefits of God’s salvation are reserved for those who are “in Christ,” including being adopted as the children of God.*

#### 3. Is it possible to have God as your Father apart from having Jesus as your Lord and Savior? (CLUE: See vv. 12-13 for an identification of who the “us” of vv. 3-6 include.)

*Those who are “in Christ” are those who “hope in Christ” or who have “heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” and who have believed. The only people who have God as their Father are those who have Jesus as their Lord and Savior.*

**God is our Father only because he is first the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**4.** According to vv. 4 & 5, why is any particular human being a son or daughter of God?

*The reason that anyone is a son or daughter of God is because God decided to adopt you. You do not become God’s child because you decided to adopt God as your father. Before the world began and because it pleased him to do so, God chose those who would belong to him, he predestined a certain number of human beings to be adopted as his children.*

**5.** How is the act of adopting a child a good example of this fact?

*The adoption of a child happens because of the initiative of the parents who want to adopt. Orphaned children don’t get to choose their parents, the parents choose the child. Before the world began, God looked over all of humanity that he was going to bring into existence and decided which ones he was going to adopt as his children.*

**6.** What is significant about Paul telling us that God decided before the world began whom he would adopt as his children?

*First of all, we are not an afterthought in the mind of God. Before he created anything he had already planned to make a family of redeemed sinners. He has known us and loved us and planned to save us from before he created anything. That means that we, the people of God, believers, have been at the center of his attention from before the world began. God’s purpose in creation is the saving of those whom he decided to adopt as his children. All that he has done to create and sustain this universe has been done so that he can adopt all of his children and bring them home to live with him. The reason the sun*

*rises and the rain falls is so that God can finalize the adoption all of his children.*

**7.** How has our status changed because of his adopting us? Compare vv. 3-6 with Eph. 3:12.

*God’s decision to adopt us has resulted in a complete reversal of our condition. Whereas, by nature we are like unwanted, abandoned, orphaned children; now we have become the recipients of every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. We have received and will receive all that belongs to God. We have been taken from a state of absolute poverty and powerlessness and placed in the family of the greatest king. The change that has happened to us is infinitely greater than the change that takes place when an American couple adopts a child from one of the orphanages in Eastern Europe.*

**8.** How does knowing you have been adopted by God affect how you approach him in prayer?

**God is our Father because he decided to adopt us.**

**9.** What are some reasons people adopt children?

*Many, if not most adoptions in America are due to the desire of childless couples to have children. They want the experience of loving and raising a child. Their lives somehow seem incomplete without a child. In other words, many if not most, do not adopt a child primarily to help a needy child but in order to meet a need in their own lives. For many the adoption soothes the pain of childlessness. I’m not criticizing parents who adopt for this reason. I’m simply pointing out that for human parents adoption is often as much about their need as it is about the needs of the child they adopt. On the other hand, some couples adopt children not because of a need in their lives but because they want to love a child who would otherwise be unloved. I think this is especially true of those couples who adopt special needs children or hard to place children due to age, race or family history.*

**10.** According to vv. 3-6 why is it that God adopts us as his children?

*There are three words that give us his motive in regards to us and then a clause that points to the ultimate motive. He adopts us “in love”, “according to his pleasure” and by giving us his grace in Christ. God does not adopt us as his children due to some need in him. He is not like a childless couple that yearns for the joy of having children and cannot be happy until they have a child. He is not needy in any way. Neither does he choose us because we have met a list of requirements that he made before the world began, like many parents do. He adopts us because he chooses to love us. He adopts us because it makes him happy to be so kind to miserable sinners like us. It gives him pleasure to adopt us. He adopts us, not because of anything we have done, but because he is gracious. He loves to make members of his family, those who deserve to live in an orphanage forever. Notice in v. 6 that he does this so that his amazing grace, his infinite love would be praised. His love for us does not depend upon us. He is our Father because he loves to treat us as his children to show forth the infinite glory of grace. He aims to make us eternally and infinitely happy in the delight of being his children.*

**11.** How does knowing that God adopts us, not because he needs us, but because he loves us and loves to show off the glory of his grace, affect how you approach God in prayer?

*He has arranged all of creation to adopt us as his children and he is arranging all of eternity to shower his kindness upon us so that we will rejoice in being his beloved adopted children. The Father to whom we pray does not need to be talked into loving us. If you are in Christ, then God always loves you and is always aiming to do you good, to the praise of his glorious grace. Prayer then is never about trying to talk God into being kind or trying to meet some set of conditions so that he will answer us. He is our Father who delights to do good to us, always.*

**God is our Father because he loves us.**

➤ **What does it mean to pray to a God who is “our” Father?**

**12.** According to Ephesians 2: 14-19, what has God done for us through/in Christ?

*He has joined the culturally, racially diverse people of the world into one body, into one new man, through the death of Jesus. We all belong to one family now. We are no longer foreigners and aliens to God’s family but members of his household. We all approach our Father in the same fashion, through Jesus by the Spirit. However, bottom line, we are members of a family.*

**13.** What is the point of remembering in prayer that God is “our” Father, that we are members of his family?

*When we pray we are always to pray with this mindset, we belong to the family of God. Our interests are the interests of the family, not merely our own private personal interests. We are part of a praying community. We are always praying for and with other Christians. Prayer is not simply a personal, private activity between God and me. Rather I am part of a family and I am concerned for my family. When I go to my Father I do not just talk with him about my concerns but I talk with him about the concerns of our entire family. I rejoice with those who rejoice and I mourn with those who mourn. I am permanently connected to the family of God and am permanently concerned for the welfare of God’s entire family. Christianity is not a private religion. When you become a Christian you join a very large and lively and outgoing family. Our pains are not private pains and our joys are not private joys. We are vitally connected to each other and to each other’s well being.*

**14.** What are some ways, in your praying, you can express the fact that you are part of the family of God?

➤ Ephesians 6:18 & 2 Corinthians 1:10-11: *We can pray for other Christians.*

➤ Acts 1:14: *We can pray with other Christians.*

➤ **What does it mean to pray to a Father who is “in heaven”?**

**15.** What does Jesus want us to remember about this Father to whom we pray because he is a Father “in heaven?” Consider each of these passages to see a few of things that he wants us to remember.

- Isaiah 6:1-4 & Revelation 4: *To say that our Father is in heaven is to acknowledge that God is not a part of this creation. He is the Creator who is infinite in power. He is absolutely holy and just. He is a consuming fire of righteousness. All who come before him tremble at the revelation of his holiness.*
- Psalm 10:4, 103:19 with Matt. 5:34, 23:22 & 1 Peter 1:17: *God is our judge and we must approach him in reverent fear.*
- Psalm 115:3, 9-15 with Isaiah 40:25-31 & Jeremiah 32:17: *God is infinite in power and is able to help us. There is nothing he cannot do. He delights to exercise his infinite power on our behalf.*
- Philippians 3:20, Romans 8:22-23: *Finally, to pray to our Father in heaven is to remember that we are not home yet. Children are to live with their adoptive parents. We have been adopted. We currently are God’s sons and daughters. We already are his children. However, our adoption is not complete in that we are not yet living with our Father in heaven, in resurrected bodies. We are not home yet. Our condition is similar to the child living in that orphanage in Romania who has been adopted by an American couple. All of the legal requirements have been met. The papers are signed. But the couple cannot make it to pick up the child for a month. They’ve sent a package to the child with pictures of his new home and letters describing their love and plans for his future. They’ve sent new clothes and toys for him to use while he waits. They have told the staff at the orphanage that whatever he needs they are to give to him and they will pay for it. They have given the child a phone card with unlimited minutes so he can call to talk his parents in America and to ask for whatever he needs. However, he is still waiting to experience the fullness of the fact of his adoption. Can’t you just imagine this child reading books about America? He is trying to learn English. His attachment to the orphanage and to the country of his birth is lessening by the day. He thinks much of his new parents and his new home and*

*little of his current situation. We are just like him. We have been adopted but our adoption is not fully realized. We are still living in the orphanage but our Father who is at home in heaven and is coming to get us has told us that we are to ask him for whatever we need as we wait and he will provide for us so that we make it safely to heaven. His provision is not for the purpose of making us feel at home in the orphanage but in order to keep us safe until he brings us home. That’s what the content of the Lord’s prayer is all about. What are the things we need to ask God for and that he longs to give us so that we can join him in heaven?*

**16.** What are some ways your prayers will change as a result of understanding that you are praying to “our Father in heaven?”