

Lesson 3: Our Father in Heaven

“That we may know what and how to pray, our Lord Christ himself has taught us both the way and the words, as we shall see.”

- Dr. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*

Keys to Lesson 3:

Topic: Our Father in heaven

Thesis: Jesus invites us to pray to God and call Him Father.

Key question: What does it mean to call God Father?

Catechism: Sverdrup Questions 275-281

Accompanying Bible Story: Luke 15:11-32 – The Extravagant Father

Warm-up or review:

As students enter the classroom, have a task posted for them.

Options:

Finish paragraph from Lesson 2

Finish questions from Lesson 2

Be sure to take time to answer any questions the students might have

Finish Lesson 2 summary

Lesson 2 quick quiz

Read and summarize Luke 15:11-23

Read the Sverdrup questions assigned for this lesson

Introduce new lesson:

Options:

Discuss “fatherhood.” Be prepared to answer some hard questions posed by our culture in which fathers abandon their children

Introduce praying to our Father with the text printed on the student worksheets

For years and years and years, people who study and teach the Bible have called it the story of “The Prodigal Son.” Prodigal means wastefully or recklessly extravagant, and the younger son in the story certainly did recklessly and foolishly waste his inheritance. Many Bible teachers, however, have suggested that a better name for this story, a parable Jesus told, could be “The Parable of the Extravagant Father.” As Jesus created the details in the story, He purposefully exaggerated how incredibly generous the father was.

When the son asked for his inheritance, it was like wishing his father was dead. The father did not argue but instead gave the boy what he asked. Then the father waited and watched for his son’s return knowing full well that the son was wasting all his money on sinful living. Eventually the son went home hoping at the most to be hired on as a servant. The father, however, ran to meet him, hugged and kissed his filthy, dirty boy, and gave him new clothes and a ring. The father fully accepted his son back as a member of the family. The father then threw a big “welcome home” party. When the older brother complained, the father did not argue with him. He simply told the older son that all the father had was his. The father owned so much that the younger son could be welcomed home and the older son could have it all, too.

Everything in the story goes against what we might think is fair, but that is exactly the point. Jesus wants to show us that God, our Father, wants to lavishly, without limits, give us “all

things.” He lavishly forgives our sin. He lavishly gives us new life. He lavishly gives us the Holy Spirit. He runs to us and lavishly covers us in grace and mercy even though it is not fair and we do not deserve it.

To help us in the relationship He wants to have with us, Jesus gave us a model prayer. We can use this prayer as we have our continuing conversation with Him. We call it The Lord’s Prayer because our Lord Jesus taught it. Both Matthew and Luke wrote the prayer down for us in their gospels (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4).

Jesus began this prayer by telling us to pray to our Father who is in heaven. He invites us to have a conversation with our Father God, the Father he showed us in the parable of the extravagant father. In this lesson, we will learn more about what it means for God to be our Father. In the next seven lessons we will study seven petitions, seven requests, Jesus tells us to make to our Father. We pray this prayer as we learn to rely on Him not only for salvation but for everything we need in life.

Lesson:

Help the students work through the text and Bible passages in the student material.

*** The Lord’s Prayer begins, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Copy the meaning of this introduction from your Lutheran *Small Catechism*.**

God thereby tenderly encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father and that we are truly His children, so that we may boldly and confidently come to Him in prayer, even as beloved children come to their dear father.

*** Read and summarize the following verses. What do they say about God as Father?**

Psalm 89:26

*He will cry to Me, ‘You are my Father,
My God, and the rock of my salvation.’*

The “he” of this psalm calls God “Father” when he cries to Him.

It might be helpful to look at the context of this verse. Notice that the author is not David but Ethan the Ezrahite. In this part of the Psalm he is speaking for David about David’s relationship with God. His words may also be a Messianic prophecy. Verse 26 is a confession about the king’s relationship with God where God is called Father, God, and the rock of his salvation.

Isaiah 63:16

*For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us
And Israel does not recognize us.
You, O LORD, are our Father,
Our Redeemer from of old is Your name.*

In this prayer, the speaker calls God, Father. He says “For You are our Father” and “ You, O LORD, are our Father.”

Here the remnant of Israel as prophesied by Isaiah is praying, crying out, to God for mercy. In their cry they call God their Father. Notice the uppercase LORD. Remember that when this form

of God's name appears in our English translations of the Bible, the Hebrew actually uses God's personal name, Yahweh. It is not only that God is our Father but more specifically that Yahweh, the named God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, is our Father and our Redeemer. Redeemer is one who buys out of slavery.

You might take this opportunity to discuss our slavery to sin and how our Father God, through the blood sacrifice of Jesus, redeems us from that slavery to sin and death.

Jeremiah 3:19

*Then I said,
'How I would set you among My sons
And give you a pleasant land,
The most beautiful inheritance of the nations!'
And I said, 'You shall call Me, My Father,
And not turn away from following Me.'*

God tells the people of Israel that He wants them to call Him, Father.

Here God is scolding the wayward Israelites who experienced His judgment resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple and the seventy years of exile in Babylon. God expressed through Jeremiah His desire that His people call Him "My Father" and in so doing would be faithful to follow Him.

Matthew 5:44-45

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

Jesus tells us that God who is in heaven is our Father.

Jesus referred to God as Father eight times during the Sermon on the Mount before He taught the Lord's Prayer (5:16, 5:45, 5:48, 6:1, 6:4, twice in 6:6, and 6:8). He referred to God as Father six more times after the prayer and before the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Have the students find these six references if you have time. In this passage notice how the Father provides sun and rain for both the good and the evil, the just and the unjust, thus highlighting the Father's extravagant provision.

Luke 23:33, 34

When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

When Jesus prayed for our forgiveness from the cross, He called God, Father.

Read the two Bible passages where the Lord's Prayer is found. Think about how you have memorized the Lord's Prayer. Compare and contrast the three: the Matthew text, the Luke text, and the words you have memorized. Write down your key observations.

The purpose of this exercise is to lead the students into the study of the Lord's Prayer itself. If you find you don't have time in class, you might assign this as "homework."

On separate paper—a sheet for each student or in groups—or on a board (chalk/white), create three columns. Use the columns to compare and contrast the Matthew, Luke, and memorized texts of the Lord's Prayer. Use this exercise to talk about the real possibility that Jesus taught this prayer more than once so there is no discrepancy between the two texts. Also discuss how differences in the texts can help us better understand the meanings of words where differences exist.

Note: The teacher's edition will discuss the use of "trespasses" for debts and sins when we get to that petition.

Summary:

Options:

Students write questions in their question column

Students write a three to four sentence summary: What did I learn in this lesson?

Students write a SEE paragraph

Possible paragraph prompt:

Why should we call God Father?

Sample paragraph:

We should call God Father because Jesus called Him Father. "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45a). Jesus referred to God as Father many times in the Sermon on the Mount. In this example, He tells us to love our enemies and pray for the people who persecute us because those are characteristics of the children of God who is our Father in heaven. Since Jesus referred to God as Father, we can too.

Luke 15:11-32

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' 20 So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"