

“ABBA, FATHER”: WHAT IS HE REALLY LIKE?

All verses are from the New King James (NKJ) Bible unless otherwise noted.

Underlined portion of verses are my emphasis, to draw attention to the point that is being made.
The following are synonymous with “Abba, Father”: “God”, “God the Father”, and “heavenly Father”
The words of Jesus are in red.

“Father”

Lesson 3 – February 28, 2012

A Parable

An hour before sunrise Jesus awakened, quickly jumped out of bed, and hurried out to his father’s shop where Joseph was already busy at work. It was an exciting time for Jesus as he had recently had his bar mitzvah, and the family was now getting ready for a trip to Jerusalem. Joseph was running behind on several projects, which had to be done before they could leave. The pressure that Joseph was under was going to create an opportunity for Jesus to work on a project for the first time all by himself.

One of Joseph’s most frequent customers, Jonadad, came in with a yoke that had begun to split. After Jonadad left, Joseph called Jesus over and explained that he wanted him to repair the yoke. Jesus was so excited that he could hardly contain himself. As Joseph talked, Jesus looked straight into Joseph’s eyes and listened intently just as He did when Joseph was teaching him the Torah. Jesus realized the trust that Joseph was placing in him. Joseph was a kind and gentle man, very strong in his faith, but at times he could be hard to please when it came to work done for customers. Yet Jesus was thrilled with the opportunity.



For seven years Jesus had been in his father’s workshop as Joseph built and repaired a variety of furniture and farm tools, but the first few years Jesus spent most of the time just playing. The fourth year He began learning the names of the tools, handing them to Joseph, and sweeping the floor. The following year Joseph began giving Jesus small pieces of leftover wood to practice a few elementary skills on. The next year Joseph began giving Jesus little projects to work on, but from Jesus’ perspective it seemed that Joseph was constantly correcting Him. As he watched Joseph using the tools, it looked so easy, but when he tried to do the same things it wasn’t nearly as easy as it looked. Often as he was using a hammer and chisel he’d lose control and the chisel would slip, marring the piece he was working on. He couldn’t remember how many times that had happened, but He kept practicing and as His muscles developed his control improved.

As Jesus began working on the yoke he knew that Joseph would keep a close eye of scrutiny on him as he went through each precise step necessary to repairing it correctly. Through the time he had worked with his father, Jesus grew to understand that Joseph knew the precise way of working with wood and that Joseph’s way could be trusted. At one point in the process Jesus started to do something when He suddenly felt a hand on His shoulder and heard Joseph say, “Son, don’t do it that way. Let me show you again exactly how to do that”. In the past Jesus hadn’t always agreed with Joseph, thinking that sometimes he knew a better way, but he’d learned the hard way to trust Joseph’s wisdom and submit to his way. Over the next couple of days the work went well and Joseph didn’t need to correct Jesus again. Finally the yoke was completed, so Jesus took it to his father to inspect. Jesus waited patiently, but was a little apprehensive, as Joseph took his time examining the yoke. Finally Joseph looked directly at Jesus and smiled, saying “Well done, son”.



Biblical Evidence And Historical Tradition Concerning Joseph

Scripture provides very little information about Joseph. In Mt 1:19 NKJ it states he was “a just man” (translated in other bible versions by upright, righteous, good, or noble). From the same verse he is portrayed as a gentle man who lived by the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. This is seen in the way he initially responded to the news of Mary being pregnant in deciding to quietly divorce her rather than make her a public example and possibly have her stoned. He listened and obeyed quickly to whatever God told him to do (Mt 1:24 & 2:13-14) without questioning. Matthew 13:55 describes Joseph as a “carpenter”, and Mark 6:3 describes Jesus as “the carpenter”, but in both passages the Greek word translated “carpenter” implies someone who creates a craft or art with wood, metal, or stone. Justin Martyr, writing in the mid first century AD, speaks about the ploughs and yokes that Jesus made.

Historical tradition indicates that Joseph was possibly 80 years old when he took Mary as his wife. This may help explain why Joseph is not mentioned in the New Testament after taking his family to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-50). It’s therefore assumed that Joseph died sometime after the family’s trip to Jerusalem, when Jesus was twelve, and before Jesus began his public ministry at the age of thirty.

Although the scripture says that Joseph was a just or righteous man, we also know that he wasn’t perfect since like all mankind he was infected by sin (Rom 3:23), which to some degree would have tainted his relationship with his children. Even in the best of families it’s not unusual that parents show favoritism toward one child over another. Individuals that have grown up in a home where there are adopted or foster children know that it’s very hard for the parents not to show favoritism of some degree toward their natural children. One possibility is that Joseph may have showed preferential treatment towards his own biological children, which would have placed pressure on Jesus to learn how to handle that correctly as he grew. A second possibility is that Jesus, being the oldest of at least six siblings (Mk 6:3), may have experienced some preferential treatment from Joseph which may have turned his siblings against him much like Joseph experienced in Gen 37 from his father and brothers. If this was true it may provide insight into the ridicule and disdain that Jesus encountered from his brothers in John 7:1-8.

We often fail to remember and comprehend the truth that Jesus “... continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom”, and “kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:40 & 52 NAS Under-lined is my emphasis). Although Jesus by the age of 12 (Luke 12:49) already possessed a deep awareness and understanding of His special relationship with God the Father, he didn’t have it from birth but grew into understanding just as he grew in learning to work with wood. He also had to grow in learning how to relate to people, and his parents and siblings were the people that created the opportunity where many hard lessons were learned.

Review Of The Previous Lesson And The Purpose Of This Lesson

In the previous lesson we saw that when Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane that the first of the two words he used to begin his prayer was “**Abba**”, the first word a Jewish child would have called his earthly father. From the child’s perspective it indicated the deepest level of intimacy, trust, and total dependency. In this study we will focus on the second word Jesus used to begin his prayer, “**Father**”, and seek to understand the experiences and implication behind the word that influenced Jesus’ view of God the Father. Jesus was the only human being that ever lived who totally knew and understood God the Father (Matt 11:27). As we see how Jesus viewed God the Father, it will help us grow into a more complete and accurate understanding of what God the Father is really like and set us free from the lies we’ve been taught and believed about Him.

Steps A Child Grows Through into Adulthood

In a child’s growth into adulthood, especially in countries where English is the primary language, there are progressive steps a child uses in relating to his or her earthly father from the infant’s first saying “Da” or “Dada”, to finally the adult use of “Dad” or “Father”. Let’s consider what each of the words

should represent in a child's relationship with his or her father, whether he is the biological, adopted, foster, or step father:

1. "Da" or "Dada" – Birth to 4 years– Key element for a child is developing a strong foundation of love, bonding, and dependency. For the father it should be a time of developing love, tenderness, gentleness, but also training the child what "No" means.
2. "Daddy" – Age 5 to 11 – Key element for the child is the development of trust, honor, respect, and gradual growth in greater levels of obedience. For the father it should be a period in which he develops the skill to teach the child to obey because they want to out of love and respect, not because they have to.
3. "Dad" or "Father" – Age 12 and older – Key element for the child is transitioning into an adult where he or she accepts greater levels of responsibility and independence. Key element for the father is guiding the child to gradually become more and more independent, responsible, and able to make his or her own decisions with wisdom rather than making all the decisions for the child. It's a time to gradually release the child into the loving care of their heavenly Father and, when necessary, letting them reap the reproofs of life (Prov 15:31-32).

In my own experience as a child when I was with my father then I would call him Daddy, and later as a teen I'd call him "Dad"; but if I was talking about him to other people then I would always refer to him as "Father". "Dad" or "Daddy" were personal words just for me to use, whereas "Father" was what I used when introducing him or talking about him to other people. Jesus followed somewhat the same pattern: when he was alone with his heavenly Father he used "**Abba**", but when talking about Him to others he always used some phrase which always included "**Father**", such as "**My heavenly Father**", "**O righteous Father**", "**Our Father**", "**your Father**". "**the Father**", or "**Holy Father**".

Although the Jewish culture that Jesus was raised in was much different than most of the people reading this, the stages of growth Jesus went through as a child in learning to relate to Joseph as a father figure would have been similar to those of children today. Jesus, in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, not only comes to His God and Heavenly Father in childlike trust, but also with a mature adult's understanding that the heavenly Father knows what is the best way to repair broken items. Through the years that Jesus worked with Joseph in his shop, he'd learned that Joseph knew the best way to fix a broken item; but if Jesus followed his own way of repairing an item then it often failed to hold up over time. Jesus learned the hard way the importance of trusting Joseph's instructions. While Jesus worked with Joseph in his shop, as Jesus grew there were times when his own will would come into conflict with Joseph's, which gave opportunities to learn to surrender his will to Joseph's way of doing things. As these two attitudes, trust and surrender of the will, developed in Jesus toward his earthy father, Jesus grew to understand that his heavenly Father could be trusted, and that He alone knew the only right way that man's broken relationship with God the Father could be repaired.

Jesus' Prayer In The Garden Of Gethsemane:

Now let's consider the situation that Jesus was in that night as he prayed in the garden. He had been sent to earth and given the largest responsibility ever required of any human being: to restore the broken relationship between God the Father and mankind. Jesus was in the greatest spiritual, physical, and emotional battle of his earthly life, much greater than the skirmish He had with Satan in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). This was a battle of Jesus' will verses God the Father's will. As Jesus prayed he was enveloped in agony, overwhelmed with exceeding sorrow and grief, distressed to the point that he thought he might die (Mt 26:37-38). Physically and emotionally he poured himself out in prayer, asking if there was another way the damaged relationship with mankind could be restored without him having to experience rejection and being forsaken by the heavenly Father. Jesus wasn't demanding, only petitioning his heavenly Father. Jesus was lying flat on His face, indicating his total surrender and submission to His Father's will no matter what His Father decided. Three times Jesus went through this

heart wrenching process, but each time there was no response, only silence. Jesus understood that the Father's silence meant "No", that there wasn't any other way that the damaged relationship could be healed and mankind brought back into right relationship with God the Father. After the third request received no response, Jesus stood up and began his walk toward the cross, committed to following his heavenly Father's will and plan whatever the cost. Jesus wasn't acting on a child's simple trust, but he had a mature adult understanding that His Heavenly Father knew the best way, and in this particular situation the only way, that the problem could be repaired and restored. Jesus totally trusted God the Father to work out His plan and will even if it meant that Jesus had to suffer.

Jesus' prayer was short, simple, very childlike, yet straight to the point, spoken with such intense anguish that sweat poured down His face, sounding like heavy drops of blood as it hit the ground,. The prayer drained him to such a degree that an angel was sent to strengthen him so that he could pray with more intensity:

Luke 22: 43-44 AMP

43 And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him in spirit.

44 And being in an agony [of mind], He prayed [all the] more earnestly {and} intently, and His sweat became like great clots of blood dropping down upon the ground.

Note the context in which Jesus spoke this prayer. He had just finished celebrating the last supper with his apostles, given them his last teaching, and then prayed for himself, his disciples, and all who would ever come to believe in Him. He knew absolutely what lay ahead: the betrayal of Judas's kiss, his arrest, Peter and the other apostles' denial of knowing him, the trial, flogging, crucifixion, and death. However, what was draining Jesus spiritually, emotionally, and physically, was the knowledge that God the Father would utterly forsake him, turn and walk away, and utterly leave him alone without help on the cross. During Jesus' earthly life and before he was sent to earth, he'd always had a close intimate relationship with His heavenly Father, so that He could say that He was never alone, but the Father was always with Him (John 8:16 & 16:32). Jesus couldn't bear the thought of that intimate relationship being severed, or being separated even for a short period of time from His heavenly Father's presence.

Conclusion / Summary:

So what does Jesus' use of the word "**Father**" in his prayer reveal about what God the Father is really like?

1. He is trustworthy, totally worthy of our trust.
2. He knows the best way, and sometimes the only way, broken things are to be repaired.
3. He has a specific way of doing things that He wants us to follow that will often go against our will.
4. He trusts us, whenever He gives us a task to do, no matter how big or small a task it may be.
5. He trains and prepares us with progressively larger tasks knowing His plans for us, just as He trained and prepared Jesus' skills and attitudes as he worked with Joseph in his shop.
6. He doesn't always answer our request to change the way He wants a particular task done; especially when He has already told us the way He wants the job done.
7. He knows that if we follow His way and will that it may cause us personal pain and suffering, but His own son wasn't spared from that, so why should we be spared suffering and pain?
8. His heart is for the redemption and salvation of every individual and He wants us to join Him in this work. We will often discover our next job when we are sinned against by people "who don't know what they are doing", and whom He wants us to love, forgive, and to help them through us.

Personal Application Questions:

1. After Jesus prayed the third time and in essence received a "No" answer, he knew not to continue

asking but to move on with what he knew was the Father's will for his life. In like manner, the Apostle Paul struggled in prayer three times asking that a thorn in his flesh, probably a physical infirmity, be removed. Yet he understood he shouldn't continue to ask, but move on to what God the Father wanted him to do, having received an answer that His grace would be sufficient (II Cor 12:7-10). The difference between being childlike and childish is often seen in our prayer life when we just keep on asking or whining for something (childishness) rather than accepting the "No" (childlikeness) and trusting our heavenly Father's decision and wisdom. How does this truth apply to your life?

2. Our ability as adults to trust our heavenly Father in the most difficult situations of life depends a lot upon how basic trust was modeled to us by parents, especially our fathers, during the first twelve years of life. Tragically I've seen a deeply wounded father tell his young son to jump to him from the edge of a swimming pool, promising he will not let him go under the water. Then the father purposefully fails to catch the child and later explains to the child that he should never trust anyone. Basic trust is also damaged profoundly when fathers do not fulfill their promises to children. Describe your ability to trust your heavenly Father and His decisions when they don't go the way you want them to. If you're having trouble trusting His decisions, what experiences in your childhood might be the root of that?
3. Jesus explained that as His disciples we must take up our cross, deny ourselves, and then follow him (Mt 10:38 & Mk 8:34). That cross is often where our will conflicts with our heavenly Father's will. Describe a recent time in your life when you encountered this conflict and explain how you worked through it.
4. Whenever Jesus prayed he always began it with "Father" (Mt 11:25-26, Luke 10:21, 23:34 & 46) and sometimes he would repeat the word in a longer prayer as in John 17(see vrs. 1, 5, 24, & 25). This was also the model Jesus taught his followers to use when praying (Mt 6:9, Luke 11:2). Is this characteristic of your prayers? If not, why do you struggle using the term "Father"? You are the Father's beloved child (1 John 3:1), and He wants you to acknowledge, honor, and value that special relationship whenever you talk with Him. If you use the word "God", then it's like a child calling his earthly father by his 1) first name, which is rude and shows lack of honor and respect, or 2) by his last name (i.e. Mr. Smith), which indicates that their relationship is very impersonal and based solely on the father's authority. In the entire Bible some form of "God" appears over 3800 times to translate a variety of Hebrew and Greek words, but it's also used to translate words that refer to idols, angels, Judges, and men. Jesus made a drastic break from the Hebrew custom of praying to a distant and impersonal God, and introduced a personal and intimate relationship, calling Him, "**My Father**" (46 times in the New Testament) or "**your Father**" (20 times in the New Testament). In comparison, Jesus is only recorded in the New Testament as using "**My God**" on two occasions: 1) while on the cross (Mt 27:46, Mk 15:34) and 2) with Mary after his resurrection (John 20:17). In both instances "God" is the translation of "Theos", a word taken from Greek polytheism (many gods) that was borrowed by Jews and later by Christians to denote the one true God in relating to the society in which they lived. The word "God" was used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) primarily to translate "Elohim" or "Jehovah". Therefore, we may use the word "God" in relating to our society, but when it comes to the intimacy of prayer we should always use "**Father**".

In the Father's Service,

Jim & Susan McCorkle

Website: www.rtbministry.org

Email: JimMcCorkle.RTBM@gmail.com