

## Teach Us How to Pray

Michael Collins, the Apollo 11 command module pilot, once described Earth as “blue, white, very shiny ... such a beautiful tiny thing, nestled in this black velvet of the rest of the universe”. William Shatner, 90, famed for playing Captain Kirk in Star Trek, rode aboard a Blue Origin rocket recently to become the oldest person in space and was struck by “the covering of blue, this sheet, this blanket, this comforter of blue that we have around us”.

Bill Nelson, was the first member of the House of Representatives to go into space. He went on to serve as a Democratic senator for Florida for 18 years. In May he was appointed by President Biden to lead NASA.

He said of planet Earth, “It is so beautiful. It is so colourful. It is suspended in nothing. There’s home and yet it looks so fragile. That experience informed a lot of my public life because I wanted to be, when I returned, a better steward of our planet.

“So I think you can just basically boldly say I became more of an environmentalist when I went into space, and that has informed my environmental record now going on 44 years of public service.

“It also struck me as a politician that when I looked, as we orbited the Earth every 90 minutes, I didn’t see racial divisions and I didn’t see religious divisions and I didn’t see political divisions – the things that bedevil us here on the face of the Earth. What I saw, we were all citizens of planet Earth, and that’s informed my public service as well.”

The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray and he begins, *Our Father...*

These two words are so important for our prayers, in fact those two words are the sum of our prayers.

Prayer begins in *Our Father...*

Prayer is located in the Fatherhood of God.

The disciples watch Jesus pray.

They must have been so impressed by the way that he prayed to God. They would have observed that Jesus' prayer was essentially a conversation – a conversation reminiscent of that between a loving father and his child.

So, it's not surprising, he teaches them to begin the prayer with *Our Father*.

Prayer begins and ends with God.

It is about coming first and foremost to God and giving God His rightful place and the opportunity to talk to us.

Those who have been in outer space and looked back at our world, see the incredible beauty and see that we are one people, the human race.

*From a distance you look like my friend*

*Even though we are at war*

*From a distance I just cannot comprehend*

*What all this fighting is for*

*From a distance there is harmony*

*And it echoes through the land*

*And it's the hope of hopes, it's the love of loves*

*It's the heart of every man*

*It's the hope of hopes, it's the love of loves*

*This is the song of every man*

*And God is watching us, God is watching us*

*God is watching us from a distance*

*Oh, God is watching us, God is watching*

*God is watching us from a distance*

It's not too difficult then to say that God is Our Father. The Father of our human race. He is our Creator, Creator of all life. He is Our Heavenly Father and He is watching us.

But what kind of Father is he?

God is like a Father who wants to give generously. Now we can use the word Father in two ways. Firstly, God is our paternal father. He created us but we all know, that a man may be a father of a child and never set eyes on a child. He is the biological father but the father can also be used in the sense to describe a relationship of love and intimacy and confidence and trust between the father and child. This is what Jesus proposes, that it is possible

for God and humans to have an intimate, lifelong, loving relationship in which God and man come close together.

So, it begins in relationship, and Jesus teaches that because God is our Father, we can trust that he cares for us. He is passionately in love with us. The bible tells us that every hair on our head is known to him, every word on our lips; every sparrow that falls to the ground, he knows; he knows your name and it is precious to him. God loves us and that is our starting point for prayer. That is what the life of Jesus is all about. Jesus Christ came to suffer the agony of the Cross because he loves us. That's the reason he did it. Prayer begins in the love of Our Father.

But we must also remember that this love of God is an undeserved love. This love of God reaches out to all, the good and the bad, the stay-at-home son and the prodigal; we are all embraced by this love. God the Father, loves us all with a love which will never let us go. Yes, we are all sinful, and distant from God, but his love comes and searches us out.

Every time we pray, *Our Father* we can know for certain that for God no one is lost in the crowd; if we matter to no one else we matter to God; that if no one else cares for us, God cares. This should lift our hearts every time we pray *Our Father*.

The fatherly love of God is a practical love, that's what the Lord Prayer informs us, "Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

God is interested in all our needs. As a loving Father, he cares for us physically, spiritually and mentally. He cares that we are fed and clothed. He is creator and sustainer of all life and he cares for you. For everything down to your daily bread. So, when we pray *Our Father* and ask him to meet our needs, we do so recognising that He is more willing to give than we are even to ask.

He is also a father who forgives, when we come to him, we pray for forgiveness; when we ask him to forgive us, God the Son is now in our thoughts. The one who came to forgive, to heal and restore is no one else than the Son of God who is teaching this prayer. He is the Saviour and Redeemer of all mankind.

So in this prayer, we have called on God as our Father to provide, we have called on the Son for forgiveness and thirdly, we call on the Holy Spirit, when we pray "lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil". We are

invoking the power of the Spirit in our lives and we are asking God, to help us in our fight against temptation and evil - two very real forces. We are asking God to fill us afresh with his Spirit, so that we are strengthened and prepared for the battle that we are in. For never forget, that the Christian faith is a battle. It cost Christ his life, but he triumphed over evil and death so that we might know the blessing of his Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our Guide, our helper, and protector throughout this life.

The pattern of the Lord's Prayer, must be the pattern of all prayer, for it begins by giving God his rightful place, and it goes on to take life's past, present and future to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus contrasts God with human fathers and says, "Bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more then will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them who ask Him?"

What I believe Jesus is saying is that God is willing and able to give us everything we need to be his followers. The Holy Spirit is our companion on life's journey. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us. The Holy Spirit came when Jesus left this world. It came to us, to be our companion.

Yes, God is the Father of all mankind but he is in a close relationship with all who have come to know him through Jesus. Those who follow Jesus are given the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is a realisation that the Holy Spirit is in our lives. We won't have any desire to pray unless we have the Holy Spirit within us. Why would we want to pray? Prayer is alien to our proud human nature. But when we follow Jesus, when we surrender our lives to him, and we are in relationship with him, then prayer becomes part of us, it becomes who we are, like breathing, without it we will die spiritually. Prayer is our spiritual lifeline.

The disciples recognised this and that is why they said to Jesus, "Lord teach us to pray, just as John the Baptist taught his disciples."

Prayer is something we learn to do, it is a discipline but when we do it, we are opening our hearts to the source of the universe. May I encourage all of us to make time each day, to come to God in a simple prayer. Amen.