

Lesson 3 Chosen by the Heavenly Father

In this course you will read many true accounts about people who had the same previous religion as yourself. One such person was Bilquis Sheikh. Whenever she tried to reach out to God through her religion, He always seemed so far away. She was not able to communicate with Him.

Then one day a follower of Jesus suggested to Bilquis, "Try speaking to God as your father". At first she was horrified! This idea seemed to be *shirk* (blasphemy)! But later, alone in her room, she tried it. Here she describes what happened:

“ ‘Oh Father, my Father’. Hesitantly, I spoke His name aloud... ‘Father, oh my Father God’, I cried, with growing confidence... He was there! I could sense His Presence. I could feel His hand laid gently on my head. It was as if I could see His eyes, filled with love and compassion. He was so close that I found myself laying my head on His knees like a little girl sitting at her father’s feet. For a long time I knelt there, sobbing quietly, floating in His love.”

(from her book *I Dared to Call Him Father*)



So, is it *shirk* to call God our Father?
Let’s continue our study in 1 Peter chapter 1.

1 1 Peter 1:2 says:

“...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,”
(1 Peter 1:2)

What title (*laqab*) is used for God in this verse? (*tick the correct answer*)

___ a) Lord of the worlds ___ b) the Heavenly Father ___ c) Creator

2 Yes, God’s names include not only *ar-Rabb* and *al-Khaliq*, but also ‘Father’! Many people have heard 99 other names for God, but never this one. Yet in the holy *Injil* God is called ‘Father’ many times. Jesus himself prayed to God as ‘Father’ and he even taught his followers to do the same.

Come Follow Me

By what title or name did Jesus speak to God? _____ (*fill in the blank*)

3 The holy *Injil* assures us,

“How great is the love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1).

This is a very startling truth! Of course, we do not mean that God has children in a physical way, which would be *shirk*. Rather, God has adopted us as His spiritual sons and daughters, in Christ.

Therefore, as God’s spiritual children, we can dare to call him _____ (*fill in the blank*)

A) The Heavenly Father always loves us

4 Let’s think about the character of our divine Father. According to the verse in question 3, what has God ‘lavished on us’? (*check the verse and tick the exact word*)

___ a) mercy ___ b) kindness ___ c) love

5 Yes, unlimited ‘love’ is what God has lavished upon us. ‘Love’ is stronger than mere ‘mercy’ or ‘kindness’. In fact, love is the strongest thing in the universe. God himself is love – love without limit!

Here again is the verse from question 3. Fill the blanks, and keep repeating the verse until you can say it from memory:

“How _____ is the _____ the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called _____ of God! And that is what we are!”
(1 John 3:1).

6 No doubt your parents love you very much. But sometimes parents show conditional love to their children. They may love a child who brings them honour, but despise a child who disappoints them. For this reason some children try to earn their father’s love through achieving success in exams.

By contrast, our divine Father’s love is unconditional. We do not need to earn His love. He loves us just the same whether we come ‘top of the class’ or ‘bottom of the class’! This is because His own nature is to love constantly; it does not depend on our achievements.

Put a circle round the correct answers below:

- a) Whose love sometimes depends on our achievements?
[a human father / our Heavenly Father]
- b) Does God love us always, or only when we are good?
[always / when we are good]
- c) When should we love our own children?
[only when they do good / all the time]

- 7 We can always trust and rely on God's love because this is His character. I once heard about a human father who wanted to teach his son a lesson of life. So he told the boy to stand on a low wall. 'Now jump into my arms', he said, 'Don't worry, I will catch you'.

The boy jumped, but the father dropped his arms to his side and let his son crash to the ground. 'That is to teach you a lesson of life', he told the bewildered child. 'The lesson is – never trust anyone!'.

Is our Heavenly Father like that untrustworthy father? No! No! No!

- *Pause now, and thank God that He is more trustworthy than any human father, and He loves us always*

- 8 By the following statements, write 'True' or 'False':
- a) Our Heavenly Father loves us if we do good and hates us if we do bad _____
- b) God the Father always loves us _____

B) The Heavenly Father never rejects us

- 9 Here is a story about a man who had two sons:

The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate'. So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and

hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will return to my father and see if he is willing to take me back, even as one of his own servants.'

So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him ...

After such a son had 'shed his father's eyebrows' [idiom meaning, brought great dishonour on his father], how would you expect the father to react? Do you think he would:

- a) welcome his son with open arms?
 - b) reject him and send him away?
 - c) let him back into the home, but with a heavy punishment?
- (write your own opinion and be ready for the discussion)*

- 10 It may surprise you to hear that this story was first told by Jesus Christ. Jesus continued the story in an even more surprising way:

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' (Luke 15:11-24)

- a) After bringing such dishonour to his father, did the son deserve to be welcomed or rejected? _____
- b) But what the father in Jesus' story actually do, welcome or reject his son?

- 11 By contrast, let me tell you about my friend Nazir (the account is true but I have changed his name).

Around 1990 Nazir was sent by his father, a leading *sheikh* in Uganda, to study religion in a *madrassa* overseas. But during that time Nazir became a follower of Jesus instead.

Several years later Nazir returned to Uganda and went to his home, hoping to be accepted by his father. Instead, from behind the locked gate, his father asked him ‘We have heard rumours that you became a Christian – is it true?’ ‘Yes’, Nazir admitted. ‘Then you are no longer my son’, replied his father. Then, from behind the gate, he threw stones to drive Nazir away.

Later Nazir told me, ‘That day was the hardest day of my life’.

Which father is God like? (*tick one*)

- a) the father of Nazir, who rejected him because he brought dishonour
 b) the father in Jesus’ parable, who did not reject his son even after he caused dishonour

- 12 We try not to cause dishonour to our divine Father. But if we do, we must come back to him and apologise sincerely, like the son in Jesus’ parable. When we do that, we can be sure He will [never / probably] reject us. (*circle the correct answer*)

- 13 It is written “Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.” (Psalm 27:10). Often we are emotionally closer to our mothers than to our fathers. But God’s love for us is even stronger than our mother’s love!

Which one of the following will never reject us? (*tick one only*)

- a) our father b) our mother c) God

C) The Heavenly Father disciplines us for our good

- 14 All parents want their children to grow up with a good character. So they discipline them and train them. God does the same with us. “God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?... God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness”. (Hebrews 12:7,10)

According to this verse, why does our Heavenly Father discipline us?

- a) for our own good
 b) because he likes to hurt us

- 15 Yes, our divine Father disciplines us for our own good. He wants to make our character more like the character of Jesus Christ. He wants us to become patient, trusting, loving, obedient children.

Come Follow Me

Do you think these characteristics will be developed in us more through the easy times of life or more through the hard times? Write your personal opinion here, and be ready for discussion:

- 16 Because God our Father loves His spiritual children so much, He disciplines us. He deliberately allows us to pass through hard trials:

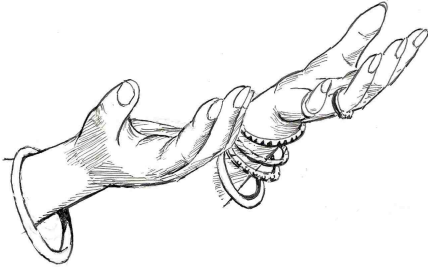
“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine” (1 Peter 1:6-7)

According to this verse,

- a) What does the goldsmith use to purify gold? _____
- b) What does God, the Heavenly Father, use to purify our faith?

- 17 Look back over three things about our Heavenly Father we have learned in this lesson.
- a) In which section did we learn that the Heavenly Father always loves us?
from question 4 to question ____
- b) In which section did we learn that the Heavenly Father never rejects us?
from question ____ to question ____
- c) In which section did we learn that the Heavenly Father disciplines us for our good? from question ____ to question 16

Now say this prayer:



Heavenly Father,
Thank you very much for making me
as your spiritual child and loving me
without limit. I too love you, and as
your child I want to bring you
honour.
Amen.

LESSON 3 PRACTICAL TASK

This week, do something to show love to the children in your life (your own or your relatives' children). Give attention to them and show interest in them. For instance, you could spend time listening to what they want to tell you, or take them with you to the market, or give them a 'well done', or lovingly guide them to change a bad habit in their life.

LESSON 3 REVIEW

- 1 Write three things we have learned about our Heavenly Father:
(see question 17)
 - a) Our Heavenly Father always _____ us
 - b) The Heavenly Father never _____ us
 - c) The Heavenly Father _____ us for our good

- 2 By each of the following statements, write 'True' or 'False':
 - a) Our Heavenly Father loves us even when we fail _____
 - b) We can trust our Heavenly Father all the time _____
 - c) God's discipline is bad for us _____

- 3 Write the verse you memorised:
 "How _____ is the _____
 that we should be called _____ . And that
 _____!" (1 John 3:1).
 (if you can't remember, see question 5)

LESSON 3 ANSWERS

- 1 b)
- 2 Father
- 3 Heavenly Father / God the Father
- 4 c)
- 5 great, love, children
- 6 a) a human father b) unconditional c) all the time
- 7 your personal response to God
- 8 a) False b) True
- 9 for the discussion time
- 10 a) rejected b) welcome
- 11 b)
- 12 never
- 13 c)
- 14 a)
- 15 for the discussion time
- 16 a) fire b) all kinds of trials
- 17 a) 8 b) 9, 13 c) 14