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## **A Lenten Challenge**

You were created to call the Father “Father” and to call the Son “Jesus” and to call the Holy Spirit “Holy Spirit.”

Maybe that doesn’t sound too profound to you until you stop and ask yourself “how many times do I simply say ‘God’ or ‘Lord’ and never speak about, or to, the persons of God by personal name?”

There’s a lot in a personal name. I am a human and an American and a Pastor. I have no problem with people calling me those things. But when my 6 year-old son crawls up in my lap, the last thing I want him to call me is “Pastor” or “Citizen Stepp.” I want him to call me “Daddy” because, as far as he’s concerned, that is my name and I have no other.

Our Father in heaven created us to call him “Father” because—as far as we’re concerned—that’s who he is. He is the Father because of his relationship with the Son. He was the eternal Father of the eternal Son forever before we came into existence, and he will be the Father of the Son forevermore. When we call him “Father” we are calling him by his true, personal name. Even the names revealed to Israel—like Yahweh and El-Shaddai—are not nearly as fundamentally descriptive of his true nature as the simple name “Father.”

Likewise, the Son has a name. He is God, yes. And he is certainly Lord, of that there is no doubt. But his Mama calls him Jesus, as do his friends, and he calls us his friends. So we should call him Jesus. We were born to be his brothers and sisters. He includes us all in his life and his relationship with the Father. We call him Jesus because that’s his name, and it will be his name forever.

The Holy Spirit is also the Lord and the giver of Life, so there’s certainly nothing wrong with calling him “God” or “Lord.” But Jesus calls him “The Spirit”—the Spirit of truth, the Counselor, the one who is Holy. He comes to us from the Father through the Son, and he gives us the fruit of the Holy relationship the Father and Son share. He gives us their love, their joy, their peace, and their kindness.

Because we know the names of the persons of God, the Church has always prayed and worshiped in one of two ways: either “to the Father, in Jesus’ name, by the power of the Holy Spirit” or “to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.” Sometimes we pray to God and sometimes we worship the Lord (those words for the Triune Life are both very Biblical), but those are not the primary ways we have talked to, and about, the Trinity. The primary and most common way we speak of God is to call upon our Father in heaven, in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I say this is how we pray and worship because I am thinking of the Church Universal, as she exists in every language, tribe, and nation for 2,000 years. Unfortunately, we have to admit that we 21st century Christians in North America do not most commonly pray to the Father in Jesus’ name. Most often we pray to God. We do not usually worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; we usually worship the Lord. The doctrinal statements of our Churches are Trinitarian but our thoughts,

words, prayers, and songs are far too often Unitarian.

Sometimes people say to me “Yes, but aren’t these *just* words?” Of course they are words, but no word is “just” a word. “Love” is a word, but it is not *just* a word. “Daddy” and “Mama” and “home” are words, but they are never *just* words.

The words we use—to think, to feel, to speak, to pray, and to sing—are all symbols that convey deep truth about the way we view reality: ourselves, others, and the world. These words also shape and form our view of reality. When 90% of our spiritual language is generic and neutral—like the words “God” and “Lord”—we have to admit that we are expressing the generic and neutral inner reality of our thoughts about our Father in heaven. And when we predominantly use that generic language, then our generic view of the Divine Life is reinforced.

Likewise, when we allow the Holy Spirit to discipline our thoughts and language so that we are always talking about our Father in heaven and our brother Jesus, that also reveals the inner reality of our thoughts. And that language also shapes our thinking and our view of the world. When we use the words “Father,” “Jesus,” and “Holy Spirit,” we can no longer think of God as some generic, impersonal force. The use of the words themselves forces our minds, hearts, and souls to understand that we are in union with our Dad in heaven, through his Son Jesus, and baptized in his Spirit.

Here’s my Lenten challenge to you: for the season of Lent stop saying “God” and “Lord.” Not because those words are wrong but because you have said them a million times in your life while you’ve only said “Father,” “Jesus,” and “Holy Spirit” a few thousand times. Try this experiment: for the rest of Lent, every time you want to say something about God, pick a person of the Trinity to speak about instead, or speak of all three together. Here are some examples:

Instead of saying “God loves us all” say “Our Father in heaven loves us all.”

Instead of saying “God has forgiven us” say “We have forgiveness in Jesus.”

Instead of saying “Let’s worship the Lord” say “Let’s worship the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.”

Instead of praying “Lord, help me” pray “Father, help me, in the name of Jesus, through the power of your Holy Spirit.” Amen.

~ Jonathan Stepp