

Prayer—where do we begin?

I suspect this is your question as you use this short guide. Prayer is something we often do without thinking too much about it, like breathing! Most of the time we pray simply, as if we are chatting, but sometimes it is hard to breathe or maybe it flows and won't stop; a bit like breathing—we work ourselves so much sometimes we get short of breath and at other times are so exuberant we breathe fast as well.

Prayer is a natural thing for all humans, part of our 'spirituality' and provides for connection with God. Prayer is about dwelling in God's presence, it is about talking with God, it is about making petition for things on our hearts and minds, and it is also about listening; to God and to ourselves.

Prayer is both corporate and very personal. Prayer is most often very personal, shaped by the heart.

You may be new to formalised prayer, or you may be very long in the tooth (or better worn of bended knee), however, as disciples we are always learning, always growing in our relationship with God and everything is always 'work in progress'.

So, this year, across Bath and Wells diocese, the offer is to look to our prayers again, personally and corporately. With that in mind Ivelchester Chapter and the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group have thought to offer a series of reflections on the Lord's Prayer which we hope may be a blessing for you or a study/prayer group over the year.

From February through to November we will offer up a reflection on part of the Lord's Prayer for use in that month. We hope each might bring you closer to God and to yourself. It may be you are moved to art, music, or writing other prayers. Maybe you will find new ways to engage with this prayer, walking, quiet meditation, whilst doing some task or work, on your own or with a group.

Here are the anticipated sections and months:

February — Our Father in heaven

March — Holy is your name (perfect for Lent)

April - Your Kingdom come, and will be done on earth as in heaven (what better for Easter)

May — Give us this day our daily bread

June —Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

July— Lead us not to the time of trial

September — Deliver us from evil

October - for the kingdom, power and glory are yours, now and always

November —Amen

Session 2: Hallowed be your name

The first line of the Lord's Prayer reminds us who it is we approach. Through Jesus God is 'our Father', and as He is Father to us as individuals so too are we reminded that the family of God is vast. Our Father, whose glory fills the heavenly reality, is the God 'not of the dead but of the living' (Luke 20:38) and so the 'our' encompasses His people from time immemorial. We also note that in coming before God, a balance needs to be struck. As His children we can boldly approach our Father knowing that He will act for our good. But He is also 'in heaven', the creator of the universe and utterly holy. And so we balance intimacy with reverence.

Once this foundation is established, the second line – hallowed be your name – expresses the first petition. This is the first thing we ask for in the Lord's Prayer. The word hallowed means to make holy, to revere. So we are praying that God's nature, as revealed throughout the Bible, will be honoured in every possible way in every part of the earth and for all time. Quite a big prayer then!

In last month's session, Bruce spoke of 'small words loaded with meaning'. In this line the word 'name' packs a significant punch.

You may know that when it came to referring to God, the Old Testament Jews held to such a sense of His greatness, majesty and holiness, that it became their custom not to use the name 'Jehovah'. They felt that the name was so sacred, and they so unworthy by comparison, that they dare not mention it. Instead they referred to God as 'The Name'.

The 'name' we are called to hallow therefore means all that is true of God, and all that has been revealed about him. Throughout the Old Testament God revealed Himself to the people of Israel through various names. For example God used the name Elohim which refers to His might, dominion and power; then came Jehovah which speaks of God as eternally self-existent. Other names were to follow. Translated from the Hebrew they express God's character: the Lord will provide; the Lord that heals; the Lord our peace; the Lord our Shepherd; the Lord our Righteousness; the Lord is present.

In a sense 'hallowed be your name' stands for all that. It was certainly Jesus' passion that His earthly ministry bring glory to God His Father (see John 17 verses 1-5). Through this prayer, His desire is that we also might come to see, understand and express this glory. That is the meaning of this first request in the Lord's Prayer. It's about a developing desire within us that the whole world may bow before God in adoration, reverence, praise, worship, honour and in thanksgiving. We are praying that God's will be known and worshipped; that God's nature might be reflected in human society in justice, peace, joy, hope, healing and loving kindness.

Did I mention this is a big prayer?!

This first petition takes us to the centre of the struggle taking place within the universe. Although Christ is victorious through His death and resurrection, the truth is God's name and nature are not hallowed throughout the earth. By praying this prayer we are therefore placing ourselves on God's side, for God and for His ways. We are in effect pledging ourselves to God's service and cause.

There is much to reflect on again in this session:

1. What does it mean for you to pray for God's name to be hallowed?
2. Even when our personal needs are pressing, or even feeling desperate, do we still remember Jesus' call to honour God first?
3. God's saints have always been concerned with God's glory, how far is this reflected within your church family?