

How often do we pray the Lord's Prayer without thinking about what we are saying? These words handed down to us from Jesus Himself, have become so familiar that there is a tendency for us to rattle them off without stopping to think that we are actually talking and making some serious requests and agreements with God. I suspect that if we stopped and considered what we were saying and who we were talking to, we may not be quite so quick to rattle off the Lord's Prayer in the way we do! I think it would be helpful for us to go through this prayer, to help us to think about what we are doing and saying when we pray the Lord's Prayer.

For many the Lord's Prayer offers comfort and I can think of two reasons for this, First; the words are familiar and most of us would have learned this prayer in primary school. The second reason is that it allows people to pray who feel intimidated about praying out loud. A powerful prayer life is an elusive goal for many who feel that they just don't have the vocabulary or language skills to pray like others they have heard. When they hear others pray, some compare their own prayers and become intimidated and timid, but the heart of prayer is worship. Prayer is worship and when we pray, we talk to our God who loves us as a Father.

The opening lines to the Lord's Prayer are words of worship: ***Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name.*** We acknowledge that God is our Father. That can cause a problem for people who have not had a good experience with their earthly father. But God is our heavenly Father who only wants what is good for us. Our earthly fathers are flawed individuals just like us, and they don't always get it right. They make bad choices that impact of those around them, especially children. But God the Father only wants what's good for us. He is our perfect creator and He loves each one of us as His own.

In reciting the opening line of the Lord's Prayer we are acknowledging that God the Father is different from earthly fathers we may have known. We acknowledge this by saying *Hallowed be your Name*. The word *Hallowed* is to do with the holiness of God. We pray this line in recognition that the nature of God is holy and distinct from us.

It's because we have recognised that God is holy and distinct from us that we can pray: *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven*. Now, the first couple of lines of the Lord's Prayer about God being hallowed tripped off the tongue without any difficulty, and in declaring Your kingdom come, we acknowledge that God is the creator and everything in the universe is His. I don't expect that declaring this causes us any problems. But what about this bit about *Your will be done*, I suspect this is a little trickier! I don't know about you but I have to admit that I am happier when *my will* is being done. I quite like the control when my will is done, and I get my own way then. But we are telling God that we are willing for *His will to be done* in our lives. The next time you pray this prayer, stop and consider just what you are saying here. If we are serious about this line, then we are asking God's wishes to be supreme in our lives.

We have said that God is holy, and we have asked God to have control of our lives, now we acknowledge that *we* are created and all *we* have comes from Him. *Give us today our daily bread*. Jesus knows that His Father will give us all we need, and in asking God to give us our daily bread, we are asking God for what we need. I think the word Bread is a cover all and it's not to be taken literally to mean only bread, but all that we need: Our food, our shelter, medicines, all that we need to sustain life. When we pray this line, let's remember that generally speaking, we are praying for things we take for granted, so spare a prayer for those who don't have daily bread or water!

Now we are getting to the most difficult line in this prayer: *Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us*.

I've said before that there's something of a deal going on here. If we hope to be forgiven our wrongdoing, then we have to forgive those who wrong us and that can be hard! Remember, it was Jesus who taught us this prayer, and if anyone knew what it was to forgive it was Him. He had done no wrong yet He was put to death and He took the punishment that should rightly be ours. On the cross in the midst of His agony, Jesus was still able to pray: *Father forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing!* (Luke 23:34). Jesus' call for us to forgive others as we are forgiven by God is important. Why would this be so important to Jesus? He knew that forgiveness is a healer, it heals others of their guilt and it heals us of our bitterness.

There was a woman who was counselling children from divorced families, in an attempt to heal their wounds and pain. She did an exercise with them where she took a large glass jar and filled it about half full of clean water. She explained that the water represented the substance of their lives. The woman had the children squirt little vials of food colouring into the water in accordance with their pain, anger and hurt. Some would squirt in only a couple drops, others would almost violently put in as much as they could. When they had finished, the water was black from the spread of the food colouring. It was black because no light could get through, and this black represents our hearts when they are filled with pain and bitterness. God is light and John's gospel tells us that God is the Light of the World. But God struggles to penetrate a heart that is clouded with hatred, anger and pain. When we forgive, we release ourselves from that bitterness. Yes, the pain may remain but we are released.

God asks us to forgive because He knows that when He forgives us, we feel better, we are healed and made whole. We feel we can start again in our relationship with God, and He wants that sense of wholeness that comes with forgiveness for us all. So we pray: ***Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.***

We live in a fallen world. We inhabit a world full of temptation and God knows that we will be tempted to enter into things that are not good for us. The world will offer us things that will take us away from God's will for our lives. So Jesus asks us to pray: *Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.* I think we all know what this line of the prayer means, and I won't labour it further.

We have opened this prayer with worship and we've acknowledged that God is our almighty Father, but unlike our earthly fathers, our Godly father is holy. We have recognised that God is supreme and that we should live according to His will for our lives. God is our provider and He will provide for us, but with the caveat that we have a responsibility to share all we have been blessed with, with those who are in need. Then we come to the question of being forgiven, and offering forgiveness. We need forgiven because we have fallen in temptation and followed our own will, often with consequences. And as we come to the end of the Lord's Prayer, we return to worshipping God.

Why are we praying to God anyway? What's so special about God? The closing lines of the prayer answer these questions: *For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.* We key word for us in this sentence is *Amen*. *Amen* is a Hebrew word that stems from the word *Aman*, which means *to be faithful, to support or confirm*. The word *amen* actually means, *so be it, or truly*. So, when we end our prayers with *amen*, we are re-affirming our dedication to God through Jesus Christ.

So the next time we pray the Lord's Prayer, I hope we will think about the words we are praying, and who we are praying to. **Amen**

(1436 Words)