

Column

In a recent sermon at a drive-in service, I passed on advice from Nicky Gumbel, founder of the Alpha programme. He advocates, instead saying the words to “Happy Birthday” while soaping your hands, saying the Lord’s Prayer. In so doing, you will be doing your part in beating down the coronavirus and, at the same time, growing spiritually.

I like his suggestion and have been trying to put it into action. To grow spiritually, though, one needs to do more than rattle off the words. Each phrase needs to be said with understanding and conviction.

To that end, what do the words of this prayer signify? Let’s take a quick look at each phrase.

“Our Father.” Yahweh (the revealed name of God) was seen as the Father of ancient Israel. God, for example, instructed Moses to say to Pharaoh: “Israel is my son, even my firstborn . . . let my son go” (Exodus 4:22, 23).

Those today who have been incorporated into the family of the Messiah by faith and baptism, regardless of their race, are in the same relationship. Jesus is the natural Son; they are adopted sons (and daughters). God is their Father.

“Who art in heaven.” God’s good creation has two dimensions: heaven, God’s space, and earth, our space. The One we are addressing dwells in the heavenly dimension. He is unseen by our human eyes, yet He is present with us and remains at work round the clock.

“Hallowed be thy name.” God’s name and everything about Him must be kept special (the meaning of ‘holy’). God is not just the highest being. He is the ground of being. He is the great “I am.”

“Thy kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven.” The problem is not in God’s dimension – heaven – but in ours. Here, human rebellion against God’s reign has put the world out of kilter and in a state of pain and travail. In this petition, we pray that His good order will be restored. Moreover, we pray that in some small way we can be a worker together with Him in bringing about this restoration.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” As God provided daily provision for His ancient people in the wilderness during the days of Moses – manna

-- so we pray that He will provide for our daily needs, both spiritual and physical. The bread in the Lord's Supper can be seen as an outward and visible sign of that provision.

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." In order to breath in the fresh air of God's forgiveness, it is necessary to breath out the foul air of unforgiveness in our own lives.

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Temptation refer to the tests of daily life. In this petition, we pray that with God at our side these tests will make us strong rather than defeat us.

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and forever." Jewish prayers normally concluded with a doxology, an expression of praise. Very early on this one became attached to Jesus' model prayer. God's goodness in creation and redemption rightly leads to a burst of joyful worship and adoration.

As we soap our hands and say these words, let us give to each phrases a hearty Amen!

ALMIGHTY God, who pourest out on all who desire it, the spirit of grace and of supplication; Deliver us, when we draw nigh to thee, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with stedfast thoughts and kindled affections, we may worship thee in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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