 **Briefing 23: Wednesday 22nd July, 2020.**

Dear friends,

How did you learn to pray?

Like most things, we learn to pray by watching other people pray and being helped by people who pray to pray ourselves. That’s why it’s so vital that parents pray with their children and encourage their children to pray. That’s why coming along to church prayer gatherings, even if you don’t feel able to pray out loud yourself, is important and helpful. That’s why reading books about prayer can be helpful too. We did that this Lent, working through Alistair Begg’s wonderful book Pray Big. If you’ve forgotten what you learned, as I frequently do, do go back and reread it. Let’s learn from the apostle Paul and pray those grand, God-centred, eternity-focussed biblical prayers!

I remember being taught to pray by my mum and grandmother. They taught me to kneel by my bed and pray the prayer that starts ‘gentle Jesus, meek and mild…’ Perhaps you know it. The language is rather odd and old-fashioned, and I certainly didn’t know what some of the words meant, but it gave me a pattern for prayer that I developed as I went through my childhood.

Jesus gave us a pattern to pray as well, didn’t he? It’s a prayer we all know, and we pray the Lord’s Prayer in church every Sunday. But as well as being a straightforward simple prayer on its own, it’s also a wonderful prayer to dissect and pray through. So over these coming weeks I’m going to take a phrase or two at a time and pray through them, writing a prayer as I might pray it, in the hope that it might encourage you to do the same, using your own words and inserting your own prayer requests as you do.

So let’s start at the beginning with **Our Father in Heaven**…

*Heavenly Father, even those words are amazing, and yet that’s what Jesus told me to call you. My father. So thank you that I can call you father, and thank you that through Jesus you look on me as one of your beloved children, adopted into your family through faith in Jesus. Thank you that you love me with an undying love. Thank you that you will never let me go. Thank you that like a perfect father, you protect me and shield me from harm, even using the trials and difficulties of life for my good. Thank you that one day I will see you face-to-face.*

*And thank you that you’re not just my father, but OUR father, father to all your people, in our church families, in churches around the town, around the country and around the globe. Please build your church, please keep us trusting in you, and please unite us in your truth. NB:* I might go on and pray for people within our church families here, using the church family lists as a helpful guide*.*

*Help me, father, to know you more. You are a faithful father, help me to trust your words. You are a good father, help me never to doubt your goodness, even in the midst of times of trial. And help me, father, to grow in your likeness, that I might be a good and godly father and grandfather and godfather to those you put under my care.*

*I want to thank you, heavenly Father, for my earthly father. Thank you for his love and care and dedication. Thank you that he showed me and taught me about Jesus and help me to grow in faith. Please would you strengthen him in his walk of faith, keep him close to yourself, and continue to reveal more of your truth to him through your word. May he continue to be a godly and wise example to me and to others.*

*And heavenly Father, I want to pray for those whose earthly fathers aren’t around, or who have lousy earthly fathers.*  *Please help them not to think that you are either absent or unloving, like their earthly fathers. May they find in you the father that we all need. And please help us as a church family to walk alongside them and to point them to you and your amazing love.*

*Thank you, Father, that although you are present with us by your Spirit, you are in heaven, ruling on high, shaping history, building your kingdom, building your church. Thank you that in all the chaos of this world, things are still ultimately working to your plans, and I pray, father that when I start to despair or fear, that you’d remind me again that you are my Father in heaven and you are ruling on high.*

*My Father in heaven, hear my prayer. Amen*

**OTHER NEWS:**

**LOSS OF A GIANT:** This week JI Packer died and went to be with his LORD. Over the last 5 decades, JI Packer has been a prolific writer and Bible teacher, reaching millions around the world with his books. As well as involvement with the translation of the ESV Bible, and writing a new catechism for the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) Packer wrote many books for the ordinary Christian. His classic book, ***Knowing God***, has blessed countless people, and is well worth a read or indeed a re-read.

**BOOKS ON HEAVEN AND HELL:** After my talk last Sunday, I said I would recommend some books on the subject of heaven, hell and eternal life. Here are 3: I’ve read the first, and will be reading the 3rd soon. If you get one, and read it, please let me know your thoughts on them.

https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/products/15500/what-happens-when-i-die

https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/products/16375/the-hitchhikers-guide-to-heaven

https://www.10ofthose.com/uk/products/1980/biblical-teaching-on-the-doctrines (of heaven and hell)

**THIS COMING SUNDAY**, we will be focusing on grace, God giving us what we do not deserve and cannot earn. We’ll spend some time looking at **Ephesians 2: 1 – 10** together. Why not read it before you come along to church. St Nicholas will be celebrating Holy Communion whilst St Mary’s will have a Service of the Word. I hope to see many of you this weekend, but if you’re not able to make it, do make sure you join us either live on Facebook or catch up later. The subject of grace should continue to amaze us!

If you are yet to book in, you can do so here: https://forms.gle/QxWhZ34wTyCuL2e86

**CHRISTMAS:** I know it’s really too early to be thinking about Christmas, but Operation Christmas Child (the shoebox appeal) have just launched their 2020 campaign. Here is a link to the new promotional video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\_continue=4&v=E5VVDymhGr4&feature=emb\_logo It’s an excellent short video which explains why the project is so valuable and why I’m so keen for us to take part again. (It’s also got 5 members of my family taking part – although you have to look very very very closely to see one of our 3 grandsons!)

**PCC MEETINGS**: PCCs from both churches will be meeting over the coming few days. (*Graveley on Saturday morning at 10am, St Nicholas at 7:30pm on Tuesday night*) Do please pray for fruitful meetings, wise decision-making and a clear sense of God’s call and direction for us as we continue to seek to serve him and build his kingdom in these testing times.

There will be another short email on Friday, with children’s activity sheets and a service sheet for St Marys. The AV system at St Nicholas is now fully operational, so we will be using that instead of paper sheets.

In the meantime, do keep me, the PCC’s, and all our church family in your prayers.

Yours in Christ,

*Dave*