**What’s in a Name?**

We all have one. It’s perhaps the only thing that we’ll possess throughout our entire lives.

It’s often the first thing strangers ask about us, and although we have the power to change it, few do. There’s often a story behind it, and many people have strong feelings – whether positive or negative – towards it.

I’m talking, of course, about names. With a new prince being born this week, there has been much discussion about what the sixth-in-line to the throne will be called.

Whether we like it or not, our names define us. Although this is certainly less the case now than it has been in the past, names tell us a lot about a person – from gender to race to socioeconomic background and more. Our name can have the power to shape our self-esteem and influence how we’re seen and treated by others.

Names are particularly significant in the Bible – bound up with identity, origin, birth circumstances, or even the ‘divine purpose’ of that person. Right from the start of Genesis, we see the importance of names. The name ‘Adam’ provides a pun on the word for ‘ground’, from which he is formed. Abram, ‘exalted father’ becomes Abraham, ‘father of many nations’. Samuel, the longed-for child of Hannah, means ‘God hears’.

Our names form a part of our faith, too. In Isaiah 43:1, it is said that God has ‘summoned you by name’; a declaration that is reflected in the Anglican confirmation [service](https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/christian-initiation/baptism-and-confirmation): ‘God has called you by name and made you his own’.

In Ephesians 3, Paul begins his prayer for the Ephesians with these powerful words:  
‘For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.’

Whether we love, hate, or are completely ambivalent towards our given names, this verse reminds us that, ultimately, they pale in significance to our family name – that which is given to us when we become adopted heirs of God in Christ. Belonging, community, and family ultimately goes back to God himself, and are reflected most truly in relationship with him.



Author

**Nell Goddard**