Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Responsibilities of the Church: Prayer, Part 1
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-152

It has been a wonderful, encouraging time as we have gone through this little series on the anatomy of the church, which has recaptured for us, in this particular time, the foundational truths upon which Grace Church has been built through the years. When I started this many months ago, I didn't really know how long the series would go on the anatomy of the church. But we've seen such blessing from the hand of the Lord that we just felt like we oughta continue to do it. The Lord has given us growth, a better understanding of the church, tremendous enrichment of fellowship. And I can honestly say I don't know that there's ever been a time in the church when there was a more wonderful, Christ-honoring, God-honoring spirit than there is right now. You are so responsive to the Word of God, the fellowship and the ministries of our church, the giving. All those things by which we measure the church are so blessed of God, and I believe this is as we come to understand what the Word of God teaches about the church and as we conform to God's standard, He begins to pour out blessing upon blessing. And...and we've enjoyed that.

And it's with a bit of reluctance that I...that I leave this subject, having experienced the goodness of God through these days. But I have to believe that God is equally good in the days ahead, and that this is foundation upon which we'll be able to build many wonderful things as we look ahead to what God has for us.

But with regard to our series on the anatomy of the church, we...we come to the culmination of our discussion. We've gone through the skeleton, as it were. We've gone through the internal systems of the church, the spiritual attitudes that carry its life. And we've been talking about the muscles or the functions of the church. We come to the last one that I want to address in the series, and that is prayer.

As you know, this is a special weekend time of prayer. We do that periodically here in our church, and...and we're just so grateful to God for the way in which you have responded to that and the way the Lord, in His grace, has answered our prayers. And it's fitting that we culminate the whole series with a discussion of prayer, because everything we do as a church, the formulation of our non-negotiable foundation structure doctrine, the...the spiritual attitudes that are generated in the life of the church, as well as the functions, as we exercise our spiritual muscles. All must be bathed in prayer. They all must be focused together and brought before the throne of God that we might know they are within His Will, and that we might experience His blessing. And so prayer is really the capstone that sort of covers everything, and I trust that we'll see it that way as we look at it during the

day.

This morning, as I was contemplating what I might do in terms of a text of Scripture, I...I was irresistibly drawn, and...and really sort of unequivocally drawn to a text of Scripture which, for me, formulates the essence of prayer better than any other one, and that is Matthew chapter 6 beginning at verse 9, in what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, but should be known as the disciple's prayer. If you wanna study the Lord's Prayer, you can go to John 17 and study His prayer as He prayed to the Father.

But this is the disciple's prayer when they asked to...how they should pray, Jesus taught them, and gave for us a model for all of our prayers. The words are familiar. They have been recited by you many times. They have been sung by you many times. They're very familiar words. Unfortunately, like so many things that become familiar to us, we substitute familiarity for understanding. And we hope this morning to get a grip on the depth and penetrating significance of the first part, in particular, of this prayer so familiar to us.

Verse 9, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

To launch our thoughts this morning, let me say at the beginning, prayer is worship. Nowhere is that more clear than in this particular prayer, which begins and ends with a concern for God. And in the center is a concern for self. First and foremost, we must understand that prayer is an act of worship...that the goal of prayer is not to gain anything for us, but to gain glory for God.

In John's Gospel chapter 14, as he was saying his farewell to the disciples, they thought they were losing everything...And so he gives them a great promise in verse 13. He says, "Whatever you ask the Father...implied from verse 12. This is verse 13...Whatever you ask the Father in My name, that will I do." And Jesus, here, gives the great pledge of answered prayer. Then He says this: "In order that the Father may be glorified in the Son." And there you have the ultimate motivation for prayer: that God may be glorified. So again I say, prayer is not primarily a means by what...by which we get what we want, but rather a means by which He gets what He wants and deserves, which is supreme glory.

Prayer must begin and end with a concern for the glory of God...No matter how severe the exigencies. No matter how difficult the circumstance. The heart of the one praying should be occupied with the concerns of God before his own. Nowhere is this more graphically illustrated than in the case of Jonah, the erstwhile prophet who, in disobeying God's Will, wound up in the stomach of a fish. And when he was in the stomach of the fish in Jonah chapter 2, he prayed. And I think it's so

interesting to see the essence of his prayer. Down in verse 7 of Jonah 2, this is what Jonah said. "While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to Thee, into Thy holy temple. Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; that which I have vowed, I will repay. Salvation is from the Lord."

He starts out his prayer with worship and praise and thanksgiving. Now, we could forgive him if he hurried to the petition, couldn't we? I mean it was a kind of a severe occasion...But it was in the nature of his own heart to come before God with a profound sense of reverence...with an understanding that God was to be adored and praised. And he starts out by saying, "My prayer came to You into your holy temple." He recognizes the holiness of God. And then he...he says, "Those who regard vain idols," thus setting God apart from all false gods. Then he talks about those who forget their faithfulness to God. And he says, "But I will sacrifice to You, and my sacrifice is a sacrifice of the voice of thanksgiving."

Here is this disobedient prophet sitting in the acid of a fish's stomach thanking God. "That which I have vowed, I will pay." What he means by that is "I...I vowed when I came to You, when I came to know You, when I gave my life to you, when I, by faith, entered into a relationship with You to honor You and to praise You and to glorify You, and I will do that, and I will extol You." And he says, "Salvation or deliverance is from the Lord." You're in charge. It's a prayer of worship.

In Daniel's prophecy, perhaps one of the greatest prayers, if not the most instructive prayer in the whole Old Testament appears in Daniel 9. And Daniel is...made aware, by reading the Prophet Jeremiah, that the 70-year captivity of Judah in Babylon is about over. He knows the beginning time of it, and he knows the end is near. And from reading Jeremiah, he realizes that now is the time when God may be delivering his people. So he launches into a prayer in chapter 9, and it's a prayer of confession that God would forgive the iniquities of Israel. And this prayer, this repentant, pleading prayer asking for forgiveness starts in verse 5 and flows all the way down through the chapter to about verse 16. But before he ever gets into his petition, before he ever launches this plea for God to forgive, here is how he begins. Verse 4, "I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, 'Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and loving kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments."

Again, he launches into his prayer with an attitude of worship. The end of his prayer, you come down to verse 17, "So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplications, and for Thy sake, O Lord, let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary." Meaning allow them to go back and rebuild the temple. "O my God, include Thine ear and hear! Open Thine eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Thy name...namely Jerusalem...for we are not presenting our supplications before Thee on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Thy great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action!...Why?...For Thine own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name." He's

saying Your name, Your kingdom, Your people, Your city, Your temple, they're at stake. The passionate concern of Daniel, then, was to answer his prayer for God's own glory. For God's own sake.

Jeremiah prayed similarly in Jeremiah chapter 32, he also, coming before the Lord with a passionate prayer, launches into the prayer...with praise. Jeremiah chapter 32...verse 16, he says, "I prayed to the Lord." And he's in a very dire situation at this time. Obviously his whole nation has rejected him. He launches into the prayer, and he says, "Ah Lord God! Behold Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thy outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee, who showest His loving kindness to thousands, but repayest the iniquity of fathers to the bosom of their children after them, O great and mighty God the Lord of hosts is His name. Great in counsel and mighty in deed, Whose eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds; Who has set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and even to this day, both in Israel and among mankind; Thou hast made a name for Thyself as at this day. Thou didst bring Thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and with wonders, and with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terror; and gavest them this land, which Thou doest swear to their forefathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. And they came in and took possession of it, but they did not obey Thy voice or walk in Thy law; they have done nothing of all that Thou commandest them to do; therefore Thou hast made all this calamity come upon them."

Before he prays with regard to the calamity, he goes through all of that recitation of the character and the work of God. Now this is standard stuff, if you wanna go through the...the Old Testament and particularly noting the...the Psalms. This is the nature of the way the saints have always prayed. And now go back to the prayer that we're gonna be looking at in Matthew chapter 6, and you can see that, as Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, it starts on this same note where He begins with very familiar words to us, "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done." Three Thys there. We're concerned about You. We're concerned about Your glory, Your Kingdom, and Your will. All prayer sets God in His proper place. All prayer takes note of the fact that God is on the throne and that prayer is primarily worship before it is anything else. And that the only legitimate petition that I can pray for...with a pure and a true heart would be that petition that sanctifies God, that advances His Kingdom, and that fits His will. That's the priority. Any other prayer would be of self-concern...rather than the concern that ought to be directed at God. So the prayer begins, and...and ends by the way, look at verse 13, "Thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever. Amen." The prayer begins and ends with this focus on worship.

I want us to look at four elements of this particular emphasis that come through here in these opening verses. First of all is God's paternity...or God revealed as paternal Father. Verse 9, "Pray then in this way: Our Father who art in Heaven." Now that is a very important primary statement, very important. "Our Father who art in Heaven." That...that distinguishes God from all other deities. As you know,

the gods of the nations, the gods of the invention of demons and men, move on a spectrum from indifference to hostility. None of them is ever identified as a loving, compassionate, tender-hearted, protective father who wants to nurture his children and meet all their needs. The best that can be said about the false gods in Israel would be that they were indifferent, and that Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Why don't you yell a little louder. He's probably taking a nap." The worst that could be said about them would be that they were like Molek, and you had to take your little infant baby and burn him to a crisp in a fire to placate the otherwise vengeful Molek. So anything from indifference or apathy all the way over to hostility, but no god of the invention of man and demons is a loving, protective, caring, nurturing, supporting, supplying father.

So we have here a brand new perspective...and it was not only new in the...in the pagan world, but it was actually new in the Jewish world, as well. In chapter 7, look at verses 7 to 11. Jesus teaching the Jews, says, "Ask, and it shall be given to you. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened to you." This, again, is a brand new approach. Whatever you ask, you're going to receive. This is very different than trying to placate some otherwise hostile deity or indifferent one. "For every one who asks, receive...receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened." That is a very, very broad series of statements...and the Jews would respond to this...in a somewhat different way than we would, because the Jews had no real sense of intimacy with God.

Fourteen times in the Old Testament God is called Father. Never is He called my Father by any individual. Collectively, He's called our Father. But in every case of the 14 times God is referred to as Father in the Old Testament, it is collectively the Father of the nation of which He is identified. No one would be so brash, apparently, as to assume that God was in some way intimate with him. In fact, I suppose, by virtue of the severity of the Ten Commandments, and the warning not to touch the mountain, because God was there, and the fire and the smoke at Sinai, the people understood that they needed to distance themselves from God. Furthermore, they knew that when the temple was constructed, there was a veil placed between God's presence and the people, and nobody could ever go in there except the high priest, and that once a year. And if he hadn't cleansed himself, he could be killed in there. They put little bells on his garments when he went in so, in case he died, they would know it, because the bells would stop ringing.

So there was a...a real sense in which God was teaching them about His utter separateness and otherness and holiness. And there was a certain fear engendered in them that I think, perhaps, they pushed further than God even intended, because they became...sort of superstitious about this, and they reached the point where they wouldn't even speak the name of God...which is known as the Tetragrammaton. Four letters in the Hebrew, and they wouldn't speak it, and so they substituted some kind of a...of a hybrid word, because they were...were unable to utter this word that was too holy to cross their lips. So they...they had to properly understand that God is separate from them. They had properly been taught that God is an absolutely holy God into Whose presence a sinner cannot enter except under very, very limited situations. They got that far and...and instead of...maybe

moving in the other direction in devel...direction in developing...their personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the religion of Israel became...I...I should say their faith in God and moving toward Him, in faith, before the coming of Christ, their religion became apostate. And so it even distanced them more.

So when Jesus came on the scene, the Jews were at a great distance from God...and they wouldn't speak of God as Father. They wouldn't even use God's own name because of the seriousness of it. Jesus comes into that environment. Seventy times, He refers to God personally. And every time calls Him My Father, with one exception. That is on the cross when He Himself being separate from God was bearing the just wrath for our sins said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Instead of saying Father. Because He was feeling the alienation. In all the prayers of Jesus in the gospels, He used Father, and He brought a new intimacy. In fact, it was that very intimacy that He kept claiming with the Father that led the Jews to kill Him, wasn't it? In the end, it was the fact that He continued to say that He and the Father were One. And He continued to celebrate this inimy...intimacy with the Father that caused them to become hostile toward Him, turn Him over to the Romans for the actual execution.

In the world around Israel, there was the same kind of attitude toward God. No god in the pagan culture, as I mentioned a moment ago...a moment ago was a father, a loving, caring, supporting, supplying father. In fact, the two dominant philosophical viewpoints of that time, which encompassed their...their view of deities were Stoicism and Epicureanism. Any of you have studied the western civilization or have studied philosophy or advanced philosophy have...have wandered through this particular area of thought.

Let's talk about that for a moment. The Stoics, first of all, the two great pre-Christian philosophies by which men lived in the Greco-Roman world, the first of them was Stoicism. And the Stoics said that the one essential attribute of God was opethea, from which we get apathy in...in English. But, when we say apathy in English, we usually mean someone who is indifferent when they need not be or should not be. In other words, we use it in a negative sense. We would say a...someone is apathetic, that means they're indifferent to something they ought not be indifferent to. They're disinterested in something they ought not to be disinterested in. But that is not what it really means in its root meaning in the Greek. It's come to mean that in English. The Greek word opetheameans the inability to feel. The inability to experience anything. Any feeling at all. And the Greeks said that the one thing that is truest about God is He can't feel anything. He cannot experience anything...by way of feeling.

And here was their basic logic: The Stoics said this, simple logic, if a person can experience a feeling of joy...if a person can experience a feeling of grief, if a person can experience a feeling of love, if a person can experience a feeling of hate, it means, then, that someone else can affect him. Right? They could make you happy, make you sad, make you love, make you hate. And, they concluded,

that, therefore, man would be affecting God...And as the Greeks saw it, no man had any power over God. And, therefore, God, to avoid being at all influenced by man, was opethea.

It was, essentially, His nature. He was passionless, emotionless, and utterly indifferent by nature. No capacity to feel anything. I would say that's quite different than the God of the Bible, wouldn't you? Into that environment comes a God who feels compassion, love, tenderness, Who weeps through the eyes of a prophet, and weeps through the eyes of His Son. A God Who says a merry heart does good like a medicine. A God knows how to love. A God who knows how to hate. Very different. A God who is a loving, compassionate, caring Father, Who brings children into His own spiritual realm and pours out unending blessing upon them, and who is sorrowed by their sin and who rejoices over their righteousness.

Secondly, the Epicureans, who were also the dominant sort of pre-Christian philosophy of the time, identified their main view of God around the word ataraxia. Ataraxia. That meant...does mean in the greed...serenity. It means complete serenity or complete calm. And the argument of the Epicureans was that if God was involved at all in the affairs of the world, He couldn't stay serene. Who could? The affairs of the world are too troublesome. If God at all got involved in the affairs of the world, it would trouble Him, and if it troubled Him, He wouldn't be God. So the gods had to be utterly and totally detached. They were ataraxia. Unmoved, uninterested, uninvolved, unaware...

And against that background comes the New Testament teaching that God is involved and very aware...feels every small issue of life personally. When His children hurt, He hurts...and sends the angels, as Matthew 18 says, to their aid. In modern times, we have these kinds of philosophical views of God. The deists believe that God was some force that wound up the universe, and it's unwinding and He's gone away and has nothing to do with it. That was major theology in the early part of the founding of America. James Stewartquotes two lines from a poem of Thomas Hardy. Thomas Hardy asks what could possibly be the use of prayer when we have no one to pray to, whom...except whom he defines as the "Dreaming, dark, dumb thing that turns the handle of this idle show." Well, you couldn't get too excited about...having a God who was a dreaming, dark, dumb thing.

Voltaire, his verdict on life, quote "A bad joke. Bring down the curtain. The farce is done." H.G. Wells, in one of his novels, paints a picture of a man defeated by the stress and strain and tension of life. His doctor wisely told him the only hope of retaining his sanity was to give his life to Christ. "'What?' said the man...H.G. Wells writes...that, that, that up there having fellowship with me? I would as soon think of cooling of my throat with the Milky Way or shaking hands with a star." An indifferent, apathetic, uninvolved force. These are the verdicts of mankind, but these are far afield from what the Bible has to say.

Our God is a loving Father, and all prayer begins with that recognition. We're not going in there trying to wake up God like the Baal prophets were doing. Nor are we going in there trying to...to...to somehow satiate His lust for blood by burning our children in a fire. We're going to a God who is our Father; and, with intimate love, longs to give the best that He has to His beloved children.

And in Matthew 7, the passage that I started to read earlier, Jesus says this about a man. "If a...if a son comes to a father and asks him for a loaf of bread, will he give him a stone? If he asks him for a fish, will he give him a snake?" How much more your Father, who is good, will good gifts to His children when human fathers, who are evil, give good gifts to their children. If a human father can be so loving and compassionate, how much more loving and compassionate is our divine Father? And we can be as intimate with God as to call him Abba. Romans 8:15, Col...Galatians 4:6. Abba means poppa. It's a term of endearment. It's a term of intimacy. We don't have to go in there trembling and shaking and quaking. We have a loving Father, and we can say to Him, "Abba."

Now that settles a lot of issues. That's where all prayer begins. You are going, not to try to get God interested in your life, not to try to stop Him from harming you, not to try to awaken Him to the fact that you're there. You're going to a loving, caring Father. That settles a lot of issues. First of all, it settles the issue of fear. Completely settles the issue of fear. God is there, loving, receiving, not threatening. Put that against the background of the most famous Greek legend of all Greek legends. The legend of Prometheus. Have you read Prometheus Boundor Prometheus Unbound? Somewhere in your education, perhaps, you did. Prometheus was a god in the pantheon of Greco-Roman gods. And all of this, of course, is fantasy. Prometheus was a god, and it was in the days before men possessed fire. And when men didn't have fire, life was very comfortless. You couldn't cook anything, and you couldn't get warm. In pity, Prometheus took fire from heaven, because there was fire up there with the gods. And he gave it as a gift to men.

Well, Prometheus really sorta slipped up and, in being good to men, he was immediately the object of vengeance by the other gods. And according to Greek mythology, Zeus was so upset that he had done this good for man...that he took Prometheus, and he chained him to a rock in the middle of the Adriatic Sea, where he was tortured with the heat and thirst of the day and the cold of the night. And then Zeus prepared a vulture, and the vulture went down and tore out Prometheus' liver. Prometheus had an unusual liver, however. It kept growing back. And so in incessant, unrelenting torture, he tore it out and it grew back. He tore it out and it grew back. He tore it out and it grew back. And that's the way the gods treated somebody who wanted to be kind to man.

It's against that background that we understand that when the Scripture talks about God as a loving Father, we're talking about a very, very different thing. That settles the matter of fear. We approach a loving Father, Abba, Father knowing that, because we're in Christ, we have nothing to fear. It also settles the matter of hope. Settles the matter of hope.

You know, one of the things I always looked to my father for as a child was the future. Is that not true? My future was totally in his hands. I wasn't gonna have another meal if he didn't provide it. His job was my source of life. His choices controlled my life. Where he lived, the patterns of life. The money he provided determined my education, the direction of my life. The values that he taught me, the principles that he taught me unfolded and became my future. Fathers are really in charge of futures, aren't they? And it settles the matter of hope.

I know as a father myself, you know, in talking to my own children, there are times when you have to say, "Well, just look ahead. Things will be better." Times when you say, "Hey, this is what we're gonna do in the future." And you fill your children's hearts with hope about some wonderful reality to come, or about the fact that some pain in the moment will pass, and there's a...there's a better tomorrow coming. Part of a father's role is to create a future, and God has created a future for His children. And the promise of that future is bound up in this statement. Very simple. God is able to make all things work together for good, to them that love Him. Settles the matter of loneliness, too. I'm God's beloved child, and He will never leave me, and He will never forsake me. And the Old Testament says he's a friend that sticks closer than a brother...That settles the issue of loneliness. I don't need to feel lonely. I can always go to God, and He's always there. I'm never alone...

It settles the matter of selfishness, too, this statement. Because, you know, as much as He is my Father, I'm not His only kid. Says, "Our Father." It's very important that the prayer is that...it chooses that particular pronoun. Because when I say, "Our Father," I immediately embrace all the rest of His children. Whatever it is that I wanna bring before Him, I have to take into account that there's a whole lot of other children involved in this, as well. Something wonderful about big families. Something wonderful about learning that your father is not just your father, but he's a lot of other kids' father, too, and they need him and resources from him and however he deals with you has to be, in some way, in concert with how he deals with all the rest.

The very word "our" ends exclusiveness. It puts me in a family. It settles the matter of resources, too, this statement. Because it says "Our Father who art...where?...in Heaven."...I suppose a little kid might think it was pretty good if he could say..."My father works at the toy store." Wow. Better yet, "My father owns the toy store." That would...that would be a premium. Well, my Father owns the universe and that settles the issue of resources. Whatever I need, He supplies, right? I have all things that pertain to life in godliness. I've been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

It also settles the matter of obedience. One thing I learned as a child, and one thing I taught my children as a father, is that father is to be obeyed...Even Jesus obeyed His Father, didn't He?...So when I pray, "Our Father who art in Heaven," I have settled in my heart the matter of fear. He is my loving, beloved Father who cherishes me and loves me...Settles the matter of, not only the matter of

fear, but it...it settles the matter of hope. There's a future for me. My Father will take care of my future. Settles the matter of loneliness. I'm never alone. Settles the matter of selfishness, as well, because He's got a lot of other children, and He has to take care of all of us. And I can't put my needs over others. Settles the matter of resources. My Father, He lives in Heaven, and He has everything in the universe at His disposal. It settles the matter of obedience.

And, finally, number seven, it settles the matter of wisdom. Now, they used to say father knows best. And when I was a little boy and I wanted to know anything about anything, I asked my dad, and I grew up thinking he knew everything about everything. In fact, when I married my wife, Patricia, she grew up believing her father knew everything about everything, too. And she had a lotta difficulty trying to believe that I knew anywhere near as much as her father. And you know what? I'm thankful for that. It's a great legacy.

Settles the matter of wisdom, doesn't it? I can go to my Father, and I can get the right answer to everything. So when you start out with understanding the paternity of the Father, the Father's paternity, you start out understanding prayer, removing fear, providing hope, removing loneliness, removing selfishness, providing resources, commanding obedience, and dispensing wisdom, now you're beginning to get the...the picture here...This is all about putting God on display...Every time you pray "Our Father," you know you're not...you're not lost in the crowd. You're His.

Secondly, God's priority. Understanding the foundation of prayer takes us to a second statement here: "Hallowed by Thy name. Hallowed be Thy name." This identifies the essence of the first request. Here it is. The first request is a request that God's name be hallowed. It's a tremendous statement. A. W. Pink wrote, "How clearly then is the fundamental duty in prayer set forth here. Self, and all its needs, must be given a secondary place, and the Lord freely accorded the preeminence in our thoughts, desires, and supplications. This petition must take the precedence, for the glory of God's great name is the ultimate end of all things. Every other request must not only be subordinated to this one, but be in harmony with and pursuance of it. We cannot pray right unless the honor of God is dominant in our hearts. If we cherish a desire for the honoring of God's name, we must not ask for anything...which would be against that goal."

What does this petition mean? We used to say it all the time. "Hallowed by Thy name," and I think we probably think it means long live the king or something like that. Just sort of something you say. Well, the word name is full of meaning. It stands for the whole character of a person. And in the ancient mind, name was all that you were. Stood for nature, attributes, character, personality. God said in Exodus, "I am that I am, and I am is My name. My name is who I am." So the...the first petition in your prayer is, "Father, Father, may Your person, Your identity, Your character, Your nature, Your attributes, Your reputation be hallowed." That's my first request. God, I want You glorified. That's what David was...was agonizing over in Psalm 69:9 when he said, "The reproaches that fall on You have fallen on me, and zeal for Your house has eaten me up. When somebody

dishonors You, God, I feel the pain...he says."

His name is to be hallowed. What a name he has. Elohim, the Creator, El elyon, these are Hebrew names in the Old Testament. El elyon, God Most High. Jehovah, I am. Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide. Jehovah Nessia, the Lord our banner. Jehovah Rafa, the Lord that heals. Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our peace. Jehovah Ra'a, the Lord my shepherd. Jehovah Sidkanu, the Lord my righteousness. Jehovah Sabbaoth, Lord of hosts. Jehovah Shamma, the Lord is present. Jehovah Magadischem, the Lord sanctifies you. And the greatest of His names, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, all the fullness of the godhead dwells. The name means all that He is.

A hymn writer, years ago, said, "O, could I speak the matchless worth. O, could I sound the glories forth which, in my Savior, shine. I'd soar and touch the heavenly strings and vie with Gabriel while he sings in notes all most divine. I'd sing the character He bears and all the forms of love He wears. Exalted on His throne in loftiest songs of sweetest praise, I would to everlasting days make all His glories known."

That's desiring God's name to be hallowed. Now, when we say hallowed, usually goes along with the word hall. We talked about hallowed halls like old buildings. At some university somewhere, the sort of cloistered places. What we might think of long robes, dismal chants, haloes, musty, dim churches, cathedrals, morbid music, tired traditions. It's not what hallowed means. It's the word hadgeadzine, hadgeadzine. Means to separate. Treat as sacred. That's what it means. To treat as sacred. It is a...it is to treat the name of God as sacred. It is to come before God with reverence and a godly fear. It is a balance to Abba. And, you know, there's a lot of familiarity in Christianity today with God. And, without balance, there's too much familiarity. Without an understanding of the awesomeness and the holiness of God who is approached in a somewhat flippant way. We can come with the intimacy of a child saying, "Poppa," but at the same time, recognizing the greatness of our Father.

The Jews were very sensitive to this, in fact, and whenever they did in their prayers refer to God as Father, they immediately balanced it off...They were very afraid of sentimentalizing God, and we should be, as well. And whenever the Jews prayed and used the term Father, it was quickly somewhat mitigated by something else. For example, here are examples of their prayers, their typical standard, traditional prayers. "O, Lord Father and Ruler of my life. O, Lord Father and God of my life. O, Father, King of great power, Most High Almighty God." Or the Shemina Ezra, which is 18 prayers. They have a...a common sort of Trinitarian beginning with...three statements. "O, Father, O Lord, O King." Always wanting to balance out that Father concept. On the ten penitential days at the time of the Day of Atonement, when they celebrate, they prayer what is known as the Albinumilkanu. "Our Father, our King. Our Father, our King." They say that 44 times. They are concerned that God be reverenced. That's been in their tradition. And when you come to God, you come as a loving father, yet recognizing you're dealing with a holy God, and you come with an attitude of great reverence.

Let's go a third component of prayer and a second priority. The first is to understand God's paternity. The second is to understand God's priority, that we are concerned about His glory, His reverence, His honor, His fear, His holiness, and we wouldn't ask for anything that would, in any way, violate that or compromise that.

Now we come to a second petition, God's program. Not only God's priority personally, but God's program. Verse 10, "Thy Kingdom come." The first petition is to...be directed at God's glory. God, I want You to be glorified and honored and exalted, and Your name to be separated from sinners and set apart and treated as sacred in this. And, secondly, I want Your Kingdom to come. My highest interest is in Your enterprise, not my own. As concerned as I am about my family or my ministry or my job or my education or my career or whatever it is, my problems, my illnesses, the first priority is for Your Kingdom. Whatever exalts Your name, whatever glorifies You, and whatever advances Your Kingdom, that's what I pray for.

The Talmud, the Jewish Talmud, the rabbis wrote this, "Prayer, that prayer in which there is no mention of the Kingdom of God is no prayer at all. That prayer in which there is no mention of the Kingdom of God is no prayer at all."

Those three little words, "Thy Kingdom come," are very rich with meaning. Thy answers the question whose is this Kingdom. It's Yours. The word Kingdom identifies the realm. What is this Kingdom? It's the sphere of salvation where God rules over the souls of those who put their trust in Him. That's what it is. Whether you're talking about in an Old Testament era, whether you're talking about in the New Testament area...or era...or the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Kingdom in its broadest sense re...referred to here is the sphere of salvation. And so the prayer would go like this: God, You do whatever advances the Gospel. Whatever brings about salvation. Whatever brings sinners into Your Kingdom. Whatever enlarges Your Kingdom, You do that.

You might have a desire in your heart for a very specific answer to your prayer. But before you get to the specifics of your prayer, you start by saying, "God, what concerns me is Your Kingdom. Whatever is best for the advancement of Your Kingdom, and whatever is going to glorify Your name, that's my petition. That's my petition." Now, that's the stuff that prayer is built on. It starts at that point.

How does His Kingdome come, that last word. It comes through conversion. When somebody puts their trust in Jesus Christ, they come into the Kingdom. Secondly, it comes through sanctification. Not only justification, salvation, but sanctification. Because, as believers grow and mature, they enrich the Kingdom. Romans 14:17 says, "The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." So when you pray "Thy Kingdom come," you could say, "God, I want You to do whatever saves souls and whatever matures Christians. I wanna bring You my petition, but I want

You to answer it in whatever way is going to advance Your Kingdom through the salvation of lost people and the sanctification of Your people."

Thirdly, His Kingdom comes in its literal form in the earthly return of Jesus Christ. And you can pray for that also. "Thy Kingdom come, oh, God, Thy rule O Christ begin. Break with Thine iron rod the tyrannies of sin." You can pray that. You can sing the hymn, "Jesus shall reign where ere the Son does His excessive journeys run. His Kingdom spread from shore to shore till the moon shall wax and wane no more." We can pray for the coming of Christ. Like John, we can say, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." We can be looking for the glorious appearing of our God and Savior. We have every right to do that. We can say, "Lord, we want You to do this if it advances Your Kingdom through the salvation of souls. We want You to do this if it advances Christians through their progressive sanctification. We want You to do this if it will bring Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth. Oh, the joy to see the reigning, Thee, my own beloved Lord. Every tongue, Thy name confessing, worship on, or glory blessing brought to Thee with one accord. Thee, my Master and my Friend. Vindicated and enthroned unto earth, remotest nations glorified, adored, and owned." You can pray for that. That the Kingdom would come. That the power of sin would be shattered. That Christ would rule over this sin-cursed world.

But those are the elements of the Kingdom. Whatever it takes to save souls. Whatever it takes to encourage Christians. Whatever it takes to bring the King to set up His Kingdom. Do that. That's the centrality of prayer. God's paternity, God's priority, God's program.

Last point. God's purpose. Verse 10, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." There's one place where God's will is always done. Where is it? In Heaven. And that's the point. Do it here like it's done there. Do Your will. And when we say that, are...are we just...is that just bitter resentment? I think maybe it could be for some people. Is it just like Omar Khayyam once wrote, "But helpless pieces of the game He plays...speaking of God...upon this checkerboard of night and days, hither and thither moves and checks and slays, and one by one, back in the closet lays." That was his definition of God. Is this some bitter resentment about a God who controls our destiny over which we have nothing to say and about which we can do nothing? Is this bitter resentment? No. How about passive resignation? Is it just sort of saying, "Oh, well, I give. I can't do anything about it." Is that it? "You've conquered me. I'm vanquished." Or maybe it's theological resignation. Maybe it's our...maybe it's our Calvinism gone wild...We...we just...we just realize God's so sovereign that we just figure, "Yeah, He's gonna do what He's gonna do."

It's like the little girl. She was asked by her father if she wanted to go for a walk. She said no. He said, "But it's such a lovely day out. I...I just wanna take you for a walk." And she said, "I don't wanna go for a walk." So he went over and sat beside her and extolled the virtues of exercise. And then the virtues of fresh air. And then the virtues of conversation. And so she went on a walk, and he turned and said, "Now, aren't you glad you came?" She said, "No, you're just bigger."...

Is that...is that...is that hyper-Calvinism? Is it just because God's bigger and sovereign and in control? Or is it because we passively resign ourselves to a fate we can't change? Or is it a form of anger? I don't think any of those things. I think when we say "Thy will be done," it's an expression of great confidence and great faith that God never makes mistakes. I can trust Him. I can trust Him with everything. I can say to Him, "You do Your will," and I'll trust it...

In the days of the covenanters in Scotland, covenanters had taken the position against the Catholic system. They were branded as heretics, and they were being tortured and killed. Marvelous piece of history of people who had come to true faith in Christ and were paying with their lives. The government was executing the covenanters and torturing them with the most savage kind of cruelty. Their leader was a man named Richard Cameron, about whom I have occasion to read. And every time I read, I'm so moved by his life. Many would say he's the greatest of all the covenanters.

And wanting to get to him, they...they took his son. His son was a little boy, and, according to the biographer, was a beautiful lad with particularly beautiful and deft hands. Skilled with his hands. A very young boy. And so they cut both his hands off, put 'em in a bag, and sent them to his father, Richard Cameron, in an act of astonishing cruelty. And the biographer says Richard recognized them at once. "They are my son's," he said, "my own dear son's. But it is the Lord's will, and good is the will of the Lord. He has never wronged me." That's not hyper-Calvinism. That's not passive resignation to fate. That's not resentment. That's confidence. Isn't it?

You never worship God more faithfully than when you put your confidence in Him in the darkest hour. Yesterday, I did a...a seminar in Chicago for the Biblical Counseling Center there, and preached all day, and between one of the sessions and the next one, a man sat down beside me and put his arm around me, and he...he said, "Just wanna take a few minutes to tell you how much the ministry of Grace To You and books and tapes have meant in my life." He said, and his wife was with him, lovely couple, about 40, I would think. And he said, "God...God gave us ten children." And then he began to cry. Tears came down his eyes, and he said, "But some time back, we had a car accident, and six of them were killed...And we had a large van to carry them all, and I was standing in the street, and these kids were all around everywhere. And my wife was there with me, and I went over, and I embraced her," he said, "and what came out of my mouth was this," he said, "Honey, God has prepared us for this. God has prepared us for this." Then he said to me, "I wanna thank you for the part that you had, as God used you through the teaching of the Word to prepare us, because," he said, "at that moment, we trusted God."

...And he...tears were coming down his eyes, and he...he said, "I'm still a pastor, and I still serve the Lord, and I can honestly say I trust God. And I trust His will. And my children are with Him." And that's, though it's a heartbreaking thing in this world, it's unimaginable to think of losing six of your children in one accident. But, you know, that man must have an awful lot of credibility in his church

when he stands up and tells people to trust God.

Prayer is worship before it's anything else. Now, if you've done all that, and you have any time left, you can say, "Lord, I'm hungry. Could you give me some bread? Lord, I'm tempt...I...I'm...I'm...I'm sinful. Could you please forgive me? And, Lord, hang onto me, will You? Don't let me get into temptation I can't get out of." And when you've said that, you can go back to where you started and say, "For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen."

Let's pray. Father, we do trust You...and we know that's where all prayer begins...We just know You're our loving Father. We just want Your name to be glorified. We just want Your Kingdom to advance and Your will to be done. And we trust You no matter what that means...And we know that You're gonna give us our daily bread, because...we've never seen the Lord's people begging bread, and You will supply all our needs according to Your riches in Christ Jesus, and You will give bread for our food. And we know that You will forgive all our sins, because You promised to do that in Christ. And we know that You will never lead us into a temptation that could overwhelm us and destroy us, because You keep us, and You protect us...and You are able...to keep us from falling and to present us faultless...in glory...And, Father, we wanna pray the way You taught Your disciples to pray and make Your concerns our concerns. And ask You only to do that which fulfills Your will, advances Your Kingdom, and lifts up Your name. Teach us to pray like that. In Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).