

Steps to Successful Prayer, Part 4

Scripture: Luke 11:2–4

Code: B120508

Part 4: Seek God's Priority

What is the most common motivation to go to the Lord in prayer? Is it to confess sin? Or is it to make a petition on behalf of a loved one? Do we want to bring our latest requests to Him, or remind Him of something we think He may have overlooked? Far too much of our time in prayer is spent focused on us, not on the One to whom we're praying.

When was the last time you prayed simply to give God glory, or to express your appreciation for His love, His mercy, His grace, or His character? If prayer is an act of worship, our prayer lives cannot revolve around us—our schedules, our trials, our needs, wants, and concerns.

That self-centered approach stands in stark contrast to the model Christ gave His disciples. The Lord's Prayer is a worshipful meditation on who God is and the sovereign care He bestows on His people. It's a pattern for successful prayer—one that emphasizes the glory and supremacy of God.

And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation'" (Luke 11:2-4).

The entire opening sentence of the prayer is a straightforward exclamation of worship: "Father, hallowed be Your name" (Luke 11:2). That is expressed as a petition, but it is by no means a personal request; it is an expression of praise, and it reflects God's own priority: "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another" (Isaiah 42:8).

Jesus established the truth that prayer is worship by beginning His model prayer that way. To worship God is to "sing the glory of His name" (Psalm 66:2). "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name" (1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalms 29:2; 96:8). "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory" (Psalm 115:1). Such expressions capture the true spirit of a worshiping heart.

Moreover, that first sentence qualifies every other petition in the prayer. It rules out asking for things "with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:3). It eliminates every petition that is not in accord with the perfect will of God.

In the words of Arthur Pink:

How clearly, then, is the fundamental duty in prayer here set forth: 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 in pursuance of it. We cannot pray aright unless the honour of God be dominant in our hearts. If we cherish a desire for the honoring of God's name we must not ask for anything which it would be against the Divine holiness to bestow.[1]

What does that expression mean: "Hallowed be Your name"? In biblical terms, God's "name" includes everything God is—His character, His attributes, His reputation, His honor—His very Person. God's name signifies everything that is true about God.

We still use the expression "my name" in that sense at times. If we say someone has ruined his good name, we mean he has disgraced himself and spoiled his reputation. He has diminished others' perception of who he is. And if I give you power of attorney, I have authorized you to act in my name. You thereby become my legal proxy, and any legal covenants you enter into are as binding on me as if I signed them myself.

That is precisely what Jesus meant when He taught us to pray in His name: "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). He was delegating His authority to us to be used in prayer—authorizing us to act as if we were His emissaries when we let our requests be made known to God.

But by teaching us to *begin* by asking that the name of God be hallowed, Christ created a built-in safeguard against the misuse of His name for our own self-aggrandizing purposes. If we truly want God's name to be hallowed, we would never sully the name of His Son or abuse the proxy He has given us by using His name to request that which He Himself would never sanction. To do that would be to take His name in vain, and that is a violation of the third commandment. Furthermore, immediately after Jesus delegated the authority of His name to His disciples, He said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (v. 15). He then restated the principle with all the necessary qualifications just one chapter later, in John 15:7: "*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*" (emphasis added).

It should be clear, then, that the expression "Your name" signifies far more than just a proper noun. God's name represents everything He is, everything He approves, and everything He is known for. So when we pray, "Father, hallowed be Your name," we are expressing a desire for God's character, His glory, His reputation in the world, and His very being to be set apart and lifted up.

The word *hallowed* (Greek *hagiazō*) means "consecrated," "sanctified," or "set apart as holy." It includes the idea of being separated from all that is profane. Putting it as simply as possible, this phrase is a prayer that God Himself would be blessed and glorified. Jesus Himself prayed for that very thing in John 12:28: "Father, glorify Your name." It is a petition God delights to answer.

By starting His model prayer that way, Jesus was reminding us of the ultimate purpose of every prayer we ever offer. The proper aim is for *God* to be glorified, honored, known, and exalted in every conceivable way.

That, by the way, is a further reminder not to call God "Father" in a cheaply sentimental or overly familiar way. He is our loving Father, but we are not to forget that His name is holy. The fatherhood of God in no way diminishes His glory, and if we find ourselves thinking that way, here is the

corrective: “Father, *hallowed be Your name.*”

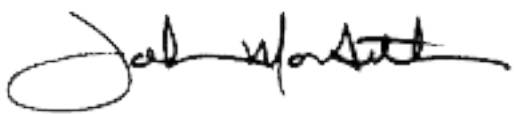
The spirit of that plea is contrary to the main thrust of the so-called prosperity gospel. I once heard a televangelist teaching the “positive confession” doctrine, and he told his audience that if they tacked the phrase “not my will but Thine” onto any of their prayers, they were not praying in faith. That is a lie from the pit of hell. Jesus Himself prayed “not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). By teaching us to begin all our prayers with a concern that the name of God be hallowed, He was teaching us to pray for God’s will over and above our own.

The kind of god who is at everyone’s beck and call and who must knuckle under to someone else’s desires is not the God of the Bible. Those who portray prayer in such a fashion are not hallowing God’s name; they are dragging His name through the mud. Their false teaching is a denial of the very nature of God. It isn’t just bad theology, it is gross irreverence. It is blasphemy. They are taking God’s name in vain, and that is patently antithetical to the spirit of this plea.

Luther’s catechism (section 39) asks and answers this question: “How is God’s name hallowed among us? Answer, as plainly as it can be said: When both our doctrine and life are godly and Christian. For since in this prayer we call God our Father, it is our duty always to deport and demean ourselves as godly children, that He may not receive shame, but honor and praise from us.”

So when we pray, “Father, hallowed be Your name,” we are asking God to glorify Himself—to put His power, His grace, and all His perfections on display. One way He does that is by answering our prayers—assuming our prayers are expressions of submission to His will rather than merely flippant requests that arise from our own selfish desires.

We were not created to enjoy prosperity in a fallen world. We were created to glorify God and enjoy *Him* forever. We ought to be more concerned for the glory of God than we are for our own prosperity, our own comfort, our own agenda, or any other self-centered desire. That’s why Jesus taught us to think of prayer as an act of worship rather than merely a way to ask God for things we want.



[1] Arthur Pink, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2011 reprint), 162.

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