

SI: We’re studying the Lord’s Prayer this summer.

The Lord’s Prayer is mentioned twice in the New Testament—

here in Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount and also in Luke 11.

In Luke, the setting is different. The disciples have been watching Jesus.

They’ve heard him pray, seen him go away and pray—sometimes all night.

They must have noticed the peace and confidence he had in prayer.

So they said: Lord, teach us to pray. Jesus said, When you pray, pray like this:

And he gave them the Lord’s Prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer is a model prayer.

It’s a guide, not just for our words, but for our minds and hearts,
as we pray to the living God.

Each line of the Lord’s prayer, each petition, as they are called
open up for us things we need to know and apply in prayer.

This morning we come to the first petition: Hallowed be your name.

Before we read the Scripture, to kind of warm up our minds,
let’s read together this question from the catechism.

INTRO: Most people have a hard time spelling my last name.

All my life I've had to say: S-I-E, G-E-N, T-H-A, L-E-R
I've gotten two written items from church members recently and one of them spelled my name S-i-g and the other spelled it S-e-i-g.
No, it's S-i-e-g. I before E, except after C.

One time Allison went to pick up something from the cleaners and they looked under the S's but there were not clothing items for Siegenthaler.
Finally they found her ticket in the T's.
They had written down our name as Cindy Thaler.

But there are some advantages.

I always know when a telemarketer is on the phone because he says:

“Hello. May I speak to Mr. . . . Sig . . . Sigelhalter?
And I don't have to lie. I just say, I'm sorry, there's no one here by that name.

Of course, a person's name is more than what he is called.

It's more than Smith, Jones, or Siegenthaler.
Your name is how you are known.
It's your reputation. Your work. Your accomplishments.
We say things like:

“He made a name for himself.”
“He has a good name in this town.”

Someone might look at an institution say about the person who built it:

“He has his name all over that.”
“He has his name all over that school, that athletic program.”
Means that it speaks of that person's character and values and hard work.

So when Christ says: Pray this way,

“Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name.”
By God's name he means everything through which God is known.
Certainly God's names themselves—God, the Lord, Savior, King of kings, Christ.
But also God's attributes—his wisdom, his power, his holiness, his mercy.
And God's works—his Creation, his Providence, his Salvation
That's God's name. Everything he uses to make himself known.

So what does it mean to hallow his name?

Hallowed, or you can say hallow-ed, is a word that's not used anymore

in every day English. But it's such a good word, and it so captures the meaning that even a modern translation like the New International Version still use it.

To hallow means to treat something as absolutely sacred, your ultimate treasure.

To hallow is to say that this thing or this person is of supreme value.

Nothing is greater. This treasure alone is worthy of all praise.

That's what this petition is about. It's about praise. It's about adoration.

So Jesus says: After you have addressed God as your Father in heaven.

After you've preached the doctrine of adoption to yourself—as saw last Sunday—

Reminded yourself of who God is and who you are—

that he is your Father and you are his beloved son and heir.

After that, the first thing you have to do in prayer is praise him.

Praise his name. Praise him in all the ways he is made known.

Praise him as the absolutely sacred,

the ultimately important person of supreme beauty and value.

This is where prayer starts. This is where all your requests start.

By giving him all praise and adoration.

J.I. Packer says in his little book on the Lord's Prayer:

“Were we left to ourselves, any praying we did would start and end with ourselves, for our natural self-centeredness knows no bounds . . . But Jesus' pattern prayer . . . tells us to start with God . . . Understand this, and make it your own, and you have unlocked the secret of both prayer and life.”

That's a pretty big claim—that the secret of prayer and life is praising God.

That may be a preacher's exaggeration.

But let's look at this in more detail and see what you think.

Three reasons praising God is crucial for Christians.

1. Praise exposes your heart
2. Praise shapes your prayer.
3. Praise completes your joy.

MP#1 Praise exposes your heart

There is a powerful illustration of this in verse 5 where Jesus says:

“Do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men . . . But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen.”

The reason the hypocrite prays on the street corner is because the thing he wants most in life is acclaim.

His ultimate treasure, the thing most important and sacred to him is that he is seen and known as a spiritual person.

Now, suppose you walk up close to him as he's praying there at the corner of First and Main, and you listen to his prayer. How would his prayer sound? It would sound like a good prayer.

He would be proclaiming the greatness of God, and thanking God for all of his great works of salvation.

It would sound God-honoring.

You would listen to it and say this is a prayer that is hallowing God's name.

Now, suppose you could make yourself invisible, and you followed this man home.

What would his prayers sound like in private, in the secrecy of his own room?

Would he close his door, and lift his hands to heaven and pray in the same way, praising God for his greatness and love, thanking for his grace and salvation?

No, he probably wouldn't pray at all.

Now suppose he sits down, and gets quiet, and you can tell he's thinking.

What's he thinking about? You're not a mind reader.

You can make yourself invisible, but that's your only super power!

But you watch him. What's he thinking about? He's smiling.

He's imagining something. He's meditating on something he loves.

Let me tell you: He's remembering how he was complimented in the synagogue.

He's playing over and over in his mind conversation he overheard in the market.

Someone was talking about what a good man he is.

What's he doing in secret? He's praising. But he's not praising God.

He's praising his real treasure.

A wise Christian said: “Your religion is what you do with your solitude.”

In other words, the way you find out what your real treasure, what you really hallow, is what you think about in secret.

When you don't have to think about anything, what do you think about?

Do you think about owning a lake house, falling in love, business success,
the admiration of your peers, your money, creature comforts.
What do you do with your solitude? What do you long for? What do you imagine?
What do you think about to make yourself feel good?
That's what you hallow. That's what you adore.

Everybody praises. Everybody spends time adoring things.
The most accurate way you can check the spiritual condition of your own heart,
is to ask yourself what you praise in secret.

There's a little Presbyterian church near my parents' home in NC.
A few years ago there was an interesting conversion in that church.
There was this man had lived a profane life.
He had fathered 18 children, only seven with wife.
He had never darkened door of a church.
But one of his numerous grandchildren is a member of this little church.
And when he was put in the hospital, she begged her pastor to visit him.
So he did, read some Scripture, didn't the man didn't listen.
He visited him again and said: Jesus Christ died for all my sins and all your sins.
The old man laughed and said: That's a lot of sins.

But a few days later, grand-daughter called pastor and said, quick come to hospital.
He said, Why? Is he dying? She said, Just come. And hurry.
Walked in, looked at man, could tell by his face, he was born again.
He was baptized. He lived for one year. And there were two things he often said:
First, He would shake his head and say, "So much wasted time."
Second, this is why I'm telling the story. He would say, "Now I love to pray."

Tell how he would wake up in the night, and start praying.
It amazed him. He had never done that his whole life. But now he did.
In the night and in the solitude, he would think of God.
What had happened? The Lord had become his ultimate treasure.
What's your treasure? What do you hallow? What do you dwell on in secret?

If you're not born again, you won't be able to praise.
If the Lord is not in your thoughts in solitude, then you should be alarmed,
because thinking about him, honoring him, a mark of a true Christian.
But even if you are a Christian, praising God doesn't always come easily.
That's why Jesus teaches us to pray. That's why he says that when you pray,
you must deliberately, intentionally, hallow God's name.

That brings us to the second point:

MP#2 Praise shapes your prayer

The Lord's prayer doesn't start with give us this day our daily bread.

It doesn't even start with forgive us our debts.

It starts with hallowed be your name.

Praise comes before petition and confession.

Don't misunderstand me, this is not about mechanics. Prayer isn't a set of steps.

Praise. Check. Petition. Check. Confession. Check.

Praise is not first mechanically, it's first organically.

Praise must frame your prayers. The context of your prayers.

Without praise, you can't pray rightly,

because praise alone gives you a realistic view of yourself and the world.

Let's see how this works.

Have you ever committed a sin, and asked God for forgiveness,

but you haven't felt forgiven? You still feel terrible?

The way people usually express this is that they say:

I know God has forgiven me. But I can't forgive myself.

Have you ever felt that way?

You've really repented. You hate the sin you committed.

You hate what you've done to your Savior and your Father in heaven.

You're trying to be reconciled to people you wronged and set things right.

You've asked God for forgiveness, know in mind forgiven, but still feel guilty.

What's your problem? It's a problem of praise.

You're not hallowing God's name.

There is something else in your life that is occupying the place of praise.

Something else that is your real treasure.

And your sin has threatened or ruined that thing you treasure most,

and it's condemning you.

I know a minister who once broke someone's confidence to make self look good.

He was confronted by this person, some other people in church found out.

And he was convicted by the Holy Spirit, he confessed to God and this person.

He asked this church member to forgive him—and the person did.

In fact, this person had such a big heart he said, Brother, it's over. Behind us.

But this minister didn't feel forgiven. He went months feeling guilty and terrible.

Finally he realized his real treasure was not the Lord, his ministerial reputation. That was what he hallowed above all. So he would pray: Lord, forgive me. But in the secret place, he would be hallowing his own name. And since he had blown it, he felt terrible.

So what did he do? He started praising God for his grace and forgiveness. He started praising Jesus Christ for his perfection. Praising Jesus as the only perfect pastor of the church. And when his confession was framed with praise, it was effective.

If you hallow success, or comfort, or control, or the opinion of your parents or your peers, or marriage, or money, or whatever—and your sins mess up any of those things, you won't be able to confess rightly. You've got to demote those things, get them out of the holy place in your life. Way you do that is to deliberately, intentionally praise the Lord. Praise him for the way he alone fully and completely fills that hole, quenches that longing that you've been filling with something else. Do that, and your prayers of confession will be effective.

Now, briefly, what about petition?

Why is it so important that all of the things you ask God for be framed in praise? Let's say you have a crisis in your business, or in your marriage. And you pray, O Lord, please fix this thing. You might even have specifics. Lord, let this conversation go well. Make this meeting productive.

If you are hallowing God's name. If he is your greatest treasure.

If he is greater to you than things you're praying for, you'll be filled with peace. You'll wait for his answer and more likely see it if it comes in an unexpected way. That's what Paul meant in Philippians when he said:

“By prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known unto God, and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

With thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is praise. It's praising God for his works.

But if you don't hallow God's name, going to continually experience anxiety and disappointment with your petitions.

So before you ask, and as you ask, and after you ask, and while you are waiting, hallow him. Praise him, thank him. Think about his goodness.

It will shape the way you pray and think.

And one more thing, third point, best of all.

MP#3 Praise completes your joy

CS Lewis has explained this better than anyone.

Before CS Lewis became a Christian, and even for a time after he became a Christian, he was very bothered by the commands to praise God.

He didn't like it when Christians said to praise God, didn't like reading those places in the Bible, especially in the Psalms that say: Praise the Lord all people. Praise the Lord with me. Proclaim his greatness. That sort of thing. And what really bothered him were those particular Bible verses where God himself is speaking, and calls for people to praise him.

This was the reason it bothered CS Lewis. He said, I hate people like that. I hate to be around people who are always fishing for compliments. People who always want to be told how great they are, who want to be assured and fawned over because of their intelligence or wealth or fame. And, he said, I despise people who give them that praise. Those people who hang around celebrities and millionaires and dictators, feeding them constant praise.

Lewis said that he could understand God commanding respect and obedience. Those are things rightly demanded by any person in authority. But when a person, even an important person, says, Praise me. Tell me how wonderful I am. Tell me how great I am. That's ugly. So he struggled with this. He wondered, Why does God tell us to praise him? What purpose does it serve? Does God need our compliments?

And then Lewis had a breakthrough. I realized that I was thinking about praise in a very narrow way, only in terms of giving and receiving compliments. But all along, I had missed the biggest and most obvious thing about praise. All enjoyment spontaneously overflows in praise. Readers praise their favorite books. Hikers praise the scenery. Sports fans praise their teams. Stamp collectors praise rare stamps. You hear people praising sunsets, wine, food, actors, automobiles, horses, colleges, children, and mountains.

He said he also realized that not only do people spontaneously praise the thing they enjoy, they just as spontaneously urge other people to join them in praising it. Isn't she beautiful? One young man says to another. Wasn't that a great game? Says one fan to another.

Have you ever seen a sunset as beautiful as that?
In other words, praise is not just telling how great something is,
it's trying to get other people to see how great it is and join you in praising it.

When Lewis realized this about praise, the Psalms made sense to him.
The Psalmists are just doing what everybody does when they are talking
about something they care about and greatly enjoy.
They love God, they enjoy God and so they say:
How great he is. Praise Him.

But CS Lewis, being the thinker that he was, couldn't stop there.
He took another step. He asked the question: Why do we do that?
When we really enjoy something and think it's wonderful,
why do we spontaneously praise it and tell other people how wonderful it is?

And this was his answer: Let me read you his own words.
"I think we delight to praise what we enjoy, because the praise not merely expresses
but completes the enjoyment; (praise) is (enjoyment's) appointed consummation."

It's frustrating to see beautiful mountain scenery, but to have to keep your mouth
shut because the people in the car with you don't give a flip about the scenery.
It's frustrating to hear a good joke, and not have someone to tell it to.
Or, the perfect person is an old friend who passed away last year.
It's frustrating because praise completes enjoyment.

So, CS Lewis asked.
What if you could be in a place where you were with that which you most enjoy?
And what if in that place you were able to express perfectly
your delight and enjoyment?
And what if you were surrounded by people who shared your delight
and said, Yes, how wonderful, how awesome! And joined you in praise.
What would that place be? That would be heaven.

And so God, in his incredible goodness, in his love, in calling us to praise him,
is getting us ready for the greatest enjoyment, tuning our hearts for heaven.
When you praise God, it's not performance, it's tuning.
The Lord is getting you ready for greater joy.

That means that sometimes praise will seem like a duty.
You'll have to work at it. Just as a musician works at tuning.

You have to deliberately say to yourself, Self, I'm going to praise God now.
I'm going to fight to get control of my thoughts,
I'm going to delight in him. I'm going to hallow him.
That's ok. You're tuning your instrument.

And when you know that, even the tuning can be great some times.
You can get a thrill hearing your favorite band warming up,
hearing a great orchestra tuning its strings and brass.
It gives you a thrill because, you're anticipating the music.

So when you praise God, in your private prayers, in the solitude of the night,
on the Lord's day when we sing together—
(that's what our songs and hymns are, they are prayers of praise
set to music, and music adds glory to the words)
When you praise him, think about what he has in store,
and let his praises complete your joy.