

# Hallowed Be Thy Name

The Rev. Dr. Peter G. James

Luke 11:1-4

**Sermon Series:**  
**Pray Daily: Igniting**  
**Our Passion for God**

***“Prayer is like playing the piano... You don’t do it well every single day, but unless you do it every single day, you’ll never be able to do it well at all.”***

- Madeline L’Engle

**O**ur focus this summer is prayer. Ninety days of prayer to be precise. The first covenant or practice of a disciple at this church is “Pray Daily.” This summer we’re going to get after it!

Madeline L’Engle said this about daily prayer: “Prayer is like playing the piano or writing poetry. You don’t do it well every single day, but unless you do it every single day, you’ll never be able to do it well at all.”

For the next six weeks, our sermons will center on The Lord’s Prayer. I’ve prayed this prayer hundreds of times. So much so that I can recite it without even thinking about it.

The Lord’s Prayer is remarkable for its brevity. Motorcycle daredevil Evel Knievel claims to be able to recite the Lord’s Prayer in ten seconds flat. I’m not at all sure Jesus had this in mind when he taught us this prayer!

Matthew’s version of The Lord’s Prayer totals 58 words. I read you Luke’s account of this prayer, which is even briefer, a scant 38 words. By comparison, the Gettysburg Address is 286 words. The Declaration of Independence is 1,322 words, while government regulations on the sale of cabbage total 26,911 words.

The Lord’s Prayer begins with an endearing term of relationship,

“Our Father.” People of Jesus’ day were shocked when Jesus employed such an intimate, familial word to address God. But, then, Jesus treats us as family and invites us to approach God as loving Father.

You’ll notice God is not “My Father,” He is “Our Father.” There is no mention of “me” in this model prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is meant to be prayed other people.

Somehow we’ve developed the notion that prayer is intensely private. Prayer is personal, but it’s not private. We approach God together in prayer. We urge you, during these 90 days, to find someone to join you in prayer. Some of you have a mental block about praying out loud with people. We want you to find a spiritual buddy, if you will, who can pray with you and for you.

Matthew’s version of The Lord’s Prayer contains a series of six petitions. The first three petitions pertain to God: your name, your kingdom and your will be done. The last three petitions center on matters of vital concern to us: our daily bread, our debts and our temptations.

Most of us start farther downstream when it comes to prayer. We focus almost exclusively on our bread, our debts and our temptations. Jesus, however, begins further upstream with things that matter to God.

***When we enjoy  
God it brings  
joy to God and  
thereby  
increases our  
joy.***

Today, our focus is the first petition, "Hallowed be thy name." I know of one little girl who thought God's name was actually Harold because she imagined The Lord's Prayer to be "Our Father, who art in the heaven, Harold be thy name."

No, it's hallowed be your name. Hallowed is an old-fashioned word meaning holy or different. God's name is not ordinary, it's holy and different from all other names. When we pray "hallowed be thy name," we essentially pray "May your name be regarded as holy. Let your name be revered in my life."

God's name has a rich etymology. The original name for God in Old Testament Hebrew contains four consonants Y-H-W-H. By adding vowels, the name is pronounced "Yahweh." Our English Bibles translates it "Lord." The 4th Commandment cautions us against taking the Lord's name in vain" (Deuteronomy 5:11). The Hebrew people, fearful of profaning God's name, used a substitute name, "Adonai." Some Jews were so scrupulous about revering God's name that they never spoke it aloud. They referred to God with the Hebrew word "hashem," which is simply translated "the name."

Why does Jesus make such a big deal about honoring God's name? Just as our name is an essential part of our identity, so honoring God's name reverences God. Honoring God's name equates to revering God's character.

Doesn't it strike you as self-serving for Jesus to pray, "Hallowed be your name? Since Jesus is God in human form, he is, in effect, saying, "Praise me. Worship me." Does God really want us to tell him how great he is?

C. S. Lewis writes in his book *Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer*, "When I first began to draw near to belief in God I found a stumbling block in the demand so clamorously made by all religious people that we should praise God. Still more in the suggestion that God himself demanded it...It is hideously like saying what I want most is to be told that I am great and good." We despise people who insist on being complimented this way.

But since God is God, there is nothing God can give us beyond himself. God has created us with the desire to enjoy God because there is nothing else God can give us to bring us such supreme joy. Our praise brings delight to God, which, in turn, increases our joy.

Rick Warren likens our enjoyment of God to his mother's cooking. He remembers how much his mother enjoyed cooking for Rick and his friends. One of his mother's chief delights was watching Rick and his friends enjoy her cooking. The more they enjoyed her cooking, the more delight it brought her. When we enjoy God it brings joy to God and thereby increases our joy.

St. Augustine is known for the memorable prayer "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our

*A delight is incomplete until it is expressed.*

hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.” The words which introduce this prayer are instructive for our purposes, “Stir [us] to take pleasure in praise because thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.” Since God cannot give us anything beyond Himself, God gives us Himself.

It is natural to praise what we enjoy. To keep the enjoyment of God bottled-up inside diminishes us. Praise seeks an outlet.

Suppose we go to a Redskins game. We join 80,000 other fans who attend the game with us. But let’s imagine what it would be like for those 80,000 fans to watch the game in stone-cold silence. When a Redskins player makes an outstanding catch or tackle, no one in the stands utters a word. That seems odd to us, doesn’t it? You see, a delight is incomplete until it is expressed.

Prayer is a natural response to beauty and pleasure. When we witness a glorious sunrise or a new birth, we want to share it with someone. A delight is incomplete until it is expressed.

There is a story told about a preacher who was an avid golfer. Golf was something of an obsession to this preacher. One beautiful Sunday morning was a picture-perfect day for golf. The sun was shining, there was not a cloud in the sky and the temperature was just right. The preacher was in a quandary. He knew it was his duty to preach on Sunday, but the urge to play golf was irresist-

ible. So he called his associate and concocted the excuse that he was sick and couldn’t preach that morning, asking his associate to preach for him. He then put his golf clubs in his car and drove three hours to a golf course where no one would recognize him.

An angel up in heaven was watching these developments. Understandably, this angel was quite upset. So he said to God, “Are you going to let that preacher get away with that?” God told the angel not to worry, He would handle it Himself.

The preacher took out his driver on the first tee and hit a beauty. His ball sailed 350 yards in the air, landed on the green and rolled promptly into the cup. It was a perfect hole-in-one. The preacher was ecstatic. The angel was more than a little upset. He turned to God and said, “Why did you let him get away with that? I thought you were going to punish him.”

God smiled and said, “Think about it—who is he gonna tell?” A delight is incomplete until it is expressed!

Praise reminds us that prayer is more than asking. Praise refreshes our appreciation for God. Sometimes we picture God as a cosmic bellhop whose job it is to wait on us. Our prayers constitute a grocery list of requests made to God. Give me this, I want that. Praise moves us beyond the puny world of the self to the larger world of God’s concerns.

Two days ago, Chris and I celebrated our wedding anniversary. Suppose I said to Chris,

***Are you willing  
to let God do  
something in  
your life today?***

“Today is our anniversary. As your husband I’m supposed to give you a gift on our anniversary. It’s my duty to honor you in this manner, so here is your gift.” Do you think she would be pleased? She doesn’t want duty, she wants devotion. God doesn’t merely want our duty, God wants our devotion!

I said last Sunday that prayer is not simply a devotional exercise, prayer is God’s catalyst for change. Prayer doesn’t change God, prayer changes us.

Watchman Nee writes, “Our prayers lay the track down on which God’s power can come. Like a mighty locomotive, His power is irresistible, but it cannot reach us without the rails.” Prayer provides the track on which the engine of God’s power comes to us.

God has a greater purpose for our lives than what we’ve yet discovered. God has bigger plans for this church than what we’ve yet realized. Prayer aligns us with God’s concerns, namely His name to be hallowed, His kingdom to come and His will to be done.

Martin Luther asks in his Lord’s Prayer Catechism: “How is God’s name hallowed among us?” Answer: “When our life and doctrine are truly Christian.”

We’re focusing this year on renewal. It’s not enough that God did something in your life back then and there. Are you willing to let God do something in your life today?

