

Why Do We Pray in Jesus' Name?

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John 14:13-14

Sermon Series:
Pray Daily: Igniting
Our Passion for God

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in Jesus' name,
we pray
cognizant of all
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implies.*

Find the process by which parents select names for their children fascinating. Old fashioned, family names are falling out of favor. Even old religious standbys are losing ground. The name Mary, for instance, dropped from first place, a few years ago, to 84th place last year.

There are companies, professional name consultants, who consult with parents today about the most suitable names for their children. Can you believe it?

The trend these days favors unique names. Today's parents are manufacturing new names as well as conjuring up novel pronunciations and spellings of old names. Parents are picking names to express individuality in their children.

Leave it to Hollywood to set the pace. David Bowie named his son Zowie. Toni Braxton named her children Denim and Diezel. Christine Brinkley named her daughter Sailor. Michael Jackson named his son Prince Michael. Sylvester Stallone sired three children named Sage Moonblood, Sistine Rose and Scarlett Rose. Demi Moore and Bruce Willis named their children Rumor, Scout and Tallulah. Gwyneth Patrow and Coldplay singer Chris Martin begat a daughter named Apple. And soccer star David Beckham

and his "Spice Girl" wife, Victoria, have named their children Brooklyn and Romeo.

The etymology of Biblical names reveals something altogether different. Biblical names, which are passed down in families, often express character and virtue. It was hoped that the person who bore the name would live up to the name.

The name Jesus originates from the Hebrew name Joshua, meaning "God's salvation." The word Christ is actually a title—no, it isn't Jesus' last name. It equates to the Hebrew word Messiah, meaning the anointed one.

Jesus' name is altogether purposeful. His name means something. When we pray in Jesus' name, we pray cognizant of all Jesus' name implies.

Why do we pray in Jesus' name? The answer is rather simple. We pray in Jesus' name because Jesus told us to pray this way.

Seven times in a span of three chapters in John's gospel, Jesus directs his disciples pray using his name. In John 14, Jesus says, "I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything I will do it" (14:13-14). Jesus tells his disciples in John 15, "The Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name" (15:16). Jesus says to his followers in John 16, "Truly,

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truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name he will give it to you” (16:23).

So, then, do we pray to God or do we pray to Jesus? We can pray to either God or Jesus, given that God the Father and Jesus the Son exist in the closest possible relationship. Jesus tells his disciples in our Scripture lesson, “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (14:11). Technically speaking, we pray to God the Father through Jesus the Son. Jesus proceeds from God the Father in order that we might gain access to God.

Power in Washington is often measured in terms of access. Everybody is trying to gain access to people in high places. You may be employed in helping businesses gain access to powerful people.

When we approach God in prayer, Jesus tells us we can use his name! Jesus gives us access!

People often ask me to pray for them, as though I have special access to God, a sort of inside track or hotline to heaven. I’ll tell you who has access: Jesus Christ! Jesus gives us access to God.

Jesus directs us to pray “in his name.” “In” is a preposition indicating location. I am preaching in this sanctuary. The preposition “in” identifies my location as this sanctuary. Paul often speaks about our relationship to Christ as being “in Christ.” He uses this prepositional phrase 164 times in his letters to the church. To be in Christ identifies us in relationship to Jesus. We are organically connected to Christ, like a limb

connected to a body or a branch connected to a tree.

Prayer in Jesus’ name touched off a heated debate during George W. Bush’s 2001 presidential inauguration. Franklin Graham, representing his ailing father, Billy Graham, ignited the controversy by praying an invocation “in the name of the Father and of the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit.” A Methodist clergyman, Kirby Jon Caldwell, added fuel to the fire by concluding his benediction with the words, “We respectfully submit this humble prayer in the name that’s above all other names, Jesus the Christ.”

I am asked all the time to pray in mixed company, when I know there are nonbelievers as well as people of other religions present. Do I pray in Jesus’ name or do I offer a more inclusive prayer in God’s name?

Lately, I’ve been prefacing public prayers with words to the effect, “I’m going to pray according to my tradition, which is to pray in Jesus’ name, just as I encourage you to pray according to your tradition. My intent is to show respect to people who are not Christian, while remaining true to Jesus’ words about praying in his name.

Jesus says, “Ask me for anything in my name and I will do it” (John 14:13-14). At first glance, this appears to support a blank check approach to prayer. All you have to do is pray in Jesus’ name and you get whatever you ask.

Most of us know better. We discovered as a children that prayer doesn’t quite work this way. God

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didn't make Mickey Mantle magically appear just because I prayed for his autograph. Prayer in Jesus' name is not a magic formula. Prayer in Jesus' name doesn't produce automatic results.

Prayer in Jesus' name must be in accordance with all his name stands for. When we pray using Jesus' name, we pray with all that Jesus is who bears the name. We endeavor to align our wills with everything his name represents.

We've been preaching on prayer in this church for the last 14 Sundays. We're nearing the end of our 90-days-of-prayer initiative. So, what happens after 90 days of prayer? Is this prayer emphasis just another church program? Does everything revert back to the way it was before we began this concentrated prayer focus?

Ninety days of prayer is intended to inculcate the practice of daily prayer into our daily lives. The first covenant or practice of a disciple is "Pray Daily." It takes anywhere from 21-45 days to establish a new habit. We want prayer to become habit forming! We want it to become as habitual as brushing your teeth.

Our secular culture often identifies Christians today by the things we don't do. Christians are often characterized as people who don't take the Lord's name in vain, smoke or drink to excess. But the kind of Christianity which measures faithfulness in terms of what we don't do loses steam quickly. We can't build our whole lives on things we don't do. We want, as Christians, to become as known

for the things we do as the things we don't do.

We endeavor to become people of prayer. People are looking today for churches where there is authentic spiritual life. They are not in the market for churches shopping their religious wares. They are not looking for slick or trendy worship. Jesus became downright indignant when God's people turned the temple into a commercial establishment. He overturned tables saying, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:13). We want this church to become known as a house of prayer.

But let me forewarn you, prayer is not merely a passive exercise. We don't adopt the attitude that since we really can't do anything about the plight of the world, we'll just pray about it. If we're really serious about prayer, prayer will change us. Prayer is not primarily for God's benefit but for ours. God will change our hearts through prayer. God will call upon us to become the answer to our own prayers.

Prayer puts us in the place of greatest spiritual potential. Prayer unites the pray-er with God's purpose and power.

A.W. Tozer asks, "If a young man wants a tan, does he tan himself or does the sun tan him?" Although the man must put himself in contact with the sun, the sun's rays do the tanning.

Prayer connects us with God's power. It's like plugging a cord into an electrical outlet. We supply the cord, God supplies the power!

***“Will you not
revive us again,
O Lord?”***

- Psalm 85:6

The year 2007 is a year of renewal for our church. Every renewal movement in the history of America has had one consistent ingredient: prayer. God renews people who engage in regular, persistent prayer.

The Psalmist prays, “Will you not revive us again, O Lord?” (85:6). I can’t think of a more appropriate prayer for us this fall! Revive us again, O Lord!

God has big plans for this church; bigger plans than we have yet realized. Sure, God has already enabled us to realize big dreams. These buildings are part of the vision God is giving us. But God isn’t finished with us yet.

I’ve been thinking about our church’s mission these past few weeks, away from the demands of everyday ministry. I’m convinced God wants us to invest more time and energy on making disciples of people rather than merely making good little Presbyterians of them. I’m convinced God wants us to invest more time and energy to Christian mission in proximity to the places where we live and work. I’m convinced God wants us to invest more time and energy into next-generation ministry with our children, youth and young adults. I’m convinced God wants us to invest more time and energy into renewing our moribund denomination. I’m convinced God wants us to put more time and energy into becoming more economically and racially diverse. And, I’m convinced God will do it all through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray and love and serve.

