

Introduction

It matters why you do what you do. In fact what you do will largely be driven by why you do it. You may not think much about why, but it will completely impact what you do if you start with why.

This week I came across an intriguing testimony. Entrepreneur Scotty Russell wrote about how an early business had failed to take off. He said: I used to co-run a clothing company called Daydreamin' Clothing right out of college. It was simple, we wanted to put cool art on a shirt and sell it. Pretty compelling right? Here lies the problem, we didn't start with Why we wanted to do this in the first place. It never took off like we planned because we lacked the driving force and were so focused on What we did.

Scotty now advocates that you should always start with why. It articulates your purpose, your cause. "Why" states what you are going after. Scotty says, "It is the internal driving force that gets you out of bed each day it gives you a purpose." For him the "why" makes all the difference.

I think Scotty has got something. Chick-Fil-A would agree. Several years ago the company was floundering so they regrouped. They assessed themselves with the question "Why?" And the company answered, the reason why we do what we do is for the glory of God. They rebuilt their approach to serving chicken sandwiches on that foundation, and today they are one of the most successful fast food chains out there.

I say all that this morning to say this. When it comes to prayer, the why matters. Why you pray is the foundation for how and what you pray. And when you pray for the proper reason why, it makes all the difference. Today we will look at the first petition in the prayer that Jesus taught. As the first petition, it sets the foundation for prayer the way it ought to be. If you will hear and apply what our Lord is teaching in this first petition, it will revolutionize your prayer life.

[Read Text Matthew 6:9-13 and Pray]

I am going to start this morning with

I. An Overview of the prayer that Jesus teaches here.

A. As we noticed last week, Jesus' guide on how to pray starts with direct address. The direct address is "Our Father in Heaven." Directing yourself to "Our Father in Heaven" in effect sets your hand over your mouth momentarily to address the Lord and to call to mind who he is in relation to you, if you indeed are his child. If you were not here last week, I would recommend you get a copy of that message. Understanding what it means that God is Our Father in Heaven is crucial for our prayers. This is how prayer is to get started.

B. Following the direct address is a series of petitions.

You know what a petition is right? A group joins together to request action from a governing body. They submit their appeal by petition. It is a request. There is more to prayer than requests. Confession of sin, giving thanks, prayers of praise and adoration of God are prayers. Yet, when Jesus is instructing how to pray, his focus is on petitionary prayer. Jesus is guiding us as to the approach to ask in the direct address and now the items for which to ask in the subsequent petitions.

Before delving into the first petition, I want you to notice that there are two categories of petitions. The first three are petitions each of which pertains not directly to us but to God. Hallowed br YOUR name; YOUR kingdom come; YOUR will be done. Only after a riveted focus upon what matters to God are we taught to pray for what matters to us. The final petitions are give US daily bread; forgive US our debts; lead US not into temptation; and deliver US from evil. Roughly half of the requests taught by Jesus relate to God, and the other half relate to us. And the requests that relate to God, his glory, his will, and his kingdom come first, before any requests that relate to the needs we have.

C. If you were to compare how you pray to God to the requests that Jesus teaches you should pray, I wonder what the differences would be. I know what the differences are for me, and I am humbled. I am instructed by Jesus' lesson on prayer here. I am way too focused on me and not near focused enough on what matters to God in my prayers.

Our tendency is to feel our desperation and rush into the presence of the Lord with a frantic cry that he must rush to eliminate the cause of our danger.

We also go before him convinced that the thing that we are dealing with is of such great importance that it cannot wait. Or our desires are so intense that God simply must do something and do it quickly.

But Martyn Lloyd-Jones sets the record straight. "The important thing to grasp is this. It matters not what our conditions and circumstances may be, it matters not what our work may be, it matters not at all what our desires may be, we must never start with ourselves; we must never start with our own petitions. . . . It does not matter how desperate or acute. We must never fail to observe the order taught by Jesus. Start with great concern about God and his honor and glory."

Now I want to focus on the First Petition in the Prayer Taught by the Lord. "Hallowed be Your name." There are four important features we must consider. We start with

II. The Direction

To whom is this prayer offered? That is obvious right? It is directed at our Father in Heaven. If it is so obvious, why do I make it a point?

Well for one thing because different people think of prayer in varying ways. Some think prayer is no different from positive thinking. It is an expression of hope or for some it is an impartation of energy into the universe hoped to bring a positive result. But biblically, prayer has always been recognized as conversation with God, presenting requests to God.

And another reason I mention that the prayer is directed at God is that the request also has to do with God, and we should not over look this feature. We do not usually think of asking someone to work in their own favor, especially when that person is God. But in essence these first three petitions do just that.

Now it is not as though God has to be cajoled into these things. A careful look at the OT reveals that God is clear that he does things for his own

namesake. But this kind of praying makes it evident that our hearts are most concerned with God and not ourselves and that in our prayers and our petitions, we are highly concerned about how events effect God.

In this kind of petition we join God in being stalwart defenders of his glory of his kingdom and of his will.

Now, the next important feature in this petition is

III. The Focus.

I am talking about the focus of concern in the petition. And the focus of the request is the name of the Lord. "Hallowed be your name."

A. Pray then like this. Pray for the name of the Lord. What is this name of the Lord?

For starters, let's just point out that the Lord has more than one name. In fact he has many names. In Genesis 1 he is introduced as Elohim. He is the God who creates. He created everything that exists other than himself. To Moses before the burning bush, he indicated he is I am. He is Yahweh or Jehovah the self-existent one. This year and last, we have been focusing in our Knights of the King's Table memory verses on the names of God. These names reveal his character what he is like. He is Jehovah-Jireh, God our provider. He is Jehovah Rapha, God our healer, Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord our Banner, Jehovah Shalom, our peace, Jehovah Tsidkenu, our righteousness, Jehovah Shammah, the Lord who is present. There are additional names to which I could point, but the idea I am trying to communicate is that in fact God has many names.

The Jews commonly spoke of "the Name" in order to refer to God without saying Yahweh or Jehovah because they had such reverence for it (sincere or hypocritical).

Then consider Moses. We regularly refer to Moses' request that the Lord would show him his glory. And the Lord said to Moses, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim the name of the Lord." And when the Lord fulfilled this word to Moses, here is what happened. Exodus 34:5 and following says, "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with

him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." To God himself, the name of the Lord is who he is. It speaks of his nature and characteristics. This is God in the fullness of his glory and majesty and greatness. "Your Name" represents that God is greater than can be grasped, but it refers to that ungraspable greatness that is who God is.

This is the concern at the heart of the first petition here: the name of the Lord.

We move from the Focus of the petition to . . .

IV. The Work.

There is a work that is being petitioned that God do in behalf of his name. And here it is. "HALLOWED be your name." What we have here is not a statement. It is a petition. The way the phrase comes across leads many to assume that this is a continuation of the direct address. What they hear is this, "Our Father in Heaven, your name is hallowed." But this is not what Jesus said. Jesus said, "Our Father in heaven, let your name be hallowed; cause your name to be hallowed."

It is not a statement of fact but a request for God to work in such a way as to bring about the hallowing of the name of the Lord.

So what kind of request is this? The word to hallow means to set something apart as holy. To hallow something is to honor that thing as holy. It is to have the highest regard for it. It is what Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15, "in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy." What Jesus is telling us as his disciples then is this, "Pray the like this, Our father in Heaven, work in such a way that all the world will stand in awe at the greatness of your being." Lloyd Jones puts it like this, Jesus "is here teaching us to pray that the whole world may come to know God [in his greatness] . . . may

come to honor God like that. It is the expression of a burning and deep desire for the honor and glory of God" (II:60).

R.C. Sproul explains it with these words: Jesus "is teaching us to ask that God's name would be regarded as sacred, that it would be treated with reverence, and that it would be seen as holy."

I think another way to say it is like this: Our Father, glorify your name. Let the world behold your greatness. Preserve your holy reputation. Work in such a way as to display for all the watching world that you are indeed matchless, holy, wise, righteous, merciful, perfect, abounding in loving-kindness, and devoted to your worth.

And that brings us to . . .

V. The Lesson

What Jesus is teaching here is much more than simply to make sure we include certain words or phrases in our prayers. He has already distinguished the kind of prayer that honors God and to which he listens from the prayers of the pagans. "They pray in order to manipulate their gods. No, you are not to pray like that," says Jesus. "You are praying to a Father who already knows what you need. I am not teaching you how to manipulate. I am not saying, 'You can get on God's good side if you pretend to be in favor of his favor of himself. NO.'"

Instead, what Jesus is teaching us is this. What we in fact need is to be invested in God's purpose. We need to prize with him that he will preserve the majesty and glory of who he is. It needs to be as preeminent in our hearts and in our prayers as it is in his work that God is looking out to preserve, protect, and magnify his glory in this world he has created.

Because of where Jesus places this petition among the others, it is clear that hallowing God is not a side need. It is not a side salad that accompanies the meal. No it is at the heart. This is prayer's priority. Above all, the first concern when you pray is to be the preservation of the glory and reputation of the name of God! Before I began this sermon this morning, if I had passed out a survey asking, "What do you believe is the most important prayer need in the world today?," I dare say that not one of

us would have said "to pray that the name of God would be hallowed." But if Jesus had been here among us and filled out that survey, he would not have been sharing a mere opinion but the absolute truth that the most important, the priority petition in prayer that we most need, is to pray for the honoring of the name of God as holy.

You see, it is clearly the burning passion of Jesus to glorify the name of God. All we have to do is turn over to John 17 to what is accurately called the Lord's prayer. Here we observe Jesus in prayer. Having begun to prepare his disciples for his departure, he turns to his Father.

He lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you."

Do you see that? Jesus is praying that he may glorify the Father. Yes, he prays that the Father would glorify him, but the purpose, the why, of his prayer was that the name of the Lord would be hallowed, that it would be glorified. And on he goes. In verse 4 he says,

"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do."

Praying or living on the earth, the overriding goal of Jesus was that the name of Lord be honored as holy, that God be glorified. The work that Jesus accomplished glorified the Father. Now I want you to notice in verse 6 how it was that Jesus glorified the Father.

"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. . . . Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you."

The disciples of Jesus were brought to recognize the glory of the name. Jesus manifested the name and they recognized the greatness of God.

Now notice what motivates Jesus in praying for his disciples. Verse 9.

"I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them."

These for whom Jesus prays belong to both him and the Father and he is glorified through them. And if he is glorified through them so is the Father.

In this amazing prayer, Jesus speaks of the name of God. In verse 6 he says, "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. In verse 11, he says, "Father, keep them in your name." In verse 12, he testifies to the Father, "While I was with them I kept them in your name." He concludes his prayer then in verse 26 this way, "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known." Listen Jesus is driven to pray and to work in such a way that the name be known and be glorified, that it be honored as holy. And frankly, I think this is what he has in mind when he defines eternal life as knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent.

Jesus' example in prayer and in life speaks volumes to us of the centrality of the name of God and of the mission of God to have his name hallowed in his creation. In fact the greatest demonstration of the glory of God here is in fact the cross where the Father glorified the son by accepting the offering he made. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that he might bring us to God. He was hallowing the name of the Lord by honoring the demands of holiness and bearing the weight of holy wrath upon himself to demonstrate that the name of God is just but is also mercy and grace. This glorious and holy God is exalted. He receives sinners to himself! He reconciles adversaries himself paying the price of their reconciliation!

David hallows the name of the Lord and I cannot keep from wanting to join him in saying, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with my and let us exalt HIS NAME together!"

Now the point here is are we praying with this spirit? Are we praying with this intent? Do we approach God with petitions, each one of which must

pass the test. Each one should be guided and evaluated, by the question, "Does this petition hallow His name?" Is this for me or for his glory? We should let our requests be made known, but we should desire most earnestly that God evaluates the way he will answer by the test of bringing glory to his name.

Conclusion

When it comes to prayer, the "why" matters. Why you pray is the foundation for how and what you pray. And Jesus shows us in this first petition that the priority in prayer is seeking the hallowing of His name. If that is the way we approach prayer, then we are starting in the right place. We are starting with the "WHY." The why is God and his reputation and his glory. This will make all the difference in our prayers first to God and second to ourselves. Many people look at prayer as something to do to influence and change God. That is so misguided. Jesus gives us prayer to communicate with God for sure. However, if we pray according to his guide here in the prayer that the Lord teaches us, then we are the ones who are going to be changed. That is because God-honoring prayer all begins with concern not for ourselves but for the name of the Lord.