

BREAKING BARRIERS TO INTIMACY WITH GOD:
Overcoming Self-Absorption
A Study of Matthew 6:9b

Characteristic of Completeness: Prayer

Big Idea: Prayer starts with God; hallowing starts with us.

Related Scriptures: Exodus 20:7; Isaiah 42:8; 43:7; Ezekiel 36:23; Matthew 5:16;
John 17:4-5; 20:19-21; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:15; 3:15

Introduction:

1. I'd like to begin this morning by asking you a question. The question has to do with prayer. In fact, ► prayer is the general topic—it's the Characteristic of Completeness—we're going to consider today. I'll ask the prayer question several different ways so you get what I mean, but it's really just one question. Now, don't overthink your answer. Just grab onto the first answer that pops into your head and hang onto it. Here goes.

If you could ask God for just one thing what would it be? What one thing would be at the top of your wish list? If you knew for sure that you had an audience with God, what's the very first thing you'd request of Him?

Okay. Do you have in mind what you would ask God for? What's at the top of your list? Now, hold that thought.

2. Now, for the purposes of comparison, we're going to consider what Jesus has at the top of His list. Jesus tells His followers how to pray in ► Matthew 6:9. He says,

^{NKJ} Matthew 6:9 "In this manner, therefore, pray: . . ."

Then Jesus proceeds to give a model of prayer. He addresses God this ► way:

^{NKJ} Matthew 6:9 " . . . Our Father in heaven . . ."

We talked about this last Sunday. It's an important salutation; we spent the whole morning on what it means to address God as our Father. But it's not really a request.

Jesus' first request—the request at the very top of His list—comes next. In the last part of Verse 9, ► this is the petition that's on the very top of His list. He says to our Father,

^{NKJ} Matthew 6:9 " . . . Hallowed be Your name."

3. Okay, how many of you had, "hallowed be Your name" at the top of your own list? If you didn't, you're not alone.

- a. If you're like me, you can be rather self-absorbed, and the request at the top of your list may be pretty much about you. "Lord, prosper me. Heal me. Help me. Guide me."
- b. And besides, I suspect that for many people, the petition, "hallowed be Your name" in is the blah-blah-blah category. Blah-blah-blah stands for stuff in the Bible you don't quite understand. As you read it, you may pronounce the words correctly, but your brain just thinks, "blah-blah-blah." For example, here's what I think many people are actually thinking when they say the Lord's Prayer.

"Our Father in heaven, blah-blah-blah. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts blah-blah-blah. For Yours is the blah-blah-blah. Amen."

Bread and forgiveness are good. The other words are just high-sounding church words, including "hallowed be Your name."

4. "Hallowed be Your name" is actually a command—a command directed to God. It's like saying, "God, make it so your name is hallowed." "Lord, get on with the business of hallowing your name; make sure it happens."

I. But what does this command, "hallowed be Your name" really mean?

- A. Let's start by considering the term, ► "name." If God's *name* is the thing that is supposed to be hallowed, what is it?
 1. In the Bible, a person's name normally stands for the sum total of that which comes to mind about the person: his character and accomplishments and position and authority and attributes and mission.¹ In a word, a person's name is his reputation.
 2. Today, when we say, "That boy is going to make a name for himself" we're using the term, "name" in much the same way Jesus is using it in our text. It's what a person stands for, or what he is known for, or what he has accomplished, or that which defines him. So, God's name represents His reputation. It's what He's known for, what He's done.²

¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev.ed., s.v. "name," (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988); Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "ὄνομα" (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977).

² Consider some other parts of the Bible to see a sampling of how this term is used. Psalm 20:7 says, "Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God." Here, to remember the name of the Lord is to remember how God has repeatedly saved His people from trouble. That's His reputation.

In Psalm 23:3, it is said, ". . . He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake." This means that God leads us in the paths of righteousness for the sake of His own reputation.

B. Now, I want to consider the term, ► “hallowed.” What does it mean?

“Hallowed” comes from the Greek word, *ha-gi-ODD-zo*.

1. The basic meaning of this word is to make holy. And, the root idea of the word, holy, is one of separation. To make holy or to be hallowed is to be clearly separated from all that is wrong, all that is sinful, all that is impure.
2. While the basic meaning of this word is to make something or someone holy, this doesn't exactly fit our text because God is already holy; we don't make Him that way.
3. A derived meaning of “hallowed” means to *consider* or *treat* something as holy. This fits. To be hallowed in this way means to win the highest admiration, the utmost respect, the ultimate reverence among people. So, “hallowed be Your name” means “May Your reputation be highly respected,” or “Let your reputation be most admired,” or “May people understand just how separate, how far above you are from all else, especially that which is wrong.” To pray, “hallowed be Your name” is to ask that God's reputation would overshadow every other competing concern on earth. To pray, “hallowed be Your name” is to ask that God would be honored above all else. That's what it means.

II. How ► does all this apply to us? What are we supposed to do? Well, the Big Idea of my sermon this morning has two parts, which I will unpack one at a time.

A. The first involves a transformation the way we pray. We need to recognize that ► prayer starts with God, not us. The prayer modeled for us by Jesus begins with God's agenda, not ours. Our personal needs are less important than God's reputation. “Give us this day our daily bread” doesn't come until after “hallowed be *Your* name. *Your*

In John 14:13, Jesus says, “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” Jesus is not saying that we should simply tack on the words “in Jesus' name” at the end of our prayers to make them legitimate. To ask in Jesus' name is to ask in accordance with everything Jesus is about. It's to ask in accordance with His reputation. One Bible scholar says this means “to pray or ask as His representative on earth, in His mission and stead, in His spirit and with His aim . . . (ISBE, s.v. “name”).” When we pray this way, in His name, our will aligns with God's will, and God delivers, so that His name will be glorified.

In talking about Jesus, John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” This is talking about how to become children of God, how to become true Christians. It says that we must believe in His name. That means that we must believe in the things Jesus was reputed to have done: Namely, that He died and rose again to save us from our own sins. We were hopelessly separated from God by our own sin. We are guilty of separating ourselves from God. But, Jesus Christ died on a cross to pay for our sin, to wipe out our guilt. That's His reputation. That the name He made for Himself. Will you believe on His name right now as your only hope of going to heaven?

kingdom come. *Your* will be done.” “Before you pray about what you want, you are to pray about what God wants.”³

1. And, what God wants—what is uppermost on His agenda—is His own glory, His own reputation.

I know this may sound like God is an egomaniac; I’ll address that in a moment. First, let me briefly show you that God is concerned for His own glory.

- a. God tells us why he made us in ► Isaiah 43:7,

^{NLT} Isaiah 43:7 “All who claim me as their God will come, for I have made them for my glory. . . .”

We were made to bring God glory, to enhance His reputation.

“Hallowed be Your name.”

- b. And, God is not interested in diluting His reputation or sharing His glory with anyone or anything else. God says in ► Isaiah 42:8,

^{NKJ} Isaiah 42:8 I *am* the LORD, that *is* My name; And My glory I will not give to another . . .

“Hallowed be Your name.”

2. So, ► if you are a believer, God’s reputation should be your highest priority. Not your comfort. Not your security. Not your happiness. Not your health. Not your career. Not your family. Not your net worth. If you want to be like Christ, nothing should be more important to you than God’s reputation.

“Hallowed be Your name.”

3. I suspect many Christians think that God’s ultimate goal in creating us is so that we might have a loving relationship with Him. Not exactly. Make no mistake, God does indeed want to have a loving relationship with us, but His ultimate goal is to bring glory to Himself through our relationship.

Yes, Jesus came to save us. But, His ultimate goal is loftier than that. Jesus alludes to His ultimate objective in a prayer to His Father, recorded in ► John 17:4-5. He says,

³ Ray Pritchard, *And When You Pray: The Deeper Meaning of the Lord’s Prayer* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 60.

^{NKJ} John 17:4 “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself . . .”

“Hallowed be Your name.”

4. Does ► this bother you? It bothers me. Or at least it did. For a time, I struggled with the thought that God wants to bring Himself glory. It almost sounds like God is an egomaniac. I don't really like people who try to show off and bring glory to themselves. And, doesn't the Bible teach us not to glorify ourselves? How does this square with God wanting to glorify Himself?

All this bothered me until I began to realize some things about God's holiness. Remember, to be holy means to be separate. God's holiness involves not only being separate from all sin, it also involves being separate from or above all else. God is one of a kind. That means He is not at all like human egomaniacs.

- a. Egomaniacs often puff themselves up to compensate for deficiencies in their own character. In contrast, God has no deficiencies. He is absolutely holy.
- b. Egomaniacs often make themselves out to be bigger than they really are. They are, therefore, inauthentic pretenders. In contrast, God is perfectly authentic; He's not pretending; and He couldn't possibly be bigger than He is now. He is absolutely holy.
- c. Egomaniacs are so self-centered that they are often unconcerned about the needs of other people. In contrast, God couldn't be more concerned about people. He is absolutely holy.
- d. Egomaniacs lack humility. But Jesus personifies humility. Jesus is the consummate example of humility. He is absolutely holy.
- e. Egomaniacs often show off to the detriment and discouragement of other people. The glory of the egomaniac comes at the expense of others. In contrast, the glory of God actually benefits other people. Let me show you.

What is the greatest, most loving gift God could ever give to you?
There is only one possible answer: the greatest gift would be Himself.
What could be better?

And, what would be the most effective way to enhance your appreciation and enjoyment of that gift? Would it not be for you to keep growing in your understanding of how good the gift really is, so that you could enjoy Him more and more? Would it not be for His name to be hallowed? Would it not be for your perception of who He is and what He's done to keep growing closer and closer to the reality of how good He really is?

To elevate our conception of God to its proper place is to elevate our own enjoyment of Him. That's why the prayer starts with God.

“Hallowed be Your name.”

B. The first part of the Big Idea transforms our prayers: Prayer starts with God. The second part of the Big Idea transforms our hearts and our lives. Here's ► the second part: Hallowing starts with us. Prayer starts with God, but hallowing starts with us.

1. I cannot legitimately pray, “God, I want your name to be hallowed in the world” unless His name is first hallowed in me. Why is that? Why must the hallowing start with me and with you? Let me give you three good reasons.

a. First, the hallowing must start with us because anything else is hypocritical. Remember, Jesus says in ► Matthew 6:5,

^{NKJ} Matthew 6:5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. . . .”

If I pray that God's name would be hallowed in the world without God being hallowed in my own heart, that would be hypocritical.

b. Second, ► the hallowing must start with us because God commands us to hallow His name in our own hearts. It's not an option. The following command is issued to us in ► 1 Peter 3:15:

^{NKJ} 1 Peter 3:15 . . . sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . . .

The directive, ► “to sanctify” is a translation of the Greek word, *hagi-ODD-zo*, the very same Greek word translated, “hallowed” in our text.

c. Third, ► the hallowing must start with us because that's the way God chooses to get the job done. God has designed us to bear His image. Our purpose in life is to reflect our Father's glory. God has chosen to stake His reputation on us.

- (1) Our Father says to us, as quoted in ► 1 Peter 1:15,

^{NKJ} 1 Peter 1:15 . . . “Be holy, for I am holy.”

Be holy because God’s reputation is at stake.

- (2) In ► the Old Testament, God tells His people how His name is going to be hallowed or sanctified among the people of the world. He says in ► Ezekiel 36:23,

^{NKJ} Ezekiel 36:23 “And I will sanctify My great name . . . when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.”

Notice where God says it starts: ► “when I am hallowed in you.” It starts with us.

- (3) Jesus says in ► Matthew 5:16,

^{NKJ} Matthew 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

One commentator rightly observes, “If Christians took the name of God more seriously, the people who don’t care about God would take us more seriously.”⁴ The hallowing starts with us because that’s the way God has chosen to get the job done.⁵

⁴ Pritchard, 59.

⁵ I could offer yet another reason but didn’t have time to include it in the sermon. The hallowing must start with us because our failure to hallow His name is a serious disgrace to God. It is at once sweet to be able to call God, “Abba, Father” and sobering to know that we can also be a disgrace to His name. I used to think that I was doing okay on the religious scorecard, especially the Ten Commandments. In fact, I thought I had one of the commandments down pat. It’s the one that says, Exodus 20:7 “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain . . .” I thought that meant that I shouldn’t use God’s name as a cuss word, and since I hadn’t used God’s name that way in such a long time, I figured I was doing okay. I was doing okay, that is, until I found out what this really means.

Remember, in the Bible, the *name* means the reputation. To *take* the name means to lift it, to bear it, to carry it, to hold it. *In vain* means lightly or worthlessly or to no effect. So then, to take His name in vain is to take God lightly. To take His name in vain is to bear His name emptied of all its glory. To take His name in vain is to honor God with your lips but not your life. Taking the name of our Father in vain is actually the opposite of hallowing His name.

One commentator says this: “Taking the Lord’s name in vain . . . is the sin of living in contradiction to that holy name. To profane his name is to live in such a way that others are unable to know God as he really is. (Morris A. Weigelt and E. Dee Freeborn, *Living the Lord’s Prayer* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2001), 37).

This makes me pucker. I used to think that I would be a disgrace to God if I stood out as doing something extraordinarily bad. You know, murder somebody, molest somebody, get caught up in some big scandal. That would certainly be disgraceful.

But, I now fear a much more common and subtle kind of disgrace. It’s the disgrace of leading an ordinary life—ordinary in the sense that I live no differently than the general population—ordinary in the sense that no one can tell just how good my Father is by watching me. You see, my Father is not ordinary; He’s extraordinary. There’s no way I could take

2. You ► say, “Okay, okay, I see why the hallowing must start with us. What do I do now?”

Well, let me tell you what happened to me recently. I ran across a passage in the Bible that really caught my attention. It’s in the Gospel of John, Chapter 20. Jesus has already been crucified, and His disciples are huddled up together in a house. The doors are closed because the disciples are afraid of being persecuted or worse, martyred. And the resurrected Christ appears to them. Verse ► 19 says,

^{ESV} John 20:19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them . . .

Now, put yourself in the disciples’ sandals. They were already afraid. And now the Messiah—the guy they thought was dead and gone—He shows up. I’ll bet their hearts pounded frantic questions. Is this a ghost? Is this for real? Is Jesus ticked because we bailed on Him?

Jesus assuages their fears. Verses ► 19 and 20 say,

^{ESV} John 20:19 . . . Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

I’ll bet the disciples were glad on at least two fronts. First, this was their beloved King who was now resurrected and alive. And second, they expected Jesus to now conquer His enemies and set up His kingdom on earth so that His name would finally be hallowed.

Jesus affirms the first idea by showing them the scars on His hands and His side. He’s alive.

But He corrects the second idea. The hallowing is going to start with them. ► Verse 21 says,

^{ESV} John 20:21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

my Father seriously and live in an ordinary way. In fact, if you cannot see my Father in me, I’m taking His name in vain. And, if our community cannot see our Father in us, we’re taking His name in vain here at Moon Valley. That would be disgraceful.

I am a child of God. So, I can never be disowned, but I can definitely be a disgrace.

The key words are at the ► end: “I am sending you.” That part jumped off the page and grabbed me by the throat. What if Jesus appeared to me and showed me His scars and looked me in the eye and said: “Bob, I am sending you.” The words of Jesus originally spoken to the first followers echo down through the ages to every follower: “I am sending you.”

The original word for sending focuses on the sender who is being represented by the one sent.⁶ The hallowing starts with us. “I am sending you.”

You may be thinking, “Well, where is Jesus sending me?” May I suggest you’re already there. At least for now. Where do you live? He’s sending you to that neighborhood. Where do you work? He’s sending you to that workplace. Where do you go to school? He’s sending you to that classroom. Where do you shop? He’s sending you to that store. Where do you go to church? He’s sending you to that community. You’re already there.

Here’s the bigger question. In all those places God is already sending you, is your heavenly Father’s name hallowed in you?

- a. Where do you go to church? Is Moon Valley Bible your church home? If so, that’s where God is sending you right now. The hallowing starts with us.

I don’t talk about money very much, but it’s very much a part of hallowing. In fact, in our materialistic culture, it may be an even greater part of hallowing than in other cultures. How you spend your money is one the most noticeable things about you. It makes a statement.

Now, if you are a guest here, close your ears. But if you are a member, I have a question. What are you thinking when you see a growing budget deficit reported week after week in our bulletin? What are you thinking? Do you think, “Oh well, things are tough all over”? Everybody thinks that. Join the herd.

But how many are thinking, “My Father’s name is on the line”? How many hear the words of Jesus: “I am sending you.”

- b. Where do you live? The Lord is sending you to that neighborhood. Is our Father’s name hallowed in you in the eyes of your neighbors? Would any of your neighbors say, “I get a sense of how great your God is just by observing you”?

⁶ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “πέμπω,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

“I am sending you.” The hallowing starts with us.

- c. Is our Father’s name hallowed by your marriage? Would anyone say, “I can tell how great your God is by the way you treat your wife or your husband”?

“I am sending you.” The hallowing starts with us.

- d. Is our Father’s name hallowed by what you say to other people? Would anyone say, “I can tell how great your God is by the way you talk about Him, especially to people who desperately need to know Him”?

“I am sending you.” The hallowing starts with us.

- e. Is our Father’s name hallowed by how you treat other people? Would anyone say, “I can tell how great your God is just by watching how you love people in such an extraordinarily unselfish and sacrificial way”?

“I am sending you.” The hallowing starts with us.

- f. Is our Father’s name hallowed in your work? Would anyone say, “I can tell how great your God is by how diligently and honestly you work”?

“I am sending you.” The hallowing starts with us.

- g. Would anyone in this community say, “When I see all you people at Moon Valley Bible—all the things that you do, and the way that you do them—I see something extraordinary. I’m not sure I get the whole Christian deal, and I’m not big on religion, but you guys make me want to follow along just to see what it’s all about”?

“I am sending you.” The hallowing starts with us.

3. All this may sound overwhelming. It’s not. You can do it. Break it down and it’s just a baby shower on Monday versus lunch on Thursday. Let me explain.

- a. The baby shower on Monday is an example of how I blew it. Two weeks ago, for the first time in my life, I went to a baby shower. I guess they have coed baby showers nowadays. Oh boy. Anyway, I’m going to this baby shower. And I know there’s going to be quite a few people there who have not yet believed in Christ.

But I'm *not* thinking "I am sending you." I'm *not* thinking that, for whatever reason, this is where the Lord is sending me right now as an opportunity to somehow represent Him. I'm not thinking anything of the sort.

Instead, I'm internally whining. I'm thinking that I'm being dragged to this thing. I'm thinking that a whole bunch of man-laws are gonna to be broken, like oohing and aahing as the young couple holds up new bibs and pacifiers and newborn outfits and stuff. How precious.

If the Lord had an assignment for me there, I didn't know it, because it wasn't even on my radar. In my head, the "I-am-sending-you" channel was turned off completely.

If it were on, it's not like I would have passed out Bibles or starting preaching or anything. But maybe I would have been prompted to encourage someone. Maybe I would have been nudged to pray silently for someone. Maybe I would have been sensitive to someone who is lonely.

- b. But this last Thursday, I did better. I'm thinking about all this hallowing stuff on Thursday while I'm at the church office. And it's getting on toward lunchtime. I think about skipping lunch because I'm busy and I don't have much time, but my stomach talks me out of it. So I head out to the parking lot to jump in my truck and maybe go for some fast food.

As I'm walking out to my truck, I see Mike out of the corner of my eye. Mike is on the riding lawnmower, knocking down some weeds in the field closest to Greenway. Mike is homeless.

A while back, Mike came to Moon Valley for some food. Mike is unusual in that he insisted on working for the food. So we gave him some work.

Ever since, he has just kept on working. Not for the food. Not because we've asked. But because he wants to be productive.

Mike has been coming to church on Sundays and he's become a friend to all of us in the office. Mike says that maybe we ought to call this something different than "church," because "church" seems like too harsh a word for what he sees here. I like Mike.

Anyway, there I am on Thursday, walking to my truck. But this time, in my head, the “I-am-sending-you” channel is on. And the signal is very clear. I’m not just going to lunch; I am being sent to lunch. Big difference.

So I hop in my truck, I drive on over Mike, and I say: “Hey Mike, I’d like to take you to lunch.”

He says sheepishly, “Oh, I don’t know, I’m really dirty.”

And I say, “You’re fine. We’re not going anyplace fancy. Hop in.”

He does, and we go to *Baja Fresh*. On the way I say, “Mike, I really want to thank you for all the work you’re doing around the place.”

And he says, “I want to thank you for giving me some dignity.”

This great privilege cost me almost nothing—nothing but a burrito and a Coke.

Yesterday, Mike came to the Men’s Breakfast here at Moon Valley. He came early to help set up. He stayed late to help take down. And he brought two homeless friends with him. I was delighted to sit with Mike and the two homeless friends to hear more about the grace of God.

The hallowing starts with us.