

# The Greatest Prayer in All the World

by John Piper

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of aligning our lives with God's ultimate purpose of hallowing His name, highlighting how suffering, the ministry of the Word, and prayer are divine influences that shape us into missionaries and God-centered individuals. The speaker urges the audience to pray for their hearts to treasure and honor God's holiness, ultimately leading to a life dedicated to magnifying God's name and spreading His glory worldwide.*

**Scripture:** Acts 7:59, Acts 1:8, John 12:27, Matthew 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:15, Psalm 29:2, Psalm 96:8, Psalm 99:3, Psalm 111:9

**Topics:** "God's Holiness", "Living as Missionaries"

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## Description

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## Transcript

I am praying that this pandemic would not be wasted in your life, but that you would mingle it with the cross-conference and with 10,000 other divine influences in your life so that the pandemic and the cross-conference and 10,000 divine influences would mingle in the mysterious working of God to make hundreds of you into lifelong missionaries and all of you into God-exalting and loving lovers of Jesus who are world Christians. I don't think many things bring more joy to my life than to ponder the amazement of watching the mystery of God make ordinary people into missionaries. I have seen it happen with my own eyes for 40 years.

Not a few of them right here in this room where I used to preach for about 20 years. It's an amazing thing to watch. It's a mystery beyond explanation.

We may write books on helping people find the will of God till we're blue in the face, but in the end, how God brings people like you who haven't even begun to think that that might be a possibility to be lifelong missionaries, that's a mystery. Nobody can explain this. None of you, none of you knows where you will be or what you will be doing in 10 years.

You don't. And the fact that some of you beyond your wildest dreams will be in places you do not know and in partnerships you cannot now imagine and in languages that you thought were impossible to learn, loving people you've never heard of declaring the best news of salvation in all the world that that could happen is a beautiful mystery of God's providence. How God does that we do not know, but he does it.

And we do know a few of the 10,000 influences that God uses to bring ordinary people to places and peoples and languages for the gospel that they never imagined. One of those things that he uses is suffering, hence the pandemic. It's no accident.

One of the things that he uses is the ministry of the word of God, hence the cross conference. That too is no accident. And a third thing that he uses of the 10,000 is prayer because Jesus said, pray to the Lord of the harvest that he would send out laborers into the harvest.

So that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to pray. And then after we pray, I'm going to connect the pandemic with the heralding of God's word.

And we will watch now and in the years to come, the mysterious providence of God turning hundreds of you into missionaries and all of you into God-centered world Christians. Let's pray. So there's my prayer, Lord, that the pandemic not be wasted, that the cross conference not be wasted, that the 10,000 influence that have made these people watching this, what they are and who they are destined to be, none of that would be wasted.

So use this message and all the messages of the cross conference, God, to turn ordinary folks who perhaps never dreamed of such a future into lifelong missionaries and don't let any of us escape being world Christians. I pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

I know from personal experience and from the Bible that God uses suffering to create proclaimers of the word of God. In the summer of 1966, I was 20 years old and just a junior in college. And the Lord totally shut down the river of my life confident towards pre-med and flattened me on my back for three weeks in the hospital.

And there that dream died. And another dream was born, namely, listening to Harold John Ockengay preach at the Spiritual Emphasis Week at Wheaton College on the radio, 200 yards from where he was standing in the infirmary. My whole life was changed.

The total course of my life changed. And I never have gone back. There was born in those three weeks a passion to know the Bible and to help people know it, to see what's there and to help people see it.

I moved into those three weeks with tremendous confidence. God had spoken to me in the May of that year, medicine, that's your calling. And in September, I was headed in a totally different direction.

And of course, there were thousands of influences that I don't even know. But I know one thing, those three weeks were decisive and they were painful. And I thank God for them with all my heart today.

God creates proclaimers of the word through suffering. He does that. That's one of the means that he uses.

Listen to the book of Acts. This is chapter seven, verse 59. As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And there arose that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. And those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Jesus had told them in Acts 1.8, leave Jerusalem and go to Judea, leave Jerusalem and go to Samaria, leave Jerusalem and go to the ends of the earth.

And they hadn't gone. So he dislodges them from Jerusalem with the death of Stephen and with a great persecution. That's how he does it if he has to do it.

Hence a pandemic. Now you may be not looking for that in the pandemic, but I'm praying for that in the pandemic. So whether it's persecution in the first century, mononucleosis in the hospital in 1966 or pandemic in 2020, one of the means that God uses to put his people where he wants them among the nations is suffering.

Another means is the word of God preached into the lives of God's people. And so I'm going to turn now to a text that you hardly have to look up because you know it by heart. Probably even if you're not a believer, you may know this by heart, namely, hallowed be your name.

So I've been assigned in the Lord's prayer that we're all addressing this phrase. Let's read the Lord's prayer. Jesus said, pray then like this, our father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Even the word of God preached, even the word of God rightly understood and rightly heralded is often a gift of suffering. The point that I'm going to make, the main point that I'm going to draw out from hallowed be your name, I had never seen until 2010, which was a very hard year in our family.

You don't need to know the details, but you ought to be encouraged that one of the gifts that God has for his people through suffering is to show them things in the Bible about himself that they had never seen. That certainly happened in this text in 2010. And I want to show it to you because it is so relevant to your engagement with the nations as a goer or a sender.

Now, going into 2010, I of course had said the Lord's Prayer hundreds and hundreds of times, and I knew a few things about it. But I knew that hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done were petitions. I used to think they were acclamations.

I'm going to draw your attention to this because this may be a no brainer to you, but it wasn't to me. I mean, for some reason, I grew up with the sense, I hadn't even thought it through, with the sense that every time I said, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, I was acclaiming a truth, not asking for anything. It was more like, your name is being hallowed, your kingdom is coming, your will is being done.

That's wrong. These are all petitions. They're all prayers.

They're all requests. Oh God, cause your name to be hallowed in my life and in the world. Oh God, cause your kingdom to come.

Set up your rule in my life, my family, my church, the nations. Oh God, cause your will to be done the way the angels do it in heaven, because it's not being done that way on the earth. God, move.

God, come. God, show power. Get these three things done.

That's what he's telling us to pray. So I knew that when I came into 2010. Here's the second thing I knew, which is not my main point.

I knew that there were really two sets of three propositions, right? The first set and the second set. Set number one, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done. That's set number one, right? We all feel those are unified.

That's one set of petitions. But here's the other one. Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive our debts. Don't lead us into temptation. So I knew the structure of this prayer is three and three.

And here's another thing I knew. The second three served the first three. They were the main thing, and the second three were a means to that end.

So I need forgiveness. I can't serve you without being forgiven of my sin, so I asked for it. I need to live, so I need bread.

If I die, I can't serve you on the earth. I need guidance and protection from Satan, so I asked for it. And then this bread sustained life and this forgiveness liberated conscience and this heart protected from evil free me to throw myself into hallowing your name and seeking your kingdom and doing your will.

That's the way it works. The second three fit us, enable us to do the first three, which are the main three. All of that I knew coming into 2010.

But I had never seen what I'm about to say. And what I'm about to say is the main thing about hallowed be your name. What I had missed was that this is not just one of three or one of six.

It's different. I wonder if you could spot the difference. It's different.

Cause your name to be hallowed. Hallowed be your name is an explicit request that a kind of heart response would happen in me and among the nations in the hearts of people everywhere. Namely the response of hallowing.

Hallowed be your name. Hallowing is an act of the human heart. None of the other six or other five petitions explicitly ask God to produce an effect, an act in the human heart.

They will. They will. They will produce that.

So coming kingdom, the coming of God's kingdom is going to cause a response to rise in the heart, but it's not named. The doing of God's will surely includes a right response of the heart but it's not named. Eating our daily bread sustains us in a life on earth that is to be used with heart responses, but they're not named here.

Being forgiven for our sins frees the heart to feel and respond as it ought to feel and respond, but it's not named. Being delivered from evil, being unleashed by forgiveness and by protection and by guidance should produce a great response, but it's not named. It's named in one petition, number one, and it's

called hallowing.

The act of the human heart hallowing God's name. Hallowing. What does that mean? What is the heart doing when it is hallowing God's name? The word in Greek is translated regularly sanctify.

It's exactly the same word that we see as sanctified or sanctifying. So what we are praying is, oh God, cause your name to be sanctified. Sanctified be your name.

What would that mean? What is the heart doing when it sanctifies? Well, we all know, maybe, that sanctify means to make holy. Comes from the word holy. Sanctify, holy.

But you don't make God holy, right? He's holy. Whether you're holy, he is holy. We don't make him holy.

So what does sanctify God, sanctify the name of God mean? It means regard him as holy, reverence him as holy, esteem him as holy, honor him as holy, cherish him as holy, treasure him as holy. What is holy? I wish we had an hour on that, but I will sum it up. The holiness of God is his utterly unique.

He's one of a kind. He's in a class by himself. We usually think of holiness as setting something apart for distinct use.

Well, if you set something apart alone, it's in a class by itself. And when a diamond is in a class by itself, it is really, really valuable. And so God's holiness is his utterly unique, infinitely pure and valuable transcendent Godness.

To be God is to be holy. To be God is to be transcendent. To be God is to be infinitely pure.

To be God is to be utterly unique. So his holiness is his utterly unique, infinitely pure Godness. Now, if you put God's infinitely pure, transcendent being in a scale, you've got these tilting scales here.

Over here's one scale. Here's the other scale. And in this scale, you put the holiness of God.

And in this scale, you put all other being, all the waters of the oceans, and all the sands of the deserts, and all the rocks of the mountains. I just read today that Mount Everest is three feet taller than they thought it was. And so we'll throw in the extra three feet.

And all the galaxies, and all the angels, and all the devils are in this scale. And over here's the holiness of God. They go up like air.

The holiness of God is absolute reality. It's weighty beyond imagination. Compared to all other reality, the holiness of God is infinitely great.

And all other reality is as nothing compared to God in his holiness. And so we are to hallow God's name. And we are to pray that God would enable us to hallow his name.

It's a yearning. It's a pleading for God's people, cause your name to be hallowed in me, revered in me, esteemed, and honored, and loved, and cherished, and treasured in me. Do that, God.

That's my first prayer. Only the first petition. None of the others.

Only the first petition of the Lord's prayer is a prayer for an explicit act of the human heart to take place. Namely, the hallowing of God's name. The revering of the holiness of his name.

Honor, esteem, admiration, value, treasuring. God is supremely valuable. And so, that's what I saw in 2010.

And that's my main point in this message. Because when I added to that fact, namely that only petition number one, only petition number one is an explicit request for the response of a human heart. When I added to that, that this is the first one mentioned, and I added that the name of God is more biblically focused on his essential being than his kingdom or will, I now see three reasons for why it should be the main point, right? It's got name, which is the ultimate essence of God.

His name, not just his rule, not just his will, his name, his essence, his being. It is number one. And it's the only one that calls for an explicit response of the heart.

So, this prayer is structured not just as three and three, but as one and five. So, on October of 2010, when I was seeing these things for the first time, I wrote in my journal what I would pray that someday you may write in a journal. My one great passion, nothing is more clear and unshakable to me than that the purpose of the universe is for the hallowing of God's name.

His kingdom comes for that. His will is done for that. Humans have bred sustained life for that.

Sins are forgiven for that. Temptation is escaped for that. Namely, the treasuring, cherishing, admiring, loving of God's infinite beauty and worth and greatness, namely his holiness.

And on October 10, next day, I wrote, Lord, grant that I would, in all my weakness and limitations, remain close to the one clear, grand theme of my life, your magnificence. I want you to join me in that. May the grand, overarching, all-embracing, all-pervasive theme of your life be the magnificence of God, his holiness, his beauty, his worth, his greatness.

Pray that God would do that. Isn't it amazing? Jesus said, pray like this. Pray for this.

You might sit there thinking, well, I'm not wired that way. I'm not there. I'm not even close to that.

Of course you're not. Neither am I. That's why he said, pray like this. God, do this to me.

Do this to my heart. And once you start doing it in my heart, make me an instrument for the nations that they too would make your magnificence, your greatness, your worth, your beauty, your holiness, the main point of their life, like it's the main point of this prayer. I want you to join me in that.

Of course, all the other five petitions in the prayer are essential to the achievement of the main point. If the kingdom does not come, God's name will not be hallowed. If his will is not done like it's done in heaven, the name of God will not be hallowed.

If we don't have food to keep us alive, our voice will vanish from the earth and we won't be able to hallow him here anymore. If our sins are not forgiven, we will perish in hell and nobody hallows the name of God in hell. If we are not protected from the evil one, we will join the world in hating the name of God, not hallowing it.

So they're all essential, aren't they? But they're all penultimate. Penultimate. There is one ultimate goal in this prayer and there's one ultimate goal in history, one ultimate goal in creation and redemption and consummation.

They are all means. There is one ultimate end. We are delivered from evil for the hallowing of God's name.

We are forgiven our sins for the hallowing of God's name. We are given bread and sustained for the hallowing of God's name. We do the will of God for the hallowing of God's name.

We submit to God's kingly rule for the hallowing of God's name. Jesus pushes us. He pushes us through penultimate aims to ultimate aim.

He pushes us through means to the one great end, which is the hallowing, the treasuring, the loving of God's name. It's not an accident that he says the first and great commandment is love the Lord your God with all your heart. And that the first petition in the Lord's prayer is, Oh God, cause me to love your name, cause me to treasure your name, cause me to esteem and hallow your name.

That's not an accident. It's the main goal of everything. In eternity, we will hallow the name of God, not as a means to anything.

Hallowing the name of God is not a means to a greater end. There is no greater end for the human heart. The hallowing of God's name is the end for which the prayer exists and you exist.

Missions exists because the hallowing of God's name doesn't. When Jesus came to his final hour and he knew that he was about to die, then rise again, ascend to the father, pour out the spirit and unleash a global tidal wave of salvation. Do you remember how in that final hour, he strengthened himself and brought his whole soul into alignment with the ultimate goal of God? Do you remember that? It's found in John chapter 12, verse 27 and 28 like this.

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose, I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name. And then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it.

And I will glorify it again. Again, to be sure, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That was a goal of his coming.

But what does that mean? What does save sinners mean? What is salvation? What are we saved unto? Where is it all going? What are we to experience in this salvation, which is the end, not a means to anything, the salvation that takes us to the end. What's that? Hallowed be your name is the end. That's the climax.

That's the consummation of a soul saved. So yes, Jesus came into the world to save sinners, namely to bring a host of people out of treasuring everything but God into a family who would hallow his name above all things. For this purpose, I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name. Cause me, Lord, to treasure your name, magnify your name, love your name, hallow your name, and cause me then to be an instrument of the nations hallowing your name from their hearts. Which brings me back to where I started as we close.

Jesus pursued the personal and global hallowing of God's name through suffering and death. That was the hour. Should I say, save me from this hour? No! I came to this hour of suffering and death.

So glorify your name. That's why I'm here, Father. Your name hallowed in the lives of millions of people.

So it began that way. The movement began that way. And it goes on that way through suffering and death.

So don't waste your pandemic. And don't waste the cross conference. And don't waste the 10,000 other divine influence that has made you what you are.

There is one ultimate purpose in the Lord's prayer. And one ultimate purpose in history. One ultimate purpose in the endless stretches of eternity.

Namely, the hallowing of God's name. The magnifying, treasuring, loving of God's name. God's beauty.

God's worth. God's greatness. God's holiness.

So make that the aim of your life. And as you make that the aim of your life, we will be able to watch, I think, in the months and years to come, the mysterious working of God's providence in turning ordinary folks, hundreds of you, into lifelong missionaries. And all of you, I pray, into God-hallowing world Christians.

Let's pray. Father, a cross conference, a pandemic, and 10,000 influences don't make this happen without your sovereign touch. So I stretch out my hand with longing.

I would like this message and all the messages on the Lord's prayer and all the panels of this conference to be part of the mysterious working of your providence in bringing people into alignment with your ultimate purpose in the prayer and your ultimate purpose in history. The hallowing of your name and then the using of us to bring the nations to hallow your name. I pray this in the great name of Jesus.

Amen.

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