

# (God-Centered Praying) 3. the Glory of God's Name

by Zac Poonen

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*Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of prioritizing God's glory in prayer and living a God-centered life to experience true spirituality.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 37:4, Malachi 3:16, Matthew 6:9, Luke 18:1, John 17:4, Romans 6:14

**Topics:** "Prayer Life", "Gods Glory"

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## Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the importance of prioritizing God's glory in prayer, emphasizing that our primary requests should be centered around honoring God's name and seeking His kingdom and will above our own needs. He highlights the root of sin as self-centeredness, tracing it back to Lucifer's rebellion and Adam's fall, and stresses the need for repentance to turn from a self-centered life to being centered in God. Poonen challenges believers to pray with right motives, desiring above all else for God's name to be glorified, even if it means personal sacrifice.

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## Transcript

"Hallowed be Thy Name"

Prayer is essentially a matter of our life, and that is why Jesus told us to pray always (Lk. 18:1). That does not mean that we are to be on our knees all the time. We do have seasons when we go on our knees for a time. But we must be in a spirit of prayer all the time. It must affect our whole life.

Right Priorities in Prayer

The prayer that Jesus taught His disciples reveals what the priorities of our life should be and what our greatest longings should be for. It has six petitions. The first three concern God: "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The next three concern us: "Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

There is something very important to notice here. Our primary requests in prayer should not be related to our own problems. We may have many problems, even spiritual ones perhaps, but they are not to come first in our praying. God's glory must be first.

If we were to examine our life and see what takes priority in our heart as we express its longings to God, we may find that we have seldom if ever followed this order. This shows that we haven't taken the teaching of Jesus seriously. For if we had read God's Word accurately and carefully, we would have realized that Jesus taught us to pray in only one way - with top priority given to God and His glory.

### Centred in God

This is the way God created man. God Himself was to be the head and man was to be like the body in subjection to the head. In our body, the head is on top - not only physically, it also rules the body. As long as our head is in control of our bodily functions, we are all right. When a person's head (brain) is not functioning properly, it is unable to control his body and we would call such a person mentally deranged or insane. God never intended man to be that way.

The Lord desires that we 'walk erect' spiritually (Lev. 26:13). The problem with many believers is that their head is not in the proper place. They don't give God the place that He should have in their lives. If God had first place in our lives, in our longings, in our desires and in our ambitions, and if God and His glory were the consuming passion of our lives, that would express itself clearly every time we went to God in prayer.

The reason why many things in our lives don't fall into place, why there's confusion and chaos, is because God is not first. And even when we pray we desire the gifts more than the Giver. One mark of a spiritual man is that he desires the Giver more than the gift; and he loves the Giver even if he doesn't receive any gifts.

This is one of the tests by which we can assess whether we are spiritually-minded or not: Are we content and satisfied even when God doesn't answer our prayers as we expected Him to?

Why is it that so many believers grumble and complain when God doesn't answer their prayers? Because they only wanted His gifts. They were not so keen on the Giver. They are like the prodigal son, who when he got what he wanted from his father, went off to enjoy it on himself. He only wanted his father's gifts. He came back to his father only when he had exhausted the gifts and wanted some more (Lk. 15:11-24).

Notice, that fifty percent of this prayer is concerned with God and His glory. It's not that we just say as a matter of ritual, "Lord, first of all I want Your Name to be glorified" and then having said that spend the next hour giving Him a shopping list of all that we want. We're not talking about a certain form of prayer here, but rather of a changed attitude and a re-orientation of our mind so that God and His glory are primary in our thinking now.

### Self-centredness - The Root of all Sin

God created everything in this universe to be centred in Him.

Consider the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars. They have no will of their own. They obey their Creator implicitly. The earth revolves around the sun without any question. And the stars have been moving in their appointed courses for thousands of years. They have steadfastly remained in the path that God ordained for them. But God does not delight in inanimate objects like these. He wants sons.

He created the angels first with a free will. Lucifer, the head of the angels, rebelled against God because he did not want to be centred in God. Sin originated, when a created being wanted to live a life centred in

himself (Isa. 14:12-15).

It's very important for us to understand this. Because if we want to understand what sin is, we have to see how it originated. Then we'll recognize that sin is not just adultery, murder, anger or jealousy, etc., Sin finds its root in self-centredness.

It was self-centredness that made an angel into a devil in a moment; and self-centredness will turn people into devils today too.

It was self-centredness that turned Adam into a sinful, fallen man. The two trees in the garden of Eden - the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil - symbolized two principles of life by which Adam could live - one, a life centred in God, and the other a life centred in himself. Satan tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, saying, "Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God yourself. Then you can live in independence of God." Adam and Eve chose to live that life - centred in themselves and independent of God.

God does not ask us to be centred in Him because he wants something for Himself. No. It's for our own good that He asks us to put Him first in our lives. If we do not worship God, we will certainly end up worshipping something else - either ourselves or the devil or the world. And so it is to save us from destroying ourselves by false worship, for our own salvation and for our own good, that God says, "Learn to worship me. Learn to be centred in Me."

God created the earth to go around the sun. If the earth decided one day that it had had enough of going around the sun and now wanted the sun to revolve around it, what would happen? The earth would thereby disobey a law of God and there would be no change of seasons, and all life on earth would perish very soon. Disobeying God's laws always leads to death.

That was how spiritual death came into the world too. God created man to be centred in Him. Man refused to accept God as his Centre; and in that day he died. When we realise this, we'll understand that salvation means to be saved from being Self-centred.

The New Testament teaches that in order for a man to be saved, he needs to repent first. Repentance means turning from our old way of life. It means a whole lot more than just giving up some bad habits, like drinking and gambling, etc., Our old way of life is a self-centred life; and repentance means saying, "Lord, I'm tired of being centred in myself and I want to turn to You now and to be centred in You."

#### Salvation from Self-centredness

Jesus came to save us from sin. In other words, He came to save us from self-centredness.

Put the word "self-centredness" instead of the word 'sin' in the New Testament and you'll see what meaning comes up in many passages. "Sin shall not be master over you" becomes "Self-centredness will not be master over you" (Rom. 6:14). That's God's desire for His people.

And yet if we examine our lives, we'll find that even in our most sacred desires, there is self-centredness. To ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit can be a self-centred desire, if we want this power in order to be a great preacher, or a great healer etc., That's as self-centred a desire as wanting to be great in this world. Do you see how sin enters even into the most holy place?

That's why Jesus taught us to pray, first of all, not even that we might be filled with the Spirit, but that God's name might be hallowed.

Only a truly spiritual man can pray this prayer in sincerity. Anyone can repeat this prayer, of course. Even a parrot can do that. But to really mean it, from the depths of our hearts, will require a total devotion to God, where He is first in our lives, where we are centred in Him, and where we are not seeking His blessing as much as Himself. If He gives us His gifts, well and good; and if He does not give us any gifts that's all right with us too, because we long for God Himself, and not His gifts.

Why did God teach the Israelites to love Him with all their hearts and to love their neighbour as themselves? Only to deliver them from their self-centredness.

There is an acrostic on the word joy that says, "Put J - Jesus first, O - others next, and Y - yourself last. Then you can have joy."

God is perpetually full of joy. There is no sorrow or anxiety in heaven, because everything is centred in God. The angels are always rejoicing, because they are centred in God.

The reason we lack joy, peace, and so many other spiritual virtues is because we haven't found our proper centre. We tend to use God for our own ends. And even prayer becomes something like this, "Lord, please let my business prosper.....Help me to get a promotion in my job.....Please let me get a better house....." etc., We want God to become our servant, helping to make our earthly lives more comfortable - like the genie in the story of Aladdin and his lamp.

This is the type of God that so many believers pray to - one who is a means to their own advancement and profit in this world. But the God of the New Testament is not One Who helps you to win the 100 metres race in the Olympics or to outwit your competitor in a business deal.

Our prayers reveal how self-centred we are.

"Delight yourself in the Lord" the Bible says, "and He will give you the desires of your heart." (Psa. 37:4). To delight ourselves in the Lord is to put God at the centre of our lives. And so it is only a God-centred person who can have all the desires of his heart.

"No good thing, will God withhold from those who walk uprightly (that is, from those who are walking with their head on top - who have God controlling their lives)" (Psalm 84:11).

"The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much" - and the righteous man is the God-centred man (James 5:16). On the contrary, the fervent prayer of the self-centred man, even if he prays all night is going to avail nothing. It is the type of life we live that gives value to the prayer we pray.

That's why the first three longings of our life should be : "Father, Your Name should be hallowed. Your kingdom should come. Your will should be done."

We may have many other requests such as, "Heal me of my backache, help me to find a better house to live in, help my son to get a job," etc. These are all good requests. But if you can say, "Father, even if you don't grant these requests, my primary desire is that Your Name will be glorified" - then you're a spiritual man.

The Name of God being Honoured

What does this first request "Hallowed be Thy Name" mean? The word "hallowed" comes from the same root from which we get many other words in the New Testament such as "sanctify", "holy", "saint" etc. It means "set apart" - that is, "set apart from all that is evil and unclean."

So the request is, "Father, let your name be feared and revered and honored and glorified." In other words, since this is the first petition, it implies that the greatest longing of our hearts is that God will be feared on the earth. Is that truly our greatest longing?

The guilt of man can be summed up in one sentence: "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES." (Rom. 3:18) "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 1:7). In other words, it is the alphabet of the Christian life. If you don't learn your ABC's you can't learn geometry, chemistry, physics, or anything else. In the same way if you don't learn the ABC of the Christian life, the fear of God, you can make no spiritual progress.

A good test of our spirituality is whether we are more concerned about God's Name than our own name. If you hear that someone is ruining your name how would you react? Vehemently perhaps? How do you react when you realize that the Name of Jesus is being dishonored? The Name of God is blasphemed among the heathen today because of the behaviour of God's people (Rom.2:24). Does that grieve us?

As you see the Name of Jesus Christ being dishonoured in India, does it hurt you? Has it ever brought you down on your knees before God with a burden in your heart that the Lord's Name should be honoured in our land. That is one test of our spirituality.

In Acts 17:16 we read that Paul's spirit was stirred within him when he saw all the idols that the Athenians worshipped. He was furious with Satan. If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we'll be stirred with anger against Satan too when we see the idolatry in our land.

Jesus' spirit was stirred with anger when He saw people making money in the name of God in the temple. If we are in tune with God, we'll be angry too at the dishonour that is brought to the Lord's Name in our land today, through people making money in the Name of Christ.

### Everything for God's Glory

Consider 2 Kings 17:33, "They feared the Lord and served their own gods." Applying this to ourselves it would mean that we symbolically worship God on Sundays but actually worship our own idols all the time.

We have all grown up considering certain activities to be holy such as reading the Bible, praying, giving out tracts, preaching, etc. Other activities like eating, drinking, sleeping, talking and buying things from the market, etc., we have considered to be secular.

The result of this type of thinking is that you may feel that your religious activities have to be done for God's glory. But having done that you can live another life in your home and in the world - backbiting and gossiping and quarreling with people etc., Then when you go to the meetings a few days later, you feel you must be holy once again. That is hypocrisy. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether, then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Every single activity in our life must be done for the glory of God.

Nicholas Herman (more commonly known as Brother Lawrence) was a cook in a monastery, many years ago. He used to say, "Whether I am washing the dishes with all the clatter of the plates around me or

whether I'm working in the kitchen, I can preserve my soul with as much serenity in God's presence as when I am on my knees partaking of the bread and the cup." That is to live in the presence of God at all times - realising that all that we do is holy.

### Right Motives in Prayer

Understanding this petition in this prayer aright, will affect the motives in our praying too. Very often our prayers are not answered because they are offered with wrong motives. But if a man really prays, "Hallowed be Thy Name" as his primary request, he cannot have a wrong motive in his prayers. His prayer is "Lord, no matter what my circumstances may be, whether You grant my request or not, let Your Name be glorified."

David once had a great longing to build a temple for God. That was a good desire. But we read in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, that God said, "No, I'm not going to use you to build the temple. I'm going to use Solomon." And when David heard that, he didn't become sour. He didn't complain. All that he said to God was, "May Thy Name may be magnified forever" (2 Sam.7:26). David was quite prepared to be set aside, if only God's Name was glorified. That's a good example for all of us to follow.

Can we pray like this, "Father, send a revival of holiness to our country; and if you decide to start the revival through some other church, that's perfectly OK by me. Send it at any cost. And if you decide not to use me but someone else, that's fine too. Just let Your Name be glorified."

It gets rid of a whole lot of selfish motives, when we can truly pray, "Father, hallowed be Thy Name - at any cost."

### Glorifying the Father's Name

Remember the words of Jesus, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to fall into the ground like a grain of wheat, to be trampled under foot by men and to die. What shall I say? Shall I say 'Father save me from this hour?' No. 'Father, at any cost, even if it means My death, glorify Thy Name'" (Jn. 12:24,27,28 - paraphrase)

Jesus practiced what he preached. Even if it meant death, He wanted His Father's Name to be glorified.

That's why He could say to His Father at the end of His earthly life, "I have glorified Thee on earth" (Jn. 17:4).

Most believers never rise up to this level in all their life. They know nothing of this wonderful God-centered life; and therefore they know nothing of what it means to be truly spiritual. Their spirit is completely foreign to the spirit of heaven.

In heaven, everyone's prayer is, "Lord, let your Name be glorified." If we don't partake of that spirit now, how will we dwell in heaven for all eternity? God wants us to partake of the spirit of heaven right now, on earth. That's why He has given us His Holy Spirit. When we sing, "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul", what we mean is that the desire of the inhabitants of heaven has now become our desire too.

Finally, let's look at Malachi 3:16: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and esteem His Name."

God has a list of names - of those who fear Him and who are concerned about the honour of His Name. And God says about these people that they are His own possession, His special treasure, His jewels (vs.17). God has a lot of earthenware pots in His house, but He's got some gold and silver vessels too! (2 Tim. 2:20,21).

All I can say is "I want my name to be in that book of remembrance that God has, of those who fear Him, who are concerned about His Name, and whose greatest longing is that the Lord's Name should be glorified AT ANY COST."

That phrase that comes at the end of the third petition - "on earth, as it is in heaven" - applies to all the first three petitions.

And so our prayer is, "Father, hallowed be Thy Name on earth as it is in heaven. Just like the angels fear You and cover their faces and worship You saying, `Holy, Holy, Holy', I long with all my heart that my fellow-believers and I will fear and reverence You always. Amen."

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