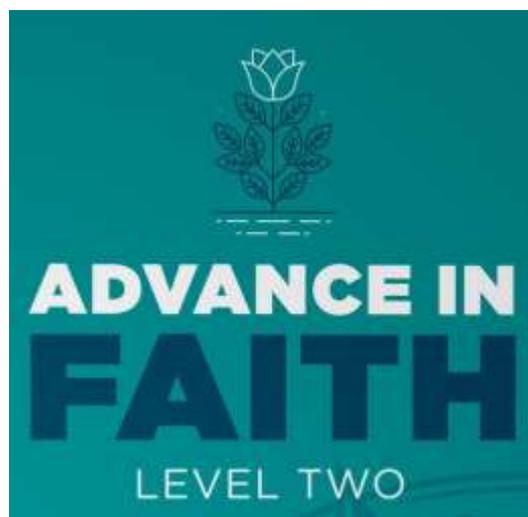


# The Lord's Prayer

## Week 2 — Hallowed be your name



## Introduction

“Hallowed be your name.” What does *hallowed* mean?

It's not a word we use any more, except in weird contexts like *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, or Halloween.

It means something like sanctified, holy. But why would Jesus tell us to pray for God's name to be holy? Isn't God already holy?

And what's this about God's name? Does God have a special name? Is there a secret name to invoke to get our prayers answered?

When we don't understand something, we just skip over it, hoping to figure it out some day. Well, today is that day!

Join me as we travel back to the mountain where Jesus taught this prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). We'll enter the crowd in the hills on the northern shore of Galilee, and hear what Jesus' teaching would have meant to them. Then we'll figure out what it means to us when we pray this prayer today.

What would God's name have meant to them? How would they have understood a prayer to keep God's name holy?

## Israel's purpose: honouring God's name

The third commandment was that Israel must keep God's name holy:<sup>1</sup>

**Exodus 20**<sup>7</sup> You shall not misuse the **name** of the **LORD** your God, for the **LORD** will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his **name**.

In our culture, it's very common to hear people using God's name carelessly: “Oh God!” when things go badly, and “Oh My God!” when things go well. Does this mean we should be the social conscience to make people think about what they're saying?

Generally, No. You might want to correct your children, but God never called us to act like Pharisees sorting everybody out.

This commandment wasn't primarily about blasphemy. We misuse God's name when we use it manipulatively, e.g. “God told me you should marry me” or “God told me I should be in charge.”

### *God's name*

Did you notice that *LORD* was printed in block letters (small capitals)? The translators are telling you that this is God's personal name,

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<sup>1</sup> Key words are colour-coded to help us trace themes.

YHWH in Hebrew. It's connected to the verb *to be*, so the name means something like *the Being*, or *I AM*. It was probably pronounced *Yahweh*. Some older translations have *Jehovah* (JHVH). Jews avoid saying the holy name, lest they misuse it.

Jehovah's Witnesses will try to tell you that you must use this name when you pray. But God never gave this name to the nations to use. It was the name he gave to the Jewish people, as part of the Sinai covenant.

When a ruler made a covenant with his people in the ancient near east, the people received the right to call on the name of their ruler when they were in need. In the covenant God made with Abraham, he gave the patriarchs a name they could call on: *El Shaddai* (God Almighty).

When God revealed himself to Moses at Mount Sinai where the covenant with Israel would be established, and revealed the name associated with the Sinai covenant: *YHWH* (the LORD). This name is therefore for the exclusive use of the Jewish people:<sup>2</sup>

**Exodus 6** <sup>2</sup> God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD.

<sup>3</sup> I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty [El Shaddai], but by my name the LORD I did not make myself fully known to them. <sup>4</sup> I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. <sup>5</sup> Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

<sup>6</sup> "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. <sup>7</sup> I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

What God was doing in the Sinai covenant was establishing a people who would represent him among the nations. Israel's purpose was to show how wonderful it was to have God ruling over them, in contrast with the slavery we experience under human rulers such as Pharaoh. The goal was to restore the blessing of God's reign to the nations.

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<sup>2</sup> The Book of Genesis uses the divine name (YHWH) because it's Israel's story. That may sound anachronistic to us, but it was natural for them to tell the story this way. No divine name was revealed in the Noah covenant, because it was with all humanity. Since it did not demark a particular people, no unique name was needed for the covenant people.

Israel's reason for existence was to be a kingdom that represented God as earth's true ruler, to represent the holy character of their sovereign:

**Exodus 19** <sup>5</sup> Now if you obey me fully and keep my **covenant**, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a **holy** nation.

God took a huge risk in trusting Israel to represent his holy name on the earth. What if they misrepresented God?

**Leviticus 22** <sup>32</sup> Do not **profane** my **holy** name, for I must be acknowledged as **holy** by the Israelites. I am the **LORD**, who made you **holy**.

Now we're beginning to understand why Jesus wants us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name!" It's all too easy for God's holy name to be profaned by the people who represent him on earth.

### *What if Israel dishonoured God's holy name?*

Israel really struggled to live as God's covenant people. As the Book of Judges spells out, they couldn't cope without human leaders. So, God allowed them to have kings, but the kings so misrepresented God that God warned he would bring an end to the kings of Israel (2 Kings 21:1-16).

Israel as a nation ceased to exist, and the people went into exile. Ezekiel was one of the exiles in Babylon explaining why the nation had fallen apart. They had dishonoured God's name:

**Ezekiel 36** <sup>16</sup> Again the word of the **LORD** came to me: <sup>17</sup> "Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they **defiled** it by their conduct and their actions. ... <sup>19</sup> I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries ... <sup>20</sup> And wherever they went among the nations they **profaned** my **holy** name, for it was said of them, 'These are the **LORD's** people, and yet they had to leave his land.' <sup>21</sup> I had concern for my **holy** name, which the people of Israel **profaned** among the nations where they had gone.

So what would God do now? The whole Abraham project was designed so Israel would show God's character to the nations so the nations would come back under God's reign as intended in the beginning, but Israel had profaned God's name? Was that the end?

Ezekiel says God was not giving up! He says God would still act for the honour his own name on the earth:

**36** <sup>22</sup> “Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign **LORD** says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my **holy name**, which you have **profaned** among the nations where you have gone. <sup>23</sup> I will show the **holiness** of my great **name**, which has been **profaned** among the nations, the **name** you have **profaned** among them. Then the nations will know that I am the **LORD**, declares the Sovereign **LORD**, **when I am proved holy through you** before their eyes.’ ”

That’s wild! God was still determined to have his name hallowed through his people! That’s how God is known on earth: through his people.

In the beginning, human beings were designed to be the visible representation of the heavenly sovereign on earth, his image (Genesis 1:26-28). When they failed, God planned to make himself known through Abraham’s family (Genesis 18:19). When that failed, God is still determined to make himself known through his people!

How? Ezekiel describes the re-creation God must do in his people:

**36** <sup>24</sup> “ ‘For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.’ ”

Ultimately, this is what God did through Jesus. God made himself known **in a human being**, because that’s how God is revealed on earth.

## Jesus’ purpose: honouring God’s name

When people want power, we say they want to “make a name for themselves” (Genesis 11:4). Jesus lived differently: he lived to make a name for his Father, even if that meant he himself would be utterly humiliated.

This was his prayer the night before his public execution:

**John 17** <sup>1</sup> Father, the hour has come. **Glorify** your Son, that your Son may **glorify** you. <sup>2</sup> For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to

all those you have given him. <sup>3</sup> Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup> I have brought you **glory** on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, **glorify** me in your presence with the **glory** I had with you before the world began.

Jesus was devoted to the honour of God's name. Even if his own name was dragged through the mud, he trusted that the heavenly ruler (his Father) would sort that out. It's because he lived purely for the honour of God's name, that he was given a name above every name.

Jesus was the human being who made God visible on earth, "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). God makes himself visible through humans!

Notice how Jesus went about honouring God's name. He did not make it his business to straighten out ordinary Israelites who were profaning God's name. We do not seek the honour of God's name by lambasting ordinary Australians for swearing or working on Sunday instead of attending church or whatever else we think they ought to do. It is not your business to correct everybody else in your street or on social media!

Instead, Jesus *lived* to honour God's name. God isn't being honoured where someone is starving, or when injustice is being done.

Jesus announced the great reversal: the blessing that comes when our heavenly sovereign's name is being honoured:

- Impoverished people no longer miss out (Matthew 5:3).
- Hurting people are comforted (5:4).
- Powerless people receive their inheritance (5:5).
- Justice comes to those who've always missed out (5:6).

Jesus calls us be the light of God's presence so people "see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

## **Our purpose: honouring God's name**

Jesus was the living presence of God on earth, and we together are the living presence of Jesus: Jesus embodied (his body). Together, we continue what Jesus began: the honouring of God's name.

That's the reason we're alive, to bring attention to the majestic name of our heavenly sovereign. That's the reason we pray,

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

What would it look like for God's name to be honoured in your street?  
In your neighbourhood? In your family? In your workplace?

What would be different?

Would could you do that would reveal the honour of his name?

What would it cost you to live for the honour of God's name instead  
of for yourself?

If you're not sure, you could ask your king. "What could I do to reveal  
the faithfulness of your name where I live?"

Jesus told a story about a father who had two sons (Mt 21:28-32).  
He said to the first, "Son, go work in our vineyard today." The son  
refused, but later went and did it anyway. The other son said, "Dad,  
I'll do it!" but he never went. If prayer is the conversation with Father,  
that conversation honours Father when it informs what we do in  
Father's world.

## Conclusion

Last week we saw that prayer begins as conversation with Father.  
Now we see that as his children, what we do and feel and are all  
reflect on our Heavenly Parent.

Jesus—God's Son—lived his entire life to bring glory to Father's  
name, so that, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father"  
(Jn 14:9). He was willing to have his own name dishonoured if it  
meant Father's name was honoured.

Father's name is hallowed when his world reflects his character, his  
providence, his love. When we pray, "Hallowed be your name," we  
commit to being like him, acting in ways that demonstrate his  
goodness and justice rather than living for self.

## Group Questions

### *Discussion starters:*

1. Make a list of the ways Jesus honoured the Father's name.  
Include the activities of his life, as well as his willingness to  
face the cross.
2. Think about your life and relationships. What could you do  
that would bring honour to God's name where you live and  
work each day?

**Prayer starters:**

- a) Thank Father for his love for you, as a child in his family.
- b) Ask for his help to reflect well on his name in the practical ways you've just discussed.
- c) Commit to living for the honour of his name, even when it costs you.
- d) Listen to what Father is asking you to do.
- e) Expect the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment—to love as Father loves.

**For further thought**

Different parts of the church have focused on different aspects of what it means to hallow God's name.

The Reformers emphasised that *God* hallows God's name. John Calvin said:

But though all the ungodly should burst with sacrilegious rage, the holiness of God's name still shines forth. Justly does the Psalmist exclaim, 'According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth,' (Ps. 48:10).<sup>3</sup>

Conversely, the Puritans focused on *our* danger of dishonouring God's name. John Bunyan warned:

With their mouth they say, 'Hallowed be thy name'; and with their hearts and lives thy delight to dishonour him all the day long. These be the prayers that become sin (Psa 109:7).<sup>4</sup>

What does it mean to hallow God's name? James Dunn says:

The prayer for God's name to be made holy is a prayer that God may so act in his creation, and particularly through his people, that the rest of humankind may in turn come to honour him as God.<sup>5</sup>

What does it look like to hallow God's name in a broken world?

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III, Vol xx. Public domain, n.d. 41.

<sup>4</sup> John Bunyan, *A Discourse Touching Prayer*. Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2006. Vol. 1, 636.

<sup>5</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, "Prayer" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* edited by Joel B Green et al, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1992. 621.

God's people are "holy"—*unlike the world*—and their holiness is constituted largely by their pursuit of unity and love for one another. The church is the gathered people who gain skills in practices of restoration, reconciliation, and forgiveness.<sup>6</sup>

How do we hallow God's name?

For when he [Israel] sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

God's reconciliation plan will succeed:

Ultimately, God's name is honoured when the profane world embraces God's holiness and comes back into fellowship with him.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Gombis, *'Worldliness' According to Paul*, 2012. <http://timgombis.com/2012/06/20/worldliness-according-to-paul/> accessed 21 June 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 29:23

<sup>8</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991-1998. Vol. 1, 399.