

The Lord's Prayer: Hallowed be Thy Name

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

Prayer of Illumination

Guide us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover your peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Ezekiel 36:23 (NKJV)

"And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I *am* the Lord," says the Lord God, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes."

Matthew 6:9 (NRSV)

"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – The Lord's Prayer: Hallowed be Thy Name

Ryan Holiday, in his brand new book *Stillness is the Key* says that stillness is one of the most powerful forces on earth. Stillness is the art and practice of slowing things down—pushing the pause button between stimulus and response. Stillness clarifies and hones your thinking. Calms your soul. Steadies you in the storm. Stillness clears out space for peace and joy. "Stillness," says Ryan Holiday, "is the key to everything that matters."

Composer John Cage was fascinated by stillness. In a speech contest in 1928 when he was in high school, he sought to convince his audience and judges to institute a National Day of Quiet. In 1951 John Cage went into an anechoic chamber, the world's most soundproof room at the time. But even in the soundless room he heard sounds—two sounds in fact. One a high sound, the other low sound. Speaking with the engineer afterwards he discovered the two sounds in the room came from within him: his nervous system and his heart pumping blood. Stillness helps you listen better.

John Cage's most famous composition is entitled 4'33". Originally the piece was to be entitled Silent Prayer. His goal was to create a song that fit all the formulas of popular music of the day: the same length (4 minutes and 33 seconds) and it could be performed live or played on the

radio. The only difference was that the composition 4'33" was a piece of uninterrupted silence. His directions were to crank up the volume, enjoy the quiet, and be quiet.

The song was first performed live by the pianist David Tudor in 1952 at the open-air Maverick Concert Hall just outside of Woodstock, New York. Tudor sat down at the piano, closed the keyboard over the piano keys, and looked at his stopwatch. In the midst of the four-plus minutes of silence, unheard sounds began to emerge out of the woodwork. Stirring wind could be heard during the first part of the piece. Raindrops pattering on a roof were then heard in the middle. At the conclusion of the composition, you could hear the sound of footprints and background chatter. After the four minutes and thirty-three seconds, David Tudor stood up to receive applause.

Each time the song is performed, new and different sounds emerge from the stillness, never to be repeated again. Some laughed at John Cage—But I think he was on to something that's at the very heart of the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be Thy Name." Reverence involves being quiet before your Maker—be still and know that I am God.

Hallowed be thy name also takes us back to creation in Genesis chapter two. We read that, "God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because God rested from all the work he had done in creation."

To hallow is to follow God's example. We slow down. We stop. We trust. We worship. And we find ourselves blessed. Invest in rest. Like Psalm 131 that says:

"I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a child quieted at its mother's breast;
Like a child that is quieted is my soul."

God's name is hallowed when we're satisfied in God.

"Hallowed" be thy name...is still a tricky word to wrap our minds around. We almost feel or intuit the word, rather than know what it means. We don't hear the word "hallowed" very much, except in this prayer or once a year at the end of October. Halloween is short for Hallow's Even or All Hallow's Eve. In the Christian calendar Halloween is the evening before All Saint's Day on November 1.

The noun "hallow" means saint and the verb "to hallow" means "to make holy" or "to sanctify" or "to consecrate." To hallow is to set something apart as special and different. We clear out space for God, so that his holiness can grow in us.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name." (Psalm 103:1)

We pray that God would be respected and honored in me and in us and throughout the world. Or as the last verse in the Psalms says:

"Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

To hallow God's name is to let God work through us, to let God shine through us for the world to see. We plead for God to make us holy, more like Christ. Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify thy name." Rather than us getting the glory, we pray for God to receive the glory. "Hallowed be thy name."

But too many times Christians live life in an ugly way—where we live as if God doesn't exist. We're cruel to one another. Rather than living in love, we live in hatred. Rather than helping one another, we harm each other. God's name is not hallowed by this. "Hallowed be thy name" is not a polite wish or a vague hope. No, it's an imperative, a command, an order—not a wish. Yet at the same time, it's a command from God to us—Be holy as I am holy.

Author and Presbyterian Anne Lamott writes that the three essential prayers are: Help. Thanks. Wow. Hallowed be thy name is a wow prayer. This prayer keeps us astonished and amazed at God's grace and God's world. Praying "hallowed be thy name" keeps us open. We don't flip over the window sign of our soul to closed. A wow prayer can be offered in speechless silence. Maybe even a gasp. Your jaw drops. There's a lot of awe in wow.

You're in a thin place—a place where the lines between heaven and earth are blurred. Filled with awe and wonder, our breath is taken away. The wow prayer is both a breathtaking prayer and a breath-giving prayer.

Attuned to glimpses of grace and the fragility of life, we're fully present. Reverent. We're mind-blown by the miraculous and the mesmerizing. We're receptive to God.

There are some etymologists who think that the word "wow" is a contraction of "I vow." This came home to Anne Lamott when a German friend visited her. Upon seeing the Golden Gate Bridge, her friend said, "Vow!" On a hike in Yosemite she exclaimed, "Vow! Look at this!" The hallowed life sees our relationship with God and others as a sacred vow and holy wow. There's commitment and dedication.

There are lowercase wows like: Hearing a young boy yodel in a Walmart on YouTube. Then there are uppercase wows: The first time you traverse across a fjord on a ferry.

Gazing upon the religious art of Marc Chagall. The realization that God has forgiven me, yet again. Gerard Manley Hopkins was attuned to the sacred vow and wow of it all when he wrote:

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God. Haunted by God's majesty and that we're miniscule, we speak and live in a hushed reverence: Hallowed be thy name."

In the Jewish culture a name is much more than what you call someone. Your name is your nature, your character, your personality, your reputation. Just as we want our name to be respected in the community, we want God's name to be held in high esteem. God lays his reputation on the line with us. God risks his good name with us.

And so we pray that God would come first in our life. We pray and long for God to be honored in our individual lives and collectively in the church. In other words, we ask God to help us cultivate a reverent and God-infused life. Reverence isn't just getting in touch with yourself. Or being reflective or spiritual. It goes much deeper.

- A reverent life believes in God.
- A reverent life knows that God is a holy, just, and loving God.
- A reverent life is constantly aware and ever mindful of God's presence.
- A reverent life is a life yielded to God.
- A reverent life honors the image of God in every person.

One scholar described a hallowed life as:

“Standing in the presence of the pain of the world and kneeling in the presence of the living God, and bringing these two together in the name of the crucified and risen Lord.”

Hallowing is a yearning that the world, my life, my home, my church, my city, be unshackled from bondage, injustice, violence, sin, and death. We long for God's holiness to be manifested in us. John Dominic Crossan wrote that God's holiness is all about delivering the endangered, freeing the oppressed, and protecting the impoverished.

What God does for us, we're to do for others, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Be holy as I am holy,” says the Lord God.

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.”

Amen.

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