

Start with God

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This summer, we had the chance to spend a little time in Colorado, and we had a blast. We were there for baseball, but I thought, as long as we're here - you know my personality is not one to miss an opportunity - we're going to take my family on some of the best hikes we can find up here in Colorado.

Now, there are moments when my family loves that part of my personality, and there are moments when they hate that part of my personality. There was one specific hike where I think they probably experienced both emotions.

The hike is called the Hanging Lake Trail. The way it works is you park in this parking lot, and you walk down a smooth path to get to the trailhead. When you get there, there's a big sign. It's really easy to know where you're going. It's very obvious where the trail starts and where you should go. At least, we thought it was obvious.

When you get on the AllTrails app and look at what people have said about this trail or how they've reviewed it, there are a lot of people who make a mistake. They get to the beginning of the trail, to the trailhead, and they see the sign, which in our minds makes it super easy to know where you're supposed to go. But they don't go there. Obviously, you're trying to go up the mountain to this lake, but they go to the right, down this smooth, easy, much easier path.

Because they start in the wrong place, they end up in the wrong place. The end of their journey has them looking at a very scenic highway and all the cars passing by on the road.

Fortunately for us, though, that didn't happen. We started in the right place, and because we started in the right place, we ended up in the right place. We made it to Hanging Lake, and I took some pictures with my phone while we were up there. Look at this. No edits, no filters, or anything on it. It was an absolutely beautiful scene.

They limit the number of people who can go up there every day. They keep it clean. You can't swim in the lake. You can't fish in the lake. They just keep it super clean, and it was absolutely beautiful. There were trout swimming in that thing. It was just an incredible experience.

There's a big waterfall behind it. My kids sort of snuck around this little barrier, found that waterfall, jumped in there, and had an absolute blast. Listen, if we could go back and do it again, I'd do it again in a heartbeat. It was so much fun.

But it was a great lesson: When you start in the right place, you'll end up in the right place.

That applies to so much more than just hiking. There are so many different scenarios in our lives where, if we just start off down the right track, we're going to end up in the right place. One of those examples is in our prayer lives.

We're going to see that in our Bible study as we continue our series, Pray Like Jesus. If you've got your Bible, open with me to Matthew chapter 6. We're going to continue that series this morning by looking at the first half of the Lord's Prayer together.

Start With God

If you're taking notes - and again, when we write things down, we remember them. Even if we never go back and look at it again, as we're taking notes and writing things down, it's just the way our brains are wired. So find a way to help you lock in. Maybe it's notes for you. But if you are taking notes, our title and our main idea today is simply this: Start with God.

Last week, we learned that, for believers, prayer is a priority in our lives. We learned to pray when? Before anything else. We fleshed out several scenarios to remind us of that. One of those was that we're supposed to pray before the day begins.

We saw from the prayer life of Jesus how He modeled that. He would sneak away to pray before the day began. We've got to start our day in prayer.

One of the action steps we gave last week was this: We know that a lot of people grab their phones first thing in the morning. If you do that, create a note on your phone called "Prayer" and write down several things you want to be praying for every day. As long as your habit, your instinct, is to grab that phone and turn off the alarm, just switch to the Notes app after you turn your alarm off and pray through the different things that are there in the morning.

Pray as your day begins. Everybody's got to find a rhythm, a routine, and a way to do that.

My kids are back in school. We're out of summer mode, and we're in school mode now, so our rhythm is a little bit different. It's a different season than it was just two weeks ago. For me, what it looks like right now is that I'm waking up before anyone else, getting the dog, and going for a walk around the neighborhood. The sun's not up yet. The kids aren't up yet. I leave the headphones at home, and it's just a way to break away before the day begins and start off in prayer.

Does it mean I have to wake up a little earlier? Absolutely, it does. But it is absolutely worth it.

Listen, find your rhythm. Begin the day in prayer. All of us need to be intentional about growing in our prayer lives and in our relationship with the Lord, knowing that it's not going to happen by accident. Set the pattern. Start your day in prayer.

If you're wondering what those prayers need to look like, we're going to see that today.

In Luke's Gospel, the disciples are watching Jesus pray. They see the relationship He has with the Father, and their request is this: "Lord, teach us to pray."

They didn't say, "Hey, it was awesome when You walked on water. Teach us that trick."

They didn't say, "Hey, the kids' meal with the fish and the loaves that You broke up and fed thousands of people - that's incredible. Teach us that trick."

They didn't say, "Teach us to preach," or, "Teach us to lead," or, "Teach us to be out in front, leading the charge." They didn't say any of that. They said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Think about that. They saw the intimacy and the fellowship that Jesus had with the Father, and they said, "We want that."

So Jesus teaches them to pray, and He gives them a pattern - not necessarily a script to recite, but a pattern to follow when they go to the Lord in prayer.

I want you to see this morning that Jesus starts that pattern by focusing on God in prayer. Before anything else, Jesus talks to God the Father about God the Father.

Here's our action step today. A lot of people enjoy a tangible action step when they leave, something they can focus on in their lives that will help them grow. Here it is. We're going to give it to you up front because every point we have today is going to point us or drive us toward this action step:

When you pray, make it about God first.

That's the action step. That's the concrete piece we want to take away from this morning. When you go to the Lord in prayer, make it about Him before anything else.

Next week, we're going to see that Jesus absolutely makes requests before God. He asks for certain things, and we're going to get into that next Sunday morning. But before any of that, we see that He starts with God.

Matthew 6:9 says, "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 also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

— Matthew 6:9-13

Jesus shows that when we pray, we start with God. He gives us a pattern. We're going to pull three points out of that pattern this morning.

Pray to the Father

The first one is this: Pray to the Father. We've got to remember who we're praying to.

What I mean is that we've got to realize there is a level of intimacy that we have when we go to the Lord in prayer. Jesus says, "Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven."

That might feel natural for you. You might already start your prayers by saying, "Dear heavenly Father." You might already start your prayers by saying, "Father in heaven." It might be routine for you. It might be something you've done for a long time. You've probably heard people do that off and on for a long time - so much so that it's possible that the routine or familiarity with that kind of language has you missing what Jesus is actually teaching here.

To go before God calling Him Father would have been unprecedented in that first-century Jewish context. They never would have approached the Lord like that. They were used to hearing prayers along this line: "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe."

Do you see the difference between "Blessed are You, King of the universe," and "Our Father"?

Jesus is showing His disciples that there is a level of intimacy we can have with God the Father. Jesus is giving His disciples, and us, access to the same intimate address that He uses when He goes before God.

You see in the Gospels - in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - that so often when Jesus goes before God in prayer, He's crying out, "Abba." It's a word that means father, but in a super-familial way. It's almost like a little kid who sees his daddy walking back through the door and yells, "Daddy! Daddy!" He's so excited to see him at home. That's how Jesus cries out to God.

This is a new concept for His disciples. In fact, a few verses before what we call the Lord's Prayer starts in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus is telling them, "Hey, don't pray like these other people. They make it a performance for everybody to see. They stand out in public. They want people to look at them while they're praying. They're a bunch of people who are super formal. In their prayers, they use big, robust, flowery language. They use words that you'd find in your SAT prep course or whatever."

What they're doing is trying to make prayer about themselves. They're trying to impress other people.

Jesus is saying, "Listen, you're missing the whole point because you're forgetting who you're talking to when you approach it that way. This is all about talking to your Father who is in heaven."

Jesus would know a little bit about us having a heavenly Father because it's only through Jesus that we are children of God. Look at what Paul writes about that in Galatians chapter 4:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

— Galatians 4:4-7

Because of what Jesus did on the cross, those who place their faith in Him are adopted into the family. They have become children of God.

So when we talk to God, Jesus is saying, "Remember who you're talking to. You're talking to your heavenly Father, who knows you, who loves you, who created you to be in a relationship with Him, and who sent His Son, Jesus, out of heaven to save you and bring you into that intimate fellowship with Him once and for all."

Never forget that when you're praying, you're talking to your Father in heaven.

When you talk to your father, there's a deeper level of intimacy and fellowship than when you're talking to someone you don't know.

I had a lunch appointment with somebody on Wednesday - someone I didn't know, someone I had never met before. I checked my email right before I walked into the lunch to remind myself of his name. I did not know him before. He was looking for a ministry partnership with Champion Forest on something that's going on.

Then on Thursday, the next day, I had a different lunch appointment. I had a lunch appointment with my dad that day.

I'm telling you, the two conversations were completely different. Wednesday was fine. The guy was nice. We got along well. But he didn't know me. He didn't know my life. He didn't know my family, and I didn't know anything about him either. Everything in that conversation was up at the surface - completely surface level. At times, the conversation even felt a little bit forced.

You've been at tables like that. Again, to be clear, the guy was fine. We got along well. We're going to do some stuff together in the future. It was all good. I'm just saying that we've been in situations with unfamiliar people, and the level of connection just isn't really there.

You've been there at work before. You've been at a work meeting, a work lunch, or some social obligation you had, and I'm sure you've found yourself sitting at a table thinking, "How did I get roped into this? How much longer until I get out of here? When is it socially appropriate for me to make the move and move on to something else?"

We've all experienced that. I was there Wednesday.

Thursday, though, was completely different. That was lunch with my father. He knows me. He knows my family. He knows my life. He knows what's going on. There is a different level of intimacy, connection, and comfort when talking to your father that's just different from when you're talking to somebody who is completely new to you.

Some of you have a great dad, or you had a great dad like me, but I know some of you didn't. Some of you had an earthly father where that relationship was a struggle. Don't get hung up there. I want to remind you that your Father in heaven loves you and desires to have a close and intimate relationship and fellowship with you.

When you pray, you can pray confidently, going to God as your Father, knowing that He knows every bit of your heart and every bit of your soul. He is not far off and distant in the clouds somewhere. He is right there

with you.

Remember that Jesus teaches us to pray to our Father, who is a good, good Father. If you've ever had a moment when that's been a hiccup for you, or you've struggled with the concept of a heavenly Father because of pain that might have been caused by an earthly father, I want to encourage you: Ask God to help you see Him for who He is - a loving Father.

One more note on verse 9. Jesus teaches us to pray like this: "Our Father."

We've covered "Father," but it's interesting. Look at that. Jesus says, "Our Father." He doesn't say, "My Father in heaven." He doesn't simply say, "Father in heaven." This is a teaching moment for Him. His words matter. They are intentional, and He chooses to say, "Our Father."

It's a reminder for us as believers. When we trust in Christ and become children of God, we are not in isolation. We are not on our own. We are adopted into the family of God, into this fellowship of believers. We have the same heavenly Father, and now we've got this group of people around us who will love us, support us, and help us grow in our fellowship and relationship with Him.

When we pray, let's remember who we're talking to: our Father in heaven.

When we pray to Him, what do we say? Look at what Jesus says: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name."

Worship Before Requesting

The second lesson this morning is this: If we're going to pray, making our prayers about God first, it means that we're going to worship before requesting. We're going to worship God with our prayers before requesting from God.

That's what Jesus does first. He says, "Hallowed be Your name."

You've probably heard that phrase before. What's Jesus saying? "Hallowed" means treating something as set apart. It means treating something as holy, sacred, and in a category on its own.

Jesus is teaching us to pray first that God's name would be recognized as holy and set apart before any other request. In His prayer, Jesus teaches us to worship the holy name of God.

Just asking for God's name to be holy isn't what makes it holy. It's holy. Jesus is asking that God's name would be recognized, treated, and honored as holy - that we would live our lives like His name, and His name alone, is holy.

I want you to see how this prayer starts completely focused on God: the intimacy with God, the relationship, the fellowship, and then immediately moving from that to recognizing His infinite greatness and holiness.

Don't miss what He does here. Just because we have this familial, intimate relationship with God doesn't mean that we don't worship Him as holy and above all things. We're not picking one track or the other here. It

is absolutely both.

When you go to the Lord in prayer, make sure you worship Him, setting Him apart as holy and above all things. "Hallowed be Your name, God. Hallowed be Your name."

But what is His name? "Hallowed be Your name." What's the name?

It's an interesting thought. If you go back to the Old Testament, they had several names for God. When you look at these names for God, they had a lot to do with what God had done.

We know some of those names. We sing them in songs here in worship. There's a song we sing fairly often called "Jehovah." In that song, we sing several different names of God.

One of the names we sing is Jehovah Jireh. It means, "The Lord will provide." It goes back to God's conversations with Abraham in Genesis chapter 22.

There's another name of God we sing in that song: Jehovah Rapha. That means, "The Lord who heals." That's from God's conversations with Moses in Exodus chapter 15.

There are all these names of God given in Scripture, specifically in the Old Testament. These names are not only a label of who He is; they are a reflection of what God has done.

But when it comes down to it, what's God's name? "Hallowed be Your name." What's the name?

It's important for us to understand that if Jesus is teaching us to pray, "God, hallowed be Your name." If we're thinking about it like that, we're thinking about it with a very twenty-first-century Western mindset. They wouldn't have thought about names the way I'm trying to make us think about names right now. Not at all.

What's my name? My name is Steven, and that pretty much sums it up. If you say, "Steven," do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to look your way and say, "What's up?" That's it. If you think of Steven, you're thinking, "Okay, it's that guy over there." For us, a name is just a label.

But first-century Jewish people would have put a whole lot more weight on someone's name. Bound up in their name, they're thinking about a person's character. They're thinking about a person's qualities. They're thinking about a person's track record. They're thinking about the things that person has done and the things they truly believe that person will do. The name of a person, then, is essentially their resume.

When it comes to God and we're thinking, "Hallowed be Your name," we're not thinking about a label. We're not thinking about letters we would write out on a page. Not at all.

We're thinking about the character and nature of God. We're thinking about the qualities of God. We're thinking about the track record and the resume of God - all the different things God has done.

"God, hallowed be Your name." That means, "God, You are set apart and holy. We're worshiping You for Your qualities, Your character, Your nature, and the things You have done."

We can see that concept all the way throughout the Bible, from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

There are some powerful verses in Exodus as God and Moses are talking about that very thing - who God is. God just lays it out there and declares it to him. In Exodus 3:15, God says this to Moses:

Say this to the people of Israel: "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name forever.

— Exodus 3:15

"This is My name. I'm the God who made these promises. I'm the God who has been God for generations and will be God for generations to come. I'm the God who promised you this land, who promised to bring you, and I'm going to make it happen."

He's declaring that to them.

Later, in Exodus 34, starting in verse 5, it says:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty."

— Exodus 34:5-7

Again, I want you to see that this isn't letters on a page, and it isn't a label. He's describing His character. He's saying, "My name is My character. It is who I am, what I have done, and what I have promised to do."

So when we say, "God, hallowed be Your name," Jesus is saying, "Pray like this." Literally, this could be your prayer: "Father in heaven, You are set apart and holy. You are faithful, and You are loving. You are immeasurably over all things. God, You created all things. You're holy. You're just. God, You're faithful in my life. You've been faithful. You've done what You've promised to do, and You'll continue to do what You've promised. God, You're a faithful God who keeps Your word."

It's a declaration of worship. We're setting Him apart as holy, as different, as something completely and altogether perfect, kind, and loving. It is a declaration of worship.

When you go before God in prayer, we get to go with comfort and intimacy, talking to our Father. When we do, we get to bring worship, acknowledging that our Father is the Creator of the universe. It's both in there together: the familiar intimacy of a father mixed with a God who is above all things.

Remember, prayer begins with worship like that before we ever move to a request.

So often, our first instinct is to go before God with our hands out. "God, I need this. God, I need that."

Jesus says, "Go before Him with your hands up in worship before you stick your hands out, asking for something in return."

Even then, the first request Jesus teaches us to make isn't about us. The first request is about God:

*Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

— Matthew 6:10

The first request is for God's will, not for our will.

Align Your Heart With God's Will

That's the third point. As Jesus teaches us to pray, He says, "Go to the Father, bring your worship, and then ask Him to align your heart with His will."

This isn't saying, "Hey, God, I've got this desire that I really want You to make happen for me." That's not it.

Jesus teaches us something that we all know deep down in our hearts and souls: God has a plan, and God has a purpose. God has a will for our lives. God has a will for this earth, and God's will is going to come to pass.

Our prayer is for that to happen - for God's will to be done. When we get our hearts and minds there first, it shapes everything else we pray. His will becomes the foundation for every other request we offer up to Him.

We're saying, "God, take Your will and impress it on my heart so that Your will becomes my will and my desire as well."

Think about what that can look like. Here's a tangible example. If this hits close to home, I'm just going to tell you this isn't about anybody specifically. I'll say it up front: Guys, your wife did not call me and put me up to this. She didn't ask me to say this. If you're feeling like she did, that's between you and the Lord.

Just imagine this. Imagine that your wife has a will to redecorate a room in your house. That is her will, her desire. The entire room - ceiling to floor, lights, furniture, fixtures, paint, carpet, everything.

When you hear about her will for your home, guys, your first instinct or reaction is, "Nope. Not going to happen. We're just not going to do it."

You've got a battle of the wills in your house now: two people with different goals, different desires, different plans, and different wills. If that persists, there's going to be some conflict. Somebody - probably you - isn't going to end up where you want.

Imagine that, rather than trying to get her to see things your way or bend to your will, you impress her will on your heart and agree. You redo the room. And listen, this is important: You don't do it begrudgingly. You don't do it with snide remarks and complaining the whole time.

No, you lean in. You understand her will. You understand her plan. You get excited, knowing that her way is the way, and regardless of your feelings about it, it's going to happen anyway.

When you get in sync with her and her will, you move forward with a different attitude. You move forward with a different level of peace, joy, and confidence in your home. Even when you don't understand why this had to

happen or why the room had to be redone - everything was totally fine before - you are now in sync with her will.

Jesus is saying, "When we approach our heavenly Father, our prayer should be for His will to be done in our hearts and in our lives, not our own."

That makes sense, doesn't it? His name is hallowed above all things, not my name. His name is set apart as holy. His name has this track record of faithfulness, power, goodness, love, and justice from generation to generation, from the beginning of creation until right now.

When we understand that, it makes so much sense that our desire should be for His will to be done, not ours, even when we don't understand or would really prefer God to do things differently in our lives.

"Your will be done."

That can be a tough prayer to pray. It was a tough prayer for Jesus to pray. Jesus didn't just teach us to pray like that. We see Jesus praying like that.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, before Jesus is arrested and goes to the cross, Jesus is praying. The Bible says this moment is so intense that He is sweating drops of blood as He prays. What is He praying for? He's praying for the will of the Father:

Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.

— Luke 22:42

Jesus is saying, "Father, if there's any other way for You to receive honor and glory without Me going to the cross, let's do that instead. If we can skip the cross, if we can skip the pain, if we can skip the humiliation, and if we can skip the unbearable weight of the sin of the world crashing down on My shoulders - Father, if there's any other way, let this cup pass from Me."

But how does He end? "Nevertheless, God, not My will, but Your will be done."

Sometimes that's a challenging prayer to pray. Sometimes it's an easy prayer to pray because there are going to be moments and situations where every possible scenario looks great.

It's easy when you're praying and saying, "God, I've got to make a choice about my job and my future, and I've got four job offers in front of me. All four of them pay three times what I'm making now. So, God, Your will be done, Lord, as I step into this new season."

That's an easy prayer, isn't it?

This one's harder: "God, the doctors have said I don't have much time left and that the sickness is growing in my body. God, my prayer is for healing and that You would do something in me to relieve the pain and restore my body. But God, if that's not Your plan, if You're up to something bigger that I can't see and don't know, if You get more glory through me not being healed here on earth, then God, Your will be done."

That's a tougher prayer to pray.

We're praying for God's will to be done. That's what Jesus teaches us.

I've mentioned him before, but I can't help but do it again here because he's modeling this. My friend Paul Kidney - a lot of you guys know him - is fighting a really tough diagnosis right now. Lewis and I sat at his kitchen table last week, and we took the Lord's Supper over to his house. We're going to share it together as a church family here in a minute.

We took the Lord's Supper to his house last week, sat around his kitchen table, and observed the Lord's Supper right there with him. As we talked about God and what God's doing in his heart, his family, and his life, this has been his attitude. This has been his prayer.

He essentially says, "God, I've got a preference, but God, I know that You have a plan. God, I want Your plan. I want Your will to be done in my life and in my family."

That right there is how Jesus teaches us to pray.

When we pray like that for God's will, not our will, we can be confident that He hears us and that He's responding to us.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

— 1 John 5:14

Listen, that matters. When we pray for the will of God in our hearts over our own will, it lifts our eyes and our hearts up. It keeps our eyes and our hearts on Him above all things. Our prayers become about God, God's glory, and God's kingdom advancing here on earth - not our own kingdom.

That's exactly where our prayers need to be.

In this first half of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is teaching us to approach God like you're talking to your Father, who knows you, loves you, and desires a relationship with you - because you are. As you go to that heavenly Father, you're going to worship Him as holy, and you're going to ask for His will to be done in every aspect of your life.

If we put our action steps together from last week and this week and make it really, really simple, so far we've learned this about prayer: Before anything else, we pray, and we make those prayers about God first.

We start with God. We know that when we start in the right place, we're going to end up in the right place - somewhere so incredibly beautiful in our relationship with Him.

I told you about sitting at Paul's kitchen table. We shared the Lord's Supper. He prayed, "God, not my will, but Your will."

At that same table, Jesus took the bread and the wine, broke it, poured it out, and said, "This is My blood, poured out for you." That's the table we're going to come to this morning as a church family.

With that said, I want our deacons to go ahead and come forward. Guys, go ahead and make your way up to the front. They're going to prepare to share the Lord's Supper with us together. Guys, come on down, grab a

tray, and get ready to pass those out here in a minute.

For the rest of us, just know that when we take the Lord's Supper, we're doing what Jesus talked about right here. We're coming to our heavenly Father. That's who we're approaching with this act of worship. We're surrendering to Him again, saying, "God, thank You for what You've done. Lord, we're praying for Your will, not ours, to be done."