

In C. S. Lewis’s classic *Mere Christianity* there is an enlightening paragraph on prayer. He writes: “An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get into touch with God. But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God—that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying—the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on—the motive. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that the whole threefold life of the three-person Being (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers.”

In a recent study on prayer, Barna Research says that “Prayer is the most common faith practice among American adults, but it’s also one of the most complex. The Bible speaks of numerous kinds of prayers and different traditions emphasize certain kinds over others. Not all Americans think about it in the same way—or even pray to the same deity (if at all).”

For us Christians, our Lord gave us fairly explicit instructions regarding prayer. “*This, then, is how you should pray,*” Jesus says to his disciples (Matthew 6:9), when he teaches his disciples about the practice of prayer. He has already told them how NOT to pray; like the hypocrites, or on street corners, or babbling like pagans! He begins with this sentence: “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...*” Addressing God as our Father reminds us that God holds on to us with parental determination and love. The idea of God as Father stems from Israel’s experience of deliverance. “*Out of Egypt I have called my son,*” says the prophet Hosea, reminding the people of the nation’s history. By addressing our prayers to God in heaven, we are reminded that our help lies not in what is transitory or arbitrary, but in the steadfastness of God who we pray to as “Our Father.”

The first petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “*Hallowed be your name,*” is really asking God to live up to God’s own reputation among the nations. As we see in Ezekiel, the holiness of God’s name is completely wrapped up in God’s actions of justice, mercy and salvation. The way God’s name is made holy is by restoring what has been ruined—renovating the run-down, resettling the refugees, embracing those in exile.

A second window of insight comes from John 12:20-28. Jesus’ public ministry was coming to a close and a variety of things were unfolding here in John 12. Jesus had just entered into Jerusalem to the shouts and praises of the huge crowds (perhaps 2.5 million) present in the city for the Passover celebration. Though people had many different opinions of Jesus, a crowd of them were ready to proclaim him king, but the Lord refused to accept the political role they wanted him to take.

A group of God-fearing Gentiles (Greeks) have come to worship at the feast. But they are more than just curious visitors or one time investigators of Judaism, they are seeking the truth. They approach Philip with an appeal to “see” Jesus. To their credit, they did not just want to see Jesus physically. They did not just want to learn more about Jesus. Having heard and observed, they were attracted or drawn to him and they wanted to believe in him, to know him. Jesus, therefore, challenges them and us to die that we might live.

Jesus announces that by his suffering and death he will *glorify* the Father's name, or as he already said, he will *hallow* the name of his Father. From this we learn that the holiness of God's name is a cross, a crown of thorns, and a dying man. Jesus' death is a consequence of his radical obedience to the demands of love and justice, his commitment to his Father. In the words of Martin Luther, we need to see God's holiness in the crucified Son of man.

So the summons to "*be holy as God is holy*" is not an invitation out of the world but into the world in a life of service and self-denial. In a word, holiness looks for justice. By his grace, God draws us to himself through the practice of prayer. And by that same grace he shapes us so that in the course of everyday life, we might more fully love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength—and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Kyle David Bennett has a book titled, *Practices of Love: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life of the World*. Bennett is professor of philosophy and director of The Spirituality and Leadership Institute for Young Leaders at Caldwell University. In his book he is eager to show believers what it looks like to follow Jesus on the ground. Looking both at Scripture and at our forefathers in the Christian faith, Bennett argues, that spiritual disciplines, like prayer, "are not really practiced for us at all. Rather, they are practiced for others. They are practiced to help and benefit others. They are seen as acts of love toward one's neighbor that bring life and health and vitality to the world."

In today's Scripture we hear Jesus say: "*Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*" You can only share in the resurrected life of Jesus if you take up your cross and follow him. Dying to self to live in relationship with Christ means the Christian life is a life of service. To serve the Lord you must be with him. To be with the Lord, you must follow him by learning to be obedient to him. Christian service may mean losing certain opportunities in life to give our time and energy in service Jesus Christ. But know that anyone who serves Christ will be honored by the Father, whose name we glorify when we selflessly serve.

That which appears to be death to us is often that which gives life. In his book, *Written in Blood*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a BLOOD TRANSFUSION. Some of you have heard the story before. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

"Would you give your blood to Mary?" the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to quiver. Then he smiled and said, "Sure, for my sister."

Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room, Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny's smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube. With the ordeal almost over, his shaky voice broke the silence: "Doctor, when do I die?"

The Father's name is hallowed and glorified whenever we offer our lives in sacrificial service to Jesus our Lord and in genuine Christian love for others.

Glory to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit! Amen.