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PRAYING FOR OUR FATHER

THE FIRST PETITION

Hallowed be your name.

What does this mean?

God's name certainly is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that we may keep it holy.

When does this happen?

God's name is hallowed whenever his Word is taught in its truth and purity and we as children of God live in harmony with it. Help us to do this, heavenly Father! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to the Word of God dishonors God's name among us. Keep us from doing this, heavenly Father!

THE SECOND PETITION

Your kingdom come.

What does this mean?

God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it, but we ask in this prayer that it may come also to us.



When does this happen?

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and live a godly life on earth now and in heaven forever.

One of the biggest surprises in the Lord's Prayer comes right at the beginning. In the first three petitions—the two above plus the one that will be considered in the next chapter—Jesus teaches us to pray *for* God. The last four petitions are more like what we would expect; in them we pray *to* God for our neighbors and ourselves.

In the first petitions, then, we're not only praying *to* God but *for* God—that God's name will be hallowed and that God's kingdom will come. Why?

There could be one easy explanation. If these petitions hadn't been taught to us by Jesus, someone could say that we're trying to butter God up a little bit, saying a few nice words about God's name and the new day before getting down to what's really important, what we want or need.

But that's not the way the God of the promise—the God of the Exodus, Good Friday, and Easter—operates. Not for a minute. God is no pompous, swelled head who keeps one hand on the treasure chest while holding out the other to be stroked with bribes. God is the God who promises, the God who raised Jesus from the dead, your heavenly Father who gives all things by grace, as a gift, without payment or price.

Why do we pray for God, then? Maybe if we look at what we're asking for, we'll get some clues. Then we'll come back to this question and see if we can't find an answer.

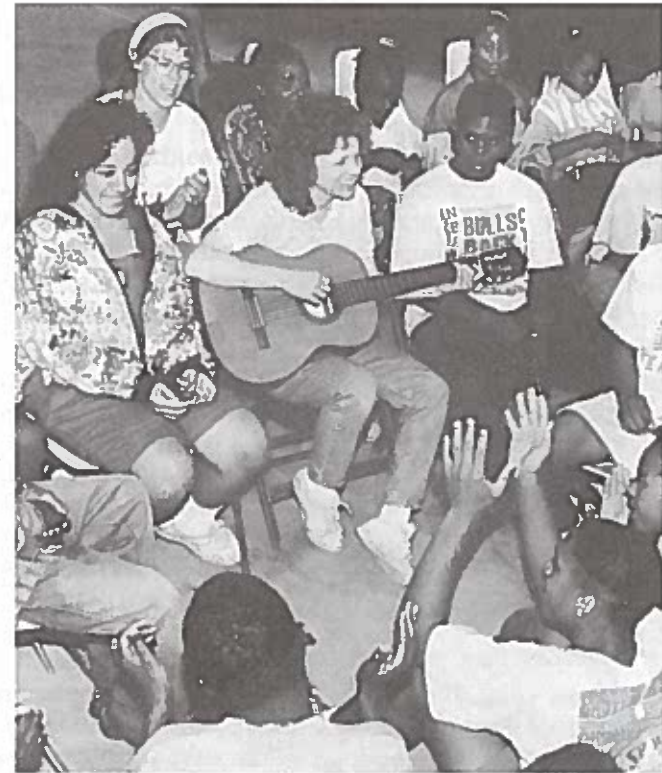
God's name and goal

The Introduction to the Lord's Prayer and the First Petition go together just like the first two commandments. In the Com-



mandments, after promising to be our God and giving us the name, God commands us to use the name rightly. The beginning of the Lord's Prayer follows the same order. After calling upon God as our Father in the Introduction, we pray in the First Petition that God's name will be hallowed.

Now *hallowed* or *holy* isn't a common word. The Lord's Prayer is probably the only place where you use it regularly. But if you take the Second Commandment as a clue, you should have a pretty good idea of what it means. When we pray "Hallowed be your name," we are asking God to give us what is commanded in the Second Commandment. We are asking that God will bring out the new you in us who will use God's name as God intends it to be used, to "call upon him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving."



Jim Whitmer



That's just the opposite of what the old self wants. The old you in you is always wondering how you can make a name for yourself, a name people will respect, admire, and appreciate. To this old you, God's name is good for nothing. It is a name to be used to curse and swear, to lie and deceive, to conjure up magic, or to prove how religious you are. The old self's contempt for God's name is so deep and so wide that there is almost nothing more common than taking his name in vain.

As the new you that God calls out in Baptism takes shape, however, something different happens. Instead of using it as an exclamation point for curses and lies, the new you takes God's name as a great and precious gift. Because God has given you his name, you can call upon God, asking for help, praising God, and giving thanks for all of the promises and gifts God has given. You know who God is, what kind of a God you have. Your God is the one who makes things out of nothing and raises the dead, the God of grace who speaks to you through his word to make you and all things new.

Hearing that, something else happens to the new you, too. Instead of being embarrassed or slightly ashamed to use God's name, the new you treats it as the name that is above every other name. It is the name to speak to others, telling all who will listen what God has done and promises to do. That's another way God intends his name to be used: so that we can give the word of grace to others.

The old self knows how to speak of God to others, too. When it goes religious, the old sinner in us makes the clouds echo with shouts of "Praise God," "Praise the Lord," and so on. But somehow when the old self gets hold of the name, it always gets turned around to point to himself or herself. "Praise God" on the old self's lips means "Praise me, for I am so religious." "Praise the Lord" means "Look at me, and you'll see the genuine article."

The name properly used

So when we pray "Hallowed be your name," we're not only asking God to continue making a new you in us who will use the name properly, we're asking God to see to it that his name



is used properly wherever it is spoken. God's name is hallowed or holy, then, "wherever his Word is taught in its truth and purity and we as children of God live in harmony with it." God's going to make that happen, calling out the new you in us and a new creation across the face of the universe that will see the good in God's name and use it accordingly.

The Second Petition, "Your kingdom come," fits in with the Commandments, too. In the Third Commandment, God commands us to remember the day—not only the Sabbath day each week but the new day coming. In this petition, we pray for the new day, asking that God's kingdom will come.

The word *kingdom* probably isn't a part of your everyday language, either. It smacks of another age, the time of Robin Hood or Prince Valiant, when there were kings and lords who ruled over little kingdoms of their own.

God's kingdom isn't a place, as those were. God's kingdom is wherever God rules or reigns. God's kingdom comes wherever God takes charge. It will finally come when God takes control of all the earth and makes all things new.

God has taken charge of you already. God started in your Baptism, when God sent the Spirit to begin making the new you in you. The Spirit has been at work since—calling you, gathering you with others, enlight-



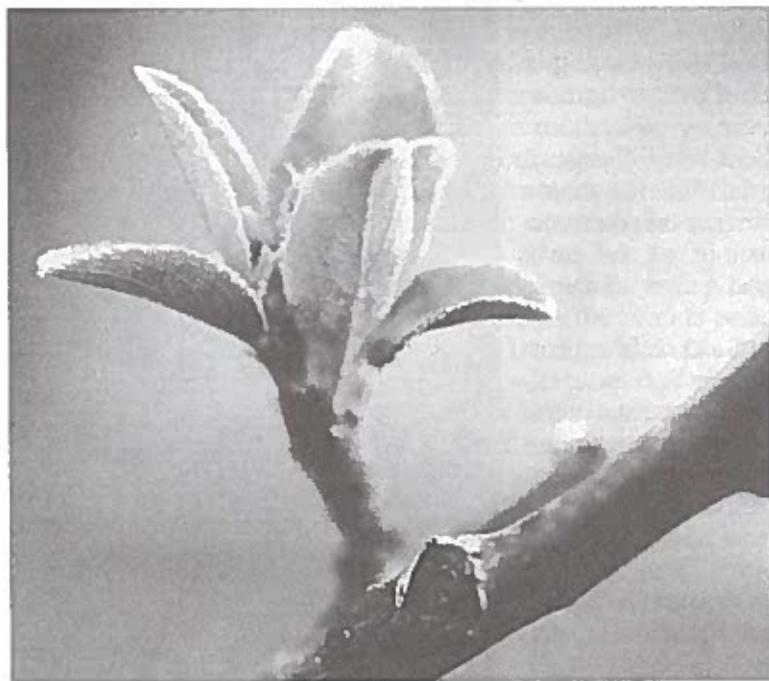
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ening you, sanctifying you.

But God's kingdom hasn't come finally, yet. God has a rival in you, the old you. And though they are not nearly as powerful as he is, God has other rivals as well, "rulers and authorities" as they are called in Ephesians 6:12. When God's kingdom finally comes, God will destroy all of his rivals. Then there will be no more old Adam or Eve in you that fights and struggles against the new you. You will be wholly and completely God's. And then there will be no more rivals who fill the earth with sin and death. The creation will be new—God's own creation, the new creation.

So, in the Second Petition, we are praying for the new you and the new day. When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are asking God to continue to take charge of us and to keep the promise, bringing in his rule or reign over all the earth. That is God's goal: to make us and all things new. And that's what God is going to do.



Jim Whitmer



Praying for God

Have you seen enough clues now to answer that first question, why Jesus teaches us to pray *for* God?

The first clue is in Luther's explanations to these petitions. We're not praying for God because God somehow needs help, ours or anyone else's. "God's name certainly is holy in itself"—God doesn't need our prayers or our help to make it holy. "God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it"—God doesn't have to wait for us to pray in order to take control of things.

"All right," the old you says, "if that's the case, why bother to pray these petitions at all? If God can get along without me, why should I bother my head about God's name and kingdom?" The old Adam or Eve always likes to make it sound as if it is doing God a favor. It's the old you who thinks you can "allow" God to do something, as if God were some helpless person who had to come and ask for your permission before doing what God wants.

That's not the way it works. God doesn't need permission from us for anything. God doesn't need our prayers or occasional good deeds, either. God doesn't depend on us—we depend on God.

Why do we pray these petitions, then? In both of these petitions, while we are praying for God, we are also praying for ourselves, that God's name will be holy among us and that God's kingdom will come to us.

Does that sound complicated? Think of your school's basketball or hockey team. If you don't play for the team, there's nothing you can do to help them win. When the whistle blows, all you can do is sit and watch or stand and cheer.

But still you hope, and maybe pray, too, that your team will have a good game. And you hope and maybe even pray, too, that they will "establish their rule" over all the other teams, defeating every rival and taking home the championship.

If they win their games and get a good reputation, the team members get some benefits for themselves. But you benefit from it, too. Otherwise you wouldn't feel bad if they lost.

Now, God doesn't hold pep meetings or organize cheering sections with pastors for cheerleaders. Furthermore, there's



no doubt about who will win the game. God's going to win it, hands down.

But still we pray, as Jesus taught us to pray, "Hallowed be your name," and "Your kingdom come." We pray for God because we love God and want God's name to be used as God intends it to be used and because we want God to take control of all things. But while we pray for God, we are also praying for ourselves. We ask that God will help us to use the name as God intends it to be used—that God will hear our prayers and keep giving us the Word. And we ask that God will keep reaching into our hearts, taking hold of us by grace so that we can live as people of faith.



THE THIRD REQUEST

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

What does this mean?

Prayer and gratitude will affect heavenly things without our prayer, but we make this prayer that it may be done also among us.

When does this happen?

God's will is done when the Word and doctrine stay and sustain and progress of the church, the world, and every child and which would prevent without helping to secure help and would support the coming of all things. And his will is done when he overcomes our faith and helps us live in his Word as long as we live. This is his goodness and good will.