

Other Words: Right at the Top of the List
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Let's open our Bibles to Matthew chapter 6. When you think about improving your prayer life or increasing your prayer life in the area of praying for others, there's something somewhere back there that got ingrained in us that includes a prayer list. Have you noticed that? All of us have made the call or we've received the call- "Hey, would you please put this on your prayer list?" And some of you've gotten that and you've thought to yourself- "I'll start one." And it may be that that just became the first item on your list! Others of you are very organized in that way, and it helps keep track of the things that you're praying for. Or maybe you have certain days that you pray for certain things. That's kind of the way I have it laid out- that when it comes to certain days, I have a reminder that on that day, I pray for these people or these needs with these events that are going on.

When we think about a list and how much connection that has with praying for others- who goes at the top of that list? Who got the first spot out of the gate? Who's right at the top of the list? Your list may be memorized. Your list may be in a leather bound journal. Your list may be in a spiral-bound notebook. Your list may be on the back of a Lowe's receipt. You may just somewhere be thinking, but in your mind when you're praying for the needs of others, who goes right at the top of the list? This morning I want you to look in Matthew six at what we commonly refer to as the Lord's Prayer. And actually before we ever pray for one another, I want you to see what God's word has to say about who's right at the top of the list. One verse-Matthew six verse nine- Jesus is speaking and he says, "Pray then like this."

"Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. The one that goes right at the top of our list is none other than the Heavenly Father himself. Before we ever begin to ask and intercede for the needs and events in the lives of others, Jesus instructs us that our prayers begin with the Father, addressed to the Father, with one huge petition- let his name hallowed. When we begin to pray, this passage, this single verse teaches us that we pray to a person in a place with a priority. First, he says "Our Father in heaven." We're praying to a person. Note when I say "person" I'm not talking about a human person with teeth and eyes, I'm talking about a person that's a being that has character and attributes that is relational and that is personal. And when Jesus instructs us to pray to our Father-capital F- in heaven, he's identifying that our prayers are to be directed, that they are to be addressed to a certain person. And by, person I'm referring to the persons of the Godhead. It brings to our mind and to our attention what we would refer to as the Trinity. When you look through Scripture, you do not see the word *Trinity* used, but you do see the concept of the Trinity played out page after page of Scripture in the way that we relate to God, in a way that our salvation has been accomplished, and in the way that we live every day life to honor Christ.

In this passage of Scripture, he's telling us we pray like this: "Our Father in heaven." We are addressing one of the persons of the Trinity. There is one God, but there are three persons that make up that Godhead, each with roles, each with functions, but of equal value, authority, power, and worth. The Trinity's made up of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This morning, what I have just said to you about the Trinity has just exhausted everything probably that I can say to you from a point of clearly defining what the Trinity or who the Trinity is. It just leaves you saying "Wow!" But the picture is there, the work is there, the truth is there. And you see that when we pray, whether we can come to someone and write an essay on the Trinity or whether we can give someone a principle by principle by principle doctrine of the Trinity- when we participate in Christian prayer, we are actually participating in an understanding of the Trinity. When we go to the Father in prayer, we are praying to the Father through Jesus the Son in the spirit.

When you think about your own prayer life, one of the things that will bring life to your prayer life, that will bring understanding to your prayer life, that will give you strength and power in the words that you use in prayer is to realize that when you posture yourself before heaven, when you posture yourself before the Lord in prayer- to remind yourself even to say the words "Father in heaven, I come to you through Jesus Christ the Son in the Holy Spirit." When we think about who the Father is and his role, he's given that title for us to understand the relationship that we have with him, that we come to him as his children. The Bible speaks to us that through faith in Jesus Christ that we been adopted into his family, that we are heirs with the son, that this relationship that we have with God is a relationship that is familial. It is a relationship that involves him as a father and us as his offspring, him as father and us as his children. And the way that we are able to have that intimate relationship with him is through what Jesus Christ has done.

Listen to these verses in Romans eight. Romans 8 speaks about this relationship of the father. In verse 12 he says, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

Christian prayer involves us coming to the Father through Jesus in the Spirit, and when we come to the father, here's how we get to address him: Abba Father. The word **Abba** is a word that said culturally connects with the world that was reading these verses. For us, it would translate into more of how you and I say "daddy." It relates to an intimate relationship of a father and a child. Maybe you've been around families like this; you may be a family like this. It's just this little strange to me, but let's say there's a mom and dad and their names are Tom and Diane. And here's Tom and Diane and here are their kids, and their son walks in and he's 14 years old and sits

down at the table. And he looks at his dad and he says, "Tom, pass the peas."

Tom? That's not Tom. That's your daddy! You'd look at that and you would think, "There's a gap there somewhere. There's an unusual relationship. They're just going by this given name. Why would that son or daughter not address that dad as, 'Daddy pass the peas?'"

And the picture that Christ has given to us in our prayers is that when we begin to pray, we're praying to a person, and that person is the Father. He says in Matthew 6:6, "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." There are two monumental moments that have created a lot of growth in my relationship with the Lord when it comes to prayer and absolute fellowship and intimacy with the Heavenly Father- two things. One is addressing him as Father. Sometime back, Newman Betts, a member of our church family, he and I were praying together. And he said to me one morning, he said, "Carlos, I want to challenge you to do something this week."

"Okay, what is it?"

He said, "I want you in every prayer you pray this week to address God in your prayers as Father. When I hear you pray, it seems like what I hear you say over and over again is 'God' and 'Lord' and 'God' and 'Lord.'" He said, "Just try this. Address him as father."

It's revolutionary. Someone has said to me recently, "I tried speaking to God as Father, and it just seems too intimate." That's actually the desire of our Heavenly Father. He wants you to address him as Abba Father. He wants you to come to him as his child and him as your Father. Maybe today, you'd look at your prayer life and say, "I want to get things right in my prayer life. I want to be a part of praying for others." Let it start right out of the gate with beginning to realize that when you're praying, you're addressing your prayers to a heavenly Father.

The second thing that God's done in my life when it comes to praying to the Father has been using words. You might think that seems a little strange. Actually, if you look at your life, you may find that when you evaluate your prayer life that your prayer life actually involves a lot of just silence or thinking. I want you to see that prayer involves words. Prayer involves language. We speak of the Trinity of God- the Father God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They've been communing together for eternity. The father speaks to the Son; the Son speaks to the Father. God the Father and God the Son speak to the Holy Spirit. It's in Scripture; you just track through there, relating to one another. And when God gives to us this privilege of praying, and Jesus instructs us to pray to the Father, he is giving us the opportunity to use our words, to use our language and for us to hear him speak as well with his words. When Jesus was asked by the disciples to teach them how to pray, Jesus said, "Pray then like this. Pray like this." And what did he give them? He gave them words. He

gave them words, and in our relationship with Christ and with our Heavenly Father in prayer, I want you to just look and see if it's possible that a whole lot of what you would call your "devotional life" is just you rolling things around in your mind. "What are we going to do about this? How am I going to handle this? I hope this comes through; I sure wish that this would happen." And we just think and think and think and think.

I want to encourage you to put specific words with specific prayers. Pray to the Father using your words. Last fall, we came through Daniel chapter 9 and Daniel chapter 10, and we saw in Daniel 10 that the angel came to Daniel. And he says, "I have come to you because of your words." I want to exhort you to find ways to pray with your words out loud- to speak words when you can out loud to God. Let your heavenly Father hear your words be formed, and let those desires of your heart be put together with syllables and sounds, and voice those prayers to the Father. When we're talking about getting things right of the top the list, before we ever pray for others, we pray to a person- our Heavenly Father using words. And we pray to a Heavenly Father who's in a place. Now, when I say that our Heavenly Father's in a place, I say that because when I read in Scripture, God's word says that our Heavenly Father is in where? Heaven. He's in heaven, and it helps orient our prayers to realize that when we are speaking words and we get the address to the right person, that we also can have in our mind it oriented to where he is. Is he there? Is he behind there? Is he in that tree? Is he in that playhouse? Is he in that water? Is he in that roar?

Here's what Jesus said: Jesus says, "Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven." When you think about God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, we see God the Father in heaven. Jesus the Son- we're told in Scripture left heaven and came to earth and he took on flesh and he bore the iniquity of us all. He humbled himself as a man. He walked this earth, and he lived a sinless life. And then he was arrested and crucified and buried and he rose again, and he appeared and they saw him. He ate with them for 40 days walking around on this earth after he had died and after he rose again. Then he ascended to heaven. We see that God the Father is in heaven, and where is Jesus now? He's ascended to heaven, and Scripture tells us that he is seated at the right hand of the Father and lives to make intercession for you. So where's the Father? He's in heaven. Where's Jesus? He's in heaven at the right hand of the Father interceding for you.

One of the great motivators for us to pray for others is to know that our Savior is praying for others today. He is in heaven at the throne interceding for you and for me. And then the Holy Spirit- where's he? Living in you! He's living in you. When you trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and you turn to him by faith, what happens in your life? What happens in your spirit? God the father is in heaven; Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. What happens in us? We die to ourselves, but the Bible says we're a new creation. We're a new creature. We come alive. How are we alive? The spirit of God- the Holy Spirit comes and takes residence in you. In the Old

Testament, there was the Temple; there was the tabernacle, and the presence of God dwelt there. In the New Testament, we find that Jesus the high priest has gone into the heavens, and through his blood he's paid the sacrifice for our sins. The veil was torn in two! He's made a way for us to go into the presence of God, and where does the temple of God now reside? In us! In us! You are the Temple of God, and he dwells in you! Right there- that body, that life sitting here today. If you've trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, living in you is the spirit of God, the same spirit that raised Jesus back to life.

You don't go through this life alone. You don't go through this life by yourself. You don't pray alone and by yourself. When we say "pray to our father in heaven," what it's doing is reminding us that our prayers are connecting earth with heaven. When we gather in this room today, you can hear people singing behind you, beside you and around you. You hear people from the stage singing out over you. We hear people moving around us, clearing their throats. There's noises rattling and papers- we hear all of that. There's a very horizontal event going on here. When we come offering these songs in prayer, when we come offering these words in prayer, there are times where we are speaking to one another in prayers and songs and hymns. But there is also going on here much much more than just horizontal; what is going on here is also vertical. And when he invites us to pray to our Heavenly Father, he's called the Heavenly Father because we are praying to heaven. And you and I have this incredible privilege to take our lives here on this earth and connect it with the power and might and majesty of heaven.

When we lift our hands, what are we doing? We are lifting our hands toward heaven! When we lift our eyes, where are we lifting them? We're lifting them toward heaven! Paul said in Colossians chapter 3, "Therefore fix your minds on things above." This ties right in with Jesus saying, "Pray to your Heavenly Father. Pray to your Father who is in heaven." Again, before you ever pray for somebody else, let this phrase from Jesus teaching on prayer orient your prayers that we are addressing a Heavenly Father. We have access to heaven through Jesus, and we are praying in the spirit. He lives in you. That's how we come to him in prayer. We pray to a person in a place and then finally with a priority.

He says, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." My guess is outside of reading this verse or quoting the Lord's Prayer before a ballgame, you haven't used the word **hallowed** in a few days. It's not in the top 20 lists of words we use, but I bet we know what it means. Maybe one of the reasons we don't use the word **hallowed** as much is because we kind of see it as one of those great words. "Our Father in heaven-" here's the priority of all prayer. "Hallowed be your name." The word **hallowed** means holy; it means sanctified. It means to set apart; it means to honor. And he's saying, "Sanctify your name. Let your name be set apart. Let it be lifted up. Let it be lifted above. Let it be seen as being something different." To hallow something means to speak of it as being a holy place and unique place. We may speak of some territory, some piece of land, and we might say, "that's hallowed

ground.”

My first year here, I was taken on a tour of the Butts-Mehre building. We were in the basement of the Butts-Mehre building. Chappy Hynes was walking me through that building, and I hadn't spent more than 24 hours hardly in Athens, Georgia. I was early in developing a love and respect for the Bulldogs. And he was trying to do everything he could to baptize me into the Bulldog Nation. So we were walking the hall of the basement in Butts-Mehre, and at that time, the hall of the Butt-Mehre building had these massive Gs painted on the floor. Now it's my understanding that halls are for walking in and floors are for walking on. And so I'm cruising down the floor, and Chappy goes berserk. "Stop! Quit! Sibley! Stop! Don't move!"

And I'm like, "What?"

"You're about to step on the G, brother!"

"Okay..."

I thought he was going to laugh, but he never-he was serious! It was just like a big deal here! And it was just this reflex of "You're on hallowed ground! Don't step on the G!" When we talk about our father in heaven- "hallowed be your name." He's saying that there is something about our Heavenly Father- his name is great and glorious. And here's what we're doing in prayer: we are honoring his name. We are reflecting who he is. We are living out who he is. We hallow him by praising him. We hallow him by living obediently to him. We hallow him by honoring, acknowledging repeating, saying, singing- using our words to declare who he is. When he says, "hallowed be your name," **name** there has to do with reputation. It has to do with credibility. It has to do with his attributes and nature and being. And he's saying, "Everything that God is, everything that your Heavenly Father is-all of his attributes-let that be known!

Listen. When you're praying for the needs of others, do you know what's wrapped up in those answers to those prayers for others? The name of God. The name of our heavenly father. And as we pray and as those prayers are answered, it's not so much that God wants you to get what you want, it's God wanting you to know who he is. Hallowed be his name. When we pray for the priority of hallowing his name, of honoring his name, it's our Heavenly Father's greatest delight. If you want to bring joy and delight to your Heavenly Father, make his name famous. Pray from the outset of whatever God does in this request and this intercession being, "Lord I want you to do something in this life and in this need that makes you glorious." It's his greatest delight; it's our greatest privilege. Our greatest privilege is to be in a position where you and I can bring glory to his name, where we can honor him, where we can make him known. And it's the world's greatest need. The world's greatest need is for God's fame.

Martin Lloyd Jones put it this way in writing about prayer. He says, "It doesn't matter how desperate they may be. It does not matter how acute the tension. It does not matter whether it be physical illness or war or calamity or some terrible problems suddenly confronting us. Whatever it may be, we must never fail to observe the order which is taught here by our blessed Lord and Savior. Before we begin to think of ourselves and our own needs, even before our concern for others, we must start with this great concern about God and his honor and his glory. There is no principle in connection with the Christian life that exceeds this in importance. If only we would always start in prayer with this true sense of the invocation. If only we were to recollect that we are in the presence of God and that the eternal and Almighty God is there, looking upon us as our Father and more ready to bless and to surround us with his love than we are to receive his blessing. We should achieve more in that moment of recollection than all our prayers put together are likely to achieve without that realization. If only we had this concern about God and his honor and his glory."

Before we ever take another hour to pray for someone else, let's get right at the top of the list this prayer, this desire that his name would be honored in glory with our life and in our prayers. I want us to pray together; I want us to practice this. Take some time right now in your prayers; just be individual, and right now, would you use your words to pray to the Father through Jesus in the Spirit adoring him, honoring him praising him, exalting him. Let's practice that right now with our words and our prayers.