

In what ways have you treated prayer as something reactive rather than foundational in your daily life, and what would it look like to shift that pattern?

How does the concept of God as 'Father' challenge or comfort you based on your own experiences with earthly fathers, and how can Scripture reshape your understanding?

Why do you think Jesus emphasized pausing to praise before making requests, and how might this reorder your priorities when you come to God in prayer?

What does it mean practically to 'hallow' God's name in a culture that casually throws His name around, and how can you demonstrate reverence in your speech?

How does recognizing that God is 'in heaven' with unlimited power and authority change the way you approach Him with your concerns and needs?

In what areas of your life have you been treating God more like a vending machine or crisis manager rather than as a holy Father worthy of worship?

What would a week of praying without asking—only praising—reveal about your relationship with God and the condition of your heart?

How does the practice of corporate prayer and fasting as a church body differ from individual prayer, and why is unity in prayer important for spiritual health?

If the disciples needed Jesus to teach them how to pray, what does that say about our own need for continual learning and growth in our prayer lives?

How might beginning each day by praising God for who He is rather than immediately listing your needs transform your perspective on challenges you face?

Small Group Guide: First Things First - Pause and Praise

Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by pausing to praise God together. Take 2-3 minutes to simply worship God for who He is before moving into discussion.

Icebreaker Question

What is one New Year's resolution or priority you've set for 2026? What made you choose that particular focus?

Sermon Summary

Pastor introduced a new series on prayer, emphasizing that prayer is a learned practice, not something we automatically know how to do. Using Jesus' Model Prayer (the Lord's Prayer) from Matthew 6:9-13, we learned that prayer should begin with pause and praise before we rush into our requests. Jesus teaches us to recognize God as Father, acknowledge His heavenly authority, and honor His holy name before bringing our needs to Him.

Key Scripture

Matthew 6:9 - "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'"

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Sermon

What stood out to you most from this sermon? Was there a particular phrase, scripture, or concept that resonated with you?

The pastor said, "Prayer is a learned practice." How does this perspective change the way you think about your own prayer life? Does it relieve any pressure or create new expectations?

Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). What does it tell us that even the disciples—who walked with Jesus daily—needed to learn how to pray?

Exploring the Three Attributes of God

God as Father:

How does viewing God as "Father" impact the way you approach Him in prayer?

For those who had difficult relationships with earthly fathers, how can we embrace God as the perfect Father described in Scripture?

Read Psalm 68:5 and Romans 8:15. What comfort do these verses offer?

God in Heaven:

What does it mean practically that God is "in heaven"—outside our physical limitations?

How does recognizing God's power and authority change what we pray about or how we pray?

God is Holy:

The pastor mentioned that we live in a culture that throws God's name around casually. Have you noticed this? How should Christians be different in how we use God's name?

What does "hallowed be your name" mean in everyday language? How do we keep God's name holy in our lives?

Personal Reflection

Be honest: When you pray, do you tend to rush immediately into your list of requests? Why do you think that is?

The pastor challenged us to "try praying without asking" this week—just praising. What might that look like for you? What could make this difficult?

How does starting with praise change the perspective on our problems and needs?

Application and Action

The sermon outlined that the word PRAY will be our guide through this series:

P - Pause and Praise

R - Reflect and Repent

A - Align and Ask

Y - Yield and Go

Which of these do you think will be most challenging for you personally? Why?

Key Takeaways

✓ Prayer is relational before it is transactional. We come to a Father who loves us, not a vending machine.

✓ God doesn't need to be reminded who He is, but we do. Praise reorients our hearts to His character.

- ✓ Praise guards us from treating God as ordinary. It keeps prayer from becoming consumeristic.
- ✓ When we praise first, everything else finds its proper place. Our needs settle into proper perspective when we see how great God is.
- ✓ The Lord's Prayer is a model for how to pray, not just what to pray. It's a template we can build upon.

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge: The Praise-First Prayer Practice

Daily Practice:

Set aside 5-10 minutes each day this week to pray

Spend the ENTIRE time praising God without making any requests

Use the three attributes from the sermon as a guide:

Praise Him as Father (His love, care, faithfulness)

Praise Him as God in Heaven (His power, authority, sovereignty)

Praise Him as Holy (His righteousness, perfection, worthiness)

Journaling Option: Keep a simple journal this week noting:

What you praised God for each day

How starting with praise affected your perspective

Any changes you noticed in your prayer life

Scripture Memory: Memorize Matthew 6:9 as a group: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

Additional Ideas:

Create a Praise List: Write down 10-20 attributes of God or things He has done. Keep this list handy when you pray this week.

Use the Psalms: Read one Psalm each day that focuses on praise (try Psalms 100, 103, 145, 146, 147, 148, or 150) and let it guide your prayer time.

Praise Before Meals: This week, instead of just blessing the food, take an extra minute to praise God for who He is before you eat.

Family Practice: If you have children, teach them to praise God first before bedtime prayers. Ask: "What is something amazing about God we can thank Him for?"

Prayer Time

Group Prayer Focus:

Praise Together: Go around the circle and have each person offer one sentence of praise to God (not a request, just praise).

Pray for Each Other: Ask if anyone needs prayer for learning to pray or growing in their relationship with God as Father.

Church Focus: Pray for Spencer Christian Church as they enter this month of prayer and fasting, that the whole congregation would grow in their prayer lives.

Special Needs:

Pray for the new elders who were ordained

Pray for Landon Laws' mother-in-law, Carolyn Visser, who is in the hospital

Looking Ahead

Next week we'll explore the R in PRAY: Reflect and Repent. Come prepared to discuss how self-examination and confession fit into our prayer lives.

Homework: Continue the praise-first practice, but begin to add a time of reflection on your own heart and life before God.

Closing Thought

"When we praise first, everything else finds its proper place."

Let this be the rhythm of our prayers this month—and beyond. Not rushing to our requests, but pausing to recognize the greatness, goodness, and holiness of the God who invites us to call Him Father.

Group Leader Notes:

Be sensitive to those who may have difficult relationships with their earthly fathers when discussing God as Father

Encourage authenticity about struggles with prayer—everyone is learning

Consider starting your next meeting by asking how the praise-first challenge went for everyone

Keep the focus on learning together, not performing perfectly

5-Day Devotional: Learning to Pray Like Jesus

Day 1: Our Father Who Cares

Reading: Matthew 6:5-9; Psalm 68:5-6

Devotional: Before Jesus teaches us what to pray, He teaches us who we're praying to—our Father. This isn't a distant deity waiting to judge our every mistake, but a loving Father who draws near to the brokenhearted. Perhaps your earthly father disappointed you, but God defines true fatherhood. He is "a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows." When you pray today, don't rush into your requests. Pause and remember: you're speaking to someone who already knows what you need, who cares deeply about your concerns, and who invites you to crawl up into His lap and share your heart. Prayer isn't a transaction; it's a relationship with your Father.

Reflection: How does viewing God as Father change the way you approach Him in prayer?

Day 2: The God of Heaven

Reading: Matthew 6:9-10; Isaiah 40:21-26

Devotional: "Our Father in heaven"—these words remind us that while God is intimately near, He is also infinitely powerful. He exists outside the limitations that bind us. From heaven, He sees the beginning and end simultaneously. He orchestrates circumstances across the globe while attending to your whispered prayer. This isn't a God who might help if He can; this is the God who created the laws of nature you live under. Before you bring your impossible situation to Him today, pause and praise the God who holds all authority. Your problem isn't too big for the God of heaven. He has the power to act, the wisdom to know how, and the love to care about every detail that concerns you.

Reflection: What "impossible" situation can you trust to the God of heaven today?

Day 3: Hallowed Be Your Name

Reading: Matthew 6:9; Psalm 9:10; Proverbs 18:10

Devotional: "Hallowed be your name"—holy, set apart, exalted above every other name. We live in a culture that treats God's name casually, throwing it around like any common word. But Scripture reveals that God's name carries authority, power, and reverence. "Those who know your name trust in you." "The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." When we begin prayer by honoring God's holiness, we realign our hearts with reality. Our problems, though they feel overwhelming, shrink to proper size when we see how truly great He is. Praising God's holiness isn't about making Him feel good—it's about positioning our hearts rightly before we ask anything of Him.

Reflection: How can you honor God's name—not just in prayer, but in your daily conversations and actions?

Day 4: Enter With Thanksgiving

Reading: Psalm 100; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Devotional: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise." You don't barge into a throne room with demands and declarations. You enter rightly, with gratitude and worship. Before you present your prayer list to God, take inventory of what He's already done. Recall His faithfulness in past difficulties. Remember the prayers He's answered, the doors He's opened, the provisions He's made. Praise guards us from treating God as a vending machine—insert prayer, receive blessing. It protects us from seeing Him only as our crisis manager or last resort. When we begin with thanksgiving, we acknowledge that God has been good to us already, and we trust He will continue to be faithful. Today, try praying without asking—just praising and thanking.

Reflection: List five things God has done in your life that deserve your praise and thanksgiving.

Day 5: Adopted Into His Family

Reading: Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-7

Devotional: Jesus doesn't just introduce us to His Father—He invites us to call God "our Father" too. Through Christ, we've been adopted into God's family. The Spirit we received "brought about our adoption as sons. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father!'" That word "Abba" means "Daddy"—intimate, personal, trusting. You are not an outsider hoping God might notice you. You are His child, welcomed into the throne room, invited to share everything on your heart. As you begin this new year, remember that prayer is your inheritance as God's child. You have access to the Father not because you've earned it, but because Jesus made a way. This week, practice beginning every prayer by acknowledging your relationship: "Abba, Father, I'm your child, and I'm coming to you today..."

Reflection: How does knowing you're adopted into God's family change your confidence in approaching Him?

Weekly Challenge: This week, before every prayer—morning, mealtime, or bedtime—spend at least one full minute simply praising God for who He is: Father, powerful, holy. Don't rush to your requests. Let praise reorder your heart first.