

How to Notice the Good When Life Feels Heavy

Matthew 6:7–13; Genesis 2:2–3; Philippians 4:8–9

REAL TALK: Honest Conversations with God

There are seasons when life feels heavy. Not necessarily dramatic. Not always one big crisis. Just heavy.

You wake up already tired. The news feels heavy. Work feels heavy. Family concerns feel heavy. Grief feels heavy. The future feels uncertain. Even ordinary responsibilities — laundry, appointments, bills, meals, messages, schedules — can feel like more than you have energy to carry.

And when life feels heavy, something happens to our attention. We stop noticing the sunrise because we are already thinking about the meeting. We stop noticing the kindness of a friend because we are replaying a difficult conversation. We stop noticing laughter around the table because we are mentally calculating what still needs to get done. We stop noticing the good because the hard is so loud.

That does not mean we are ungrateful. It does not mean we do not love God. It means we are human. Heavy seasons narrow our field of vision.

Last Sunday, I was driving to Sidney for my great-niece's fourth birthday party when it started to pour. The road was slick. The wipers were moving as fast as they could, and I still could not see clearly. My hands tightened on the wheel. My whole attention went to the few feet of road in front of us.

The trees were still there. The fields were still there. The sky was still there. But in that moment, I was focused on the storm.

That is what heaviness can do to the soul. It does not mean God's goodness has disappeared. It means God's goodness can become harder to notice. And that is exactly where the next line of the Lord's Prayer finds us.

Last week, we talked about how prayer begins with relationship, "Our Father." Before Jesus teaches us what to ask for, he teaches us who we are talking to. We are not praying into emptiness. We are turning toward the One who has already turned toward us in love.

Now Jesus teaches us to pray: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."

That phrase may sound old and formal. Most of us do not use the word hallowed very often. We do not say, "I had a hallowed cup of coffee this morning," or "Please pass the hallowed mashed potatoes."

You may remember the line from President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, delivered in November 1863 at the ceremony to dedicate the Soldiers' National Cemetery after the bloodiest battle of the Civil War. He said, "**But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.**" [<https://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>, accessed 06/19/2026]

So what does "hallow" mean? To hallow something means to treat it as holy. To recognize it as sacred. To honor it. To set it apart as worthy.

When we pray "hallowed be thy name," we are saying: God, may your name be honored. May your goodness be recognized. May your character be visible in me, among us, and in the world. Because in the Bible, God's name is not just a label — it points to God's character: who God is, what God is like, how God acts, what God loves.

So this is not simply a line of praise. It is a prayer of reorientation. It says, "God, help me see you clearly. Help me honor you rightly. Help my life reflect who you are."

Notice that Jesus places this line before everything else. Before daily bread. Before forgiveness. Before deliverance. Before Jesus teaches us to ask for what we need, he teaches us to remember who God is. Not because our needs do not matter — they do. But Jesus knows something about us: if we begin only with our problems, our problems can crowd out everything else, including God.

So we begin with God: "Hallowed be thy name." Before I name the burden, let me remember the One who carries me. Before I ask for help, let me remember whose goodness is greater than my fear.

That is praise. And praise is not what we sometimes think it is.

Praise is not pretending life is easy. It is not forced cheerfulness. It is not saying "everything is fine" when everything is not fine. Praise is learning to tell the truth about God while also telling the truth about life.

Praise says: "This is heavy, and God is holy." "This is painful, and God is present." "This is confusing, and God is faithful." "This is not how I wanted life to go, and God is still worthy of trust."

That is not shallow. That is deep faith.

And because today is Father's Day, let's pause with the first words of the prayer for just a moment.

For some of you, "Our Father" is a beautiful phrase. It brings memories of safety, provision, encouragement, and love. Today may be a day of

gratitude for a father, grandfather, stepfather, foster father, or mentor who reflected something of God's care. If that is your story, what a gift.

For others, the word father is complicated — it may bring up absence, disappointment, or grief. Father's Day is tender for some of us.

When Jesus teaches us to pray "Our Father," he is not asking us to pretend every human father has reflected God well. He is showing us what true divine care looks like. God's love is the standard by which all human love is judged, corrected, healed, and restored. The holy name of God is not meant to wound us. It is meant to heal us.

Now here is where this becomes very practical. If hallowing God's name means honoring God's goodness, it changes the way we pay attention. To pray "hallowed be thy name" is an invitation to retrain the way we see.

That brings us to Philippians 4. Paul writes: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable — think about these things."

This can be misunderstood as "just think happy thoughts." But Paul is not writing from a beach chair. He is writing from prison. He knows pressure, hardship, and limits he did not choose. So this is not positive thinking for its own sake. This is spiritual training.

Paul is teaching us that attention matters. What we continually notice begins to shape who we become. If we only notice what is wrong, fear grows. If we only notice what is missing, resentment grows. If we only notice bad news, we start to believe there is no good news anywhere.

But Paul says there is another way to train the mind. Think of it like a flashlight. A flashlight does not remove all the darkness from a room — but it helps you see what is there. Philippians 4 is a flashlight for heavy days.

What is still true? Maybe: God is faithful. I am loved. I do not have to face today alone. This is hard, but it is not forever.

What is lovely? A child laughing. A flower blooming. A hymn you cannot stop humming. Warm light through a window. Coffee with a friend. A text that says, "I'm praying for you."

What is praiseworthy? Grace that showed up in the middle of a hard week.

Praise is not denying the weight. Praise is refusing to let the weight be the only thing we notice.

Paul does not stop at thinking. He continues: "Keep on doing the things you have learned and received — and the God of peace will be with you." What we dwell on shapes what we do. What we practice becomes the kind of life we live.

One of the practices God gives us to help us notice is rest. In Genesis, on the seventh day, God finished the work, rested, blessed the day, and made it holy. God works. God finishes. God rests. God blesses.

Before human beings accomplish anything, creation is already called good. Before striving, there is gift. Before productivity, there is blessing.

Many of us live as if everything depends on us. If I stop, everything will fall apart. If I rest, I will get behind. But Genesis tells a different story. God rests — not because God is done caring, but because creation is good and

rest is part of the rhythm of goodness. God blesses the seventh day and makes it holy.

Holiness is not only found in church buildings or religious services. Time can be holy. Rest can be holy. A meal can be holy. A breath can be holy. A quiet afternoon can be holy.

Sabbath, time set apart for rest and worship, is a way of saying: “God is God, and I am not. The world does not rest on my shoulders. My worth does not depend on how much I produce. I can pause because God is still at work.”

Rest helps us receive life as gift. And when we receive life as gift, praise becomes possible again.

So how do we practice this? Three simple things for this week.

First, begin with God's goodness before naming the burden. When you pray this week, try starting with one phrase of praise before moving to your concern. Not because God needs reminding, but because your heart needs re-centering. "God, you are faithful, and I am worried about my family." "God, you are near, and I feel alone today." "God, you are good, and life feels heavy." That is honest praise — it tells the truth about God and the truth about your life in the same breath.

Second, do a daily Philippians scan. Once a day — at dinner, before bed, during morning coffee — ask three questions: What is one true thing I can hold onto today? What is one lovely thing I noticed? What is one praiseworthy thing I can thank God for? It does not have to be big. This can take less than two minutes. Over time, it trains your attention.

Third, take a Sabbath-shaped pause. Sometime this week, take one intentional pause that is not about productivity: a walk without headphones,

coffee on the porch, a meal without rushing, ten minutes outside. During that pause, pray: "Hallowed be thy name." Then ask: "God, where was your goodness present today?" Not: Was today easy? But: Where was God present? That question can change the way we see.

I wonder what would happen if we became that kind of church. Not a church that ignores pain or pretends the world is fine. But a church that practices holy attention.

A church that can grieve honestly and still praise deeply. A church that can name what is broken and still notice what is beautiful. A church that can say: Life is heavy, and God is holy. There is much to carry, and there is also much to receive.

That kind of praise changes us. It changes the way we pray, the way we handle disappointment, the way we walk through grief, the way we notice God is already near.

When we pray "hallowed be thy name," we are not only asking God to be honored somewhere out there. We are asking God to make that holiness visible in us — in our words, our homes, our church, our attention, and in what we choose to celebrate.

So this week, do not force yourself to feel cheerful. Do not pretend everything is fine. Do not shame yourself if you are tired. Simply ask God to help you notice. Notice what is true. Notice what is lovely. Notice what is praiseworthy. Notice the holy hidden in the ordinary.

Because when life feels heavy, prayer teaches us where to look. Praise begins when we learn to say: "Our Father, hallowed be thy name."

Let us pray.

Our Father, hallowed be your name. Teach us to notice your goodness without pretending life is easy. When the world feels heavy, open our eyes to what is true. When our hearts feel weary, help us receive what is lovely. When our minds are crowded by worry, turn our attention toward what is praiseworthy. Make your name holy in us, among us, and through us. And let the God of peace be with us as we learn to live with eyes open and hearts at rest. Amen.