

One Life

I want you to think of a name. Not just any name, but a very specific name for a very specific reason. I'll tell you what that reason is in a few moments, but first, I want you to think about the importance of names.

What do you do when you hear your name? It depends on who is saying it and how they say it, right? A couple weeks ago in Vegas, I was sure I heard someone call my name on Fremont Street. In a crowd of vacationers, drunks, gamblers, brides and grooms, beggars, street artists, someone was calling, "Dan. Dan." I stopped, looked, craned my neck, but if they were looking for Dan, it was another Dan they were looking for.

When my wife screams at me from the other side of the house, "Dan!" I know either she needs help or I've messed up in a big way. The only problem is I don't know whether to run to help her or run and hide. She can say my name ten different ways and mean a hundred different things.

Our names are important to us. My name is Daniel, but very rarely am I a Daniel. That's Daniel.

As I child, my mom would say, "Daniel Allan Raymond!" That was not a good thing. However, as I walked across the stage at graduation and the dean of students says, "Daniel Allan Raymond," that was a badge of honor?

In my childhood, I was simply Danny, but when we moved in my 10th grade year, I thought Danny was too childish. I wanted a new name. I wanted a fresh identity, a chance to redefine myself, so I started going by Dan, and if my parents or my sister dared to call me Danny, the wrath of Daniel would come out.

It took us forever to pick out Alyssa's name. I liked Kayleigh. She hated it. Teresa liked Madison. I wasn't a fan. Alyssa was simply the first name that neither of us hated. It's impossible to think of her as anything else now.

I. **Names Matter to God**

A. **God Knows Your Name**

But consider this. God knows your name. God thinks of you individually. Personally. You are not just a member of humanity, a data point of Gen X, the millennials, or Gen Z. You are more than a gender, a political affiliation, or any group identity. You're more than a member of your family, a student at your school, an employee at your company or a member of your church.

You are an individual, a soul created in the image and likeness of God. The very fact that you exist imbues you with divine meaning and purpose.

You have a Savior who knows you and loves you. Jesus says in John 10:14, "*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.*"

God knows you deeper than you know yourself, even knowing the numbers of hairs on your head. Jesus says in Matthew 10:29-32,

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

God knows you by name. God says through the prophet Isaiah, “*See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.* (Is. 49:16 NLT)” The idea here is that God has tattooed or branded himself with our names on his hands. This imagery is God’s way of saying, “Whatever I’m doing, I’m thinking about you. I won’t forget about you. I care about you.”

We find these very personal threads woven in Scripture all the way to the book of Revelation. In chapter 3, Jesus promises to the faithful in the church of Sardis, that “*I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.*” Think about your name written down in the Book of Life and your Savior will speak your name aloud before the ruler of all worlds seen and unseen and the innumerable mysterious angelic creatures of the heavenly court.

The same voice that called Abraham by name, that called Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Martha, Simon Peter, and Saul by name, that same voice will speak your name in the halls of heaven.

B. God Knows Their Name

We need to be careful here, since we live in such an individualist culture. Even American Christianity can become “It’s all about me. Yay, me!” and I’m not trying to feed into that. So, let me take everything I just said in steer it in a new direction.

Look at the sticker you found on your seat this morning. I want you to write a name there, but not your name. I want you to pick out one name. Think of someone in your life who really needs Jesus. Maybe they need Jesus back in their life. Maybe they’ve never had Jesus in their life.

This is someone who is in your life who needs to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Think of what that name means to you. Maybe you work with them. Maybe you go to school with them. Perhaps they are your neighbor, someone in your family that you care for deeply. It could be a friend or a rival.

Think of what this person means to you. Think of what you’ve been through together. Just the mention of their name brings to mind certain memories that you share, the times that you have laughed or cried. Their name brings to mind the hopes you have for them. Or you are reminded of fears. You think of hurt and heartache when you hear their name. It’s a name that’s a part of your life every week. Maybe even nearly every day.

However deeply you know that name, whatever that name means to you, know this— God knows that name too. That name means more to God than it will ever mean to you. God knows them more intimately, more personally, more fully and completely than you or anyone else will ever know them.

The same God that knows every number of every hair on your head, the same God that knows you, that calls you by name, that has your name written on the palm of His hand, and written it down in the Book of Life, that God knows and cares just as deeply for them, and wants to see their name written down in the book of Life.

That's how much they mean to God. God loves them so much that He sent his Son to die on the cross to pay for their sins, so that God could love them and be loved by them, because God wants to spend eternity with them. As people, our hearts don't have the capacity to love multiple people that fully, that deeply, that completely. But an infinite God has the capacity for infinite love. That's how He loves you. That's how He loves them.

That's how I want you to see that person whose name you've written down. We need to see them as God sees them— as a beloved person created in the image and likeness of God, a soul created with divine purpose and with eternal destiny.

II. Praying for Others is Powerful

A. Pray for Their Name

We're going to do more than just write down this name. I want you to do more than think about this person. We are going to pray for this person. Over the next month, your assignment is to pray for this person every single day. Pray for them by name. Pray for them specifically. This series is going to take us all the way to Thanksgiving, and your mission is to pray for this person. Every. Single. Day.

Take that "Hello My Name is" sticker on which you've written their name and stick it somewhere it will make you think of them and remind you to pray for them. Stick it on your bathroom mirror. Stick it on your steering wheel. Stick it near your desk, or on the lampshade on the lamp on your nightstand next to your bed. So whether it's the first thing in the morning, or the last thing you do before bed, and the first thing you do at lunch every day is pray for that person by name.

B. Prayer is Essential

As a church, we're going to pray for these people up until Thanksgiving. Here's why we're going to pray for these names. Praying for others is powerful. Prayer reaches beyond our earthly dimension into the spiritual realm to access the very throne of heaven and connect the power of God to the hearts and minds of our friends, our family, and our neighbors.

Imagine this— we get the whole church praying about a lost person in their lives. The whole church is praying for a lost person every day at the same time. James 5:16 says, *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*

Our prayers will make a difference in their lives. It will put divine moments in their path, and it will put them on the path to divine moments. Our prayers will empower us to make a difference in their lives. We will see them differently. We will think about them differently. We will love them as God loves them, and the Holy Spirit will guide us in what to do and what to say.

1. Prayer Acknowledges God’s Primacy in Salvation

Prayer isn’t just important. Prayer isn’t just powerful. Prayer is essential. First of all, prayer is essential because prayer acknowledges God’s primacy in salvation. Nothing else is as important as what God does in salvation, because without what God does, there can be no salvation. Prayer is fundamental to spreading the good news of Jesus because the work of salvation is the power of God working through the Holy spirit through the means of Jesus’ blood on the cross and prayer connects us to all of that.

2. Prayer Admits Our Own Inadequacy in Salvation

Prayer also admits our own inadequacy in salvation. We don’t have the power to save anyone. Nothing you say or do can save another person. Not by itself. You can’t know enough, say enough, or do enough to save someone else.

A syringe doesn’t save anyone’s life. A pill bottle doesn’t heal anyone. It’s the medicine inside. By ourselves, we’re just an empty syringe or an empty bottle until we are filled with the truth of God about the saving work of Jesus applied by the Holy Spirit to change someone’s heart.

This is why we must pray for them.

I could give you all kinds of evangelism strategies. You could be trained in all sorts of soul-winning techniques. You could be equipped with every answer, and none of it would matter without prayer. Salvation begins, continues, and ends with prayer. From the planting of the seed, to the first sprout of faith, to the budding of repentance, to the full blossom of obedience, it all requires the divine work of God and that means we need prayer.

I love what R.A. Torrey writes about the role of prayer in winning the lost:

The most important human factor in effective evangelism is PRAYER. Every great awakening in the history of the church from the time of the Apostles until today has been the result of prayer. There have been great awakenings without much preaching, and there have been great awakenings with absolutely no organization, but there has never been a true awakening without much prayer.

Let me give you just a couple examples of what he's talking about, one old and one new. Most of us know the incredible story of the beginning of the church in Acts 2. God pours out his Holy Spirit on the twelve apostles who were gathered in the upper room. They were filled with the Spirit and they went out into the temple courts which were packed with pilgrims for the sacred festival of Pentecost. These pilgrims came from all corners of the Roman Empire. Though all of them were Jewish in heritage, they spoke many different local languages.

The apostles begin to preach to them in different languages so that each person could hear the saving message of the good news of Jesus in their own language. By the end of the day, 3,000 people were baptized into Christ, their souls were saved and they became a part of the infant church that day. Overnight, the church grew from 120 believers to 3,120 believers.

But how did all of that begin? What were disciples doing in that upper room? What was happening there when the Holy Spirit was poured out in such dramatic fashion? We get a clue in Acts 1:14, *"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers (ESV)."*

They were praying. I know it's Sunday morning, but let's do a little math. Acts 1:3 says that the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples over a period 40 days teaching them about the kingdom of God. Jesus' last promise to the disciples was that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit, and then they would be his witnesses in all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. So, the disciples all go back to Jerusalem to wait for that to happen.

Remember Jesus' death and resurrection happened at Passover. The Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, which is 50 days after the Passover. That's what Pentecost means. It's the Greek word for fiftieth. The fiftieth day falls on another Jewish holy day, called Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks. So 50 days minus 40 days, leaves 10 days. The disciples were praying for 10 days as they waited for the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is the priming charge that ignites the explosive growth of the early church. Prayer sets in motion this massive chain reaction that results in the salvation of 3000 souls, the lost coming to Jesus and this sudden, dramatic growth of the church. Prayer lights the fuse, and once the fuse is lit, whoa boy, you better look for cover.

Now fast forward all the way to February 8, 2023. A regular scheduled chapel service came to an end at Asbury University. A group of students from this Bible college decided to remain and pray. This wasn't led by faculty or staff, but simply a spontaneous decision of these teenagers and a sovereign move by the Spirit of God.

Unplanned and unexpectedly revival broke out. Worship and prayer services continued in the chapel around clock continuously for more than two weeks until February 23. All of it led by students of the Gen X generation, whom we are told are the least spiritual of generations, but these kids displayed an hunger for desire and a desire to draw close to him. Soon tens of

thousands of people were pouring into this small Kentucky community of 6,000 people. Revival spread to other campuses. The revival went viral online. Dramatic stories of faith, power, and transformation poured out of this revival. One day, history will tell us what the long-term impact of this revival has been, but one thing is certain. It all began with prayer.

3. Prayer Fulfills God's Command to Pray for the Lost

Finally, prayer is essential because it fulfills God's command that we ask for His help. Jesus commanded us to pray for the salvation of souls. Jesus says in Matthew 9:37-38, *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

III. The Place of Prayer in Reaching the Lost

Evangelism begins in heaven. Prayer isn't just something we do before the work of evangelism. It begins the work of evangelism. Prayer is a partnership between you and God to change the life of that person.

Imagine God placing in their heart a yearning desire to know him, a burning conviction that something is missing from their life, that something more is needed. God may give them the right questions to ask. God may place certain people and events into their lives that put them on the path they need to be on before you ever share your own faith with them. Your prayer has the power to remove unseen hindrances from their heart and mind. Your prayer can smash through barriers in their thinking. Your fervent prayers erode away the sinful attitudes that present blockages to faith.

Praying for them alone is not enough. But without prayer nothing else will ever be enough. By itself, prayer cannot do the work of evangelism, but without it evangelism will never work.

How many of you love the Powder Keg roller coaster at Silver Dollar city. It's the one that doesn't slowly send you to the top of a hill and then drop you. No, it shoots you like a bullet out of a gun using compressed air. As the ride gets ready to launch you can hear the compressors charging. You hear whining and puffs of air as the pressure builds. You know what's about to hit. And then...fooom! Your head slams to the back of your chair. Your face looks like one of those NASA training videos where your cheeks get sucked behind your ears.

That's what prayer does for our efforts in reaching the lost. Prayer is that powerful launch. That push of divine wind that propels our efforts with power. Without prayer, our efforts will lack power and fail to produce results.

Pray earnestly for that person. Imagine them spending eternity in hell. Now imagine judgment day when their destiny is proclaimed. Think about all the days you worked together. All of the Christmas and Thanksgiving meals you shared. All the times fishing, shopping, all the meals

together. All the discussions. Why didn't you talk more about Jesus? In all of those discussions, couldn't you have found a little more time to talk about spiritual matters.

Charles Spurgeon, the 19th Century Prince of Preachers once said, "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for."

That's why we are praying for these names that we have written. We are not just praying for them to live a blessed life or a more fulfilled life, or even just to grow close to God. We are praying for their salvation. The stakes are eternity. The only options are heaven and hell. This matters, and it matters forever.

Think of the apostle Paul and how he thought of his fellow Jews who refused and rejected Jesus as their Savior in Romans 9:2-3, "*I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people.*"

We all have people in our sphere of influence who are unsaved. We should be praying for them because we love them. We should be praying because God loves them and doesn't want any of them to perish. 2 Peter 3:9 says that God doesn't want "*anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*"

Since these people are in your circle of relationships, you might be the best qualified person to reach them. There are people out there that you are more able to reach than anyone else. Because you know them. You have a relationship with them. They see your life as a living representation of who Jesus is and what Jesus can do. That matters more than what you know or don't know. That's more important than if you can answer every question.