

john 15:4
A b i d e in **M E**



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 4 - Number 13
The week of February 10, 2019

Sermon Series: *The Real Thing*
Real Love and Answered Prayer
1 John 3:19-24

THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT

Desperate Prayer *Psalm 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him, and finding direction for daily life.

Answers to Your Questions on Prayer
Dr. Bill Bright¹

We have learned through the years that the average Christian does not know how to pray. A friend of mine who has been a Christian for more than 50 years told me, "I never pray in public, and I know very little about prayer or how to pray." Because so many Christians -- new and old alike -- know so little about prayer, I wish to share with you some simple, basic truths and answer some vital questions about prayer.

1. What Is Prayer?

Someone has said, "Prayer is a dialogue between two people who love each other -- God and man." Simply put, prayer is communicating with God. Every Christian has a direct line of communication with God, available at all times. Prayer is much more than words, however. It is an expression of the heart towards God. It is an experience, a relationship, not an activity.

As a child of God, you are invited to come boldly before His throne. "Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God," Paul writes, "let us...then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Because the One to whom you pray is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Creator of heaven and earth, you come into His presence with reverence. But He is also your loving heavenly Father who cares for you and delights in having fellowship with you. Therefore, you can enter into His presence with a relaxed joyful heart, knowing God loves you more than anyone else has ever loved you or will ever love you. To me, real prayer is simply communicating with God, inviting Him to talk to you as you talk to Him. There is more to prayer, but this is basic to true prayer.

2. Who Can Pray?

Anyone can pray. However, only those who walk in faith and obedience to Christ can expect to receive answers to their prayers. On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus promised to those who belong to Him, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Many people instinctively pray whenever they are faced with tragedy, heartache, sorrow or danger -- even if only to false gods made of wood, stone, or their own fallen imaginations. But serious danger exists in this. People always assimilate the moral character of the objects they worship. Those who worship gods of lust, for example, become morally degenerate. Those who pray to gods of blood, gore and war, become militaristic, ruthless and sadistic. Those who bow to the god of materialism become greedy and self-centered. Prayer to anything or anyone apart from God through our Lord Jesus Christ is forbidden. God's Word declares:

"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts..."

Paul writes that "anyone who comes to Him (God) must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." By coming to Christ and worshipping Him, you are changed into His image: "*We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*" This explains the scriptural emphasis on the worship of and prayer to the only true righteous, holy and loving God.

According to the Scriptures, "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men..." Jesus Himself claims to be the only way to God. He says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Does this sound too exclusive? No. Jesus Christ came to die for all people in all lands. He promises rest for all who are weary and heavy-laden. Many people who have ignored God for a lifetime come to a difficult situation near the end of life and are too embarrassed to turn to Him in prayer. They reason, "I've ignored God all my life -- it's too late now."

Do not feel this way. God listens to the prayer of any truly repentant individual. He proved His love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still in our sins. There is nothing that you or I can do that will cause God to stop loving us. The fact still remains, however, that you cannot expect God to answer your prayers unless you come to Him in the name and authority of the Lord Jesus as your only mediator and confess your sins and receive Him as your Savior and Lord.

Heart Attitudes Conducive to Prayer

Those who have clean hearts can pray. You must not only ask in the name of Jesus. You must also come with a clean heart. The psalmist says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." Therefore, you cannot expect God to answer your prayers if there is any unconfessed sin in your life. Just as the omission of one ingredient in a cake recipe can result in failure, so the omission of confessing any known sin can result in prayer failure.

Those who have a forgiving spirit can pray. One of the most frequent hindrances to prayer is an unforgiving spirit. Jesus said, "When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive Him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

In our Lord's prayer, the words "give" and "forgive" occur in the same context: "Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." No prayer except the prayer of confession can be answered by God unless it comes from a heart that is free of unforgiveness and bitterness.

The well-worn compromise, "Well, I can forgive, but I can't forget," only defeats your prayers. What if that were God's attitude? His love has prompted a wonderful forgetfulness in which He has pledged to put all of your sins behind His back and remember them against you no more. You and I must come to God with a forgiving heart if we are to receive the Christian's legacy of power in prayer.

Those who pray in faith can pray. You must also have a believing heart if your prayers are to be answered. The same Lord who says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" and, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" also says, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" and, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" and, "According to your faith will it be done to you." Yet few of us take seriously these words, and few dare to claim what God has so generously promised us.

¹Adapted and slightly edited from the *Transferable Concept: How You Can Love By Faith; How You Can Pray with Confidence*, by Dr. Bill Bright, co-founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. © Cru.

STEP ONE . . .

OBSERVATION
What does the text say?

1 John 3:19-24

¹⁹By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²²and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

- Place brackets around the prepositional phrase **by this** in verses 19 and 24..
- Double underline the phrase **we shall know we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him**. Write in the right margin: *the main point*.
- Write in the left margin beside verse 19: *Assurance by Obedience*.
- Write in the left margin beside verse 21: *Assurance of Confidence*.
- Draw a circle from the word **confidence** (verse 21) to **whatever we ask** (verse 22).
- Write in the left margin beside verse 22: *Assurance of God's Pleasure*.
- Place (1) in the text before verse 23. Place (2) in the text before the phrase **love one another**. Place (3) in the text before verse 24.
- Circle the pronoun **his** in verse 23 and write: *Father*; then circle **Jesus** (v. 23) and **Spirit** (v. 24). In the right margin write: *The Trinity*.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

What does the text mean?

The commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

¹⁹ **By this.** This prepositional phrase is the grammatical connection to the preceding passage. There are two very different ways of interpreting verses 19-20. John is either seeking to comfort us or challenge us. The history of interpretation adopts the latter view since these verses are not a digression from the command to love one another but an integral part of such a command. **We shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him.** This phrase governs the entire passage. Loving one another is not always easy. When we do love one another, an assurance that we belong to God will arise (**shall know**) in our hearts when we show genuine and active love. This assurance is experienced in two ways: First, we will have the knowledge that **we are of the truth** (i.e. that we belong to Christ; see John 13:17). Secondly, when the condition is met (i.e. when we show tangible love instead of withholding it) our hearts will be assured. **Reassure** [*peisomen*] can mean: 1) To persuade or convince which is the most common usage in the NT. 2) To set at ease. The way this term is understood is governed by which view is adopted (see comment above). **Before him:** Christ is the witness of our deeds and actions. This may also have a future reference that suggests when Christ appears any anxiety that we do not belong to Christ will be removed. Heart [*kardia*: the seat of emotions] is used 156 times in the NT; four times in verses 19-22.

²⁰ **for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.** Sometimes, however, we will close our hearts to a brother or sister in need (3:16-17). At those times, our hearts will accuse or blame us for not loving one another as we should. The word **condemns** occurs elsewhere in the NT only in Galatians 3:11. **God is greater than our heart.** He knows our hearts better than we know them ourselves. God also excels when it comes to kindness and generosity and therefore will motivate us to resist the hardness of our hearts when we refuse to show compassion to those in need. **And he knows everything:** Any stinginess, meanness, or coldness of heart will not go unnoticed by God. His omniscience is both comforting and challenging. God knows what we do and don't do and will assess us accordingly (see Psalm 139:23)

²¹ **Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.** Verse 21 stands in stark contrast with verse 20. Beloved [*agapetoi*] is used for the third time in the letter; a common term of compassion among the apostolic leaders of the first century for Christians (Paul used it 8x,

Peter 6x, James and Jude 3x). It is also a reminder that since we are loved by God, we should actively love others. It is also a term of concern for those who struggle with a condemning heart. **If our heart does not condemn us:** when we cast ourselves on God's infinite knowledge and extravagant mercy we can have **confidence** before Him. Why? Because He heals our hard heart and forgives us. **Confidence** before God is no small thing. It means boldness and freedom of speech. It enables us to enter into the most holy place by the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19; see also Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 4:17). It speaks of the confidence children have in approaching their father whom they know loves them.

²² **and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.** The key to answered prayer is obedience to God (see John 14:12-14). Therefore, our confidence in prayer is a means and not an end. This is the first mention of prayer in John's letter, if we don't include the implied confession in 1:9. John affirms the confidence we have to God in prayer because our hearts are at ease. This relational access to God is not flippant but reverent and rooted in our obedience. **Keep his commandments:** keep is a present, active, indicative which means we keep on guarding and obeying. **Do:** also a present, active, indicative. Our prayers are not selfish but based on what **pleases Him** (see John 8:29).

²³ **And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.** To please God requires three active steps. *First of all, we must confess faith in the Son.* The command to believe is a moral imperative (see John 6:29). Such belief or faith has a clear object. Belief is to be placed in the name of Jesus. *Secondly, we must love one another.* What we believe (the doctrinal test) will impact how we love (the relational test).

²⁴ **Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.** *The third step toward pleasing God is to abide in God* (the moral test). Abiding is obeying. The Spirit in us bears witness to the evidence. Verses 23&24 are wonderfully Trinitarian referring to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Complementary Passage

John 14:12-14

¹² "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

STEP THREE . . .

EXPLORING the passage through discussion

Questions

1. **Read 1 John 3:19-24.** This is a hard passage that is also filled with assurance and hope. Let's remember the context. John is discussing the command to love one another in deed and truth. **Read 1 John 16-17.**
2. What happens when we *do* love in deed and truth? (see verse 19). According to John, **how do we know we are of the truth?** In addition, what does it mean when John says, **and reassure our heart before him?**
3. Have you ever closed your heart to someone else's need? (Of course! We all have). What happens when we fail to love as we should? What kind of condemnation is John talking about?
4. Who sees your heart all the time? When is that reassuring and when is it terrifying?
5. In general, how do Christians handle failure in our own lives? What should we do when we either commit sin intentionally or are guilty of deliberate omission (i.e. not doing what we should do?). Specifically, what should we do when we are convicted of a failure to love?
6. How do we avoid becoming self-condemning when God has forgiven us?
7. What do we learn in this passage about the correlation between our obedience and our prayers?
8. Are you able to pray with confidence and boldness? What are some barriers you feel that keep you from being bold?
9. **Read Matthew 7:7-9.** In this passage, Jesus explains prayer. Why does the Father give us good things? Why isn't it always what we ask for?
10. What are the three things that John says pleases God? (see verses 23-24).

11. Who makes it possible for us to abide in God? What is the evidence of abiding?

STEP FOUR . . .

APPLYING

How is the text lived out?

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the Word but doers ~ James 1:22

You're encouraged to journal your answers to the following questions in order to apply what you've learned this week.

1. How is God making Himself known to you?
2. What is going on beneath the surface of your life that Jesus is trying to change?
3. How is God calling you to serve your family, community, and world?

Prayer

*Lord God, Your love for us all,
present in the beginning and
especially evident by sending Your Son,
extends throughout history
and touches my own life.
You see my failure
and You forgive.
Your love feels pain
and wipes away our tears.
Your love knows grief,
and comforts the sorrowful.
Your love sees sin
and still loves the sinner.
Forgive us when we fail to live
lives that reflect Your love.
Forgive us the many times
when we take for granted
all that You have done for us.
Transform us, through your Spirit,
and empower us to serve you
and love others today.
In Jesus' Name,
Amen*

A Bible Reading Plan for 2019

(on LCC website)

Sunday, February 10 thru Saturday, February 16, 2019

Numbers 1-3; Numbers 4-6; Numbers 7-9;

Numbers 10-12; Numbers 13-15; Numbers 16-18; Numbers 19-21

THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

Undiluted Worship *Matthew 22:37-40*

Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor, and my neighbor as myself.

Constant Abiding *John 15:1-11*

Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

Desperate Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him, and finding direction for daily life.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives, and in the world.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Total Forgiveness *Ephesians 4:30*

Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

Tangible Compassion *Matthew 25:31-46*

Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

Generous Giving *2 Corinthians 8:7*

Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

God Space *Ephesians 6:19-20*

Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

Memory Verse

~1 John 3:23~

²³And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.