

The following series of daily readings and questions has been designed by Pastor Tom Cullen to lead up to the sermon for the coming week. There are five daily studies for each week. Allow about 20 minutes a day to complete each daily devotional.

The weekly sermons can be listened too at sbc.com

Each week's daily devotional guide is also available online at sbc.com under the small group tab.

Endnotes

1. W. Bingham Hunter, *The God Who Hears*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 198.
2. R.A. Torrey, *How To Pray*, (U.S.A.: Whitaker House, 1983), 54.
3. Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, (U.S.A.: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1992), 249.
4. Andrew Murray, *Ibid.*, 180.
5. Bo Stephens, *Abide in Christ*, (Nashville, Tennessee: LifeWay Press, 2007), 63.
6. Bo Stephens, *Ibid.*, 81.

Reflection and Prayer:

“Beloved disciple, seek above everything to be a person of prayer. Here is the highest exercise of your privilege as a branch of the Vine; here is the full proof of your being renewed in the image of God and His Son; here is your power to live not for yourself but for others; here you enter heaven to receive gifts for others; here your abiding in Christ has led to His abiding in you, to use you as a channel and instrument of His grace. The power to bear fruit for humankind has been crowned by power to prevail with God in prayer.

“Christ’s work in you is to bring you to the Father in such a way that His Word can be fulfilled in you: ‘In that day you will ask in My name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father Himself loves you.’ (John 16:26-27). The power of direct access to the Father for people, the liberty of intercession, claiming and receiving blessing for them in faith, is the highest exercise of our union with Christ. Let all who would truly be branches give themselves to the work of intercession. It is the one great work of Christ in heaven, the source of power for all His work. Make it your one great work as a branch, and it will be the power of all your work.”⁶

Pray: Write out your prayer to God.

Week 5: The vine and prayer

This week we begin to focus on the last section of our text. Jesus speaks some more of abiding in Him and bearing fruit. Clearly this has something to do with obeying Him and loving others. We’ll look at that next week. But in verse 7 and 16 we see that abiding and bearing fruit is also connected to prayer.

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” (verse 7)

This is an astonishing promise. We are a bit skeptical, and ask, “Can we really ask for whatever we wish and expect to receive it?” It thrills us to know that the Father is so attentive to us that He hears and answers our prayers but at the same time we have our doubts. We know that this promise has not been fully realized in our experience. We know lots of people who are earnest, sincere Christians who have not received whatever they wished for in prayer. We ourselves have prayed for a friend to be healed but no healing has come. We have asked God for a relative to accept the fact that Christ is their Saviour but no confession is made. We are left to ask, “Is this promise genuine? Are there strings attached? Was I not fully abiding in Christ for the prayer to be answered positively?”

During the coming week we’ll be thinking of this great privilege and mystery that is called prayer and addressing these questions. Let us approach this study with faith and with a child like trust in our Heavenly Father who loves us and who answers our prayers.

Pray: Dear God - Your name is great and exalted. You have revealed your name to us and allowed us to know You intimately and personally. Thank you for the privilege of being able to call you my Heavenly Father. May I live today in such a way that your name is glorified in me.

Read: John 15:9-17

Focus: Praying in the name of Christ

1. John 15 is part of a long discussion Jesus is having with His disciples. It begins at chapter 14 and ends at chapter 16 and is often called "the upper room discourse". All the way through these three chapters Jesus speaks of prayer. Look up the following verses – what is the common phrase used in all these verses?

John 14:13

John 14:14

John 15:16

John 16:23-24

John 16:26

Pray: "Lord teach me to pray." (Luke 11:1)

Read: John 15:16; Ephesians 6:10-20

Focus: Prevailing prayer

1. Write out Ephesians 6:18 in your own words.

2. Do you think "pray in the Spirit" and asking "in the name of Jesus" are the same thing? Why or why not?

3. How many times does the word "all" appear in Ephesians 6:18. What does this tell you about the nature of prayer?

4. Do you think the church is often prayerless and powerless? If so, why?

Reflection and Prayer:

“What we need is to realize that in our relationship to the Infinite Being whom we call God, who has created and redeemed us, the first sentiment that ought to animate us is that of subjection: the surrender to His supremacy, His glory, His will, His pleasure, ought to be the first and uppermost thought of our life. The question is not, how we are to obtain and enjoy His favour, for in this the main thing may still be self. But that this Being in the very nature of things rightfully claims, and is infinitely and unspeakably worthy of, is that His glory and pleasure should be my one object. Surrender to His perfect and blessed will, a life of service and obedience, is the beauty and the charm of heaven.”⁴

Which statement best describes your surrender to Christ?

- A. I completely surrender my life to the Lord each day as best I know, and He helps me obey.
- B. I surrendered my life to Christ at one time, but I don't know whether I am surrendered to Him today.
- C. I have never fully surrendered my life to Christ.
- D. Other _____⁵

Pray: Dear God, teach me this lesson of obedience so that I may fully abide in You. Correct me when I go wrong. Affirm me when I am right. May I bring delight to Your name.

2. What do you think it means to pray in Jesus' name? Does saying the words actually force the Father to give us whatever we ask? Is the phrase important or is there something deeper?

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3. Read Acts 19:13-16. When these men were using the phrase “in the name of Jesus” what happened?

4. Clearly, “in the name of Jesus” is more than a phrase we are to tack on to the end of our prayers. Do you think that praying in Jesus' name is the same as praying according to God's will?

5. If you think of prayer in God's name as prayer according to God's will, does it explain why some recent prayers of yours were not answered? Does it help to know that? Why or why not?

Reflection and Prayer:

“Jesus prayed according to the will of God. And that ultimately, is what it means for you and I to pray in Jesus’ name – to pray according to the will of God. You will find that the phrase according to God’s will can be substituted in [each of the verses above] and it makes sense of the fact that “in my name” conditions both our asking and the Father’s giving:

Prayer: Anything you ask according to God’s will, you will receive.

Answer: God will give in accordance with his will anything you ask.

Put differently, when we pray in Jesus’ name we receive whatever we ask because our will and God’s will are the same. We pray according to God’s will when we respond to the Creator as He really is, in light of His nature and attributes, His character, His personality. And we pray in the will of God when we respond in faith as His child to his Fatherly love and concern.”¹

Pray: Write out your prayer to God.

Pray: “Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.” (Psalm 119:33-36)

Read: John 15:9-17; James 5:16

Focus: The need for obedience

1. What one word describes the person in James 5:16? What does it mean?

2. What does this verse say is the one condition for answered prayer? Can a person be righteous without doing righteous acts?

3. Read 1 John 3:21-23. What does verse 22 say is the stipulation for answered prayer?

3. Why do you think we need to pray constantly (“without ceasing”)? What does it demonstrate to God?

Reflection and Prayer:

When my children were little I would get upset with them when they constantly came to me for help. Getting ready to go outside on a winter’s day was particularly trying. First they would ask me if I knew where their coat was. Then they would need help getting on their snow pants and mitts. Finally they would ask for help in tying their boots. By the end of it all I would sometimes say, “Can’t you do anything for yourself???”

I think this is a picture of our relationship with God in prayer. Unlike me, the frazzled parent, God wants us to continually come to Him and pray to Him without ceasing. It’s not because He’s needy, it’s because we are. God will never ask us, “Can’t you do anything for yourself?” because He knows that we can’t. (see John 15:5)

Andrew Murray writes,

”He who seeks to pray without ceasing because he wants to be very pious and good, will never attain to it. It is the forgetting of self and yielding ourselves to live for God and His honour that enlarges the heart, that teaches us to regard everything in the light of God and His will, and that instinctively recognizes in everything around us the need of God’s help and blessing an opportunity for His being glorified”³

Pray: Write out a prayer to God.

Tuesday February 7 Conditions

Pray: Dear Lord, help me to trust in You alone to recreate Your character in me. Keep me from trusting in my act of

trusting in You. Keep me from relying on my obedience to Your commands as a reason for You to listen to me. It is You Lord that I want and ask that You would fully abide in me.

Read: John 15:7

Focus: Abiding in Christ

1. All through Scripture when God gives us a promise He gives a condition. E.V. Hill used to call these “the preludes” to the promises. For instance, the promise of God drawing near to us is conditioned upon our drawing near to Him. “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” (James 4:8) In John 15:7 what is the promise and what are the conditions?

2. The first condition is _____. When we think of it, it makes perfect sense. God always hears the prayers of His Son. So, it is only as we fully abide in Christ that our prayer can be heard. Review your notes and remind yourself what it means to abide in Christ. Pastor Tom gave us three definitions – it means to rest in Christ, trust in Christ and to die to self.

3. The second condition is _____ .
What do you think it means to have Jesus' words, "remain in us"?

4. How can we practically have Jesus' words remain in us? (see John 15:9-11)

Reflection and Prayer:

To abide in Christ is "to renounce all life independent of Christ and constantly look to Him for the inflow of His life into us and the outworking of His life through us. When we do this, our prayers will obtain that which we seek from God. This must necessarily be so, for our desires will not be our own desires but Christ's. And, our prayers will not in reality be our own prayers, but Christ praying in us. Such prayers will always be in harmony with God's will, and the Father always hears Him. When our prayers fail it is because they are indeed our prayers. We have conceived the desire and offered our own petitions, instead of looking to Christ to pray through us."²

Reflect on the whole of idea of "Christ praying in us". How do you respond?

Pray: Write out a prayer to God.

Wednesday February 8

A life of prayer

Pray: "Lord teach us to pray." (Luke 11:1)

Read: John 15:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Focus: Praying as communication with God

1. Which best describes the prayer life of a healthy believer?
 - A. Prays only in the midst of crises
 - B. Prays once a day
 - C. Prays once a week.
 - D. Prays constantly.
2. What do you think it means to pray constantly? Think of the relationship between the vine and the branch.
