

The Benefits of Abiding in Christ – Part II
Pastor Ty Blackburn
John 15:1-17
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Amen! Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 15th chapter of John. We come this morning to the fourth message on this wonderful and rich metaphor that Jesus uses here in the 15th chapter when He tells us His seventh and final ‘I AM’ saying. He says He is the vine, “I am the vine. I am the true vine. My Father is the vinedresser. I am the vine. You are the branches.”

As we’ve been looking at this, we’ve seen that the context of it is the last night before Jesus’ crucifixion. He wants to prepare His disciples for the coming storm, the tribulation, and turbulence of the next few days, and indeed the rest of their lives, living for Christ in times of persecution, suffering. So He teaches them an important principal, and that is how are you to bear up, what are you to do when life falls apart around you, when evil comes in like a flood, when literally all hell is breaking loose around you? What are you to do as a Christian? He stops in the middle of the discussion about all that is happening. He talks about the ruler of the world in Chapter 14:30, “He’s coming,” He says, “Get up, we’ve got to go. The ruler of the world is coming.” In Chapter 15:18, He talks about persecution that is coming, and here in the midst of that, He gives them this wonderful image, perhaps as they walked along the way from the upper room to the garden. They passed a vine, a great vine and the branches, and He stopped and began to talk about it.

We don’t know for sure whether there was actually a vine in front of them or not, but we do know that Jesus felt like this was essential for them to understand so that they could know what they are supposed to do. And the first message we looked at the question, *What? What are we to do when we encounter adversity and trials, spiritual opposition? What are we to do?* We saw that the vine metaphor tells us we are simply to bear fruit. Seven times in the passage, you will hear it as we read in a moment, the words ‘*bear fruit*’ are used. We are supposed to bear fruit. We’re supposed to do what vine branches are supposed to do every day of the year, simply work toward bearing fruit. They don’t bear fruit every day of the year, but they are always about that business. We are supposed to bear fruit, that’s *What?*

Then secondly, we asked the question, *How? How does the branch bear fruit? How are we supposed to bear fruit?* And we said that is by abiding. The word ‘*abide*’ is used ten times in the passage. We are to abide in Christ. We are to seek an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, to look to Him no matter what is going

on around us. The one issue in the Christian's life is, "Where is Jesus at work in this? I need to draw near to Him in this moment." That is *How? How do you bear fruit?* You love Christ. You let His word fill your mind. You let His love fill your heart. You let His will rule your life. That is what it means to abide.

Then we began last week looking at the third question, *Why?* After He tells us what to do, and how to do it, He tells us why we ought to do it. The amazing thing about the grace and kindness of God, that He condescends to give us reasons, inducements to do His will. It really ought to humble us. I mean, as parents there are times where we are supposed to say, "Do it, because Dad says," or, "Mom says." There is the place where the child needs that. They need to learn that they are to obey, and they don't have to understand everything. Especially when they are little, right? You don't explain everything to a child until they get to a certain age and you start explaining a little more. But sometimes in our pride, we want to just always have that kind of mindset, whether they are three or they are 15, "Do it because I said so." We may have to watch our own pride. But God, though sometimes He says, "Do it because I said so," here we see His kindness in giving us reasons.

We shared the first reasons last week and what I've titled this message is the same thing as last week, 'The Benefits of Abiding in Christ'. That basically He says, "What you are to do is you are to bear fruit." How do you do it? "You are to abide in Christ, and this is why. Because if you abide in Me," the first thing we saw last week was, "you will experience fullness of joy." The second benefit we want to look at this morning is, "If you abide in Me in times of adversity, if you cling to Me, if you learn to commune with Me, then you will experience an incredibly powerful prayer life." That is the second benefit, an exceedingly powerful prayer life. You will pray and things will happen. You will pray and God will move. You will pray and the resources of Heaven will be released. That's what He says in this passage, and He says it twice in the passage. Listen for it, Verse 7 and Verse 16.

Great power will be exercised as you pray if you are abiding in Christ. That's the big *'if'*. It is not a *'name it, claim it'* message. You know, just decide what you want and Jesus does it. Though the language, if you isolate it, if you take part of the sentence out, and don't read the whole sentence in Verse 7, you could come up with a *'name it, claim it'* theology. But if you read Verse 7 carefully, there is no way. It shows how preposterous it is that people miss these things. Clearly this promise is conditional. It is explicitly conditional. It is the result of abiding in Christ. When you are abiding in Christ, then you will be able to pray whatever you ask and it will be given to you. That is what He is going to say.

But the point that we don't want to miss is, He is telling us that we will have this incredible benefit that when we pray, we will be able to call in the resources of God. I was thinking about this, the power that He is describing in these verses. Not that we possess the power, He does, but He lets us be a part of, once we meet the condition, of unleashing His power. God really works through prayer. It is important for those of us in Reformed circles to remember that. Sometimes we can focus so much on the sovereignty of God that we forget the responsibility of man. But the glory of God's sovereignty is that He is ordained the means, He is ordained every single step in the process of Him doing His perfect will. He always does His perfect will, but one of the things He uses to accomplish it is prayer. Prayer is not just simply a rote exercise that we do, and it is already determined. It is already determined, but prayer is the means by which God makes it happen. That is why He can say, "You have not because you ask not." Prayer makes a difference and we are going to see that.

But to think about the wonder of this, I was thinking about, I like to study military history, and everything that I can get on that. I enjoy reading, it is fascinating to read about the conflicts that have shaped our world, and men that have led the armies in various wars. One of the things that you see in recent warfare since World War I, particularly World War II, is that one of the key ingredients in victorious military campaign is to establish air superiority. That if you have complete air superiority, you have won the war. It is just a matter of time. Just a matter of time. And America has been blessed since World War II, about the midway point of World War II, we gained air superiority in Japan, in the Pacific, and finally complete air superiority toward the end of the war, and we did the same thing in Europe. When you have air superiority, that means that people on the ground can speak into a walkie talkie, and they can talk to somebody who sends in an air strike.

This is especially something that if you remember the explanations about the Gulf War, if you've read anything about the Gulf War of 1991, or the modern wars of Iraq and Afghanistan. We have experienced complete air superiority so that our soldiers on the ground, though they are in danger, and in peril, need our prayers. They are risking their lives for our country, but they had the benefit and the blessing of being able to call into the radio, or I guess now the cell phone, they don't have the big field radios. Remember how cell phones used to be like field radios? If you carried it around, "I'm so tired of carrying my phone." Now they are so small. Anyway, but they can call a number, they call someone and say, "I need an air strike," and they give the coordinates, and suddenly a missile comes in, or an airplane comes by, or a helicopter comes in, and it takes out the enemy. That is

power in a call. That is unleashing incredible power in a call, and I would submit to you that prayer, for the Christian, who is abiding in Christ, is far greater than that. That when we pray to God, when we are abiding in Christ, when we meet the condition that we are going to see, we are in a spiritual war that makes the physical wars of this world pale in comparison. And then the power that is unleashed when almighty God acts in response to the prayers of His people, which He has ordained, yes. It is also wonderful when we pray. “We only pray because He told me to pray.” Why do I think to pray in the first place? Because the Lord put it in my heart. And why did I pray the way that I pray? Because He has taught me how to pray at this point, but still keep on learning to pray, and pray. It is the sight of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, but this passage is putting before us the wonder, and opportunity of our responsibility to pray. Look with me at John 15. We’ll read Verses 1-17. Listen particularly for Verse 7 and Verse 16. Jesus says:

John 15:1-17 ~ “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that

your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17 This I command you, that you love one another.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that You by Your grace might work in our hearts to give us eyes to see, and ears to hear. Enable our wills to be submitted to You, surrendered to You, and stir our hearts to love You with greater depth resulting in greater joy. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

We're going to talk about this issue of how to have an exceedingly powerful prayer life, but I want to consider four questions. The outline is basically four questions. Now the question I'm going to go ahead and give you up front so it will help you to follow as we go along. The first question is: *What is prayer?* The second question is: *Why don't we pray more?* The third question is a 'what, also': *What is God's promise concerning prayer?* So, *What is prayer? Why don't we pray more? What is God's promise concerning prayer?* And then, *How can we experience this power that has been promised in our prayer life?*

1) What is Prayer?

First, *What is prayer?* Now just to help us to have a foundation as we talk about this, I want us to talk just for a moment, briefly about what really is prayer? It is something that sometimes we don't define our terms, and we assume, and it helps to stop and think about it. John Calvin defined prayer as a communion and communication with God. A communion *and* communication, so it is a fellowship with, and communication with. A communion and communication with God whereby we expound to Him our desires, our joys, our sighs in a world, all the thoughts of our hearts. John Knox added that communication with God where we share our hearts, ask His help, and praise His magnificent name. We share our hearts, and we ask His help. Here in the text we have the word '*ask*' twice. Praying is asking God for help and we praise His magnificent name. So prayer is communion with God, and communication with God, and it ought to be a familiar kind of communication where we are talking with someone that is dear to us, that we love in the same way that we talk to other people that we love. There ought to be a familiarity in our prayer life, not a rigid formality. Though the holiness of God is certainly a part of how we approach Him, we remember that He is holy, and there is reverence, and there is awe, and yet also, what is it that the Spirit does when He makes someone a new believer? He works in their hearts so that they cry,

“Abba, Father, Daddy, Papa,” to God Himself. So prayer is communion with and communication with God.

2) Why Don't We Pray More?

Now let's go to the second question: *Why don't we pray more?* If prayer is so important, why don't we pray more? In a word, the reason that we don't pray more, or the reason we don't pray as we ought is, in a word, the answer is unbelief. *Unbelief.*

First of all, one of the reasons that some professing Christians don't pray is because they don't truly believe in a saving way. That prayer is at its essence an expression of dependence upon God, and it is an inevitable, it is not automatic, but it is an inevitable expression of the heart that has been redeemed. That there will be a sense in which there is this crying out to God, “Abba, Father!” And if there is nothing of that in someone's life, no matter what their character looks like, if there is nothing of this dependence, crying out to God, they need to examine themselves, you need to examine yourself, and to see if you are truly in the household of God.

Go back to the Gospel and to realize what does the Scripture teach us about our salvation? We are completely helpless we are without God in the world. We are hopeless and helpless in our sin, separated from God, dead in sin. We are not sick men who need to be made well, we are dead men who need to be made alive. So to be saved you have to understand how utterly dependent you are, and cry out, and cast yourself upon God and His provision through Jesus Christ. That His precious Son has done everything necessary in His perfect and righteous life. In His offering His body upon the cross, bearing in His own body our sins, being treated as if He lived your life, experiencing the wrath of God against your sin, suffering in agony, an agony that you deserved. If you believe that, and you believe that He rose from the dead, and you cast yourself in the essential beginning prayer, the first prayer that is truly of God is the prayer of repentance, faith, trusting in Christ. But the person who has believed, has been made new, has a new life, and a new yearning, and a new desire, and there should be something of the stirrings of that in the Christian life, the genuine Christian.

So unbelief, but also unbelief for the Christian. Why do we not pray as we ought? Still the problem is unbelief. Though I said prayer is inevitable, it is not automatic. We have to cooperate with God just like in other areas of our sanctification, we have a responsibility. The flesh is working against prayer all the time. Sin remaining in our members is resisting prayer all the time. Satan is doing everything

he can to distract us from prayer. He knows that the power of prayer, when Christians are abiding in Christ, is like the ability to call in an airstrike. If you know that, you want to destroy the communication system of your enemy. And so he is laboring to keep us from praying.

And then you just have our own ignorance and forgetfulness. Sometimes we just don't know what we are missing, and other times we knew but we forgot. I want to share three things that I think that we need to examine as Christians, those of us who are trusting in Christ, but feel like our prayer lives, we don't pray as much as we ought. Why? We don't believe what the Scripture teaches about three things. These are three sub-points under the second point, *Why don't we pray?* We don't pray because we don't believe what the Scripture says about:

A) How Much We Need to Pray:

That's the first sub-point, how much we need to pray. I mean, God's word is clear, we need to pray all the time. Colossians 2:4 says, "Devote yourselves to prayer." Luke 18:1 says, "Men ought always to pray." 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing." He doesn't say, "Hey, remember to pray often." He says, "Pray and never stop praying." That is what God's will is for us to be continually praying. 1 Peter 5:7, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God casting all your anxiety upon Him for He cares for you." What is He saying? How do you humble yourselves? You cast your anxiety upon Him. We forget how much we need to pray because we forget, partly because we are sheep, we forget that we are sheep. Sheep are untrainable, they don't learn, you never see sheep in the circus doing tricks.

We went to a basketball game a while back, and they had dogs doing these amazing tricks and stuff, but there were no sheep doing tricks. Sheep don't learn, they don't learn from their mistakes, they don't learn skills. I mean, I'm not saying that they are completely without a brain, but there is not much there. So they forget how much they need, they forget that they are sheep, and not only are sheep forgetful, but sheep are completely needy. Sheep are not burden-bearing animals. You don't hook up sheep to a wagon and pull it. You don't load them down with things that they can carry. So now, realize that when you and I are not praying, when we are not praying, what we are doing is we are letting the burdens pile up, and pile up, and pile up, and we are trying to carry them. That is just dumb. We are not meant to do that. God said we're not, we're sheep. He said, "I'm the shepherd." "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." All we are supposed to do is follow

the shepherd. That's all we can do. So that's why He says, "Humble yourselves, acknowledge who you are."

How do you humble yourself? You acknowledge who you are, you cast all of your anxieties upon Him. Every time a burden comes, you cast it upon Him. Every time a burden, and this world is full of burdens, you find that you cast it upon Him. That is why we're are to pray without ceasing because burdens are coming continually, and we need to continually lay them down at His feet. He says we are like a child, we are supposed to live, I talked about this last week that our joy should be like a child who just doesn't concern himself with matters, like Psalm 131 says. David, the king, says, "I don't concern myself with great matters or things too high for me, but I've quieted my soul. I have quieted my soul like a weaned child. Like a weaned child rests against his mother, so my soul is quiet before the Lord. See, I don't think about these, I don't carry the burdens. I act like a little child, and a little child doesn't carry burdens either." And Jesus said to get saved, what do you have to do? You have to come like a little child, to have you acknowledge your helplessness. And then how do you continue to grow in Christ? The truly growing Christian is the person who continues to know, and actually knows more and more the longer he follows Christ, how he can do nothing in himself. We are just branches, we are not the vine. We can do nothing. And so prayer is the expression of that, and one of the reasons that we don't pray, unbelief is the reason, but we don't believe how much we need to pray.

B) How Much is Lost Because We Don't Pray?

Then secondly, a second area of unbelief in this point, *Why don't we pray?* We don't believe what the Scripture says, not just about how much we need to pray, but we don't believe what the Scripture says about how much is lost because we don't pray. We don't really believe that we have not because we ask not. There can be kind of a spiritual complacency, especially in circles where we have a high view of the sovereignty of God, kind of a reformed complacency.

I had a professor in seminary, my favorite professor, Dr. Doug Kelley wrote a book If God Already Knows, Why Pray? And of course his answer was not, "Forget prayer," his answer was because God has commanded it, and it is how He is going to activate all that He's already planned. And you are to pray as if it depends on you, even though you trust that it all depends on Him, because that is what He has commanded you to do as a Christian. We get in trouble where we start, we know one truth, and we start making inferences about it. "Well, if God is sovereign, He has worked it out. I don't need to do anything. He has to do it." No, He is always

telling us, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Even though we believe in eternal security, the Bible teaches it, there is no way if you are truly saved that you can lose your salvation. Yet if you read through the New Testament carefully, you’ll find things like this. That we belong to Christ *if* we hold fast our confession firm to the end. What is that saying? Hold on to your confession so that you can persevere. If you are truly His, it won’t matter if you let go in one sense, He won’t let go of you, but you are not to think about that, you are not to presume upon that. You are to do what He says, hold on to Him. And so it is with prayer, we don’t believe what the Scripture says about how much is lost if we don’t pray.

You know Jesus made this clear in the first major sermon in the New Testament. That illustration Ted used the other day, the best sermon you’ll ever hear, the *Sermon on the Mount*. He says in Matthew 7:7:

Matthew 7:7-11 ~ “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

You have to ask Him. You have to knock. You have to seek. We must do these things. And so, one of our problems is we don’t pray because we don’t believe how much is lost because we don’t pray.

C) How Much is Gained when We do Pray?

Then thirdly, lastly under this sub-point, *Why don’t we pray?* Unbelief. The third reason, we don’t believe what Scripture says about how much can be gained when we do pray. We don’t realize that the power of God really is unleashed through prayer, that He has ordained that. That when men of God and women of God have prayed throughout the centuries, that the Lord has done incredible things. That is why James 5:16 is important, where James reminds us that Elijah was a man of like nature, just like us. Yet he prayed, and it stopped raining, and for three years it didn’t rain, and he prayed again and rain fell upon the earth. And he says, “The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, avail accomplishes much. Prayer accomplishes much.” Do we believe it? If we don’t believe it it is because we are not believing the word of God. So why don’t we pray? Unbelief.

3) What is God's Promise Concerning Prayer?

Now we've looked at *What is prayer?* The second question, *Why don't we pray?* Now we've come to the third question, *What is God's promise concerning prayer?* the third point. Basically, He is emphatically saying, "Your prayers will be answered." He is saying that when you are abiding in Christ, your prayers will be answered in the affirmative. You know in one sense we know, and this is true, all prayers are answered, right? Every Christian's prayer is answered, either with a, "Yes," a "No," or a "Not yet," right? I mean, God is attentive to His people, He knows. So, "Yes," "No," "Not yet," but what He is saying here is that when you meet the condition, you can know that your prayers will be answered in the affirmative, with a, "Yes," and not just with a, "Yes," but with an emphatic, "Yes!" It's kind of a, "Yes, of course!"

We can understand this a little bit. Just like Jesus said, "Think about your children." I love how He said that. When you read the Scriptures carefully, remember He said, "What man among you if his son asks him for a loaf of bread is going to give him a rock?" "Dad, I'm hungry. I'd like a sandwich." "Here are a couple of stones. Chew on these for a little while. Suck on them." "What man among you if a child asks for a fish, is going to give him a snake?" And then He says, I love this: "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts..." Jesus tells it like it is. What are we? Compared to God's standard we're all evil, and we really are. Our hearts are deceitful, desperately wicked. Who can know them? He says, "If you, being evil, give good things to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him?" I mean, for us it's easy for us who are evil to want to give good things to our kids. The child is hungry and we give him something to eat. There are times where I feel like, "Yes!" an emphatic yes. I don't say it like that. Maggie or John comes to me and asks me and I say, "Yes!" an emphatic yes. Although they may think I get a little overboard at times, but, "Yes, of course!" I mean. "Dad, can I have that?" "Yes. Sure. Absolutely." What He's saying is that the Christian who asks gets this kind of answer from God, an emphatic, "Yes." Look at Verse 16. He says:

John 15:16 ~ ... so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

He says, "I've chosen you, I've appointed you to bear fruit, so that you would go and bear fruit, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name (there's the condition) He may give to you." Look at Verse 7:

John 15:7 ~ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you...

There's the condition, but look at the promise:

...ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

I love the emphasis on *whatever*. Look at Verse 7:

...whatever you wish,...

Verse 16:

...so that whatever you ask...

Do you see that? He's saying basically, it's almost like the king says to Esther. "Ask of me anything you desire, and you'll have it." Remember that? And he holds out the scepter to her, she risks her life and goes in before the king in the book of Esther, and he says, "Ask whatever you will." This is what God says to the Christian when he's abiding in Christ, when he's praying in the name of Christ. He says, "Ask whatever you will." Now, do we think about God like that? When we pray, do we think that the Father is for us like that? Now, He's for us when we are for Him. We're going to see that. But don't miss the impact of that, that He says, "Ask whatever you wish." This is so important that Jesus deals with this several times on this night. Turn back to John 14:13.

John 14:13 ~ Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

Turn over to John 16:23-24.

John 16:23 ~ In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

Do you see this? He's wanting them to get this. Three different times on this evening, He says, "Listen, I want you guys to understand something. You need to ask." He says, "Ask whatever. Ask anything in My name," yes, but He's saying, "Have an idea that you are a child of the King." I mean, if you were the child of the

king, you don't go sheepishly in and ask for something. You go in because you know he loves you, and he has all the resources, and you know he has enough money to handle it. It's not like you have to hold back from asking for something because you wonder if mom or dad even has enough money for this. "Maybe it's not right." No, the King says, "I want to give you whatever you want. Come on in." That's how we're to approach God. This is where we have to hear the word of God and respond to the word of God. God is basically saying what we sang out there in that last song, "And can it be?" When he says, "Boldly do I go to the throne and take the crown." Boldly, isn't that amazing? That in Heaven there's a sense in which because of Jesus Christ, the Christian who was conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity, who in himself is evil, yet God has made righteous, and what God has made clean, you are not to call unclean. And so when you come before the throne of God, then you are to be able to come boldly to the throne of grace, according to Hebrews 4, and that's what the hymn writer says. We'll boldly go and take our crown, because that's how God wills it, and we're supposed to do that, boldly approach the throne of grace, not because of who we are, not because of what we want, but because of our Savior, who He is.

That's part of what it means to pray in His Name. When you pray in His Name, you're praying, trusting in all that Jesus is and all that Jesus has done. That's His Name. His Name is His character. His Name is His work. His Name is His purpose, His intention. And so when you're praying to God and you're trusting Jesus came into the world to die for me, He poured out His blood to wash me, He's made me clean, His righteousness I'm standing in, and I come to You in His Name, I come to You not trusting in myself. I'm not trusting in the fact that I had my quiet time today. I'm not trusting in the fact that I've just witnessed to somebody. I'm not trusting in the fact that I've had a pretty good day. No, I come to You regardless of how my day has been, good, bad, or indifferent. I come to You on the merits of Jesus Christ and Christ alone. It's His blood that makes the way. As one of the Puritans said, "We come boldly to the throne of grace along the bloodstained path that is laid out for us.

That's what it means to pray in His Name. But we're to see the sense that given that we have that, we've to come in this sense of boldness and anticipation, believing we're going to receive, not sheepishly, hopefully, maybe, what if, possibly You could do something for me. Now, just like Jesus prayed, His model, "Father, let this cup pass from Me." He prayed that earnestly. He prayed it three times. Anything that you find three times in the Scripture in a row, that's important. It's emphatic. "Father, let this cup pass from Me." But what did He always, the next clause, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Your will be done." But

He went earnestly with His request. It wasn't a show. In His humanity He felt the desire, "Is there another way?" In His humanity, fully human, He's trembling before the cross in a sense of knowing what it's going to be, not just the physical agony. That's small, but knowing that it's going to be to bear the wrath of God, to experience the displeasure and separation in some sense from the favor of the Father, something that's never been experienced in all history. Jesus is going to experience hell, and so He says, "Father, if there be any way, let this cup pass from Me." We're to pray like that.

He says, "He may give it to you," in Verse 16, "...that He may give to you." Look John 15:7, when He says:

John 15:7 ~ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

There's an interesting word there. "It will be done for you." Actually in the Greek the word means to become for you, to come into being. It's the same word that's used in John 1. "All things came into being." Not that you create it, but through your prayer, God brings something that wasn't there, into play. His grace that wasn't there is now there. He's emphasizing how much is accomplished through prayer, dependent prayer upon God. Now, that's the third question. What is God's promise concerning prayer? He will answer our prayers. He will say, "Yes," to the prayers that are offered according to this condition. He liberally, generously, gives. But the fourth question is:

4) How Can We Experience His Power in Prayer?

We've considered 1) What is prayer? 2) Why don't we pray more? 3) What is God's promise concerning prayer? And fourthly, how can we experience His power in prayer? What He's basically telling us in this passage by this emphasis on abiding in the vine, and then highlighting the connection with prayer twice in the passage, is to say we must labor to pray rightly. This is the work of prayer, to pray rightly, because these promises are, as I said earlier, explicitly conditional. Verse 16:

John 15:16 ~ ...whatever you ask of the Father in My name...

John 15:7 ~ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

There are really, I think, two things that we should see from Verse 7 and Verse 16 that need to be evident in our hearts for us to be able to count on the fact that our prayers really are going to, in a sense, bring God's blessing to bear in our life and in the lives of those for whom we pray. There are two C's, two sub-points here: Communion and Commitment. He says in Verse 7:

John 15:7 ~ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

He's saying that the key ingredient, the missing element in prayer is that we pray too often with not communing with Christ. This is one of the reasons that we have such trouble in our prayer lives, is we try to do prayer in our own strength. We try to do prayer as an independent branch. "I'm going to bear this fruit of a good prayer life." And though prayer needs discipline, it needs accountability and things like that, prayer lists, and all these things are good and they have their place, but the essence of prayer, or the essential foundation of prayer is communion with Jesus, that what will make you pray more, and what will make you pray better is to commune with Christ, to seek Him with all of your heart, to seek communion with Jesus. That's what will result in a powerful prayer life. He uses this idea of mutual indwelling as an image here. In Verse 4:

John 15:4 ~ Abide in Me, and I in you.

So we're supposed to be in Him and then He's in us. In Verse 7 He says:

John 15:7 ~ If you abide in Me,...

We're in Him, and look what He says:

...and My words abide in you,...

How do you experience Jesus in you and you in Jesus? There's a key there. It's His word. The way that we pursue communion with Christ, this is basically saying the foundation of prayer really needs to be the Scriptures, that you can't pray unless you're abiding in the word. You can't pray like you ought to. You can pray and it'll be profitable, but what makes your prayer life really powerful is abiding in the word. I remember reading years ago about George Müller and his marvelous prayer life. George Müller was a believer in England who was used by the Lord to do some amazing things, particularly to start orphanages in England, and he was a man of incredible prayer and faith.

You may have read some of his stories of how he basically had the conviction that he should never make his needs known of the needs of the orphanage. He'd never ask anybody for money, never told them that we have a problem, we have a shortfall, and we need food. He never did that. That's not saying that you should do that. The Bible doesn't teach that, but it was a conviction he had. It's one of those areas where let each man do as he is convinced in his own heart, and he did that. He never let anyone know what was going on, and the Lord chose to honor his prayer. They would be short a breakfast, and one day there's a wagon going by, and like the wheel falls off the wagon, and the guy's got eggs and milk that need to be delivered, but he's not going to be able to get it there, so he comes and knocks on the door. "Listen, I've got a lot of eggs and milk in here that are going to go to waste. Do you guys need anything?" He'd just been praying for breakfast. Stuff like that happened all the time in Müller's life.

He was a man of powerful prayer, but one of the things that's really interesting, and Donald Whitney brings this up in his book *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life* is that Müller's prayer life got amped up dramatically when he came to understand how essential it was to start prayer in the Scriptures. Rather than just sitting down and seeking to pray, what he did was he began to get into the word and labor to understand the meaning of the word, and to commune with God in the word, and that the word itself would then spawn prayer. This is the way we're supposed to pray. This is what Jesus is saying. "If you abide in Me and my words abide in you..." All the word of God is telling us about Jesus. So if you want to commune with Jesus, you go to prayer. The first thing that you do is seek Him in His word. You read the Scriptures, look for the glory of Christ, and ask Him to meet with you in His word. "Lord, help me. I feel listless. I feel unable to even concentrate. I need You." So you get in the word and you labor in understanding the words on the text. Meditation, and reading, and study are the handmaid of prayer, and the more that you're in the Scriptures, the more you see the beauty of Christ. The Scriptures themselves make you more like Christ.

When you look at how important prayer is, one of the things that's really astounding to ponder concerning the necessity of prayer is how much Jesus prayed. You see this particularly highlighted in Luke's Gospel. Jesus was continually going aside to pray. Now, if anybody didn't need to pray, you would think it would be Jesus, wouldn't you? I mean, you would think He could handle this situation, and in fact, I would submit to you that His whole life, that He was the one Man who obeyed the command, "Pray without ceasing." He did pray without ceasing. He prayed continually. What was He doing by getting away? He was basically saying, "There are times where I need no distraction, so that My ongoing prayer

life with the Father can be completely focused and undistracted. I've got to get away from those guys for a little while. It's best for them that I get alone with the Father." He loved to pray. He needed to pray. In His humanity, He was truly, fully Man. This was something we heard at the Shepherd's Conference a couple of weeks ago. A guy was talking about how Jesus grew in knowledge of the Scriptures, that the Man Christ Jesus had to learn His Bible. That's kind of mind blowing. He *is* the Word. The eternal Son of God is the Word, and yet the Man Christ Jesus memorized and meditated on the word of God. When He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," He meant, "This is how I have lived, as the Man Christ Jesus," though He's fully God, full humanity, and He needed to pray, and He lived a life of complete dependence in prayer.

In John, we've seen this even highlighted, His intimate communion with the Father, and the more that you commune with Jesus, what happens is the more you commune with Jesus, the more at home you feel with the Father. It's just like when you get to know somebody in your life and you love them, and you hear them talk about their mom and dad. Neat memories or whatever they share, experiences, or talking on the phone with dad and they get off the phone and tell you about it, and you're like, "Man, that's a really neat family." And the more you hear about them, the more you want to be with them, and then because you love this person and they love this person, you have a connection. So then when you go to see them, they welcome you gladly, because, "You're a friend of my son. You love him, therefore, my house is open to you."

This is what's happening. When you love Christ, and the more that you're in the word, the more that you love Christ, and the more that you love Christ, though positionally you're already perfectly loved by the Father, experientially your prayers are empowered, because you now are more in love with Christ, and the Father is more ready to bless and answer you. You've removed all the obstructions to His blessing you, all the personal obstructions. When we love His Son more, then He releases His blessings more. You see Jesus' continual prayerfulness. He mentions in John 5 that He's continually communing with the Father, that He doesn't do anything but what He sees the Father doing. The idea is He's always looking to the Father. "What's the Father doing in this circumstance? That's what I'm going to do." "The words that you hear Me saying," says John 5:30, "are not My own words, but the words the Father has taught Me. I'm listening to Him. I'm looking to Him. I'm listening to Him continually."

In John 6:15, after the feeding of the 5,000, it says Jesus put His disciples in a boat, and He went up to be alone by Himself. They had just tried to make Him king. He saw that outpouring of euphoria and enthusiasm, humanistic kind of desire to take the Kingdom of God and hijack it, and Jesus in His humanity may have felt some of that pull, though of course without sin. But He felt the pull and He needed to have some time alone with the Father to refocus, not that He was ever out of focus, but in His humanity He learned obedience through the things He suffered. What an amazing reality that we have a Savior like that. He understands. He understands how hard it is. He understands far better than we could ever imagine, because He knows it far better than we do how hard it is to live for God.

We see His prayerfulness in John 11. John told us when Jesus was at the grave of Lazarus, the tomb there, He says, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me, but because of the people standing around, I said it so that they may believe that You sent me,” verses 41 and 42. He’s sitting there at the tomb of Lazarus. He’s been weeping. He was moved, He wept, and now He prays, “Father, thank You that You’ve heard Me. I’m about to ask for the Spirit’s power to be made known in raising My friend who’s dead.” It was just so natural for Him to pray like that.

In John 12, remember when the Greeks come to Him. They come to worship at the feast. It’s a Jewish feast, but there are Greeks who come to Him, and they say to Philip, “Sirs, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. Remember how surprising Jesus’ response is. He says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” He didn’t even respond to those guys that came to Him. By finding out that they came to Him, it was a signal that now is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. When the gentiles are seeking You, that’s the moment for the cross. But look at His heart as He goes on. After He says:

John 12: 24 ~ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Skip on down to Verse 27:

John 12:27 ~ “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’?”

“What shall I say? What shall I do?” He doesn’t say, “Peter, what shall I do? John, what should I do?” He says, “Father, what should I do?” His heart tuned in to pray.

“Father, should I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? No, but it’s for this purpose I came to this hour.”

John 12:28 ~ Father, glorify Your name.”

Prayer is not just opening our hearts to God. It’s listening to God and hearing from God’s heart, and in response as we love Him more, then we have more freedom to share, and there’s a transparent surrender to God. And communion with God, back to John 15:7, it says we need to commune with God.

John 15:7 ~ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Look at Verse 16. This is commitment. The second condition is not just commune with God, but you’re committed to His agenda. You’re committed to Christ and His agenda. It makes this really emphatically clear in Verse 16. He says:

John 15:16 ~ You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit,...

Here is God’s purpose in election. He says, “You didn’t elect Me. I elected you, and I appointed you.” He says, “It’s not about your agenda. You’re not here because of your agenda, your intelligence, your desires, your aspirations. You’re not following Me because of that. You’re here because I chose you, and I appointed you, and it’s My agenda that’s happening here.” That’s what He’s saying. “And My agenda is...”

John 15:16 ~ ... that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain,...

“And then when you’re on My agenda...”

...whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

You see, what happens in prayer, this is what prayer is supposed to be. Prayer does really activate blessings from Heaven. It really does call in power strikes, in a sense. It really does, but the way it does it is surprising. It doesn’t do it by changing God’s mind. It does it by changing the prayer’s heart. That’s how God does it. Prayer doesn’t change God in His plan. Prayer changes you to line up with His plan, and then you want what He wants. You delight in what He likes.

Like the psalmist said in Psalm 34:3, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” If you delight yourself in Him, He will change your desires to want what you ought to want, not to want what you do want. He will change you, and then you’ll want the right thing, and then He’ll say, “Open wide your mouth that I may fill it. I will give you all that you long for.”

The power in prayer is seen, and it’s seen, back to John 12, turn back to John 12 we just looked at a moment ago. This is astonishing. We have the perfect Son of God. I’ve told you our Savior has charted the way. True humanity, experiencing exactly what we have experienced, yet without sin, tempted in every way, yet without sin, so that He can be a perfect Savior, to save to the uttermost the one whose hope is in Him. You see in a sense this microcosm of how to experience the power of prayer in Jesus Himself in these verses. Look what He says in Verse 27:

John 12:27 ~ “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name.”

What you see is Jesus wrestling with God without sin. He’s not denying the Father, but in His humanity He’s genuinely wrestling. He’s wrestling and He submits. This is what prayer is supposed to be. We wrestle with God and then we submit, and look what happens when you submit. He said:

John 12:28 ~ Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” 29 So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered;

When you pray like God tells you to pray, when you really seek His face, thunder will come down from Heaven. That’s what the Lord wants for our lives. Not literal thunder. We can’t see the thunder. We won’t hear the thunder, but everyone in spiritual places will see it. The demons will feel it. The angels will behold it. When we really labor before God to love Him, to commune with His Son, to commit ourselves completely to His agenda, to surrender to Him, when we pray, our words will, by His divine power and His orchestration changing our heart, our tongue will be the source by which His power is unleashed, and it’s all to His glory. From Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. The Lord wants us to have lives of prayer. We’re like paupers who are sitting in paupers’ rags when we’re really children of the King. Let’s live like children of the King by seeking His face.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer...

Our Father, we worship You. We stand in awe of You. The wonder of Your glorious plan, that You, oh Lord, who uphold all things, sustain all things, You've created all things, Lord Jesus, You uphold them all by the word of Your power. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, majestic in glory, able to do all things, and yet You have chosen to extend Your kingdom and to manifest Your glory through weak and frail people like us. You have taken up the dust of the earth and You have made it your own. You've taken us when we were rebels, hardened sinners, and You broke us. You take out the heart of stone and you put in a heart of flesh, and you begin to fashion us into the image of Your Son, through adversity and difficulty, making us cling to You, and in the process we see how wonderful it is to see Your glory, and it's the most wonderful thing that the human heart could ever experience.

Father, we pray that You would help us to be people who are mighty in prayer. As the world gets darker and more hopeless, may Your people, may the church be the church, and may you help us to grow up in our salvation, to lay aside the sin which so easily besets us, and to run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Lord, let us be like Him, and let it all be to Your glory. Let us be people who pray as He prayed, and pray because of His grace and His love flowing through us, and because of the power of Your Spirit. And we pray that You would be glorified in all these things. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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