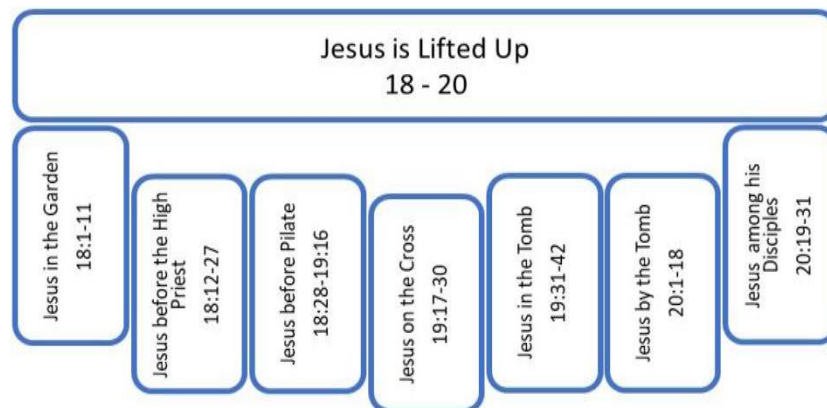


Lesson 28: John 16:16-33 Ask the Father in My Name

Introduction



In John 16:16-33, Jesus shifts from witness to the world back to the great sorrow about to fall on his disciples. Our lesson consists of two main parts. First, we will walk through the text with a focus on the disciples' confusion. Then we will address the tricky issue of prayer that I have been putting off since chapter 14. Let's get right into the text.

Jesus Comforts His Disciples (John 16:16–33)

¹⁶ “A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.”

¹⁷ Some of His disciples then said to one another, “What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father?’” ¹⁸ So they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.” ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, “Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’?” ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. ²¹ Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. ²² Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. 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. ²⁵ These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. ²⁸ I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.” ²⁹ His disciples said, “Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. ³⁰ “Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Behold, an hour is coming, and has *already* come, for you to be scattered, each to his own *home*, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. ³³ These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Jesus reconfirms the sad news of his departure (16-19)

Jesus returns here to the theme that has run through these chapters, the theme of his departure. This passage in the second half of chapter 16 parallels the first half of chapter 14. Jesus acknowledged the sorrow and confusion the disciples were beginning to experience by his

announcement. Jesus is preparing them for anguish that is to come very soon. He said in the first verse of that previous section, “Let not your heart be troubled; **believe** in God, **believe** also in Me.” Belief is the most fundamental heart attitude of the disciple. When we struggle, when we are confused, when we don’t feel love or humility or the desire for God’s glory, when our heart is not with God, when our own circumstances close about and the positive emotions of the Spirit leave us, we have left the choice to believe. “Let not your heart be troubled; **believe** in God, **believe** also in Me.”

Here in this section Jesus affirms that his disciples have indeed believed, “You have loved me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.” But even as he affirms the reality of their belief, he also questions the extent or clarity of their belief, asking questioningly, “Do you now believe? Behold, an hour is coming and has already come, for you to be scattered.”

There is real belief here. There has been a true, initial yielding to Jesus as Lord and Savior. They have passed the crucial moment. Still, that moment is only the beginning of belief. All of us who have believed in Christ know the reality of tension in our belief. Like the man who cried out to Jesus, “I believe, help my unbelief!” Belief describes both that absolute starting point when you place your faith in Jesus, you have seen him, you spiritually see him, he’s opened your eyes. But we can also use this idea of belief to describe the ongoing process of trusting God. The moment we truly believe, we are forgiven of our sins and made eternally secure in Christ. We’re born again. At the same time, it is a new birth that begins a lifelong process of growth in faith.

These disciples are at the beginning. Their struggle to understand Jesus is apparent. Jesus repeats the announcement of his going. “A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.” The disciples still do not understand clearly what Jesus is talking about. And that lack of understanding explains a comment I skipped over in our last section. Jesus said in 16:5, “But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are you going?’” That’s a curious thing for Jesus to say. It doesn’t sound quite right, does it? And it’s exactly what Peter asked back in chapter 13, verse 36. He did ask, “Lord, where are you going?” And now Jesus is saying, “None of you ask where I’m going.”

We understand this by understanding that there is a progression of dialogue going on through this evening. Peter asks. But then he is immediately told he is going to deny Jesus. And then in a little bit Thomas asks, “How can we know the way?” And Jesus says, “I am the way to the Father.” And Philip says, “Show us the Father.” Jesus responds, “Do you not know me, Phillip?” And then Jesus goes on to teach. Peter spoke up, and Thomas spoke up, and Philip, and they all show that they do not quite get what Jesus is saying. And as Jesus continues to teach, no one comes back for clarification to the question, “But where are you going? You never answered, Jesus, where you are going. We don’t get it.” So Jesus doesn’t mean that no one has asked this question at all when he says that in 16:5. He means, “You just let the question drop and you still do not understand. Are you not going to asking me? Are you not going to pursue understanding?” You know, nobody is asking me where am I going.

At the very end of chapter 14, they had left the upper room. Perhaps Jesus is teaching as they walk. We don’t really know the setting of this dialogue, or this teaching. It’s more teaching than dialogue. By chapter 18, they’re getting ready to cross over the Kidron valley out of Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane. So maybe they’re walking through Jerusalem as Jesus is teaching. And we can imagine as they walk that the disciples begin to talk among themselves. You know, Jesus is teaching but then they’re talking about it, wondering what Jesus is saying, without asking him directly. And they are confused. He is going away to the Father. But they do not understand how, or where exactly, or even when. What does he mean in a little while? That’s the specific detail they are discussing here. Let’s read verses 17 and 18.

¹⁷ Some of His disciples then said to one another, “What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go

to the Father’?”¹⁸ So they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.”

Jesus hears them, or he just knows what they’re talking about because he is Jesus. So we have verse 19,

¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, “Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’?”

The disciples do not know what “a little while” means. We who read the story know. We know that Jesus is going to be betrayed this night. He’s going to be arrested and he’s going to be crucified on the next day. “A little while” means it’s really a little while.

Why didn’t Jesus just tell them that? I don’t know but I can imagine. I doubt they would have been able to pay attention to anything that Jesus has been telling them if they knew he was getting ready to be arrested and crucified. So, Jesus has more to say. He’s not ready yet to reveal to them the extent of the anguish that is about to happen.

Jesus gives the disciples a metaphor of joy (20-22)

Instead of telling the disciples directly what trial was coming, Jesus gives them a metaphor of hope through suffering. This is verses 20-22,

²⁰ “Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy.²¹ Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world.²² Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one *will* take your joy away from you.”

My wife Brenda and I recently read this with our teenage daughter Claire. And afterwards, Claire commented, “Well, mom is the only one here qualified to judge this metaphor.” Claire was right. And Brenda responded, “It’s true. For me, I do not remember the pain when I think about it. I just remember my babies.”

Brenda did not forget the pain because it was minor. The pain was intense. But the pain was not lasting. And great joy waited on the other side. Not only did the joy push aside the memory of pain when the baby came, but before that the anticipation of joy, the anticipation of the baby provided strength to go through the pain. And that’s what Jesus is saying, that there is a great joy. You’re going to see me again. There will be restoration. But you have to pass through some intense suffering to get there.

He does not deny the suffering of grief and loss that is getting ready to come onto the disciples. He does not say, “If you believe, you will not hurt, you will not feel loss, you will not grieve.” That’s not the picture of discipleship Jesus gives. He’s telling us we will suffer. Jesus does not say that faith takes away the pain. He does not say you’re going to enjoy the pain. You’re not going to enjoy suffering. He says the world will rejoice. The world is against you. You’ll have to suffer that, you’ll be opposed. There will be some who are glad at your pain. And you will grieve. You will suffer anguish. But your anguish will turn into joy and you will forget your grief. Darkness will fall. But Sunday is coming.

Jesus has more than one application for his followers. The immediate anguish is the anguish of betrayal, fear, shame, loss, the death of Jesus. And they are getting ready to suffer. But in only three days they will see Jesus again. They will see him after he raises from the dead. So that really applies to the baby metaphor. There’s this short, intense pain and then, joy and the realization that Jesus has defeated death. And that’s the first, immediate application of this metaphor. The second application will be after Jesus ascends into heaven. That leave taking will not be full of anguish but will include loss. Jesus will be gone. And he’s going to be gone for a long time. But when they see him again in death, their joy will be made full.

A third application of this metaphor has to do with a general principle for our life with God. You know, we lose someone we love. There is real suffering that Jesus doesn't deny. But there is also going to be joy, if that person is a believer, we are going to meet them again in heaven. This life has its trials and its struggles but if we know Jesus, we have tasted some joy of knowing him, whatever that is, there is a hope we have that, when we are with Jesus, as intense and as long as the suffering is here, we can't deny it here and it's very real here and it feels like forever here; whatever it is here, when we are there with him we will forget it because the joy of being with Christ will overwhelm, will shove aside the memory of suffering. Jesus' next words to the disciples here apply to that longer separation. He says, "In that day you will not question Me about anything." That statement alone is a tough one to understand. "You will not question me about anything." What's he talking about? Why will they not ask Jesus anything? Because he is gone? Yes, that's the simple explanation. "That day" refers to the next stage of history: in that day, the day after Jesus has come, died on the cross, returned to heaven; that day or period of time before he comes again. "In that day you will not question Me about anything." Why not? Well, one, because Jesus is not going to be present with them, and two, because Jesus is telling them, "Address your prayers to the Father." Jesus makes that clarification. This is 23b-28. It's a bit longer passage.

Jesus reconfirms his promise to answer prayer (23-28)

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.²⁵ These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father.²⁶ In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf;²⁷ for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.²⁸ I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father."

This is one of those new things that comes with the new covenant. Jesus has already adjusted the second great commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," to the new commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you." Everything for the believer in God is adjusted by the new reality of Jesus having come, having died on the cross, and having returned to glory. Our understanding of love for others is adjusted in light of the model of Jesus. Instead of, "Love your neighbor," it's "Love as Jesus has loved you." So we define love according to Jesus. So also, our prayer is adjusted. Before this nobody prayed in the name of Jesus. They prayed directly to Yahweh or to Elohim. We still pray to God. But the new reality of Jesus having come to the Earth changes how we pray to God. Jesus invites us to pray to him as Father. That wasn't unheard of in the Old Covenant but that becomes the norm in the New. And Jesus tells us to pray in the name of Jesus. Pray in my name. And that's completely new. Nobody prayed in the name of somebody else before, not any good Jew. But now we're praying in the name of Jesus.

What does not change is that we don't pray to somebody else. We are still praying to Creator God alone. We don't have any other mediator. We pray to God. Jesus does not even instruct us to pray to him. He accepted worship during his life. He is God. He would hear our prayers. We could pray to Jesus. Still, in teaching us about prayer, he does not say, "make your requests to me." He directs us to the Father. We all know the famous way he taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven..." This is the emphasis Jesus gives here. He wants the glory to go to the Father. He wants us to know we have access to the Father. We have the love of the Father. He says here he's not going to request of the Father on our behalf. You see, Jesus is saying, "Don't pray to me to make a request to the Father." I'm certain he never had in mind, "pray to Mary," or "pray to the saints." That's totally foreign to the Bible. And Jesus here is even saying, "Don't pray to me to pray to the Father for you." He says, "You pray to the Father for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father." Jesus assures us that God the Father wants us to bring our questions and our requests directly to him. And whenever we pray to somebody else as

mediator, even if it was another human being, and we don't feel like we can go to God and we feel like we have to ask somebody else, a priest or somebody to pray for us, then we're missing who God is. And we're missing the relationship that Jesus has established for us. It's okay to ask somebody to pray for you. I'm not saying that you shouldn't and I understand that we're all insecure. What I want to make sure is that we see what Jesus is saying. "The Father loves you. You don't even have to pray to me to pray to the Father for you. The Father wants to hear from you for he loves you."

We will come back to these words about prayer in a minute. First, let's finish out with the confused belief of the disciples. Jesus does acknowledge that he has been speaking in figurative language that may not be easily understood. Jesus would do this during his ministry for different reasons. He did it to as a teacher to create cognitive dissonance, that is, to create a kind of mental tensions that his listeners would learn from because they would be forced to wrestle with what he's saying. That's part of what I think he's doing here. He also does it as a faith challenge. If you really want to Jesus, he's told some kind of metaphor about the Kingdom, or a pearl, or spreading seed and you want to know what he's saying, you have to lean in, you have to seek after him, you have to ask. It's a faith challenge. He also did it when he judged that his followers did not have the capacity to understand more direct terms: Messiah or Christ, you know, Son of God. Jesus avoids those terms in reference to himself because he knows they would be misunderstood, so he speaks more figuratively, less directly. Here, Jesus tells his disciples, "an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father."

The Disciples over-estimate their understanding (29-31)

If you take seriously without a smile what the disciples say next, then you're going to have trouble making sense of it. We need to smile here. Jesus just said,

²⁸ I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father."

Then his disciples say, ²⁹ "...Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. ³⁰ Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God."

Really? After all the confusion the disciples have expressed in their comments, Peter and Thomas and Philip, all Jesus has to do is say is, "I came from the Father and I've come into the world and I'm leaving the world again and going to the Father," and now somehow the disciples can claim, "Now, we know." What they say about Jesus is true. He knows all things and has no need to be questioned by anyone. His own witness of the Father is authoritative. It's true what they say. But what has Jesus just said to justify their claims, "Now we know" or "by this we believe", you know, "you're speaking plainly now"? The disciples are close to being like all the others in the Gospels who have claimed to know without really knowing, to see without seeing. They have gotten caught up in the moment, thinking they have insight when, in reality, they're still just as clueless as they were before.

Jesus' promise to speak plainly is for a future time. He says, "an hour is coming." And I can think of that time. After his resurrection, it's reported in Luke 24:44-45 when Jesus appears to his disciples he says,

⁴⁴ ..."These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...

That's when, I imagine, Jesus is speaking plainly. After the resurrection, he's going to reveal to them truth from the Old Testament. He's going to show them things that they could not understand before the experience of the cross. They had to go through this first. So the disciples' claim of insight at this point is not credible and we have to smile there. They're a little over-excited, you know. They get this one little thing clearly that Jesus is going to the Father and now they think they know. And that's why in verse 31, "Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe?'"

Jesus does not take time to correct them. They will soon see things differently. They have a heavy weight to bear. Nothing like his but still heavy. The experience is going to enable them to see. So Jesus doesn't really need to challenge their claim to belief. He'll just wait and let it play out. He gives a final word to strengthen them. This is 32-33.

Jesus reconfirms his promise to provide peace (32-22)

³² Behold, an hour is coming, and has *already* come, for you to be scattered, each to his own *home*, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. ³³ These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

As when Jesus confronted Peter with the truth that he would deny Jesus, telling disciples here that they would scatter and leave him alone, that must have been hard from Jesus. And Jesus goes on to tell them these things so that they might have peace and take courage. How does telling them they will abandon him, that they will scatter promote peace and courage?

It does because it's hard truth. Jesus is not giving them false optimism. He said, "The truth is, you're going to fail." And so this doesn't give peace and courage now. It will after they scatter. After they fail. After they leave Jesus alone. They will remember that he knew they would fail. They will remember that he did not reject them for it or cast them out. Jesus knew it was coming. Their courage does not depend on their own success but on the fact that Jesus has overcome the world in spite of their weakness. They're strengthened by their faith in Jesus. And they are going to fail this time. But these men will grow from this failure. Every one of them will live to face of persecution. They will all die for Jesus. Everyone, except John, will go to his death, refusing to deny the name of Jesus. They are going to learn and grow and become courageous because when they do fail, they know from the words of Jesus that he invites them to come back.

They will also learn this truth, that on the other side of trial is joy. The metaphor is going to make a lot of sense to them afterwards. They will learn that the world may rejoice, but Jesus overcomes. They will learn there is peace in Jesus that the world cannot explain. They do not know that now. Jesus knows that. There are truths we simply must grow into through failure.

Interpreting the Promise of Prayer - Ask anything and I will do it.

Understanding prayer is another one of those truths we must grow into. This is the big question I have put off. It is one of the big questions of chapters 13-17. Jesus again promises again here that, if we ask for anything, the Father will give it to us. And that is a problem. Because we have asked for all kinds of things in our lives. We've prayed to God and he has not done it for us. We could say, "well, we have to ask according to his will. That's simple." But that makes it sound like a guessing game. You know, I will get it if I guess what his will is. If I pick the right box, I'll get what I want if what I want is in the box. Or we might say, "you have to ask with enough faith. You have to somehow drum up enough faith in you to kind of have power over God." If you have enough faith, or pure faith God will give you whatever. There is something to these answers about faith and the will of God, but it just comes out as a pat kind of truism. And I don't even think further about what Jesus has said here. You know, if I just try to give a quick, simple solution to the problem, then I'm missing completely the point of what Jesus is doing. That would be to act just like the disciples in this passage, to claim a truism, like, "You have to pray according to God's will." And I say, "Oh! Now I fully get prayer! Now I understand! Now it's all clear. You just have to pray according to God's will and then he answers. I get it." And then we forget about prayer and move on and act like we know what we're talking about. That's exactly what we must not do. Jesus expresses his words the way he expresses them to draw us in, to make us question, to make us confused and to create a problem that we now have to think about and reflect on. What does he mean, all we have to do is ask and God will answer whatever? How does that really work? What then is prayer?

I have resisted addressing the problem of this promise, three times already because we haven't had enough of what Jesus is saying to put it in the context. Here is our fourth opportunity and now Jesus has given us to think about. So, let's think about it.

We read the first promise of prayer in 14:13, the passage parallel to this one, "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." Jesus repeated the promise twice in the central "abide" passage, first in 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you." And also in 15:16, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, he may give to you." We have the final version here in 16:23-24,

²³ ...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.

With four repetitions, we have to see that prayer is important to Jesus. The problem that arises from Jesus' teaching comes from the way he phrases the promise without qualification or condition. Jesus simply says, "If you ask anything in my name, he will give it to you." The phrasing changes slightly, but is essentially the same, "Whatever you ask, that I will do...ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you...if you ask anything in my name he will give it to you." You ask, he gives. That's what it seems to be saying.

We know these words have to have a qualification. They must. Because we do not get everything we ask for or everything we wish, certainly not. Jesus' words are drawing us into further consideration. He seems to be speaking plainly, not figuratively, but plainly is probably not the right word. I think he is speaking plainly to us as though we have a mature heart and mature faith, as though we have already become who he is making us to be. I think then this would make complete sense to us. He has put words in front of us that we have not yet grown into.

Before coming to Christ and early on in our relationship with Christ, the desires of our sin nature, the habits we have built up, the way we perceive God all affect how we understand and approach prayer. God is inviting us into conversation with himself. We can begin that right away. We can all talk. And in some way, I imagine God enjoys very much the talk of a baby Christian in prayer. It's very honest, very simple. Just like we enjoy the words of a toddler, the words of a four year old, or the words of a ten year old. The words of a 13 year old or 18 year old, in that range we're starting to have some ups and downs. When a young person becomes smart enough to have clever conversation but lacks the wisdom to see how much he or she does not know, despite their intelligence, that conversation is not always enjoyable. We have all been that young person. There is a move from innocence and openness in conversation, when we just say whatever, when ignorance comes across as wonder and delight and honesty that shifts to more knowing conversation, and as we grow the conversation is skewed by fear and pride and self-focus. Growing up as human beings, we learn to hide our true selves. We put on fig leaves. We cover up. We also become more self-centered and not always more self-aware. At the same time in our conversation we hold back, we don't reveal everything inside, and we also overreach, we say too much. This is true with people and it's definitely true of our relationship with God.

The disciples have just overreached with Jesus. They claim, "Now we know that you know all things." That may be a true statement, but they still do not understand why it is true or to what extent it is really true or even what's motivating their hearts to proclaim it. They don't really know why they're saying it. They speak out confidently from minds that are still dark and hearts that are still mixed. We can't come to God any other way. We come to God broken, and immature, and affected by our sin nature. He doesn't say, "Get right first, then come talk to me." Conversation, prayer, must start somewhere. It will grow as we grow, as we come to see ourselves clearly, as we come to know God truly.

What basic ideas underly Jesus' promise of prayer?

That's my basic premise. These plain and simple words of Jesus must be grown into to be understood. The clear problem that we do not get all we ask for alerts us to this reality that there's something that we don't get initially. There is something here that we must grow into.

My second basic premise is that the invitation stands whether we understand prayer or not. God has invited us to communicate with him. We are to pray. We are to ask for things, as a child to his Father. God wants us to communicate with him through all stages of our development.

My third basic premise is that prayer is an essential component for relationship with God in that through prayer we express our dependence on God. Our physical dependence, our spiritual dependence, our emotional dependence. We are dependent on God but we don't always express it. We want to be independent or self-reliant. Prayer is the way we communicate we are not self-reliant. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. Regular prayer acknowledges a need for God. We depend on him for life. He is our shepherd. He makes us lay down in green pastures. He leads us by quiet waters. He restores our soul. And he does it for his name's sake, that is to lead us into purpose and into glory. We depend on him.

Prayer is communication with God by which we express our love for him and our dependence on him. God invites us to this communication, knowing full well that we need to grow into it. Because that's basic.

What else do we see here? What ideas in these promises about prayer or in the surrounding context suggest to us the direction our growth needs to take? How do we need to grow in prayer?

How must we grow in order to understand prayer?

First, Jesus refers to God as Father. God is not a genie. God is not a power source that we tap into. God is not a being we try to manipulate. That's is the natural course of human prayer, that's the tendency, is to see prayer as a means to get what we want from God, rather than seeing prayer as a mode of loving communication with God. So we have to re-frame how we're understanding these verses. Prayer is not about me getting what I want. Prayer is about me entering into loving relationship with God and communicating to him.

Growing in prayer as relational communication

In the Old Testament, the third commandment is really about prayer. "Do not take the Lord's name in vain." We often hear that means, don't cuss and use God's name, and that is forbidden, too. But that's not what it's really about. If you think about the origin on the cussing, if somebody were to say, "God damn you," that's not some random explicative or frustration or anger. That is an attempt, originally, to call God as a power, "God, would you, please, damn this other person?" It's a call to harm somebody. That's what a curse is. At heart, it is an attempt to harness the power of God to carry out a personal agenda. And that is what it means to not take the God's name in vain. Do not try to harness the name of God as magic for your personal goals. That is not what prayer is meant to be, though that is so often what human prayer becomes: God exists for me to get done what I want to get done. It is the natural direction of our sinful flesh. We want some kind of spiritual power, even if he's greater than us we can manipulate him or control him or get him on our side, then that will help us to accomplish what we want to accomplish in life. It will give us control, or power, or safety, or security.

God as Father means he is the right authority over us. We submit to him. We make requests, not demands. We are trying to obey his will. We trust him with his answer, whether it is yes, or no, or maybe. God as Father also means he loves us, and we love him. Prayer is not magic. We're not trying to use words to harness spiritual power. Prayer is communication in a love relationship between heavenly Father and human child. In prayer we speak to God.

I have often been asked, "Why pray if God knows what is going to happen anyway?" It is an interesting question. And I think it is off the mark because it goes at a wrong human assumption of

prayer. It assumes that the real reason to pray is to get stuff. So if he's going to give it whether I pray or not, why should I pray? Because God really exists just as a power source for me to get stuff from. Isn't that really what the question is saying? Why pray if God knows stuff already? Well, why pray? Well, we talk to God to express our love and dependence on him. We talk to God that our perspective might change, that we might see as he sees. We talk to God because we don't really understand how it all works, we just know he told us to bring our requests. We talk to God because it is not all about getting stuff. It is about bringing ourselves, our heart, our mind, our soul to him. It's through prayer that we yield. It's through prayer that we cry out. It's through prayer that we unload burdens. It's through prayer we stop looking at our circumstances and we begin to see him, and our perspective changes. Prayer is communication with our heavenly Father. Of course he knows what's going to happen and of course he knows what he is going to do. But we don't. We don't even know what we really want. And it's not all about getting stuff from God. And maybe in the asking we will find out what we want. Regardless, we trust him in his will to accomplish what he wants to accomplish. We enter into prayer as communication between a son or a daughter, and their father. Doesn't matter if he knows what's going to happen or not.

Growing in prayer in the name of Jesus

So, first, we see Jesus inviting us in these promises to pray to God as Father. That's huge. Second, and what stands out as really new, we see Jesus inviting us to pray in his name. There is something simple here and something very deep here. By praying in the name of Jesus, we are stating something about who we believe God to be. If I pray in the name of Jesus, I'm not praying according to God's prophet Mohamed. I'm not praying to Mother God. I'm not praying to Krishna. I'm not praying to Saint Francis. All of those prayers indicate a certain belief about God that is contrary to the teaching of Jesus. When we pray in the name of Jesus to God the Father, we show our allegiance to Father and Son. This is what we believe. We show that we have believed in and yielded to the vision of who God is proclaimed by Jesus Christ. He is our Father and he receives prayer in the name of Jesus.

That is the simple basic idea. To pray in the name of Jesus is to make a statement of faith regarding who we believe God to be. The idea goes deeper. To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray according to the nature of Jesus. And this has something to do with our mind and our heart as we come into prayer. If you remember in the prologue in chapter 1, verse 12 and the purpose statement, chapter 20 verse 31, eternal life is not said to come does not come from belief, but to come from belief in the name of Jesus. It's to those who believe in the name of Jesus. That's a way of saying belief in Jesus according to who Jesus has revealed himself to be. Or to say, true belief in who Jesus really is. That's what it's meant by belief in the name of Jesus. Many have claimed belief in Jesus through this Gospel when their belief actually rests in a misconception of who the Messiah or the Prophet is. They believed in their version of Jesus. You can say you believe in Jesus, but if you deny that he is God and man, you don't believe in Jesus. If you deny he is the Word who has always been, you do not believe in Jesus. If you deny that he died in your place as the true sacrifice of atonement and there is no salvation apart from him, if you deny that, you do not believe in Jesus. You are rejecting something essential about his nature. You are not believing in his name as he has revealed it: the "I am." Name is not just the word "Jesus." Jesus is his name. But here, name means, "the nature of Jesus." To believe in his name is to believe in the fundamental truths about who he is.

To pray in the name of Jesus is a similar idea as believing in the name of Jesus. It is not simply a formal way to end a prayer, "...in the name of Jesus. Amen." We do that all the time without thinking about it. What we need to grow into is making a connection between the nature of Jesus and the requests we are making to God. If I'm going to end my prayer with, "In the name of Jesus," I seriously need to be thinking about can I really ask this in the name of Jesus? Do I believe that what I just asked for is in harmony with his nature? Jesus could ask that the Father remove the cup of suffering that was the cross. Jesus could ask that. But at the same time he could not bring himself to ask it if it was against the will of the Father. That was the nature of Jesus. Because of who he is, he added, "not my will but your will be done." And that wasn't just this formula Jesus came up with because that's

the right way to speak to God. That was the authentic expression of his heart. On one level, he did not desire the pain of the cross. Of course, he didn't. But on a deeper level, he desired the glory of God, he desired the salvation of humankind. He desired the strength and courage to carry out the will of God. That is what he truly wanted because that is his true nature. We're trying to pray according to that nature when we pray in the name of Jesus.

And that has an intellectual component. I am thinking as best I can with my mind whether I can honestly ask my request in light of who I know Jesus to be. I am thinking with my mind, can I pray this according to his name? Prayer is not merely an intellectual exercise. Prayer has a heart component. When I consider the wishes of my new heart, "What is it that I truly want?," I begin to find that deep in me I want the glory of God. I want to love God with my obedience. I want the courage, and goodness, and honesty that is Jesus. I want my heart to be in harmony with the name of Jesus.

I have these other wants that come out of my flesh. I have other perspectives that come out of my mind. But when I see who I am becoming in Jesus, I have a new set of desires and perspectives. I have a new vision for what life really is. This abundant life that Jesus spoke about does not come from my fleshly desires and habits and perspectives. I have a lot to learn about new life in him. I can see that in my soul. I need to reject, to put to death, the desires and perspectives and deeds of the flesh. I am learning to turn away from those desires of the flesh and turn towards the desires of the Spirit. This is to pray in the name of Jesus. It's to be walking in the Spirit of Jesus so that what I pray for comes out of my heart relationship with him.

In 15:7 Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you." To pray in the name of Jesus, according to his nature, I need to abide in him and in his word. So it's walking in the Spirit and this continually understanding his Word so that I can have a clear vision of what it means to live for Jesus so that I can pray in his name, according to his nature.

Abiding in Christ makes me into the kind of person who prays in his name. And the person who prays in his name is the kind of person who is able to experience joy and peace from his relationship with God. That's why, when I pray in his name and he answers those prayers, and those prayers bring glory to God, then my joy is made full because I love God. And I love the idea both of God meeting my needs, but also of me successfully producing fruit for him.

Growing in prayer as an act of abiding intertwined with heart and fruit

All three of our tricky issues from chapter 14:12-15 are intertwined. Jesus declared that we will do greater works, you know, greater works than he did. He tells us to pray and ask, and God will do it for us. He says, "If you love me, you will be obedient." It's all connected. Because I love God, I want to be obedient. I want to do these great works. And he said I'm going to do great works. But if I'm going to do the great works God wants me to do, I've got to pray. Because that great work is to love, and I can't love like he loves. So it's all connected.

We can sum up all the truths of abiding that we've been talking about, just to remember. Because it's in this context that we have to understand prayer, that there is a heart of abiding. And it is fundamentally a heart of faith, of belief. It is a heart of love for the Father. It is a heart of humility. And it is a heart of glory. I want to bring glory to the Father. That's our heart. Belief, love, humility, glory.

And that leads us to acts. We want to act for God. And the fundamental act is prayer. That's first. We have to pray to show our dependence on Christ because without him we can do nothing of value. We pray, we're in his Word, we're obeying, and we're witnessing.

That's the acts of abiding coming out of our new heart, and from that we experience the fruit of love, of joy, of peace, of new life.

Let's sum up. Let's conclude the three basics of prayer. Do we understand prayer? Does a child understand communication before he starts to talk? No. Jesus invites us to pray before we

understand prayer so remember the three basics. First, prayer is a relational act of communication by which you express your love for and dependence on God your Father. That's what prayer is. Second, God your Father invites you to come into his presence no matter where you are in maturity or understanding. Come, come freely because you are in Jesus. If you have guilt, come, confess and be forgiven. If you have sorrow, come, be comforted. If you are confused, come, learn from him. If you have joy, come and worship. Come enjoy him. Just come. And third, prayer is something you grow into. You don't have to understand it to do it. You're going to grow into prayer over your life as you walk with God and as you keep talking to him.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 2:16-33. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. How would you imagine the present emotional state of the disciples as Jesus is speaking with them? How do you imagine potential variation in their emotional states as the next 24 hours proceed through arrest, trial, and crucifixion and then through resurrection, appearance and ascension?
3. How might the metaphor of joy benefit the disciples through the immediate leaving of Jesus (death) and the future leaving of Jesus (ascension)?
4. Can you relate to the over-estimation the disciples make to their understanding of Jesus' teaching? When have you thought you understood only to later realize you barely understood or misunderstood? How are you doing now? Do you feel like you have life with Jesus all figured out?
5. Does Jesus' promise to answer prayer in 23-28 bother you at all, intellectually or emotionally, or not? Explain.
6. What is the difference between a magical/controlling view of prayer and a relational view of prayer? What does it mean to take God's name in vain?
7. What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus and how is this connected to the abide language in chapter 15?
8. Do all of your prayers get answered? In light of the context here surrounding Jesus' promise, how would you explain the reality that not all your prayers get answered?
9. Do you need to be able to answer question 8? Could the answer be, "I am not quite sure. I think I need to keep praying and trust God that I will grow into the answer"?