

Prayer

Lift our hearts in praise, Almighty God, our Lord and Saviour. Fill our hearts with a desire to praise You in the midst of everything that happens to us; may we sing Your praises, speak of Your greatness, and do all our work as if for You. May everything we do be a worthy sacrifice of praise, Lord God: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Television

Pray for those who present news on television, and the journalists and other staff who work for news agencies. The things they say influence many people for good or for ill.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the rule of law and the security it gives people
- Pray for young people in prison and for those who seek to help them
- Pray about how children are taught about our world and God's creation

Meditation

I trust You, Lord Jesus Christ, to

Maintain and sustain my life, my health,
My mental capacity and family life.

Search my soul and root out sin
From every corner of my being.

Guide me through life's troubles and trials,
And all its arguments and division.

Judge the merits of what I do and say,
And tell me what is good or bad.

Challenge me to listen to Your Word
To the Spirit and the voice of prophets.

Give me work to do which is valuable
In the service of others and the Kingdom.

Comfort my soul when life is hard,
And lift my heart to praise Your name.

I trust You, Lord Jesus Christ; forever.

Bible Study - 1 John 5:14-17

¹⁴ This is the assurance we have in Him: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us; ¹⁵ and if we know that he hears us, whatever we should ask, we know that what we have asked of Him is ours. ¹⁶ If anyone sees a fellow believer commit a sin that is not deadly, he should pray and God will give him life; that is, for those whose sin is not deadly. There is a sin that leads to death; I am not saying that he should pray about that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not deadly.

Review

Throughout John's letter he has been forthright in speech, and towards the end, we should not expect anything less than a powerful message about God's love and the power of sin. Our reading contains just this. In the space of a few verses, John speaks about the believers' marvellous assurance that God will hear prayer and grant requests; yet he continues with some extraordinary comments about helping a fellow believer who sins. Our breath is taken away by the manner in which John refers, almost as an aside, to two types of sin; sin that is deadly and that is not!

To begin with, John's language is of assurance and the power of God to answer prayer (5:14,15). He says that the believer may ask God for 'anything' and have assurance that God hears the prayer and answers it. This is a message that many people find difficult because it seems to fly in the face of personal experience, for most people have asked the Lord for blessings that have not been received. However, we will only be disappointed if our prayers are focussed on our own needs (however worthy or pressing), and not immersed in the will of God the Father. When Jesus said 'ask and it will be given you ...' (Matt 7:7), He was speaking primarily about people's quest for the Kingdom of God not their quest for personal needs (or the good life on earth)! The same is true of John's comment here about praying to God for 'whatever we should ask' (5:15); he was talking about receiving eternal life (see 5:11,12), and for John, this was the most important thing in the world.

In the next verse (5:16), we realise why John was speaking about praying and knowing that God hears our prayers. His mind was focussed on the same problem that has dominated the whole of his letter, which is how the Christian community deals with the sin committed by Christians. Remember that in chapters 1 and 2, John said that everyone sins, but appealed to believers to do all in their power to stop sinning (2:1). He added that if anyone did sin, they had 'an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous' (2:1). This was all important, but it did not deal with the pressing problem of what people should do if they saw others sinning. John's strong advice was to pray for that person, and we who read this would be advised to hear this, and avoid the gossip, criticism and condemnation of others that can easily consume us in such circumstances.

Now we must look at the condition John adds to this prayer, which is that if the sin concerned is deadly, there is not much point in praying about it. Prayer is only worthwhile if the sin is not deadly. But what does John mean by 'deadly'? Does he mean sins that end in the death of other people, sins that defiantly reject God's commands, or some other particularly horrifying sins? In fact, none of these are likely. I suggest that John, as a disciple of Jesus, remembered when Jesus talked about the 'sin against the Holy Spirit' (Matt 12:25-32), when addressing the Pharisees. They were people to whom the blessings of God had been given and who had all the evidence of the love of God before them, and yet they chose to ignore the work of God and pursue their own religious objectives. Jesus said that the sin of rejecting good and choosing blatant evil was 'unforgivable', and it is likely that this type of sin is what John called 'deadly'. It is not something we should presume that we will come across very often, if ever.

If we can turn away from the potential horror of what such a sin might mean, and avoid the continuing debates about it within the church, then there is a good and positive message here in what John says. His words strongly encourage us to pray for one another and offer to the Lord those sins we see in each other that might otherwise be a source of gossip, friction and division. This is positive and helpful advice, which would help most Christian fellowships to grow in grace and love.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss your own reaction to John's words about prayer in verses 14 and 15. To what extent are John's words true to life?
2. How do people in the church react when they see the sins that other people commit within the church? What sins do we see within our own church?
3. Is it possible to take John's advice here, and how can this be put into effect?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

John speaks here with great personal conviction, and towards the end of his letter says 'we know ... we know ...' over and over again, as if to emphasise the importance of what he is saying and appealing to his readers to accept what he has to say. I find it amazing that this advice is not better known, or quoted from scripture on those occasions when people start to gossip about the 'not so good' things they see other people do in the church. Our reaction when seeing other people in difficulty should surely be to remember that we too are saved sinners, and do all in our power to help others by praying for them; especially if they are not fully aware that what they do is sinful.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Reflect on the occasions when you have seen people do what you consider to be wrong. What have you done? Are you aware of anything you do that others may perceive to be wrong? What would*

you expect them to do or say? Think about this in every way possible, because it may help you in Christian fellowship.

- *Pray for people who have come into the church relatively recently and have difficulty coming to terms with issues of morality which are unfamiliar to them, Pray that they will be blessed and helped by the loving prayers of others in Christian fellowship.*

Final Prayer

All praise and glory is Yours, Jesus Christ my Saviour. You lift my heart and soul, You give me visions of peace and security, You give my life its hope and joy, You are the guard around me which never fails. All praise and glory is Yours, Jesus Christ my Saviour: AMEN
