

Prayer.

Text: John 16:23-24

Suggested Hymns:

420, 425, 424, 840, 426

1) How it is to be offered

2) What its great promise is

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 16:23–24, *Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Look where you will, either through the Bible or through the history of the Church, and you will see that the man of prayer is the man of power. It is not intellect alone that is wanted, or culture or social position or money, to make a Christian an efficient witness and worker for the Master, but prayer, fervent unrelenting prayer must also be added. That is what is needed.

Christians do not pray enough. Many are negligent, slow, and slothful, neither praying for themselves nor for others, thus disregarding God's plain command.

God has taught us *“that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.”*¹ God says *“Watch therefore, and pray always.”*² The Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle to write, *“continuing steadfastly in prayer.”*³

If these positive precepts of the Bible are disregarded, how can a blessing be expected? And how can a Christian escape the temptations of the devil, the world, and his own flesh?

The example of our Saviour puts such prayerless people to shame. It is written of Jesus in Mark 1:35, ³⁵ *Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*

On another occasion Jesus went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God.⁴ Have any of us, following the example of our Master, even once risen up a long while before day and prayed in a solitary place?

The person who prays is not only mighty, but also calm and contented, the most peaceful amidst the trials and sorrows of earth, because he sees the hand of God in each event of his life and walks in closeness of fellowship with his heavenly Father.

All benedictions, all strength, all safety, all consolation, all consecration, are found in the frequent, fervent, and secret prayer of faith.

From creation until now the happy and honoured servants of the Lord have been, and are, and always will be, people of prayer. Today our text teaches us how prayer is to be offered and what its great promise is. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How Prayer Is To Be Offered

Holy Scripture alone can instruct us how to offer a God-pleasing prayer. The person who desires to know how to pray must study the subject in the light of God's Word and not in the light of a sin-corrupted imagination.

Firstly, prayer is to be offered in Jesus' name. Jesus Himself has taught us how to pray when He says in our text: "*Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*" Here prayer is called asking. Elsewhere it is defined as calling.

Speaking with God, either by word of mouth or wish of heart, is praying, for prayer offered by the heart is heard every bit as well as that of the lips. In fact, true, earnest, sincere prayer always comes from the heart; if not, it lacks sincerity and savour.

Secondly, if you want to be heard, your prayer must be addressed, not to the Virgin Mary, not to a departed saint, or to a supreme being, or to the great Architect of the Universe, or to some other imaginary god, but to the Father, to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Father has begotten the Son from eternity. In Him and through Him He has entered the relationship of Father to us. That is why Jesus, teaching His

disciples how to pray, told them to address God as “Father,” ***“Our Father who art in heaven.”***

In Christ, God has become our Father and we His children. This has been revealed to us by the Son. ***“These things,”*** says Jesus, ***“I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.”***⁵

Jesus has plainly told us of the Father’s love and mercy and long-suffering towards sinners. He is the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. Since He has power to do whatever He desires, a prayer addressed to Him can be fulfilled even if it seems impossible to man.

God, who created the universe out of nothing simply by His word, who created man out of the dust of the ground, who wrought the great miracle of redemption, is able to fulfil our petitions. Never doubt God the Father’s ability to answer prayer. Let prayer, then, be offered to Him, the Almighty, the one true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, note the Saviour’s words, ***“whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.”*** Prayer is to be said in the name of Jesus Christ, for through Him alone the Father has become our Father. Jesus says in our text, ***“²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full,”*** and, ***“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”***⁶

All other prayers, no matter how touching, how pleading, how stirring they may be, if not offered in Jesus’ name, are not true, God-pleasing prayers, but are unscriptural and sinful.

Every prayer not conforming to the standard and rule laid down in Scripture is wrong. Such prayers never reach the Throne of Grace, are never heard nor answered; but those spoken in Jesus’ name reach their destination and fulfil their object, because through Christ we are made fit to seek God’s face.

It is Christ who mediates and who intercedes for us. His name is that of the Only Begotten, the dearly beloved Son of God. And this name is pleasing to the Father, for it tells Him of the great sacrifice offered for the children of men, a sacrifice with which He was, and is, well pleased.

This name calls forth the Father's mercy and love, as Jesus says, "***The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.***"⁷ Here we have the reason why the Father loves us, because we believe that Jesus came forth from God.

Sent from God on that all-important mission to redeem the world, Jesus came down from the realms of eternal glory into this world of sin and suffered, died, rose again, and ascended into heaven. For this reason the Father loves us that the Son, in obedience to His Father's command, willingly and of His own accord, came and atoned for the sin of the world. In view of this atonement, appropriated by our faith, God is our loving Father.

Another reason for praying in Jesus' name is His intercession for those that are washed and cleansed by His blood. The Christian daily sins, he is and remains a sinner until death. Every believer is well aware of this part and feels the need of forgiveness every day, every hour.

We are happy to know that Jesus pleads for us in behalf of our daily shortcomings, as John writes, "***My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ²And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.***"⁸ Jesus is our great High Priest, who daily holds up to God His sacrifice for sin. Prayer in His name assures us of God's favour and blessing.

The third instruction as to how we should pray is that we must pray in true faith. Every prayer without faith is displeasing to God; it is nothing less than blasphemy. Those who do not believe, cannot pray. They may utter words, may say, for example, the Lord's Prayer; they may pay attention when prayer is offered during services, but, having no faith, they are sinning instead of praying.

There are many, many prayers said that are useless, that do not deserve the name of prayer. There is the prayer of the ungodly person. He is suddenly hurled into calamity. He prays — a horrid prayer! There is the atheist, the agnostic, the unbeliever — on the point of death — praying without faith. There maybe even be a person in church, a hypocrite and Pharisee, imitating the Christian — shameful mimicry! How can God be pleased with such people?

How can God answer their supplications if they do not believe in His existence, in His ability to help, and in His grace and love revealed in His Son?

Surely, God cannot hear their prayer, for it is written, ***“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”***⁹

The whole tenor of today’s Gospel¹⁰ shows that faith is necessary for prayer. Or, turning to other Scriptures, we read, ***“Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”***¹¹ And ***“Let him ask in faith, with no doubting.”***¹² And in Mark 11:24, ²⁴ ***Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.***

This faith must centre in Christ, in whose name the prayer is offered, for there is salvation in none other, neither is there any other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Such faith firmly holds to Christ and His sin offering; such faith knows that God will not deny prayer; and such faith is pleasing to God — not indeed on account of itself, but on account of the object which it apprehends, which is Christ Jesus.

The believer in Christ will naturally approach God humbly, reverently, and meekly, as an obedient child to whom much has been forgiven, as a loving child who relies on God’s ineffable love; as a lowly child who knows the humility and lowliness of his Saviour.

Prayers offered by such people will be answered when addressed to the Father of all mercies in the name of His dear Son, Jesus Christ, and said in true faith. For such prayers the Bible has surprising promises.

2. What Its Great Promise Is

Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Here you have the promise of your God. ***“Whatever,”*** as many things as you ask for, He will give them.

You have the promise of the Holy Spirit. We read in Luke 11:9–13, ⁹ ***“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.***

¹¹ ***If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?***

¹³ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

As a father who truly deserves the name does not refuse his child anything necessary to sustain life, so your Father in heaven promises to hear you in spiritual distress. He will send the Holy Spirit to everyone that asks Him; and this Spirit gives us the assurance that we are the children of God.

Prayer has the promise of being heard in bodily distress. God says, ***“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.”¹³*** The words preceding our text tell us that the disciples would have to suffer many things, but they are told to go to Christ in prayer. ***“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”¹⁴***

In Christ there is peace even though tribulation be our lot in the world. Life is like a ruffled sea, where storms and calms interchange. Tempests sweep the sea, thunders roll along the horizon; lightning cuts the air; darkness spreads her wings; the deep roars; adversity, affliction, sorrow, pain, distress, worry, care, turmoil, sickness, stir up the waves among the voyagers. But here is God’s beautiful promise of prayer; assistance and help from on high.

And oh, how faithfully God hears the prayer of His children! ***“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”¹⁵*** Go, look over the pages of your Bible, and the result will be: You will find that all great and godly men, who have accomplished much, were men of prayer.

Think of Solomon. He was only a youth when he ascended to the glorious throne of his father David. He prayed earnestly for wisdom and prudence to rule right and justly. The prayer was granted. And God added to Solomon’s unsurpassed wisdom, - wealth and honour, the like of which has never been bestowed upon any mortal.

The first thing that is stated of Paul after his conversion is ***“Behold, he is praying!”¹⁶*** And he laboured more abundantly than all the other Apostles.

Or turn to the pages of history and see that the men who achieved the most in the Church were men of prayer. Think of Luther! Moreover, miracles have

been wrought by prayer time and again, as the Scriptures and the history of the Church testify.

Perhaps there are some who think: *“God never hears my prayer. I can ask Him ever so often, and He never answers.”* But, perhaps you ask for foolish or hurtful things or prescribe the time and manner when and how God should help; or perhaps under the weight of tribulation you do not see the helping hand of God.

There are many things that hinder prayer. See whether you pray to the true God and in the name of Jesus Christ. See whether you have true faith, *“he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*¹⁷

Living in known and intentional sin hinders prayer. We read in Psalm 66:18, ¹⁸ *If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.* And in Proverbs 15:29, ²⁹ *The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.*

The love of pleasure will choke the avenues of the heart so that God’s grace cannot reach you. *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures”* we read in James 4:3.

Pride puts up an effectual barrier in the way of God’s mercies. We read in Job, *“There they cry out, but He does not answer, Because of the pride of evil men. ¹³ Surely God will not listen to empty talk, Nor will the Almighty regard it.”*¹⁸ And the Psalmist writes, *“Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar.”*¹⁹

An unforgiving spirit kills prayer. We read in Mark 11:25–26, ²⁵ *“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”*

Contempt and neglect of God’s Word will make prayer both worthless and offensive to the Holy One who gave the Word. It is written in Proverbs 28:9, ⁹ *One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.*

Remember that God hears the prayers of all Christians and answers in His own way and at His own time.²⁰ When praying for spiritual blessings, necessary for our salvation, we should ask unconditionally, but when praying for other gifts, we should ask that God grant them to us if it be His will.²¹

Sadly there are many so-called Christians who never pray. They rise in the morning without thanking God who permitted them to see the new day. They sit at the table without saying grace. They go to bed at night without praying. Thus day after day, week after week, month after month passes, and these people never dream of praying.

Then an accident befalls them, sickness visits them. Then they try to pray, but they cannot. That heart of theirs is alienated from God. God is a stranger, with whom they cannot converse.

Therefore make a covenant in your heart to pray. To be happy, pray! To be content, pray! To be fearless, pray! To be blessed, pray! To die saved, pray!

Let us heed the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, ***16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.***

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,²²

O Thou, by whom we come to God,
The life, the truth, the way,
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod:
Lord, teach us how to pray. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 18:1

² Luke 21:36

³ Romans 12:12

⁴ Luke 6:12

⁵ John 16:25

⁶ John 14:13

⁷ John 16:27

⁸ 1 John 2:1–2

⁹ Hebrews 11:6

¹⁰ John 16:23–30

¹¹ Matthew 21:22

-
- ¹² James 1:6
¹³ Psalm 50:15
¹⁴ John 16:33
¹⁵ James 5:16
¹⁶ Acts 9:11
¹⁷ Hebrews 11:6
¹⁸ Job 35:12–13
¹⁹ Psalm 138:6
²⁰ *Luther's Small Catechism*, CPH, Q200
²¹ *Luther's Small Catechism*, Koehler Q205
²² Hymn 424