

SADNESS WILL TURN TO JOY

John 16:16-33

Have you ever wished your prayer life would have come with an instruction manual? I know I have. If you have felt the same way you will be glad you came this morning. Because we are going to give you the official Village Church prayer manual.

To begin with, we want to encourage you to be simple and direct when praying to God, both in public and private prayer. The genuine expression of sincere plain talk before the Lord means far more to Him than the insincere words of someone who is more concerned about trying to impress others with a lot of fancy-sounding religious expressions than they are about communicating their feelings to God. On the contrary, God likes straight talk from the heart. And when we call on God in our private prayer during our quiet time alone with Him, He wants the same thing. **Any insincere formality or elaborateness in our petitions is an offense to God.**¹ Any attempt on our part to impress God with insincere expressions using language that we think will impress God will be offensive to Him.

Jesus outlined some important principles in Matthew 6:5-15 NAS. We will summarize them here.

Pray audibly. You need not lift your voice so you can be heard a block away, but it is better to pray not merely in your thoughts but also with words. Saying our prayers out loud gives us a sense of actually having a conversation with God. We suggest you try it.²

Be honest in your private prayer. Do not express any want that you do not feel. Do not confess any fault that you do not mean to give up. Do not try to hide anything from God that needs to be confessed and forgiven. Remember that He knows everything you have done and are thinking.³ He knows everything and desires that you confess your sin for your own good. Without confession and asking forgiveness, the guilt of unresolved sin will grow within you like an untreated cancer. Confession and repentance should bring immediate cleansing from those sins. That is God's promise, and if for some reason that guilt remains you can be certain it is coming from Satan and not from God. Ask then that God intervene to cast out Satan and free you from His crippling influence.

Leviticus 5:5 (MSG)

¹ James Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), WORDsearch. CROSS e-book, under: "Prayer". Paraphrased from the work of Walter Rauschenbusch.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

"When you are guilty, immediately confess the sin that you've committed."

Pray earnestly. The words need not be loud, but the desire should be intense. *"The fervent, energetic prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* No half-hearted, drowsy requests of God will be sufficient.⁴

Pray always with special reference to the needs of the day and the hour—the warfare to be waged, the temptations to be resisted, the work to be done, the sorrow to be borne. Put your life into your prayer, and let it be the most real and the most immediate business of your life.⁵

Beginning in verse 16 of John chapter 16, Jesus begins to speak to His apostles regarding what is about to happen to them. There would be some difficult days ahead involving Jesus' departure from them, but those days would then be followed by a time when they would again see Jesus and experience **joy** and **peace**. Nevertheless they were depressed and confused about what was to happen to their Master as well as themselves, much the same as we would probably be today if we found ourselves in a similar situation. But Jesus assured them that the sorrow they were about to endure would not last and that it would be followed by a joy that they would feel forever.⁶

John 16:16-22 NAS:

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.*

Now the apostles were getting more than a little confused. What does it all mean? Well

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rom. 6:9-10; Luke 24:33-52; Heb. 7:24-25.

let us go back to verse 16 and see if we can figure this out.

John 16:16-18 NAS:

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."*

Now it is understandable that the apostles did not understand Jesus' meaning when He said these things. They may have thought this was some kind of a riddle that Jesus was using to test them. These words would only become clear to them after Jesus rose from the dead and had spent several weeks with them before He ascended into Heaven to be with the Father.

John 16:19-22 NAS:

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."*

Jesus makes a very interesting association between what they will experience and a woman going through childbirth. If you are a mom you understand first hand what childbirth is like. If you are a dad and have gone through the birth of a child with your wife, you are aware, and in some cases acutely aware that it is not a pleasant time for a woman. But when the baby is finally born, that same baby that caused all that pain becomes the source of greatest joy. The pain can quickly be forgotten as the mother holds that little baby and feels the eternal bond that will always exist between a mother and child. That is exactly what will happen to the apostles. The suffering and pain they will have to endure as the result of Jesus' death will soon be transformed to joy by the power of the Holy Spirit as Jesus overcomes death and rises from His grave. Just imagine the sense of elation and pure joy that they would feel when they saw their beloved Teacher again after such a brutal slaying.

Now Jesus can do the very same thing in the lives of every Christian. He can change your sorrow into joy. No matter how bad things may be or may seem to be, Jesus can

turn that sorrow into joy. Just in case you do not remember a promise He repeats over and over again in the Scriptures, perhaps it is time for a quick review:

- *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13 ESV).*
- *If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it (John 14:14 ESV).*
- *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, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you (John 15:16 NAS).*
- *In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf (John 16:23,24,26 ESV).*

Do you want your sorrow to turn to joy? Then ask. Pray to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit asking for joy to reflect to other people the power, grace, and mercy of God. Ask it in the name of Jesus for His glory. God has said, "The joy of the LORD is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10)

Deuteronomy 23:5 NAS:

"Nevertheless, the Lord your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the Lord your God loves you.

Nehemiah 13:2 NAS:

Because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.

Most of us are familiar with the story of **Job**. God took Him from the depths of despair to joy and riches. What about other Bible figures? How many could you name where God provided the same blessing taking the person from sorrow to joy?

Getting back to John 16:16 we see that Jesus has told the apostles that in **a little while** they will not see Him; then in **a little while** they would see Him. Now if I were an apostle I would have had a few questions here: "Which is it? Will I see You or not see You, or both?" and "What could it all mean?" Now remember, Jesus had told these same apostles prior to this that He would rise from the grave on the third day. Perhaps they just could not connect the dots.

It is not as difficult for us to connect the dots because we have the New Testament to study. Perhaps some of you have already understood that Jesus was referring to His own death and resurrection. When Jesus was crucified and buried they would not see Him for a little while, but when He rose from the dead they would also see Him for a little while longer. They would also “see Him” when the Holy Spirit came to dwell within them. They would exchange physical sight for spiritual insight. Today, believers “see Jesus” (Hebrews 2:9) through the Holy Spirit’s teaching of the Word of God. Then they would yet see Jesus again when they died and went to Heaven.⁷

Jesus also was referring of course to His return to His Father in Heaven. But rather than asking Jesus to explain what He meant, the apostles began asking one another what Jesus meant. They probably could have received a quicker and more accurate answer if they had taken it directly to Jesus. You see Jesus knows that we cannot do life the way He would like to see us do life by human wisdom alone. That is why He sent the Holy Spirit to serve as our counselor and teacher. Do you think the Church could have survived through all these centuries without the power of the Holy Spirit?

The world does not want anything to do with the one and only true God and those who believe in and follow His commands. Late night talk shows ridicule Christians. Politicians and judges have thrown God out of government, the courtroom, and the schools. Corporations speak of diversity and the right of each human to be who they are, no matter the extent of their violation of God’s commands. The true god of this world is the almighty dollar and all the things people believe that dollar will bring them so they can be happy. But when people make money their god it almost always ultimately brings unhappiness instead of the happiness people believed it would bring. *“For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows”* (1 Timothy 6:10 NLT).

Where can we find joy in times of pressure and uncertainty? First, by acknowledging that everything we do is for God and everything we possess is God’s. Jesus is Lord, and everything we have and do is committed totally into His hands.

To know that Jesus lives, that He hears, and that He responds as we speak to Him, should bring us joy no matter what pressures come at us.⁸

John 16:23-33 NAS:

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.*

⁷ Richards, Larry; Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Teacher's Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987, S. 747.

⁸ Ibid.

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."*

Again Jesus speaks about praying in His name. We have already seen that praying in Jesus' name refers to one who is abiding in Him, which means sharing His life and obeying Him. You cannot simply add His name on to the end of a request and expect to get what you ask. That is not how He meant it to work. Remember that these apostles had never prayed to the Father in the name of Jesus and needed to be taught exactly what that meant. Today we pray to God the Father in Jesus' name because the New Testament has given us specific instructions about that. Some people have asked me if they should pray to Jesus and the Holy Spirit as well. There is certainly nothing in the Bible saying you should not do that. In fact you may be led by the Holy Spirit to direct your prayer to either Jesus or the Holy Spirit, and you can be sure, no matter who you direct it to, it is the same God for the Bible refers to "God the Father, God the Son," and "God the Holy Spirit."

In verse 23 the phrase "in that day" means after His Ascension. Since Jesus would not be with them physically any more the apostles would not be able to ask Him questions. But the Holy Spirit would help them as Jesus had promised in John 16:13-15. "Truly, truly" in verse 23 introduces us to an important statement.⁹

The apostles would now be Jesus' ambassadors in the world and therefore were being given the right to ask the Father for whatever they needed to accomplish His will. The

⁹ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:329.

words, “in My name” that is “in Jesus’ name,” are not a magical formula which enable the user to get what they might want. Instead those words would connect their requests to the work of the Son in doing His **Father’s** will. Those words indicate a relationship between the petitioner and God the Father, a relationship that comes through God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

Do you remember what Jesus told them in John 14:13-14 and 15:16?

John 14:13-14 NAS:

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.”*

John 15:16 NAS:

“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.”

Then Jesus says in this passage in John 16:23-27 NLT:

²³ *At that time you won’t need to ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, you will ask the Father directly, and he will grant your request because you use my name.*

²⁴ *You haven’t done this before. Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy.*

²⁵ *“I have spoken of these matters in figures of speech, but soon I will stop speaking figuratively and will tell you plainly all about the Father.*

²⁶ *Then you will ask in my name. I’m not saying I will ask the Father on your behalf,*

²⁷ *for the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God.*

Verses 23 and 24 speak of answered prayer bringing **abundant joy**. And why does it bring abundant joy? **Because it means that God is at work in His people.** Abundant means “plentiful, having more than is needed.” So if you have “abundant joy” it means that you will never lose that joy. You will always have more than is needed so that you will be able to experience joy no matter what kind of circumstances come against you. You will be able to experience joy even when you are suffering. Do you fully grasp what is being said here? We no longer have to worry about anything no matter how bad things may seem. You can always feel a sense of joy if you are a believer and have the Holy Spirit living within you. You will remember that we referred earlier to the phrase “In that day” (23), or as it appears here in the NLT translation, “At that time.” The time that is referred to here will occur when the full implications of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension are understood after they occur. Then the apostles will clearly understand and

comprehend what Jesus was talking about, and they will be able to teach others that same truth.

In this passage Jesus is trying to teach His apostles that God is not hard to get along with. In fact He loves to answer prayers. Jesus is saying in effect, "If you think that I have to ask the Father to be good to you and to be generous to you, you are wrong. The Father Himself loves you. I don't have to ask Him to love you. He loves you already. The Father isn't hard to get along with. He loves you and that is the reason He will answer your prayers that you pray in My name." Today God wants to hear and answer prayers, but they must come from the heart of one who loves Christ, and who is in fellowship with Him, obeying Him.¹⁰

Jesus is telling His apostles that prayer is the essential ingredient to experiencing a never-ending joy. An essential ingredient of prayer will be to present their prayers in the name of Jesus, whom they are replacing as God's physically present ambassadors to the world, in order for God's will to be presented to and accomplished in the world. This is a monumental responsibility and we hope you all understand this reality clearly. You have been given the responsibility as believers to represent Jesus in this world on behalf of God. You are to be what Jesus was for God when He was on the earth. Are you up to it?

It should also be noted that God was willing to receive them before His throne of grace because He loved them. They had accepted, loved, and trusted in His Son and for those who show the same love for Jesus, they too will receive the love of God, which includes mercy and grace to receive salvation and everlasting life.¹¹

Do you think Jesus would ask God for a new Cadillac convertible? Do you think He would ask His Father for a chest full of gold coins? Or perhaps to have the best-looking body in Jerusalem? Well, if you know that Jesus would not ask these things of the Father, then neither should you. You see piggybacking the name of Jesus on your prayer is not going to do any good if you do not pray with the same motive that Jesus prayed. Jesus would never pray for anything if it were not in the will of God for the world. Now you may be asking, "*How do I know what is in God's will?*" Well there are two ways. First through what is taught in the Bible. It is a futile prayer, for instance, to ask about whether you should have an affair with someone to whom you are attracted when the Bible clearly states in several places, "*you shall not commit adultery*" and that all sexual intercourse outside of marriage is a sin. Or you may wonder whether to pray for someone's salvation. Yet the Bible teaches us that God wants everyone to come to salvation (1 Timothy 2:4) so you know that you should pray fervently for that person. But then there are many things which may not fall into a sin category or which are not explicitly covered in the Bible; for instance which job to take or what house to move into. In those areas, the Holy Spirit can lead you about how to pray in God's will. Scripture tells us to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). That includes asking for wisdom about how to pray about a matter. Scripture

¹⁰ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, under: "Chapter 16".

¹¹ Pfeiffer, Charles F.; Harrison, Everett Falconer: *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, S. Jn 16:25.

also tells us that we do not know how to pray about some things but that the Holy Spirit prays for us with “*groanings too deep for words*” (Romans 8:26).

So you should not pray for anything that you know is outside the specific will of God for His creation as announced in the Bible. Jesus was telling them all this so that they would know that after His resurrection they were to address God in the name of Jesus because they were now representing Jesus on behalf of God in this world.

You need to recognize this reality every time you pray in Jesus’ name. If you would like to ask God for something you know is just for you, do not attach Jesus’ name to it because in effect you are trying to sneak something by God by telling Him that this is something Jesus would ask Him for. So be straight up with God. We do not see any evidence in the Scripture where He would object to your having a new dress or a new suit for your son’s or daughter’s graduation. Then you can just say: “Lord, would you please in your goodness provide me a new dress or suit? Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.” I would not, however, suggest you pray that prayer if you have bought five new suits or dresses over the last six months. You might just find that God would send you something else. Remember, He loves you and wants to do good things for you. Very often, however, He will not answer your prayer because what you have prayed for is either not in His will or He knows it will not be good for you even though you think the opposite to be true.

But the point we want you to write on your hearts and minds is that after the resurrection and Jesus’ ascension to Heaven the apostles will be expected to pray in Jesus’ name because He will no longer be there to serve them and they will have replaced Him as the servants of God on earth.

“In John 16:25–27, Jesus explained that there would be a new situation because of His resurrection and ascension, and because of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He would no longer speak to them in terms that demanded spiritual insight for their understanding. He would speak to them plainly and reveal the Father to them. There in the Upper Room, He had used a number of symbolic images to get His message across: the washing of their feet, the Father’s house, the vine and branches, and the birth of a baby. In the days that followed, these images would become clearer to the disciples as they would be taught by the Spirit of God.”¹²

“The purpose of Bible study is not simply to understand profound truths, but to get to know the Father better. If our reading and Bible study fall short of this, all of that knowledge will not do us much good.”¹³

Now let us try to pull this all together with a closing story:

“Three ministers were talking about prayer in general and the appropriate and effective positions for prayer. As they were talking,

¹² Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 16:23.

¹³ Ibid.

a telephone repairman was working on the phone system in the background. One minister shared that he felt the key was in the hands. He always held his hands together and pointed them upward as a form of symbolic worship. The second suggested that real prayer was conducted on your knees. The third suggested that they both had it wrong—the only position worth its salt was to pray while stretched out flat on your face.

“By this time the phone man couldn't stay out of the conversation any longer. He interjected: "I found that the most powerful prayer I ever prayed was while I was dangling upside down by my heels from a power pole forty feet above the ground."¹⁴

No matter what position you are in when you pray, make sure the prayer comes from your heart and is, to the best of your knowledge, in line with God's will and then you will experience wonderful answers to your prayers and even more importantly you will experience great joy and come into a deeper understanding of God Himself.

¹⁴ James Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, under: "Prayer".