

# Time to Pray



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# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

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*Topics subject to change without notice*

## **APRIL 6 – TAKE TIME TO PRAY**

One of our greatest blessings and privileges is the ability to speak directly to God. To faithful Christians God's ear is available at any time. We cannot afford to lose sight of this marvelous gift and privilege.

## **APRIL 13 – THE PRAYER LIFE OF JESUS**

Though Jesus was the Son of God, He spent much time every day privately praying to the Father about the important matters of life. If the Lord Jesus needed time with the Father, don't we also need to pray regularly?

## **APRIL 20 – THE POWER OF PRAYER**

Believing in God means that my prayers matter! We should believe God will answer when we ask Him and will act in ways He would not have acted if we had not prayed. God can do great things when the faithful pray.

## **APRIL 27 – WILL GOD HEAR?**

Will God hear my prayers? Does God care? It's important to know when God will hear us and when He will not hear. God cares about all people but listens to those who are faithful and obedient to His will.

## Take Time to Pray

Private prayer alone with God is certainly the one of the most important spiritual activities of any Christian. The essence of prayer is simply communicating to God your hearts and minds, speaking with humility and openness to the One that you love and the One who loves you and already knows all about you. Humble, fervent prayer to our Father and Creator is one the Christian's greatest needs and greatest privileges. People are at their best when they get on their knees before God. They see the awesome glory of God and the blessing of approaching Him.

Prayer, by its very nature, is an act of faith in God our Father. Prayer acknowledges not only His existence but also His care for us as His children. We must never let busy lives keep us from drawing close to the throne of grace and having fellowship with our Father in heaven. Faithful, loving Christians pray daily and often. Weak Christians may go days, even weeks, without prayer. When was the last time you spent more than ten minutes in prayer? When was the last time you got alone with God on your knees and earnestly called out to Him?

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Ephesians 3 verses 14 to 19. And there Paul talks about a magnificent prayer wanting love to be at our hearts.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

What a marvelous prayer Paul prayed. And I hope that we can have that knowledge of God's love. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that You have loved us so much. Help us to have that great love rooted and grounded in our hearts. And Father may we always do Your will to show our love to You. In Jesus name, Amen.

The simple statement, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), seems to be impossible. No one can pray twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Paul isn't saying this but is encouraging saints to never stop praying. One can go days without even saying one meaningful prayer. The Lord God wants to hear from us and draw close to us. Should we stop praying, we're denying God a time of our fellowship. Jesus made an active prayer life a priority; and He spent much time alone with God. "Jesus would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." And we should make prayer our priority.

No matter how busy we are, we must never be too busy to pray to the Father in heaven. We need Him, and He wants to hear from us. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:7 to 8, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." Prayer time is never wasted; it gives us the strength and confidence to face busy and hectic lives. Prayer time keeps us from anxiety and worry, "casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5 verse 7).

Daniel would rather spend a night in the lion's den than cease praying to the Father in heaven. We too should make our prayers a priority! We should have regular prayer times and spontaneous prayer times when we are in need. There's simply no substitute for prayer in our spiritual lives.

To pray effectively, first prepare. Focusing on God before we pray sets our hearts in the right direction. The Lord Jesus admonished the apostles, "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter

into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26 verse 41). We mustn't forget, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. (because) Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5 and verse 8). And each of us will face challenges to our faith. A morning prayer prepares us for the day's challenges. Connecting each day with God helps us to remain devoted to Him.

How we think matters, so let's focus on God continually. Paul said in Romans 12 verse 2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." A morning prayer and Scripture reading renews our minds, so that we can meet the challenges and we can prove in our lives what the will of God is. Preparing for spiritual tests keeps us from being surprised by others who don't share our faith. Preparing helps us to know how to respond to temptations. Preparing helps us to stand strong!

To pray effectively, second, let's pause. We used to hear people say, "Before you do something you'll regret, count to ten!" Well we must be careful never to act before we think. Pausing gives us time to think about what we ought to do. It gives us time to ask, "What would Jesus do?" or "What does the Bible say about this?" Proverbs 15 verse 28 reminds us that, "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things."

We've all said cruel and hateful words without thinking, only to regret what we have said. Reacting to anger with anger never helps a situation. James 1:19 to 20 says, "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." When Peter was faced with the crowd coming to arrest Jesus, he drew a sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus (John 18 verses 10 to 11). And Jesus told Peter to put up your sword; Peter was interfering with the cup Jesus was to drink, and His death on the cross (Matthew 26 verse 39). When we act without thinking or are unprepared for the challenge, we too can act unwisely and create more problems. We have to take time to think before we act. When we pause and pray about a matter, it helps us have the right perspective.

It's an amazing thing to recognize that in prayer I am speaking to God Himself in heaven. I am speaking to the One who created this universe and gave me life. I am speaking to the One who has loved me and provided for my needs, to the One who sent His Son to die on the cross for my sins and forgives me, and to the One who wants me to spend eternity in heaven with Him as His child. Oh He has time for me. I don't have to beg for an opportunity to pray. His heart and His ear is always open to those who love Him and do His will.

To pray effectively, third, we have to pray and speak our hearts with love and humility. Our prayers don't have to be long. We can pray one-sentence prayers to the Lord. We can ask for strength, for patience, for comfort, or for wisdom. The Lord gives us wisdom to know how to deal with the challenges of everyday life. This is not a personal, miraculous revelation, where God directly talks to us; but it does come from God in answer to prayer.

James encourages us in James 1:5 to 8, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." God is happy to help us when we need help and don't know what to do. Remember "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matthew 6 verse 8). We don't know all the things the Father is doing to help us face our problems and challenges. But we do know that He cares and will answer our requests.

Before Jesus picked the twelve apostles, He spent the whole night in prayer (Luke 6 verses 12 and 13). When Nehemiah heard about the terrible condition of Jerusalem with its walls torn down, He fasted and prayed weeping and mourning for days. He asked God to help him. God gave Nehemiah an opportunity to speak to King Artaxerxes for help. Before Nehemiah answered the question of King Artaxerxes about his sadness, Nehemiah briefly prayed to God. You see he realized that he needed God's help to answer this great king wisely.

Nehemiah 2:1 to 5 says: And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and (Nehemiah says) I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid. (Nehemiah says) I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" (Then Nehemiah says) So I prayed to the God of heaven. I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

God heard Nehemiah, and the king granted his great request. You know when we face a struggle in life, it's important to call upon the Lord to help us fulfill His will and to do what is right. In the end, God is the One who decides where our steps lead. Proverbs 16:1 says, "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." God listens to our prayers and He can make great things happen. Proverbs 3:5 to 6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight."

To pray effectively, fourth, we must be patient. David wrote in Psalm 40 verse 1, "I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me and heard my cry." In Psalm 147:11 David said, "The Lord favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness." God cares for His people and gives them what they need when they are ready for it. And while we may long for things, we may not be ready to handle them properly. God encourages us to be patient for Him to act in His time.

James 5:16 to 18 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit." God doesn't answer every prayer immediately, but He does answer when the time is right!

To pray effectively, fifth, pray expecting an answer. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 11:22 to 24, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you." We need to believe God's promises will come true and not doubt that He is listening and will respond.

God through the prophet Isaiah could say to a rebellious people in Israel in Isaiah 65:24, "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear." "God is ready for us to call upon Him, and to pray. He will help us. Hebrews 4:14 to 16 says of the Lord, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." We can have confidence in Christ.

When should we pray? Well, pray when you hurt, pray when you are blessed, pray when you need wisdom, pray when life is stressful, pray when you need to be forgiven, pray when you need to forgive others, pray when your friends and family hurt, pray for those who are lost, pray for our nation and its leaders, pray for your enemies, pray for forgiveness, and pray for God's will to be done. Pray with thankfulness because God has been good to you. Rejoice in the Lord and in His love. Thank God for the joy of salvation, for the hope of heaven, for His steadfast love. And never let a single day not even one day, pass without a prayer from your heart to God.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, haloed be Your name, and we praise You and thank you for all the good things that You have done for us. Help us Heavenly Father to be more devoted to You in love and service. Help us to be strong in our faith. And Father we pray that You will bless us and help us through all the struggles of life that we face. Give us each day our daily bread. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Why not decide today that you will devote yourself to prayer. You can pray brief prayers within your heart or you can pray much longer prayers. You can pray once a day, but I hope you'll pray often each day to the Father who is your best friend. Get alone with God in private prayer. Think about what is on your heart to say to God. This is a time of spiritual intimacy with God who created you and who loves you. He invites you to ask, to seek, and knock. Spend a moment preparing to pray. Focus on the fact that you're coming into God's presence.

As you pray, recall that you're speaking to God Himself. Pray humbly, confidently, and lovingly. Christians should offer adoration and praise to God, they should confess their sins and ask for forgiveness, they should thank God for all that He has blessed them, and ask God to supply your needs. It's not enough to talk about praying, we must put it into practice every day. Why not decide to begin praying regularly to the Father?

God's promise to hear our prayers belongs to those who love and obey Him. Do you? Now to become a Christian, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and trust what He teaches and what He has done for you on the cross and at the empty tomb. Repent of your sins, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow the Lord! Confess the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And be baptized into Christ, immersed in water. Baptism isn't something that you do; really it's something done to you. A person immerses you in water, but in baptism God unites you with Christ, forgives your sins, gives you newness of life, and makes you His child. As a loving and obedient Christian you have all the blessings and promises of God. So get right with God.

## The Prayer Life of Jesus

The Lord Jesus had been with the Father in heaven from all eternity past. John 1 and verse 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When the Word became flesh and lived as a human, He knew He would need the fellowship and strength of the Father in heaven. And so He prayed continually to the Father and kept the Father in His heart. Jesus wouldn't do anything but what His Father said to do. His time alone with the Father kept Him spiritually strong, and your time alone with the Father can keep you spiritually strong too.

Prayer was not a hobby or a pastime with Jesus; it was a priority. He needed His Father in heaven, and so do you. Jesus frequently prayed before speaking, acting, and making decisions. And Jesus could say in John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Jesus knew who He was and why He came to this earth. When we realize that we have been created by God and our purpose is to love and to serve Him, we too will want to have a regular, private fellowship with our heavenly Father.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to John, chapter 17 verses 24 to 26. And they are the ending of the longest recorded pray we have of Jesus found in the gospel of John. He prays,

Father, I desire that they (His disciples) also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

What a marvelous prayer of our Lord Jesus. Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to know the love that You have shown to Your son Jesus and that You show to us each day. And help us to love You fully and to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

Prayer for Jews was a normal practice of everyday life. The Jews had set prayers in the synagogue, giving thanks before meals, and saying of personal prayers in the morning, in the afternoon and at the time of sacrifice in the temple, and in the evening. Though much in His day-to-day life is not mentioned in Scripture, the four Gospel accounts say much about the prayer life of Jesus Christ. And so we're going to look at His prayer life as an encouragement to draw closer to our Father in heaven.

Luke 3:21 to 22 says, "Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'" Now Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3 and verse 15), and the Father blessed Him openly.

Mark 1:35 says that, "In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there." Now Jesus started His day with the Father, because He knew how the day started would set the tone for the rest of the day. Luke 5:16 informs us that, "Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." He needed to focus on His Father, and He wanted no distractions.

Luke 6 verses 12 and 13 tells about Jesus choosing the 12 apostles: "It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles." Jesus took His people seriously and named twelve chosen men to take the gospel to the world. Jesus prays to God about people and even intercedes for me and you.

In Matthew 19 verses 13 to 14, that passage reminds us that even little children mattered to Jesus: "Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Let the (little) children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'" It was customary, in those days, for religious leaders to bless and pray for little children.

Matthew 14 verses 19 to 21 tells us that Jesus praying before miraculously feeding the multitude: "Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, and they all ate and were satisfied. (You see) They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children." And Jesus thanked God for the loaves and fishes. Oh, He knew where all blessings come from.

John 17 records the longest prayer of Jesus Christ, only 26 verses. And it took place after the Passover and before Gethsemane. Jesus recognized that He would be glorified and have authority over all flesh. He said in verse 3, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." People would come to know the true God by the words that He gave His followers. And Jesus asked the Holy Father to keep His followers so they would not perish. Jesus gave them His word and proclaimed "Your word is truth." He wanted His people to be one as they believed.

He prayed in verses 20 to 21, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." He wanted the world to know that the Father "sent Me and loved them, even as You (that is the Father) have loved Me." Such a prayer humbles me, that God could love me like He loved Jesus. The Lord Jesus ended His prayer to the Father that "the love with which You loved Me (speaking Jesus speaking) may be in them, and I in them." Jesus wanted the love of the Father toward Himself to be in us. Truth, unity, and love were at the heart of His prayer.

From the time that Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane to the time that He died, Jesus was praying to the Father. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane for the Father's will to be done (Matthew 26 and Mark 14 and Luke 22 all mention that) and He prayed with loud crying (Hebrews 5 and verse 7)

Jesus prayed for those who were crucifying Him while they were putting nails through His hands and feet and lifting up His cross. Luke 23:33 to 34 reports, "And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus was said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments." Can you imagine how the soldiers must have felt while they were executing Him? He was more concerned about their sins and their souls than He was about His hands and feet.

You might wonder how Jesus was able to remain on the cross, bearing our sins. Oh He could have called twelve legions of angels to protect Him, but He didn't. He bore the punishment for hours and stayed there until He died. He endured the terrible pain, the shame, the darkness, and the mockery of the Jews and Romans. How was Jesus able to endure the cross with the pain, the mockery of those standing nearby, and the sins of the whole world laid upon Him? Well, 1 Peter 2 verses 21 to 24 gives us an answer, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but (He) continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we



might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” Jesus went with a purpose to the cross, and the Father heard His prayers.

Throughout His time on the cross Jesus entrusted Himself to the Father. He was praying. When you go through the hardest times of your life, do not hesitate to pray to the Father. The Father wants to hear from you. Matthew 27:45 to 46 says, “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” No doubt through His pain, Jesus felt very much alone. God was punishing Him for the sins that you and I committed. And though He felt forsaken at that moment, Jesus knew something profound.

He knew that what He was enduring was not the whole story. Matthew 27:46 is actually a quotation of Psalm 22:1, a psalm of David that points to the Messiah. It begins with a feeling of abandonment, yes, because of all those who opposing Him were encompassing Him. And so He's calling out for help from God, yes; but He knows the prophecies of Psalm 22, Jesus does, that God rules over the nations and is righteous. Yes, there is a cross that will take His life; but in a few days God would raise Him up victorious over death. He knew that God would seat Him at His right hand. Hebrews 12 verses 2 and 3 tells us to look “to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him (verse 3) who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”

The last words of Jesus before He died were in a prayer. Jesus prayed just before He breathed His last, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23 verse 46). This too is a quotation from Psalm 31 verse 5. Solomon described death in Ecclesiastes 12 and verse 7, “and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” This prayer reminds us this life is not all there is. That our spirits live on. And this is why He could say to the thief in Luke 23:43, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Yes Jesus lived on, and so shall we.

Jesus is now in heaven. But you know what? He's praying for us. How and why is He praying in heaven? Well first He is interceding for us. Romans 8:33 and 34 says, “Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” The Lord Jesus is appealing to the Father on our behalf, praying for God to help us in troubled times. Hebrews 7:25 speaks about how He prays for our forgiveness and salvation: “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Intercession is the act of intervening between differing parties, particularly the act of praying to God on behalf of another person.

Second, the Lord Jesus is our Mediator. 1 Timothy 2 verses 5 and 6 says, “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.” Now since He is the sinless guilt offering, yes a guilt offering, for our sins, He can approach God on behalf of our sins. Mediation means to stand between or intercede between two or more parties. And when used in a biblical sense, one of the parties is usually the Lord God. You see Christ is the ultimate mediator.

Third, as a mediator and intercessor, the Lord Jesus is advocating for us before the Father. The apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:1 to 2, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” An Advocate is one who pleads another's cause, who helps another by defending or comforting him. And Jesus is the

atonement sacrifice who continually pleads with the Father to forgive Christians when we sin. The sinless one is defending us before the Father, so that we might be saved.

For me, one of the most touching pictures in Scripture comes from the Lord's loving patience with Peter who said he would never desert the Lord but would die for Him. We know how Peter denied the Lord three times. And the Lord Jesus said to Peter in Luke 22:31 to 32, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." The Lord prayed for Peter by name. People matter to Jesus. He may even have prayed for you by name. If the Lord thinks so highly to pray for you, do you love Him enough and pray that His will be done?

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're so thankful that our Lord Jesus taught us how to pray. And also taught us to keep on praying. Help us Heavenly Father to show our love to You and to devote ourselves to You and to have fellowship with You in prayer. And to do Your will. This is our prayer today in the name of Jesus, Amen.

The more I know about Jesus, the more I love Him. To hear Him pour out His heart to the Father in heaven about you and me helps me to see His priorities. He wants us to be glorified and given eternal life, because we believed the words that He gave to the apostles and that we have now in Scripture. His word is truth! You can believe it. He wanted to unite His people, but He wanted to make them one with Him and with the Father, by believing the truth of His words. You can't be one with the Father or one with Jesus, unless you're willing to believe the truth of His words and follow Him.

Sadly, many who call themselves Christians aren't perfected in unity with God and with each other because they follow human councils and traditions that came centuries later. They believe and practice things never imagined in the New Testament. We must look first and foremost to the words of Jesus and His apostles to truly follow the Lord. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7 and verse 21 that, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." Don't deceive yourself that it doesn't matter what you believe or practice. If you do, you'll be rejected

To become a Christian place your faith in Jesus Christ. Believe what He teaches. Believe that He died for your sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. Repent of your sins and turn your heart to righteousness. Confess Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. Be baptized, that is immersed in water, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). This is what they did in the beginning and what you should do today. Become a Christian. Become one.

## The Power of Prayer

Someone says, well, "I don't know what's happening to our marriage. Our love for each other seems to be fading away. There seems to be no hope." "Have you prayed about it?" You might say, well, "I don't know what to do about my life. What should I do?" "Have you prayed about it?" "Life is really hard for me right now. There seems to be so many expenses and so little money. There are so many demands and so little time." "Have you prayed about it?" We worry about sin and say, "I just don't know how to deal with temptation. And I'm so weak." "Have you prayed about it?" We worry about our lost friends and family. We say, well, "You can talk to them if you want to, but it won't do any good. I don't think they want to follow God." "Have you prayed about it?"

I believe in the power of prayer, because I believe in the power of God. When we love and serve God, our prayers matter to our Father. We don't have to beg God to hear our prayers; He invites us to pray!

Our reading today comes from the words of Jesus found in Matthew 7 verses 7 to 11. Where Jesus Himself talks about the power of prayer.

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

That's a reading from the words of Jesus found in scripture. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that we can come to You and ask. That we can seek and find. And that we can knock and the door will be opened. Father we're thankful for all Your love and for Your kindness and goodness. And bless us Father as we study. And help us always to love You and to serve You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Prayer is a good habit, but praying by habit only is a very poor habit. Prayer out of habit really misses the point; it shows a lack of belief. You see real prayer, heartfelt and fervent, blesses both God and man. Proverbs 15:8 says that, "the prayer of the upright is His delight." God wants to hear you; He wants to hear your heart and soul. James 5:16 to 18 says that, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit." Prayer can do anything that God can and will do.

It is a great blessing to come away from prayer having shared our hearts, our burdens, our fears, and our concerns with our Father, knowing that He cares to listen and CAN DO SOMETHING about them.

The words of Matthew 7:7 to 8 ring true. You know the object of asking is to receive. The aim of seeking is to find. Now the goal of knocking is to have the door opened. God invites us to ask, seek and knock. Prayer can open the door to anything God can and will do. Since I cannot do many things, prayer reminds me of my dependency on God. I trust God, and trusting God means that my prayers matter! God will answer our prayers in ways that He wouldn't have answered if we failed to pray and asked. Divine solutions are always the best solutions, the wisest solutions, and the right solutions for everyone.

Prayer releases the power of God. My friend, Greg Tidwell of Columbus, Ohio, recently wrote in a book on prayer published by Lads to Leaders: "Recognizing the limitless ability of God is vital to understanding the power of prayer. God's ability to provide is limitless, and prayer is the key that opens the door to His abundant grace." 2 Corinthians 9 and verse 8 says, "And God is able to make all grace

abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” We think sometimes it all depends on us and we forget God is able to make all grace abound. God can do what we can't do. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 19 and verse 26, “with God all things are possible.”

Now the God who created the world and raised up the Lord Jesus from the dead can help you with your troubles and trials. The God who sent the flood and parted the waters of the Red Sea isn't limited. The Lord Jesus who fed the 5000 from five loaves and two fish, stilled the raging waters of the Sea of Galilee, and walked upon the water can do great things beyond our understanding. Psalm 103:1 to 5 reminds us, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.”

Paul glorifies God in Ephesians 3:20 to 21: “Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” God can do more than we can imagine—exceedingly, abundantly more! God can do more than we can ask—exceedingly, abundantly more!

2 Kings 19 tells how Hezekiah and Jerusalem were surrounded by the powerful king of Assyria and 185,000 troops. Hezekiah prayed to God for deliverance. 2 Kings 19:35 says, “Then it happened that night that the angel of the LORD went out, and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead.” Does prayer work? Of course it does! When Israel sinned grievously; Moses prayed and saved a nation.

In Joshua chapter ten, Joshua spoke to the Lord and the sun stood still. In 1 Samuel chapter 1, Hannah prayed for a son; and God gave her Samuel. In 1 Kings 3, God gave Solomon the opportunity to “ask what I shall give you.” Solomon realizing his inexperience as a king, asked for “an understanding mind to govern your people.” God gave Him a wise and discerning mind and many other blessings.

James 5 and verse 17 tells how Elijah, a man with a nature like ours, “prayed earnestly that it might not rain and it did not for three years and six months.” Elijah in 1 Kings 18 prayed for fire to come down from heaven and consume a sacrifice, and it happened. Later Elijah prayed for rain, and it did that very day!” Let's remember that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. If God heard Elijah's prayer, He can hear ours also.

In 2 Kings 20, Hezekiah became sick and he was at the point of death. Isaiah told him to set his house in order. Well weeping bitterly, Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and he prayed for God to remember him. And God remembered his faithful service, heard his prayer, and gave him 15 more years of life.

In Daniel chapter six, Daniel defied the king's edict and continued kneeling to pray three times a day to God. King Darius had no choice but to throw Daniel into the lion's den, but Daniel was not killed by the lions. Daniel explains in Daniel 6:22, “My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime.”

In Acts 12, Herod the king put to death James the brother of John and arrested Peter. The disciples hearing about this arrest gathered to pray for Peter's deliverance. When an angel of the Lord rescued Peter, Peter thought it was just a vision. Later he realized that God had delivered him. When Peter showed up at the door where they had gathered, the disciples could hardly believe and they thought the servant girl Rhoda was out of her mind. But Peter kept knocking until they opened the door and saw Peter. They

were astonished. Sometimes we pray but we're too slow to believe that God will truly answer our prayers.

Philippians 4:6 to 7 reminds us of God's care for us: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Rather than living in anxiety and worry, let's pray to God. 1 Peter 5:6 to 7 says, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." God truly cares.

Mack Lyon wrote in his book, *Continuing Instant in Prayer*, that, "Since prayer is the means by which we draw upon the unlimited resources of God's power, there is no limitation to what prayer can avail (that is to do), but little faith in God, that hinders us." We need to believe. People wonder why they pray and God doesn't answer. It's not because God has no power; it could be because we fail to have a right relationship with God. God hears the prayers of the righteous.

Now God's promise to answer prayer has some conditions. Many people pray but fail to believe or to live their faith and keep God's commandments. Hebrews 11 and verse 6 reminds us, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Now Jesus' promises go out to those who are committed to Him. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 11:22 to 24, "Have faith in God. 'Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, (this is Jesus talking) all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.'"

You may not always know what is best and wish you did. James 1:5 to 8 says that, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Our faith should lead us to commit ourselves to God and obey His teaching. The Lord Jesus said in John 15:7 that, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." Do you abide in Christ? Do His words dwell in you? 1 John 3:22 says to Christians, "and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him." Do you please the Lord? 1 John 5:14 to 15 says, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." Are you living according to the will of the Lord?

Psalms 37:4 to 5 says, "Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it." Again, Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established." God answers our prayers, but He does it in His own time. And we have to be patient and wait upon the Lord. Lamentation 3:25 to 26 says, "The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently For the salvation of the LORD." Trust in the Lord to keep His word and bless you, when you love and serve Him.

The Lord Jesus didn't want us to give up on our prayers, simply because we didn't receive an answer immediately. You remember Luke 18:1 to 7 says, "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said that, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither

feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' "

And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" God answers prayer in His own good time, and when the time is right for you. And we're not always ready for all the things we desire. Let's persist in prayer. Let's devote ourselves to prayer. And God will answer, and we'll see His great power.

Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You hear our prayers and that You answer them. Help us to have strong faith. And to commit ourselves to Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

One aspect of the power of prayer is in realizing how prayer changes us. I hope you can grasp how much change that regular, fervent prayer will cause in your life. Praying reminds me I'm God's child and God is my heavenly Father. It reminds me of my dependence on God and how He has blessed me and I also have a duty toward God. Prayer lets me share my burdens with God. And in prayer I confess my sins to God. Prayer reassures me that God is with me. It reminds me that I will be with God forever.

Now if you want your prayers to matter, then first look inside your heart and life. Some accuse God of not caring, while they live in unbelief without a thought of God's love, God's ways, or God's morals. Are you living like you should? Do you truly love the Lord with all your heart? Do you truly believe in God and believe that Jesus died and rose again? Do you care what God says? Do you obey the commandments of the Lord? Are you living a sinful life, or have you repented of your sins? You can't please this sinful world and please the Father at the same time. When people refuse to honor God, why do they suppose God will listen?

Becoming a Christian involves much more than saying a prayer. Honoring God by placing your faith and trust in Him is also essential. Love Him with all your heart and put Him first. Surrender to Him by turning from evil and pursuing righteousness. Confess with your mouth Jesus Christ is the Son of God and your Lord; and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). In baptism God washes away our sins as we call upon His name (Acts 22:16), and then is when we become a child of God (Galatians 3:26 to 27).

## Will God Hear?

A recent report said that 84 percent of Americans prayed within the last week. Even six percent of atheists say they pray every single day. We sometimes wonder, "Does God hear my prayers? Will praying make a difference?" Well, prayer is an amazing gift of God; and we should rejoice over it and be thankful. But like any gift, it only works if we practice it; and it only works if we practice it according to His will. God answers prayer, yes, but God doesn't grant every request. Some prayers violate the will of God; and some prayers come from selfish or disobedient hearts. Prayer is not like rubbing a lamp and having a genie grant you wishes. We pray to a holy and righteous God, who wants us to be holy and righteous as well.

Our reading today comes from the letter of James to those who are dispersed abroad. And he says to them about the need to look to God and to pray. He says,

But if any of you lacks wisdom, (this is James 1: 5 to 8) if any of you lacks wisdom let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Here James gives good advice and I hope you'll take it sincerely, to have faith. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You give us Your word and Your promises. Help us to believe them and that You'll help us with wisdom. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

We all face times when we need to pray. We need God's help. And we want to know that God hears us and grants our requests. Certainly, God hears the prayers of those who love and follow Him. Jesus said in Matthew 6:31 to 33, "do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." First, when you pray, you're praying to your Heavenly Father. Second, your Father knows what you need. And third, He promises to supply your needs if you put Him first in your life.

The Father loves us and deals with us as His children. Jesus said in Luke 11:5 to 8, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs." Well, God is better than that. He gives to us out of love, not because we are a bother.

Paul said in Philippians 4 and verse 19, "my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." God the Father wants to bless His children and supply their needs, just as any father might. God invites us to pray. We don't have to apologize to God for taking up His time. Jesus said in Matthew 7:7 to 11, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

Jesus wants us to feel confident in prayer. Some think when they sin that God doesn't want to be around them, so they withdraw from God and quit praying. Well, that's exactly what God doesn't want.

He wants us to cease from sin, yes; but He also wants us to come boldly to Him for help. Hebrews 4:14 to 16 says: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Rather than avoiding God, when we're tempted, let's draw near to get help for the temptation.

Now it matters how we live, whether we believe, and whether we seek first the kingdom, if we wish the Father to hear our prayers. 1 Peter 3 and verse 12 says, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." Ephesians 3 and verse 20 says that God "is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." Now many shut God out and then they wonder why He doesn't hear their prayers. You can't live a wicked life and then expect God to bless you. Now if that's the case, whose prayer will God not hear?

Well, James 4:1 to 3 says, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." If I'm praying to God, and what I'm praying is selfish and wasteful, I shouldn't expect God to help me do what's wrong. Think about what you're praying and how the Father thinks. Some people's prayers are so self-centered and hurtful to others that God wants no part of it.

When you pray, remember that God treats you the way that you treat others. Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6 and verse 12 "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." But He explains in Matthew 6:14 to 15, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." How can you expect God to forgive you, if you aren't willing to forgive others? If we're children of God, we ought to have the same tenderness and compassion for others that God has shown to us.

Solomon said in Proverbs 15:29, "The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous." God allows us to change our ways, to repent, so that we can have a loving relationship with Him. Now nobody is perfect, though we strive to serve God. But God distinguishes between the person who sets his heart to do right but sometimes fails and the person then who lives his life to serve his own desires and he sometimes does good. But He makes a distinction between the two. We can't be perfectly sinless, no, but there's a difference between endeavoring to do right and having no intention of following God. The Father will not hear a person who has turned his heart away Him.

Peter said in 1 Peter 3:7, "husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." A man who mistreats his wife or children cannot expect to draw close to God and be heard. God will treat him in the same way that he has treated his family. Don't let a lack of kindness put a barrier between you and God.

Faith is necessary. The Hebrew writer, as we've mentioned before, in Hebrews 11:6 says that, "without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." You know if we seek God's help and blessing, we need to believe that He'll keep His promises and will bless us. James said in James 1:6 to 8, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by



the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Repentance also comes into this discussion. Some folks think God is supposed to be at their beck and call, but they ignore their sinful behaviors. They think God will overlook all their sins. Some folks think they can negotiate with God. "Well, I'll change Lord, if you just grant me this wish." But God is not a fool. You can't bargain with repentance. Some people repent just long enough to get what they're after, but after their change which is temporary, and not real, they go back to the old ways. Now you can fool yourself, but you can't fool God with a negotiation. If you want God to hear you, then first change your ways.

Isaiah 59:1 to 2 says, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear." You can't hang on to sin and expect to have the ear of God listening to you. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 66:18, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." Here the Psalmist is clarifying for us the point. You can't let sin be cherished in your heart and find room for God too. He won't hear your heart's request, if your heart's real desire is to sin.

Now continuing in sin and failing to repent builds a wall. Tear down that wall. God said in Isaiah 1:15 to 20 that, "When you spread out your hands [that is you pray], I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. (he says to them) Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. (then he says) 'Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'"

God has always wanted His people to pray and to love Him, but people don't show love to Him if they live in sin and ignore His teaching. You can't love the world and love God at the same time. 1 John 2:15 to 17 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." We must keep God close to us. We must live righteously if we wish to have God's blessing and God's ear.

Now I'm thankful for the opportunity and privilege of prayer. God not only allows us to pray, He actually asks us to pray. He wants to hear our hearts and to grant our requests. In John 14:13 to 14 the Lord Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (and He says) If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." Oh, we can approach God because we have a right relationship with Jesus His Son. God hears us when we speak in His name.

I don't know how close you are to God, but I do know prayer is a precious privilege. And it's one that you should seek and one that you should practice as often as you can. But do it with a heart filled with love and a life filled with righteousness. Careing about the will of God and what God wants from us. Now to speak our hearts to God and to know that He will listen is a great blessing. I don't want to build a barrier between God and me by neglecting my faith or by continual sin against God. I want my life to say to God, "I love You and I serve only You." I don't want to disappoint my Heavenly Father by participating in moral compromise or by believing something that's absolutely false. I want to stay close

to Him in this life, so that I can live with Him forever in the life to come. My friend, are you close to God? Do you have a loving close relationship with Him.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're so thankful that we can speak with You and bear our hearts to You and tell You the things that are on our minds. And Father we're thankful that You care enough to listen to us. Help us Heavenly Father to have faith in what we pray. Help us to love You and help us to do Your will always. In Jesus name, Amen.

God speaks to us through His word, the Bible; and we speak to God, or with God, through prayer. Prayer is powerful, because God is powerful. Our Creator and Father wants to hear our prayers and bless us. And we should tell God "I love you," "thank you," and "forgive me" every day. When our hearts are burdened, we can find comfort in the Lord. When we're weak, we can pray for strength. When we're fearful, we can find reassurance and courage. The right to pray is an essential blessing. So, we must maintain that close, peaceful, loving relationship with God. Jesus told the apostles, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" (Matthew 26:41). And prayer keeps us from sin and helps us stay close to God.

God said in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." Well, anyone who knows the value and power of prayer wouldn't think about ceasing to pray. This passage isn't speaking about praying every minute. It's saying don't stop talking with God. Keep on praying. Keep loving Him, thanking Him, praising Him, and asking for things of Him in prayer. Keep your relationship strong. Live a life of love and obey the teaching of Christ. Keep worshiping at church. Keep your faith alive by serving others. Don't start even a single day without prayer, and you'll find life getting better and better.

To become God's child, believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Galatians 3:26 and 7 says, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." When we're baptized, God unites us with Christ. God washes away our sins in baptism (Acts 22:16), so that there is nothing offensive between God and us. In baptism, He adds us to His church and causes us to be born again as His children. In baptism you begin your walk as a follower and a lover of Jesus Christ.