

Troubles In Our Prayers

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[0 : 00] Well, we have happy words of our Savior in John chapter 16. Let's turn to that passage, John chapter 16, and we'll begin reading in verse 16.

They kept asking, what does he mean by a little while? We don't understand what he's saying. Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, in a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me?

I tell you the truth. You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come.

But when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you, now is your time of grief.

[1 : 27] But I will see you again, and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language, but will tell you plainly about my Father.

In that day you will ask in my name. I'm not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from God.

I came from the Father, and entered the world. Now I am leaving the world, and going back to the Father. Then Jesus' disciples said, Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech.

Now we can see that you know all things, and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God. You believe at last, Jesus answered.

[2 : 44] But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.

Pastor Jason, come and preach. Well, in this world you will have trouble. And that's what we've been talking about on these Sunday evenings.

God's attributes and our troubles, man's troubles. In John chapter 16, Jesus is preparing his disciples to go through some really deep waters.

His upcoming death, his leaving, the world's hatred. He's going to get the full blast of it.

[3 : 49] But some of that venom is going to splash on to them. And it's not just what's going to happen that night, but what's going to happen in the years to follow.

And so he's encouraging them in that trouble. And right at the heart of his encouragement, and really the way they're going to get through this, is through prayer.

Asking God for help. Asking God for mercy. Asking God for power. For protection. For boldness.

Prayer was going to be the way that the saints get through a troubling and a troubled world.

And we see that in Acts as the history unfolds. When the apostles get into trouble and the church gets into trouble, the first thing they do is they pray. And God answers them.

Prayer. But prayer is hard, isn't it? Prayer can be one of those troubles that we have. What various hindrances we meet when coming to the mercy seat.

[5 : 03] If you have difficulty praying, you're not alone. It's an age-old, church-wide struggle. It's hard to focus.

It's easy to get into a rut. It's hard to know what to say. We struggle with unbelief. Is this doing any good? Would God have done what he's going to do, even if I didn't pray?

Does God even care? Here? We have lots of troubles. But I think the worst trouble of all, and maybe the foundational trouble, trouble, or at least the trouble that adds grief to all the other troubles, is this.

Does God even want to hear from me? When I pray to him, how does he receive me? What's his heart toward me? Will he turn the cold shoulder to me?

Or maybe at best just give me sort of a careless hearing, where he's not really invested. He doesn't really care. He doesn't...

[6 : 13] Does he want me to be there? Does God love me? Does God love me?

And how we answer that question determines how we're going to get through all the other prayer troubles that we have. So it's hard to focus. It's easy to get into a rut.

I don't know what to say. Those problems look totally different, and we will handle them totally differently, depending on how we answer that other question of, do we think God really loves us, or do we feel in our hearts that he really, really doesn't love me?

Now, those other problems, we will work through. And we will work through them. We'll struggle with them. But we won't feel like it's the end of the world.

We won't feel like, oh, everything is a loss. It's an absolute ruin. If we think God really loves us. It puts a totally different perspective on those kinds of questions. That gives me all kinds of space to grow, to progress, to persevere, to have encouragement, to work on my prayer life without feeling totally depressed and totally hopeless and totally ruined.

[7 : 33] But if I feel like God really, really doesn't love me, all the other problems will sink us. They'll sink us.

They'll make us give up. They'll make us feel depressed. They'll make us feel hopeless. They'll make us feel stuck. And so this question, does the Father love me?

Really love me? That will make or that will break your prayer life. It will break or make your Christian joy, your faith.

It is one of the foundational questions. It will make or break your hope in a troubling and troubled world. And so answer for me.

Answer in your own heart. Does the Father love you? Does the Father love you? Do you feel it in your bones?

[8 : 36] Is it one of those settled facts of life that you just know, that you count on, that you're relying upon? Maybe it's not even a feeling.

It's not necessarily a feeling. It's just the settled understanding of your soul. My Father in heaven loves me. The Father's love.

And that's what Jesus went to when he was helping his disciples to pray. That's what they needed to hear. That's what they needed to believe and understand.

And you can look at that again in verses 26 and 27. And Jesus says to them, in that day you will ask in my name. But then he clarifies what he's saying.

He says, I'm not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself. The Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

[9 : 37] The Father himself loves you. It's not just Jesus who loves you. It's the Father himself who loves you. It's not just me that loves you. And the Father is not some sort of just distant, only needing to be pacified person.

No, the Father himself loves you. You are praying to someone who loves you. And so do you have trouble in your prayer life?

Jesus thinks that this is what you need to know. This is what you need to hear. There's lots of other help we can give you. And the Bible is full of lots of other help to help us in our prayer life.

But it really does. This is one of the foundational layers. This is sort of the bottom line. The Father himself loves you. You've been adopted into God's family.

You were once distant from God. Relationally distant enemies. And we sing that song, I did not know his love within.

[10 : 41] I didn't know his love within. God's love was not something that I ever felt. God's love was not something that I knew. And that's really what marks unbelievers.

That's really what defines them. Relationally, they are far away from God. You don't have to. You don't feel God's love in your heart.

But then he gives you his spirit. And that's part of that new creation. He pours out his Holy Spirit in you. And the spirit is called the spirit of adoption.

And you begin to know his love. And you begin to know it in your bones. And you begin to rely upon it. And that's a process, though.

It's a process. It's something that we grow in. It's something that we grow into as the years of our Christian life go by.

[11 : 41] We grow with a greater sense that I am a child of God. I've been adopted into his family. I have this right and this access to the Father. So I'm going to pray to him.

Now, it's a process. But we're all, all Christians are adopted children. And I can tell you from deep personal experience, from continual study, adopted children can have some real struggles with feeling, with knowing, with coming to grips with their parents' love.

In a moment, a child goes from orphan to adopted, from orphan to child in a family. But just because their status changes in an instant, and that's what has happened to every Christian.

The moment you become in Christ, like what we've been talking about, you become a child of God. And I'm sure Pastor John will cover that. That status changes. But not necessarily do our hearts catch up with that status.

And sometimes hearts are slow to let go of those old ways of thinking, those old ways of feeling, those old ways of survival, old defense mechanisms, old survival schemes, to give up control, to let go of the fear, to let go of the anxiety, to trust adopted children, to trust their parents' hearts.

[13 : 08] And it can be very difficult. The ones that adopted children are called to trust in are the people that sometimes they fear the most. They're the most uncertain about.

They're the most not convinced of. And what I'm saying is, that sort of adopted children issue is a problem that Christians have.

Because we're all growing into this. We're all growing in our sense of this. Now, Brian Borgman is a Reformed Baptist pastor in Nevada.

He's also an adopted dad. And in his book, *After Their Years, The Grace and Grit of Adoption*, he tells the story of his own adopted son. And his son had continual problems with his, with the mom, with his mom, Brian's wife, Ariel.

It was this constant conflict, this constant back and forth. And it wasn't until the son, the boy was 13, that they have some sort of breakthrough and understanding of what was going on.

[14 : 12] He got into some trouble, and it was one of those really heated situations where there was an explosion. They needed to, everyone needed to cool off. And so everyone cooled off and went to their separate corners.

And Brian Borgman sort of forgot about the whole thing for about an hour until later, he remembered what was going on. He goes into his son's room. And there his son was with Ariel, his mom, on the floor, tears coming down both of their eyes.

And, what's going on? And, well, tell him. Tell your dad what you told me. Why do you have such troubles with me? And the son's answer was, I'm always afraid that you're going to give me up like my first mom did.

So you look past all the behavior, and why is there this distance between parent and child? Why is this distance between mother and father and child?

Why couldn't they be close? Well, it was this constant fear, this constant uncertainty. They're probably going to give me up. Now, maybe that's nothing he would ever have said.

[15 : 26] But that's what his little heart was telling him over and over again. And so think about what it's like if you're feeling that.

How desperate and uncertain and always on edge, never really comfortable. And that fear ruled in his heart. And that isn't unusual for adopted children. And that isn't unusual for many Christians. We feel like orphans when we're children. We can, we barely feel his love within. And no wonder, then, that we don't pray.

No wonder we don't pray. Prayer is just one more thing that we have to get right or he won't be happy with us.

Or prayer isn't this wonderful gift where I get to talk to my father. Where I get to have fellowship and communion with my father. So listen to John Owen.

[16 : 30] Great Puritan. He says this, Love is a feeling or emotion of union and delight and desire to be near to the object loved.

And so long as the father is seen as harsh and judging and condemning, the soul is filled with fear and dread every time it comes to him.

And so we read of sinners fleeing and hiding from him. But when God, who is the father, is seen as a father filled, filled with love, the soul is filled with love to God in return.

And so now they want to be near him. Now they want to be close to him. Now that they want to speak to him. Now Jesus, the good doctor, knew what recovering orphan hearts needed.

They need to hear, the father himself loves you. And you see what Jesus is getting at. In this passage, there is this idea where, oh, I can pray, I have to pray in Jesus' name.

[17 : 37] And what that means is, I sort of like hand my prayers off to Jesus and then Jesus has to go take them himself. But I can't, I personally can't speak to the father.

I can't pray directly to the father. Jesus can pray for me. He can go for me. But again, it's best that I stay away. And Jesus says, no, no, that's not what I'm talking about.

That's not what it means to pray in my name. He says, the father himself loves you. And so, yes, you pray in my name. You pray with clothes with Jesus Christ, but the father himself loves you.

The father himself loves you. So don't be afraid. Don't think you have to, you know, just, don't think that I'm the only one that can come close. No, the father himself loves you.

Not me alone, the father himself. And so, we want to ask, what kind of love does that father have for believers, for his children? Well, his love has two different parts.

[18 : 40] One is, in love, he's determined to do you good. That's what love means. And it's this determination to do another person good.

And God, in love, is determined to do you good. Now, shouldn't that encourage you when you're going to prayer? Because when you pray, you are praying to someone who is determined to do you good.

Like, that's the determination of his heart. That's what his heart is set on. I want to do this person good. Well, that's the kind of person I want to ask. That's the person I want to talk to.

That's why he sends his son. The father loves the world, and so he sends his son. He chose us in Christ to be adopted. God, in love, has determined to do you good.

Now, that should encourage us to pray because all that you'll ever get from praying is blessing. All that you will ever get from praying is blessing.

[19 : 49] Even when he says no. Even when he says later. No good thing will he withhold. But we need to go further because, yes, that's encouraging, but we can't be ignorant of Satan's devices because he can stop some Christians from going further.

He can even twist that love into a heartless thing where he divides God's affection from his determination, from God's heart, from what he wants to do.

And this can happen, especially to people like us. And it has happened to reformed Calvinist people with high views of God's sovereignty.

And it can rob Christians of the intimacy, the closeness, that God wants you to enjoy.

Because the Father's love is not merely a determination to do you good. It's not just that. You can't boil a husband's love or a wife's love or a parent's love for a child or a child's love for their parent just down to, I want to do that person good.

[21 : 11] Right? That's not all that love is. Wives, you want your husband's heart. Don't you? You don't want just their determination to do you good.

You want to be near them. You want to be close to them. You want a relationship. You want their intimacy. And you don't want their mere determination to do you good. You want them.

You want to be near to them where you're accepted and welcomed and brought in and you're close to them. It's friendship. It's acceptance. It's soul to soul.

Communion. And that's what you want. And that's what we can hardly believe that we have with God.

Heart to heart, soul to soul, closeness, friendship, acceptance. But that's exactly, that's exactly what Jesus is telling his disciples that they have. He's saying, because you have loved me, you have been brought into the circle of friendship, the circle of fellowship.

[22 : 19] Matthew Henry says this, speaking on these verses, he is a friend to you. The father is a friend to you and you cannot be better befriended.

No one could have ever been a better friend to you. Your father is your best friend. Henry goes on, Christ not only turned away God's wrath from us, he brought us into a covenant of friendship.

You're praying to a friend who loves you. Now Jesus has already talked about that in the last chapter. He's been talking about what his friends, he says, I laid it on my life for my friends. And then he says, you know, I don't call you mere servants. I call you my friends. And we have this relationship. We're intimate. We're close. But now he's saying, there's more than just me and you in the circle of friendship.

The father himself loves you. The father himself loves you. Now what does love, what does love want?

[23 : 28] In love, we want to be close. We want to be near. That's husbands, wives, that's what you want from each other. If you're single, that's what you're most longing for in a relationship.

You're not hoping to find someone who merely wants to do you good. You want closeness. Heart to heart. And the father, the father says in Proverbs, my son, give me your heart.

Give me your heart. And that's the father's love. The father says to you, give me your heart. Come close.

Don't be afraid. Trust me. See that I'm full of love for you. My love isn't some sort of mechanical determination. I'm just going to, I'll do you good.

Because I've decided it. No, it's, it's a fountain of affection. And out of that fountain of affection, out of that fullness, he gives us all things.

[24 : 33] Again, listen to John Owen. And I can't say it any better than he does. And if I were to do, I'd just be copying him. So just listen to what he says. Consider, think, Christian, just think about this.

And there, I, I'm telling you, there's a, just a world of, of joy here. Consider that it is the greatest desire of God, the father, that you should have a loving fellowship with him.

His greatest desire is that you should receive him into your soul as one full of love and tenderness and kindness to you. Flesh and blood is apt, is accustomed to, is apt, has the tendency to think hard thoughts of God, to think that he is always angry and incapable of being pleased with his sinful creatures.

That is, that it is not for them to draw near to him. And there is nothing in the world more to be desired than to never come into his presence. I knew that you were a hard man, said the evil servant in the gospel.

Now there is nothing, nothing more grievous to the Lord, nothing that serves the purposes of Satan more than such thoughts as these. Satan rejoices when he can fill your heart with such hard thoughts of God.

[25 : 58] Satan's purposes from the very beginning was to fill mankind with lies about God. Now there is a lot there, but what were some of the highlights of that quote?

God wants to be close to you. That is what love is. God wants you to receive him, to believe about him, to accept this about him, that he is full of love for you, Christian.

To believe that about him, to trust him, to quit acting like an orphan, and to act like a child. To quit thinking he is always angry or can't be pleased.

Again, that's the devil's lies that would just suck the heart out of our obedience. That isn't what God wants. The Father himself loves you. And so, now I want you to think with me.

How does he love me? How is this love? What is it like? Well, he loves you eternally. God is love.

[27 : 08] And there's never been a time, this is an amazing, I mean, amazing thing. There's never been a time, Christian, when he hasn't loved you. Psalm 139 talks about all of God's thoughts for me, and David is amazed at that.

How vast is the sum of them. They're more than the sands of the seashore. Thoughts of love. Thoughts of care. Concern. Going on forever.

And so, what did he predestine us to do? What did he want? What was his determination to do us good? He predestined us to be adopted as sons. God has always loved you, has always wanted to do you good, and eternity past, he predestined, he elected to do you good.

Now, he loves you freely. He loves you freely. He loves you because he wants to love you. He wants to love you.

No one is forcing him. The father is not in any way obligated to love you, but the father has given you his heart freely. No one wants to be loved because they have to be.

[28 : 18] Do they? We don't want that. We don't, moms or wives, do you want your husbands or your kids to give you a Mother's Day gift because they have to? Like, go get your mom a present.

All right. And then they give it to her. That's not the kind of love that we want, the forced to have to. And husbands or wives, do you want your husbands to take you on some sort of anniversary vacation or anniversary dinner because you have to?

Well, it's that, oh, I've got to that takes all the love and the joy out of it. And what I'm saying is when I say God loves you freely, there's no sense of, he has to.

There's a sense of, this is his joy. This is his delight. This is what he wants to do. This is coming from his own heart. God loves you because he wants to love you.

He wants to love you. So, he loves you and he wants to be close to you. Again, John Owen said it's his greatest desire.

[29 : 29] Maybe we could say, oh, doesn't he have other desires that are greater? Yes, probably, but you get the picture. This is what he wants, to be close to you. His heart toward you isn't some sort of rusted over hose that you have to really turn in order for love to come out.

His heart is this fountain of love and it's joyfully spewing out love and when it overflows, it's doing exactly what it wants to do. His love for you surpasses all knowledge.

It surpasses all knowledge. Ephesians chapter 4, Paul is praying for the Ephesian church and he says, pray that you would know that this love that surpasses knowledge.

So I want you to think about that. His love for you is greater than you could ever, ever, ever know. His love for you is bigger and deeper and more full and more full of affection and more powerful and more real than you could ever know.

It's more than you can know right now. It's more than you've ever felt or experienced in your life. There are times, aren't there, when we feel it most deeply.

[30 : 50] Well, he loves us more than that. His love is greater than you'll know when you are more holy. So let's get in our time machine and go 10 years or 20 years in the future and now hopefully you're a more holy, a more sanctified person and you understand God's love for you more.

Guess what? He loves you more than that than you'll know then. He'll love you more than you'll know when you get to heaven.

So, imagine that. You see Him. And now, now you know He loves you. That's what Paul was talking about in that great love chapter 1 Corinthians 13.

He says, for we know in part. But then we will know fully even as we're fully known. You know, when we get to heaven, we shall know how much God loves us and it will fill all of our sanctified humanity.

And I'll see Him and I'll love Him and I'll know that He loves me. And so, I want you to think about the happiest you've ever been in God's love.

[32 : 08] Now, multiply that by a hundred or a thousand times. That's how much when you get to heaven, that's how much you'll know His love. But He loves you more than that right now.

His love surpasses knowledge. It can't be known. And when we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun.

And we've been soaking in God's love year after year. And that love now is filling us and bursting out of us.

And His glory and His love will make us to shine like the sun. It'll be our food and drink. Guess what? He loves you more right now than you'll even know His love then.

It surpasses all knowledge. All human knowledge that is or ever will be. And so, there's no thought.

[33 : 17] There's no imagination. There's no song. There's no word that can reach to the greatness of God's love for His children.

His desire for you. His yearning to be close to you. His affection for you. His delight and joy in you, His child.

He's determined in the ages past to predestine you to be adopted. That's what this all is about. To bringing you to that place where you're in heaven experiencing the full greatness of His love for you. Now, let's go back to our prayer troubles. doesn't all of this make you want to pray? To be close to Him?

To talk to Him? Doesn't it make you want like a small child to go and be with your father? To go and tell Him all your cares and all your joys?

[34 : 28] To give Him all of your heart? To just go freely to Him? There's no sense of you just have to do it just right or you have to have these right steps, all the right words, or it's no good.

That's not what a loving fellowship and communion between a father and a son or a father and daughter is like. That's not how love works within that relationship where you better cross all your T's or dot all your I's and do what everything you're supposed to do just exactly right or none of it's any good.

Just talk. Talk away. And maybe you've been away a while. Well, you come running back.

Any loving parent wants their child to return to them. No fear, no hiding. He wants to hear you.

He wants to hear you especially if you've been far away. Orphans run and hide. Orphans think their parents are demanding or have to impress their parents.

[35 : 42] They have to get in their good graces before they can ask for something. Orphans have to hold themselves back. But we're not orphans.

We're children. We're children of God. So go write to him and talk to him. Give him your heart. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, we do want that kind of relationship with you.

Where we're close to you. Where we are more and more like Adam and Eve in the evening.

Walking with our God and with our Father.

But we don't want to just do it in the evening. we want to wake up and be talking and loving you.

And we want to go to work and go to play and parent and love and care and go through all of our whole life with you close by us.

Talking to you and thinking about you. love and love and love and love and warm our hearts to live in that.

[37 : 01] Warm our hearts to love you in return. And so we would pray that you would blow upon these hearts and make love and every grace to blossom.

That Jesus Christ, God the Father, might come and find joy and delight in us. That we might find more and more delight in him.

Thank you for your great love for us that was showed ultimately at the cross where you put all of our sin upon our Savior.

And you accepted his sacrifice on our behalf. Thank you for that. And help us to walk in the goodness of that. And walk in the goodness of your love.

That these things might make us happy and make us confident and make us strong in the joy of the Lord. I pray this in Jesus' name. We do come in his name. Amen.