



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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A Christian's Love

Jesus Christ teaches us that love is the clearest mark of a Christian, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (**John 13:34-35**). Love is to characterize the life of a child of God. If you are growing in love, you are growing in Christ.

The Word of God emphasizes the place of love in a child of God's life:

"This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you" (**John 15:12**).

"These things I command you, that ye love one another" (**John 15:17**).

Be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (**Romans 12:10**).

"Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (**Romans 13:8**).

"Let all your things be done with charity" (**1 Corinthians 16:14**).

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (**Galatians 5:14**).

"And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (**Ephesians 5:2**).

"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (**1 Thessalonians 4:9**).

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (**Hebrews 10:24**).

"Let brotherly love continue" (**Hebrews 13:1**).

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (**1 Peter 1:22**).

"And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (**1 Peter 4:8**).

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“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (1 John 3:11).

These verses reveal that love is the character and badge of Christianity. It characterizes the lives of those who follow Jesus Christ. Yet, at the same time, God calls His people to grow in love. How can believers grow in love? In order to grow in love, we have to examine the following truths:

The Counterfeits To Christian Love

Some people flatter themselves on how loving they are. They consider themselves loving parents, good neighbors, and devoted friends. They would never consider that their love is not genuine biblical love. What are the counterfeits to biblical love?

The first counterfeit is **natural affection**. In normal circumstances, parents love their children, family members love each other, and people love their friends. This is generally true for both Christians and non-Christians. God has made us in such a way that, even in a fallen world, we naturally love certain people. This is why I call it natural affection.

Many people are congratulating themselves on what is natural to both Christians and non-Christians. They flatter themselves about their love when they are actually doing what is merely human. At the same time, they wrongly conclude that their spiritual health is fine because of their “love.” Natural affection is just one of the pretenders to the kind of love that only those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit can express.

Along with natural affection, there is **self-love**. Self-love appears to be love but at its root, it is all about pleasing oneself. Any benefits it brings to others is secondary to the main question, “Does it please me first?” For instance, a man will believe that he loves a beautiful woman. He will do almost anything for her. He adores her. He thinks of her all the time. He wants nothing more than her.

Yet, the truth is he only loves her for what she does for him and to him. She excites, intrigues, and arouses him. He wants her to be happy, but in reality, her happiness brings him pleasure. He continues to love her only to the degree that she pleases him.

This kind of love is just as common in other relationships as it is in romantic relationships. With parents or children, friends or neighbors, we can show love only because it pleases us. We find pleasure in the responses that the other makes to our actions. This is very different from the love that one indwelt by the Spirit of God exhibits.

Another counterfeit is “**I’ll love you if you love me**” type of love. This kind of love doesn’t originate from the commitment to love. It doesn’t flow out of a desire to be like Jesus Christ. It dispenses love if it receives love. This is the epitome of worldly love. This is what characterizes worldly love. Jesus Christ describes it in this way, “For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? For sinners also love those that love them” (Luke 6:32).

Worldly love is reciprocal – I will love you only as much as you love me. I will be good to you only as good as you are to me. When a person is filled with worldly love, he can show affection for some and bitterness to others. He can approve of them that praise him and fiercely oppose those who disagree with him. He can be filled with affection for some and great dislike for others. The test of a believer’s Christlikeness is not how much love he has for those that love him, but how much love he has for those that don’t love him.

A final counterfeit is **unbalanced love**. Unbalanced love separates a person rather than seeing him as a whole. It fails to treat people as a unity – a unity of body and soul. It will not recognize that people have both physical and spiritual needs. Unbalanced love will do most anything to meet physical needs but ignores spiritual needs.

Unbalanced love is when a man will give money to help people but have no concern for the souls of men. This kind of love will do whatever it takes to meet the physical needs of people but totally ignore their spiritual needs.

They will give, volunteer, and sacrifice to meet the physical needs of people but have little if no concern for the souls of people and their eternal destiny. They will not pray for, weep over, and plead with people concerning their spiritual needs. This is the exact opposite of the love of Christ and the love that the Spirit of Christ produces in people.

The Word of God shows us the balanced love of Jesus Christ in **Mark 6:34-44**. In this text, Christ taught the people. He labored to meet their spiritual needs. Yet, at the same time, He feeds them fish and bread – He meets their physical needs! Do you see the balanced love of Jesus?

Jesus primarily came to save sinners from their sin and eternal condemnation not merely to heal our short-lived bodies. Yet, He always had a balance. Christ had compassion on men's souls and bodies. He showed compassion by feeding both! He labored to meet physical needs. Yet, He always labored to meet spiritual needs. Growing in Jesus' love means that you and I will seek to meet not only physical needs but also spiritual needs.

The Characteristics Of Christian Love

If these are the counterfeits, what then is biblical love? Some non-Christians appear to have the kind of love that Christians have. I had a lady recently say to me that some non-Christians are more loving than those who profess faith in Jesus. I have seen this. Yet, there is a difference between the love of a Christian and that of a non-Christian. What makes a believer's love "Christian" and the non-Christians not?

Biblical love starts with God. We love because He first loved us. Our love is rooted in God's love toward us. We love others because God has loved us. We have come to understand how much God loves us and that in turn motivates us to love others. We have apprehended the unceasing riches of God's mercy and love to us in Jesus Christ. This in turn leads us to show that love to others.

Biblical love is fueled by the glory of God. We seek to love others that God might be honored and glorified. Our motive in loving

others is to please God. We love because we are doing God's will in order to glorify God. This separates Christian love from all the counterfeits. It is primarily about glorifying God. We love because we want to please God. We are not seeking to please ourselves but God who loves us and has saved us. Christian love is focused on pleasing God and glorifying Him. We show love to others for God's glory. It's not simply about our pleasure.

Biblical love is the result of the Holy Spirit pouring God's love into our hearts, "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us" (**Romans 5:5**). The non-Christian has to muster up love for others. The non-Christian can only pump love from his own limited, stagnant, brackish reserves. On the other hand, the Christian pours out to others the love that God has poured into our hearts. The Holy Spirit releases the love of God into our hearts. We have a supernatural fountain of love to draw from and to pump into the lives of others.

Biblical love is a sacrificial, balanced love. It seeks to reach out to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others. We seek to follow Christ's example in the gospels. He had compassion for the whole person. He sought to meet the needs of the body and the soul. Biblical love stirs people to give and to sacrifice to meet the physical needs of people. However, it also stirs us to pray, to weep, to be concerned, to witness, and to plead with people concerning their souls. Jesus loved sinful people (**Mark 10:21**). How can we who profess Christ do any less?

The Cultivation Of Christian Love

Until you see Christ in heaven, you will need to grow in love. We must cultivate our love. The reason is that Christian love goes against the grain of our nature. It is opposed to every instinct in our fallen nature. It is against every fiber of our being as sinners. Through regeneration, we have been changed. Yet, we must seek to grow in our love. We must seek to move from our self-centered, self-loving nature to Christlike love. The following are

some suggestions you might consider for maturing in Christian love:

- *Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to grow in love.* The apostle Paul reveals that God teaches believers to love, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (**1 Thessalonians 4:9**). God teaches us to love by His Holy Spirit. He is the One who pours the love of God into our hearts. Plead with the Holy Spirit to teach you how to love. Ask Him to help you mature in love. It’s interesting that Paul commends the Thessalonians for their love in **1 Thessalonians 4:9**. Yet, in **2 Thessalonians 1:2**, he writes, “the charity (love) of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.” He acknowledges that they had grown in their love. He praised them in **1 Thessalonians 4** for their love; in **2 Thessalonians 1** he acknowledges that they were growing in their love. This is the work of God – the ministry of the Spirit. Call on God to mature you in love by His Spirit.
- *Meditate on love as the most important distinguishing mark of the Christian.* If you want to grow in love, think about love. Meditate on the Bible verses concerning Christian love – like those at the beginning of this newsletter. In his article, *The Supreme Grace of Christian Love*, Maurice Roberts writes, “Love is the jewel among the graces of the Christian life. We know it – and perpetually forget it.” We should do more than remember that love is the most important distinguishing mark of the Christian. We should think about it, meditate on it. Love is not a spiritual gift given to some and not to others. The Bible insists, “He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is love” (**1 John 4:8**). Think much about the importance of love in the life of a Christian.
- *Allow your heart to be often warmed by the love of God.* God is the Source of love that flames the love in a Christian’s heart. We must reflect on, rest, and bask in the love of God for us before we can consistently show that love to others. In your times of prayer and meditation, think about the love of God. Meditate regularly on the cross and the empty tomb. Reflect on the Bible verses that speak of God’s love for you. Pray **Ephesians 3:18-19** regularly. God is love and having fellowship with Him in prayer and the Word will cause us to grow warm in His love.
- *Discover the assurance that God is your Father by loving as He loves.* The Word of God tells us that God is love (**1 John 4:8**). It also reveals that those who love know God as their Father, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God (**1 John 4:7**). The Word of God says that those who love are born of God. They know God; they know and experience Him as their Father. God’s nature is love and those who have His nature are His children. Anyone who is born of God will have His nature, that is, His loving nature. Those who show love are the children of God. By loving, you gain the assurance that you have God as your Father.
- *Delight in imitating God.* The Word of God says, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children and walk in love” (**Ephesians 5:1-2**). The Bible exhorts us to imitate God. How do we imitate God? We do it by showing love as He has. As we love others, we are imitating God. When you love others, you can be thrilled with the awareness that you are being like God when you do this.
- *Think about and identify the relationships you need to grow in love the most.* Target specific people. Seek to express love to specific individuals rather than everyone in general. It may be a family member, a member of your church, a neighbor, or someone you work with.
- *Take the initiative to show love to people from whom there is little or no expectation of that love being returned.* Isn’t this what Jesus did? If we want to be like Christ, we must learn to love those from whom we may receive little or no love in return. Let the fact that you are imitating God and

becoming like Jesus be enough whether or not the person loves you back or not.

Praying 1 Corinthians 13

The following Scripture prayers are based on 1 Corinthians 13. They are designed to help you seek God for maturity in love. You can pray these for yourself or for others. You can also adapt them for your church:

Father, I plead that I will not exalt anything above love. I pray that I will not substitute anything for love. The ability to witness, preach, or teach, biblical insight and knowledge, faith, service, and giving mean very little apart from love. They are like sounding brass and clanging cymbals. I ask that Your love will fill my life and permeate all these aspects of my Christian life.

Father, Your Word says that love suffers long. Create within me the patience of love. Set me free from being impatient with others.

Father, Your Word says that love is kind. I ask that I will be kind to others regardless of their words or actions. Deliver me from being mean-spirited.

Father, Your Word says that love does not envy. Break the jealous spirit in me. I ask that I will rejoice in the blessings that You give to others.

Father, Your Word says that love does not boast. I pray that I will build up others rather than building up myself.

Father, Your Word says that love is not proud. Deliver me from a self-righteous spirit. I pray that I will exalt others over myself.

Father, Your Word says that love does not act unbecomingly. Teach me to be gracious to others. Enable me to act in purity toward others.

Father, Your Word says that love does not seek its own. Empower me to seek the good of others.

Father, Your Word says that love is not provoked. Set me free from unrighteous anger. I ask that I will not be quick to get angry and spew that anger out on others.

Father, Your Word says that love does not take account of wrongs suffered. Help me to forgive quickly. Empower me to release the wrongs done to me.

Father, Your Word says that love does not rejoice in unrighteousness. I plead that I will not find joy in what other people suffer. Give me a heart to sympathize with the suffering.

Father, Your Word says that love rejoices in the truth. I ask that I will be concerned about others spiritual condition. I pray that I will share the truth and will rejoice in those who hear and believe.

Father, Your Word says that love bears all things. Deliver me from holding grudges. Give me compassion for those who wrong me.

Father, Your Word says that love believes all things. I pray that I will encourage others and believe in them.

Father, Your Word says that love endures all things. I plead that I will graciously bear with the faults and failures of others, encouraging and blessing them.

Father, Your Word says that love hopes all things. I pray that I will expect the best of others. I pray that I will not give up on people, failing to pray for them, bless them, and encourage them.

Father, Your Word says that love endures all things. I pray that I will not give up on people, failing to pray for them, bless them, and encourage them.

Praying Through Ecclesiastes Meaningless Pleasure Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Most Americans today are richer than most people in history. Yet, in spite of our

material prosperity – or maybe because of it – we still suffer from poverty of soul. The taste of pleasure has grown our appetite for this world beyond satisfaction. Meanwhile we are desperately searching for meaning in life.

Solomon now goes on a search for meaning through the pleasures of this world. He has already tried by seeking knowledge and by practicing good and evil. He found that these things gave him no sense of meaning. They gave him no hope. Instead of giving up, he labors to find meaning and hope in the pleasures of this world.

What He Sought (2:1)

In **2:1**, Solomon talks to himself after his first pursuit failed. He has an inner dialogue. He decides to do something new hoping to find meaning, hope, and fulfillment. He decides to test pleasure. The word “prove” means a deliberate attempt to learn something from experience. He wanted to find hope and meaning through pleasure. He chooses to make his own personal happiness the chief end – goal – of his life.

He tells us that this pursuit failed just as the previous two in chapter 1. Pleasure seemed to hold out the promise of purpose, hope, and meaning. However, it turned out to be empty and unsatisfying. By the time he had experienced all the pleasure he could, he found that he really had nothing.

In announcing the result of his quest right at the beginning, he was not prejudging things. On the contrary, he carried on a comprehensive experiment. He explains how comprehensive his search was in **2:2-8**. Yet, he wants us to know that pleasure will not give a person meaning, hope, or purpose. He sought these things in pleasure and came away empty and unsatisfied.

What He Tried (2:2-8)

In **2:2-8**, Solomon lists all the pleasures he followed after.

Entertainment (2:2) – Solomon sought out every kind of entertainment. He pursued every form of entertainment yet there was no lasting fulfillment. Life is no laughing matter and it left him empty and hopeless.

Alcohol (2:3) – This is a popular way to find enjoyment and peace, to escape from the troubles of life. Solomon drank as much as he wanted. Yet, it left him empty with no hope.

Building projects (2:4-6) – Solomon was a builder, an architect, and a developer. He spent more than a decade building his own palace at great expense. He built better homes and gardens (**2:4**). He planted fruit trees and plants (**2:5**). He built massive irrigation systems from reservoirs (**2:6**).

A Huge Workforce (2:7) – Solomon had to have many workers to accomplish all his building.

Taxes and Tribute (2:8a) – Solomon was filthy rich from the taxes and tribute paid to him.

Music (2:8b) – Music was a rare pleasure in this day. He could afford to bring it to his home. He had entire choirs to sing for him.

Sex (2:8c) – “delights of the sons of man” – Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He had more sexual partners than anyone could ever imagine. This was the royal icing on the cake. Solomon had it all and experienced it all.

What He Learned (2:9-11)

These verses give Solomon’s summary of his experiment with pleasure. In **2:9**, Solomon admits no one had experienced pleasure like him. He has no comparisons as far as worldly pleasure. In the midst of it, he evaluated pleasure as a way to hope, meaning, and purpose. This is why he says, “my wisdom remained with me.”

In **2:10**, Solomon admits that whenever he spied something he wanted, he took it. He indulged in every worldly pleasure he could. He denied nothing to himself.

In **2:11**, Solomon tells us how he felt after he pursued worldly pleasure with all his being. He confesses that his pursuit ended in hopelessness. Worldly pleasure is vanity – empty, fleeting, and hopeless. He declares that you can squeeze all the pleasure you want out of life and you still have nothing.

Lessons From Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

- *Pleasure, pursued for its own sake, does not and cannot satisfy the soul.* Solomon pursued every form of pleasure you can imagine. He tried it all. He declared that none of it gave him hope, meaning, or purpose.
- *Our unsatisfied longings give us a spiritual clue that we are made for God.* The fact that nothing in this world can satisfy us ought to point us to God. It should show us that only God can give us hope, purpose, and meaning – only He can fill the holes in our souls.
- *True pleasure comes from the enjoyment of God.* God is not a spoilsport. He is not trying to take pleasure away from us. Once we learn how to find our satisfaction in God Himself, then all of His other gifts become the best and truest of pleasures. We must learn to find satisfaction and purpose in God. Then we will be able to enjoy and use all of God's gifts to us.

Father, forgive me of all the times when I've exalted the pleasures of this world over You. I plead that I would find my satisfaction in You. I ask that I would find my greatest joy and enjoyment in You and Your Word. Help me to see Your blessings as Your gifts to me, to rejoice in and enjoy, but not to replace You. Amen.

Developing An Awareness of God's Presence

Most professing Christians can identify more with the words of Jacob, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I knew it not" (**Genesis 28:16**) than with the promise of Jesus when He said, "I am with you always" (**Matthew 28:20**). Perhaps you have sensed the presence of God at various times in your walk with God. However, how often are you aware of the presence of God?

If we take the teaching of the Bible seriously, perception of the presence of God should not be an occasional experience. I don't mean that you should **feel** a supernatural presence because that would be highly unreliable. Yet, it shouldn't be unusual for us,

wherever we are, to recognize that "God is here." As we grow closer to Him, we should discern His nearness more readily and more often.

What can we do to grow in our awareness of the continuous presence of God? The following are some suggestions to help you grow in this awareness:

- *Spend much time in the place where God has revealed Himself the most – the Bible.* The more we know God's Word and read it, the more it will take us into the presence of God. If you want to set the Lord always before you, spend much of your time with regular, daily reading of God's Word. God gave us His Word in order to reveal Himself to us. Shouldn't we expect to experience His presence primarily in the Word of God? Read the Word but don't stop there. Meditate on it. Reflect on it. Linger over verses until it gets deeply planted in the soil of your soul.
- *Acknowledge His presence by talking with Him.* The way to develop intimacy with someone is by communication. When a person's prayer life is decaying by silence, is it any wonder that he or she feels unaware of the nearness of God? God is a real Person who is very present. If you ignore Him, He will seem absent. If you don't talk to Him, He will seem distant. Talk with Him and you will almost always feel Him closer.
- *Seek the manifestations of His presence in congregational worship.* The Bible says that the body of believers is the temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 3:9, 16-17**). Because of this, going to worship with the people of God is going to the Lord's temple where His presence abides. The solitary worshiper does not have access to the presence of the Lord that comes through corporate worship. He or she misses on the manifestations of God's nearness when His people gather to worship Him. While there are experiences with God that He gives only in private worship, it is equally true that the Lord manifests His presence in unique ways in the public worship of the church.

- *Continually affirm the truth that God is always present.* God Himself is always present with us. Jesus promised us, "I am always with you." He is with us even when we don't sense His presence. We must continually affirm that God is with us. We must do this even when we don't sense His presence. We have to affirm this truth even when we don't feel it to be true. You may be saying, "I just don't sense God with me. He seems so far away." Faith responds by saying, "I know He is with me. He told me He would always be with me, that He would never leave me or forsake me. Whether I sense He is with me or not, the truth is: God is with me at this moment as much as any moment in my life. I will believe the truth."

- *Say to yourself often, The Lord is here.* Do this especially in the ordinary moments of life – sitting in traffic, standing in line at a store, in the kitchen, at the gas station, sitting on the computer.

Additions To The Prayer Closet Website

We would invite you to check out the new additions to The Prayer Closet website. On our Sermons page, we have added a series of messages on emotional healing by Dr. Meador. This series is entitled "Healer of The Brokenhearted." You can also download the study guide that goes along with it. Check out the Bookstore; we've added a variety of new prayer rings! Check us out at – www.prayerclosetministries.org!



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