

Teach Us to Pray

Lesson 3: Praying to the Father Through the Son -- John 14:13–14; 1 Timothy 2:5

It is the last night before the cross, and the disciples are frightened. Jesus has just told them he is going away, and their hearts are troubled. Into that fear he speaks some of the most comforting words ever spoken, and tucked inside them is a promise about prayer so large it is easy to rush past: “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” He says it twice, as though he knows they will need to hear it again. He is leaving, yes, but he is not leaving them without access to God. He is about to open a way to the Father that has never existed before.

We say the words all the time. We end our prayers with “in Jesus’ name,” often without thinking, the way we sign off a letter. For some it has become almost a verbal seal, the phrase that makes a prayer official, as if leaving it off might cause the prayer to bounce. But Jesus did not give us a password. He gave us himself. To pray in his name is to come to God leaning on who Jesus is and what he has done, asking in line with his character and his will, as people who belong to him.

Years later the apostle Paul puts the same truth in one shining sentence: “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” One God. One mediator. Not many ladders to heaven, not a crowd of go-betweens we must enlist, not our own goodness propping open the door. One bridge spans the distance between a holy God and us, and his name is Jesus. When we pray, we do not have to wonder whether we are worthy to be heard. We come through him.

That is where this lesson begins, with a question that lives underneath all our praying: how can people like us actually get through to God? The answer is not a technique and not a worthy enough resume. It is a Person. Read these verses slowly, and let them give you the confidence of a child who knows the way to the Father, because the Son has taken her by the hand.

Group Discussion: Most of us have heard, and said, “in Jesus’ name” at the end of countless prayers. What do you think people generally mean by that phrase, and why might it be tempting to treat it as a kind of magic ending that makes a prayer work? What would change if we really understood what it means to pray in Jesus’ name?

Personal Reflection: Think about how you actually approach God in prayer. Deep down, do you feel you have to be good enough, or do enough, before God will listen to you? How might it change your prayers to know that your access to God rests entirely on Jesus and not on your own worthiness?

Read John 14:13–14; 1 Timothy 2:5

Study Questions

1. Jesus promises, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do” (v. 13). What does it actually mean to pray “in Jesus’ name,” and why is it far more than a phrase we attach to the end of a prayer?
2. Be honest about your own habit. Has “in Jesus’ name” become a routine sign-off for you, or even a kind of formula you assume makes a prayer count? What would it look like this week to pray in his name with real meaning rather than out of habit?
3. Paul writes that “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). What is a mediator, and why does it matter so much that there is only one, and that the one is Jesus?
4. We can drift into leaning on other things to make us acceptable to God: our own goodness, a streak of religious effort, or the sense that we need an especially holy person to pray for us. Where are you tempted to trust something other than Christ to secure God’s ear, and what would it mean to rest in him alone?
5. Jesus gives the purpose of answered prayer: “that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (v. 13). How does this stated goal shape what it means to ask in his name, and how does praying for the Father’s glory protect us from treating prayer as a way to get whatever we happen to want?
6. Imagine holding your current prayer requests up to the test, “Would answering this glorify the Father in the Son?” Which of your requests look different in that light, and how might that question reshape what you ask for?
7. To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray in keeping with his character and will, the way an ambassador acts in the name of the one who sent him. How does Jesus connect answered prayer to abiding in him and having his words abide in us (see John 15:7), and what does that teach about the kind of asking he promises to answer?
8. Praying in Jesus’ name slowly conforms our desires to his. Take one request that matters to you right now. How might bringing it under the character and will of Jesus change the request itself, or change you as you pray it?
9. Some treat “in my name” as a guarantee that any request, worded correctly, must be granted, and some look to other mediators, to departed saints or to anyone besides Christ, to carry their prayers to God. Why is both of these a serious error? Using these verses, explain how we approach God: through Christ alone, the one mediator, asking in line with his will, rather than through a formula or any other go-between.
10. Look back across John 14:13-14 and 1 Timothy 2:5. Jesus is your one mediator, and through him you have real access to the Father. Name one specific way this truth is reshaping the confidence with which you pray, and one thing you will do this week to come to God boldly through Christ.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 7:23–25, Jesus our ever-living high priest who always lives to make intercession for us; John 15:7, abiding in Christ and his words abiding in us as the setting for asking; Ephesians 2:18, through Christ we both have access in one Spirit to the Father; 1 John 2:1, Jesus Christ the righteous, our advocate with the Father; Acts 4:12, salvation in no one else, for there is no other name by which we must be saved.