



4 Diversified in Prayer

Our love for God cannot be separated from our love for others. Our love for God results in us loving others, which has huge implications for our prayer-lives.

Text: 1 John 4:19-21

Points to discuss:

1. We love God because he first loved us

We only love God because he loved us first. He is the love initiator. God created us because he loved us. The Bible says that he chose us before the world was even made (Ephesians 1:4). Even when we sinned, he reached out to humanity by sending his son, in human form, to pay the price for our sin and to bridge the gulf that sin caused between us and him. He gave everything to win us back to himself because he loved us (John 3:16). His love is powerful and transforming, and compels us to respond.

2. God's love for us should compel us to love others

Matthew 5:43-47 & Romans 5:10

When we have received God's love, we respond by loving him back, and loving the people he loves. When we really understand how profound it is that God chose to pay with his own life, for the filthy sin in our hearts and lives, we are filled with absolute gratitude and a profoundly humble love for God.

This understanding of the gospel levels us with everyone else. It makes us realise that the next person's sin is as deep and pervasive as ours, but that God stooped down and loved them just as much as he loved us. Instead of looking down on other people, we are then able to see them as God's beloved children, and we choose to treat them as such. Our love for other believers serves as a kind of 'litmus test' for how much we really love God, and how deeply the truth of the gospel has gripped our hearts.

If we are harbouring bitterness towards another believer, then we are missing something in our love for God, or in our understanding of his love for us. We cannot claim to love God and be self-righteous at the same time. Being made righteous because of Christ automatically removes our ability to claim our own righteousness, and so we cannot look down on anyone.





We need to remind ourselves that every human being has been made in the image of God, and therefore they deserve dignity on this basis alone. God sees the people we dislike/hate in the same way he sees us. His grace extends into their sin and brokenness just as deeply as it extends into ours and so we should love them, just as much as we love ourselves, and those we find easy to love.

It is one thing to love those we don't really like, but another to love those who despise us and make our lives unbearable. Yet Jesus commands us, on the same basis, to love our enemies. One of the best ways for us to do this is to pray for them.

3. Praying for others is an expression of our love for God

Knowing that God loves people motivates us to pray for them. Praying for others also reminds us that life is not all about us, and it keeps us from being so inward focussed. Prayer reminds us of God's passion to reach the lost, of his love for the nations and it also connects us to God's work around the world. Prayer is our most effective way of partnering with God on his mission. There is nothing better than seeing answered prayer in the lives of people we interceded for.

3 groups of people to pray for:

- Those we love
- Those we don't love
- Those we are blinded to love

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you find easier: praying for yourself or praying for others?
2. Why do you think that it is easier to pray for those we love than those we care little or nothing about?
3. Why is praying for others directly related to how well we understand and embrace the gospel in our own hearts?
4. Why does praying for others help us to think of ourselves and our own problems less, and why is this a good thing?
5. Why is praying for our enemies one tangible way to love them?
6. ♥ Personal Reflection: When last did you humble yourself and pray for an enemy, and what was the outcome for you and for the person you prayed for (if known)?
7. ♥ Personal Reflection: Who is God pressing upon me to pray for? Tell the group why you feel led to pray for them (without breaking confidentiality/gossiping) and what you are going to commit to over the following week. Take time at the beginning of next week to report back on what the process of intentional prayer taught you.

