

THE WALK BACK: How Prayer Brings Confidence and Confrontation (1 John 5:13-17)

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Series Slide

Good morning! My name is Jacob, I'm the Worship Minister here at City Church. Glad to have you all with us this morning.

Though he lived out the rockstar lifestyle in his early career, Dave Grohl and his band Foo Fighters have become, in his words, "disgustingly domesticated."

In a 2011 interview with The Guardian, Grohl and his band have traded their troublemaking antics for conversations about family sock drawers and their kids' piano lessons. And as the article says, they're content with that.

However, Grohl doesn't shy away from the hard living that preceded the calm they were experiencing. For example, he details the harrowing story of his bandmate Taylor Hawkins overdosing on heroin back in 2001.

Hawkins was hospitalized in London, where Foo Fighters had been touring at the time. Grohl was at his side as Hawkins remained in a coma for 2 weeks that he eventually woke up from.

Grohl was weary of watching his peers lose themselves to drugs and ultimately to death. Just 7 years earlier, he called to confront his former Nirvana bandmate Kurt Cobain's saying, "I don't want you to die."

Commenting on Hawkins' overdose, Grohl said,

"When Taylor wound up in hospital I was ready to quit music. Because, to me, it felt like music equalled death. I started *praying*. I've never been to church in my life, and I'm walking back from Taylor's hospital to our hotel every night, praying out loud in the streets of London. I don't even know if I believe in God. But I felt like, y'know, this is just not right, y'know, what kind of God would let this..."¹

Grohl was no longer indifferent but indignant towards the Divine. He couldn't ignore the depth of sorrow and anger burning in him as he paced the London streets.

¹ Dave Grohl: 'I was ready to quit music. It felt to me like music equalled death. I started praying...' by Tom Lamont (The Guardian 2011)

Many of you are familiar with the “walk back” Grohl is talking about here. The “walk back” is the reality of enduring everyday life while the weight of suffering or shame closes in on you. It’s walking back to your car from the hospital, knowing your relative is still there in pain - it’s the walk back to your dorm after a night of drunken partying has left you feeling empty yet again.

And often the last thing you and I want to do in those moments is pray.

TITLE SLIDE

My hope today is to show you that you don’t have to wonder if your prayers are heard on the walk back. Our God has given us prayer not only to communicate with Him but also to speak life into those around us.

If you have your bible, you can turn to 1 John 5 - we’ll be starting in verse 13. If you don’t have a bible, please take one as our gift to you. You can find them on the wall in the back. In the meantime, the words will be on the screen behind me.

John writes,

“I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him.

If anyone sees a fellow believer^[a] committing a sin that doesn’t lead to death, he should ask, and God will give life to him—to those who commit sin that doesn’t lead to death. There is sin^[b] that leads to death. I am not saying he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin that doesn’t lead to death.”

- 1 John 5:13-17 CSB

And that is the Word of the Lord from 1 John 5.

CONTEXT/TRANSITION:

TITLE SLIDE

In verse 13, John is closing out his letter to the church in Ephesus saying, THIS IS IT! Here's why I'm writing to you: so you may know life with Jesus is life to the full. It's yours. This is not just a nice idea; it's reality.

This was needed encouragement for the Ephesian church because they were hearing people they once trusted saying, "Jesus isn't the Son of God." Like Dave Grohl walking back to his hotel, the Ephesians likely walking back from their gatherings feeling stressed and discouraged. But

1) God sees and hears us on the walk back

v 13 & 14

In verse 13 & 14, John, in essence, is saying, "Because you have eternal life and are called children of God, you can go to God with your questions and requests knowing he'll hear you." Once again, John is grounding the Ephesians in reality that gives them confidence before God.

He's clearing up the confusion they may have had as they watched their fellow church members leaving - he's speaking into

And the word "hear" in verse 14 is not passive hearing - the greek word for "hear" is "a-koo-oh", which means to listen and show regard to.

I think one of the main reasons you and I may be inconsistent in prayer is because we're unsure of our standing with God. Hear this: if you have made Jesus Lord of your life and are living in relationship with Him, his ear is always towards you.

Our confidence is not in the eloquence or frequency of our prayers; our confidence is in Jesus putting us back in right relationship with God the Father, giving us life in Himself. And that truth should lead us to call out to Him more.

v 14 & 15

Now there are two phrases in verses 14 and 15 that should cause us to turn our heads a bit: the phrase "according to his will" in verse 14 and the sentence "we know that we have what we have asked of him" in verse 15. Let's talk about God's will first.

At some point, we have all made God's will more of a frustrating mystery than it needs to be. Let's look at aspects of God's will that are clearly stated in scripture:

"Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 CSB

“For this is God’s will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality...seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your own hands... - 1 Thessalonians 4:3,11 CSB

As you’re praying and discerning the will of God, look first to clear evidence of God’s will in the Bible. These are verses that take us out of our individualistic mindset and make us look at what God is calling ALL of us to.

Back to v 14 & 15

Ultimately, praying “according to his will” is praying in alignment with what God desires for our lives. God’s will for us is to flourish in loving, obedient relationship with Him which overflows into love for others. Are your prayers lining up with His will?

Practically, Jesus modeled praying according to God’s will beautifully the night before He died. He prayed:

“He said, “Father, if it’s your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not my will but your will must be done.” - Luke 22:42 CSB

We’ll talk more about that prayer later but for now, I want you to notice 2 seemingly contradictory themes here: honesty and yielding.

Jesus was honest with the Father in his request - “take this cup” - but he ultimately yields to Him in loving submission - “your will must be done”

We often think honesty and yielding are mutually exclusive in prayer: either we vent thoughtless anger to God (“cause He can handle it!”) or we say we’re yielding to God when really we’ve just given up because if He’s not answering, what’s the point?

Back to 1

Let me be clear: I’m not trying to bust your chops about your prayer lives - we worship the God who gives new mercy every day to us and there is grace for our imperfect or even nonexistent prayers.

But my hope for us is that God’s kindness and grace leads us to repent of our anger, repent of our apathy and bring honest prayers that are lovingly yielded to His will.

These often look like laments, which are simply prayers in pain that lead to trust.

Prayers that say things like - “God, I feel burned out at work. I’m looking for other jobs but coming up empty. I feel stuck” (there’s the honesty) - “but I choose to trust that you’ll

give me the strength I need to endure. Help me do the next right thing. Your will be done. Amen.” (yielding).

God honors these prayers and His Spirit will change our hearts as we begin to humbly go before Him in this way.

Now that we have a framework of praying according to His will, what do we do with verse 15?

v 14 & 15

This verse might be creating some confusion or frustration in you - hear me: don't shut that down - we're going to engage this together.

John is grounding the Ephesians in the hope that when they voice prayers according to His will, He hears and answers them. And he goes on to depict an example of that kind of effective prayer, the prayer that asks God to save others from their sin.

But when you read verse 15, you may be thinking, “Hang on - that can't be right! I've been praying for a new job, a spouse, a diagnosis, a new house, for so long and I'm not getting any answers!”

I'll be upfront with you - I don't have the answers. I *do* think God is in the business of answering prayers in ways that are unexpected, frustrating and beautiful all at the same time.

So first look for the unexpected ways God is answering your prayers. For example, your prayer for friendship in a spouse might currently be answered by friendships in your community group.

Your prayer for financial security in a new job might currently be answered in simply being given what you need now in your current job.

But I'm sure there are some of you here saying, “Jacob, that doesn't cut it. There are no answers in sight. I'm ready to give up!” If that's you, I'm so sorry for the pain you're experiencing. I do have good news for you.

I want to take us to a passage we tend to throw around in times of uncertainty - when it seems God is on mute. God says through the prophet Isaiah,

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways.” This is the Lord's declaration. For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” - Isaiah 55:8-9 CSB

It feels like a trump card, doesn't it? Because his ways are higher, he's not concerned about me, right? But look at the preceding verses:

“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call to him while he is near. Let the wicked one abandon his way and the sinful one his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, so he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will freely forgive.” - Isaiah 55:6-7 CSB

He's got plans we can't comprehend but he's got love we can't comprehend. Those thoughts include thoughts for us - higher love than we could ever imagine.

v 15

Church, verse 15 is true, we have the good we seek because we have the SOURCE of all the good we seek.

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” - James 1:17 CSB

Don't you see, church? The more we're honest and yielding in our prayers, God's Spirit is bringing the beauty of the Father and the Son into focus so we can see that our God is our ultimate treasure and good.

Back to 1

We have what we ask because we have Him.

His will is for us to flourish in relationship with Him and others. Loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and loving others as ourselves.

Transition: And that love will sometimes lead us to confrontation. We'll become burdened when we see that just as “music equalled death” for Dave Grohl, sin equals death for those we love. And that can lead us to one end of the phone saying, “I don't want you to die. I want you to flourish.”

2) When sin is confronted, prayer equals life for all of us

In a 2018 interview, Grohl said this about people going down the path of heavy drug use:

“If I could grab every person who thinks that’s the way you should live your life and sit them down and say, ‘Listen to these horror stories,’ they’d maybe think differently. But who am I to tell anyone else how to live their life?”²

Look at that last sentence. While, yes, horror stories can only do so much, but I’d be willing to bet Grohl had the rapport with many musicians to have those confrontations.

Back to 2

Grohl’s approach to confrontation is not too unlike our approach to confronting sin in our church family. We talk ourselves out of it saying, “Who am I to do this? I’m just as sinful as they are!” Thankfully, John has a better vision for us in verse 16.

To recap, John has shown us how prayer gives us confidence but now we’ll see how prayer confronts. How the relational prayer life we carefully cultivate with God overflows to care for others.

v 16

Here we’re presented with “the sin that doesn’t lead to death” and “the sin that does lead to death”. It’s the latter that should be grabbing our attention. What is the sin that leads to death?

John doesn’t elaborate on what that sin is exactly but we can get some context from the letter itself. “He identifies sins such as rejecting Jesus’ messiahship, unwillingness to pursue holiness and failure to love others as sins” that can lead to death³. He says in the first chapter:

“If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.” - 1 John 1:6 CSB

Speaking of the people who left the Ephesian church, John writes,

“They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us...”

No one who denies the Son has the Father...

I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.” - 1 John 2:19, 23, 26 CSB

² *Why Dave Grohl Stopped Taking Drugs* (RadioX 2018)

³ *What Is the Sin that Leads to Death? (1 John 5)* by Ray Van Ness (Crossway 2022)

John isn't describing people who left the church to go to another one; they left completely denying Jesus as Lord. He is reminding the remaining Ephesian believers that these people are walking away from light and life, not towards it.

v 16

And so now we come back to the two types of sin. Here's a simple way to remember the contrast:

We're either imperfectly running towards the Light or decidedly running away from it.

I wanted to use John's repeated contrast of dark and light to create this picture for us. Let me explain what I mean.

The sin that doesn't lead to death (the imperfect running towards the light) is the sin that we commit but can still confess and repent from. Here's John again:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." - 1 John 1:9 CSB

We are all prone to sin. And we need to pray when others are falling into the same patterns of sin we're prone to⁴, that God will bring them back to their senses.

We're either imperfectly running towards the Light or decidedly running away from it.

Then we have the sin that *does* lead to death (the running away from God). This represents a decided hardness of heart that never returns to God. The darkness and spiritual death this person experiences on earth culminates in physical death.⁵

I do not talk about this kind of sin lightly or with an air of superiority. I know working through this text is like putting salt on a wound for some of you. Maybe you've been watching people you love run away from God and it looks like there's no chance of return.

Or maybe you're asking yourself, "Am I too far gone? Has my current sin decided my future?"

If you're feeling that, let me assure you: if you got breath in your lungs, you can turn toward the light. You can repent. You are not too far gone.

⁴ *Being Certain You Can Be Certain (1 John 5:13-18)* by J.D. Greear (The Summit Church)

⁵ Ibid

Hear the Father's heart for you and for those in your life running from God:

“Dear friends, don't overlook this one fact: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.” - 2 Peter 3:8-9 CSB

And you're not earning your way back to God. You're not put on a waitlist for His grace. When Jesus died on the cross, He gave us His perfect record of righteousness so when we return to Him, it's a celebration!

Jesus said there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 people who don't need it.

Back to 2

When we confront sin in others, prayer equals life for all of us because not only does God's Spirit use our prayers to help people turn back to Him; we get to see His Spirit work up close, in the flesh of those we love.

We've seen so far that prayer gives confidence and confrontation. How do we live this out?

In order for us to practice those honest & yielding prayers, we have to start by getting it on the calendar. Y'all know, if it isn't planned, it's not gonna happen (speaking from personal experience).

This is A WAY you can practice this - we'll start in the morning:

Morning - read a passage of scripture and H.E.A.R journal

Before I talk about these practicals, I wanted to let you know you can find these on the homepage of our app or you can scan the card in your seat for a link.

Here's a simple way to start: read a psalm (or if you're in a bible reading plan already, the passage of the day), highlight a verse, explain it, apply it and respond in prayer to it.

There are even some days I just do an H.R. journal - I write down the verse and write a short prayer about it.

Because the "R" in H.E.A.R. journal is last, it can easily become rushed or an afterthought. Don't miss this: one of the main points of reading the Bible is to enrich your conversations with God. So take time to respond.

Secondly,

Midday - pray "God, am I working with you today in love?"

Set an alarm or a reminder in your phone each day at lunch or right after lunch for you to pray this quick prayer. If you're anything like me, you have to sike yourself up to finish the day strong.

This is a great way to pause, invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart, and let Him empower you to work worshipfully for the rest of your day.

As you practice these prayers, you'll become more acquainted with what pleases God which means you'll also begin to see sin in yourself and others more quickly.

As your prayers move out into confronting sin in others, let it start by seeking the Lord in your morning prayers and maybe including 1 or 2 voices of wise counsel. Then eventually the confrontation may have to come to life in the form of a one-on-one conversation.

Remember, this is what you're aiming for in praying for others' sin:

"But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception." - Hebrews 3:13 CSB

Our aim in confronting sin in each other is pulling each other towards the light. It's stopping someone sprinting away from God and reminding them that, yes, there's sin in you and there might be consequences but facing them in light of Jesus' forgiveness and the community around you is far better than running into darkness.

Back to 2

Transition: These are the prayers that make the Walk Back a little more bearable.

Though we may feel riddled with anxiety or doubt, we have confidence our God is listening. Though we may have been wronged by our brother or sister, we can confront sin in our prayers, knowing our God wants to give life to them.

But these assurances came to you and I at a cost. As we sang earlier, we were in darkness, without hope and light. But with heavenly mercy in his eyes, Jesus came to pull us out of darkness. .

3) Jesus was abandoned so we wouldn't be alone on the walk back

The night before Jesus died, He was praying alone in the garden, knowing the cup of suffering he would have to drink. He prayed,

“He said, “Father, if it’s your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not my will but your will must be done.” - Luke 22:42 CSB

When Jesus prayed “your will be done”, he didn’t get up with a sense of levity - he got up and allowed himself to be betrayed and ultimately be crucified in sober obedience to the Father’s will.

Yet he was devastated by the Father’s abandonment of Him on the cross - the One who knew no sin had become sin for us. He cried out the words of Psalm 22 - “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

Back to 3

All of the sin that we pursued and will pursue away from the light - all of our sin - past, present, future - was laid on Jesus. But with His perfect life, he died on our place, defeated sin & death in the grave and rose victorious so we could step into the light, step into the freedom Jesus brings.

Now when we’re on the walk back from a loved one’s hospital bed, another night of drinking - a time where you and I can feel the most alone - we can know we’re not. Our God hears us and sees us because Jesus has brought us back into right relationship with the Father.

LORD’S SUPPER SLIDE

As a response to God’s Word today, we’re going to take the Lord’s Supper together. The way we do it here is we take it in small groups; what better way to be reminded we’re not alone! (covenant members you will lead a prayer in these groups).

Here we’ll remember Jesus’ body broken and His blood spilled so we could made new and draw near to Him

If you haven’t made Jesus Lord of your life, it wouldn’t make sense to for you take the bread & juice this morning. Instead of taking it, I encourage you to sit in one of these groups and witness how Jesus’ death and resurrection has changed the people of our church body.

However, if you’re here today and you’ve been sprinting towards sin but you’re ready to run towards Jesus and make Him Lord, would you take a moment to tell the Lord that as

we close out today? Then I would love to talk to you about that afterwards, come find me outside at the top of the stairs by the Welcome Team tent.

Before we take the bread and juice, let's take another moment to be quiet and pray together.

*SHORT PRAYER > 2 tables in the back, 2 tables in the front, grab your elements and circle up