

John 11:1-3

Prayers that Move Jesus Most

TSC: HELP!

MPT: Jesus is the resurrection and the life; wherever he is, God's resurrection power is available *now*.

MPS: When you appeal to God's heart, you can expect to see God's hand.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to TSC, my name is Curtis. My wife, Elizabeth, and I have been at the Summit since 2011 and we both have been on staff here for a little over five years...

Happy Father's Day to all of you dads...I have been blessed with the great privilege of being the Father to 3 beautiful girls. The youngest of which my wife and I just welcomed into the world **21 days ago** (3.5, 2, and new). ***Jesus be a nap // wedding sponsor***

- Sometimes when I'm at the gym people will ask me what I'm training for, and my response is always the same: *"Life with three daughters."*

You know, we've been in this prayer series entitled "**HELP**" which, for me, has been incredibly descriptive of my prayer life lately with a newborn, because I feel like all I've done is **PRAY** those words to God: "HELP! Three daughters, Lord, HELP!" The last few weeks we've seen how if we offer our desperation to God in prayer, we will find him eager to **listen**, eager to **forgive**, eager to **heal**, and eager to **step in** and **HELP**.

I want to continue today by preaching on a fairly well-known Bible story, and that's the **story of Lazarus**. If you have your Bible go ahead and take it out and turn to **John 11**. *If you don't have a Bible, or if you want a nicer one, you can go to our Next Steps area after the*

service...we have a lost and found there. You might even find the one you left here on Easter.

Since we are officially Southern Baptists now, at all of our locations, why don't we **stand** in honor of the reading of the Word of God...

John 11:1-3 (ESV)

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.

³So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

PRAY

- *See your resurrection power today // Ps. 19:14, "Words of mouth..." // John 3:30*

With the addition of new baby girl, I've been at home as much as possible the last few weeks, and I've quickly been reminded how the requests never stop; how you never get a moment "for yourself." I mean, if you asked me to make a list of hardest jobs in the world, I think it would look something like this: **mercenary**, **bomb technician**, and **stay at home mom** (who has to be both a mercenary and a bomb defuser *daily*). It may be Father's Day, but being home has reminded me what an incredible gift that stay-at-home moms are!

As with most kids, my girls are never-ending chatterboxes of requests.

- "Daddy, I'm hungry."
- "Daddy, I want to play in the pool."
- "Daddy, I have a boo-boo."
- "Daddy, Norah hit me."

What's interesting, though, is that they don't really ever ask **questions**; they just make **statements**. They're not worried about using correct punctuation; they just want what they want when they

want it. But even though they don't state things as **questions**, we all know they're **requests**, right? I'll translate for you:

- **"Daddy, I'm hungry."** means: Can I have some form of candy, bread, cheese, ice cream, popcorn, or pizza? Preferably *all of them*, Dad, please and thank you.
- **"Daddy, I want to play in the pool."** means: Can we go to the BIG pool? Not the plastic kiddie pool you keep filling up in the front yard because you're too cheap to buy a membership to the big pool, DAD.
- **"Daddy, I have a boo boo."** means: Dad, can I have a squish and a band-aid?
- **"Daddy, Norah hit me."** means: Dad, will you please do something about my terrorist little sister?

I'm **genuinely trying** to cherish this season of dependence they have on me. We even have a little thing we do where I'll ask:

- *Why did daddy get/do that for you?* "Because he loves me."
- *And how long will daddy love you?* "Forever!"

I want them to know *why* I'm willing to do all of these things for them, no matter how ridiculous and no matter how long the list is...I want them to know they should **never stop asking, never stop coming to me, never stop pleading** for my help.

- They don't have to say, *"Will you please help me in my **pain**? Will you please help me in my **hunger**? Will you please help me in my **situation**?"*
 - They simply say, *"Daddy, I **have** a situation..."* And hearing those words are enough to move me to action on their behalf **because of how much I love them**.
- My kids never stop asking because they believe two things about me: 1) I love them & 2) I have the power to help them.

It makes sense to me now why Jesus said to have "childlike faith." Because **if we really believed about God** even just as much as my kids believed about me, **the way we pray would fundamentally change**. It would change because you'd recognize there is a God who is

good/loving/kind/sympathetic to your situation, as well as **great/powerful/mighty** enough to do something about it.

Which brings me back to our story here in John 11, where I want to show you today **the prayers that move Jesus most**. It's not an overstatement for me to say that if you can learn this, the confidence you have in your prayer life will never be the same.

- (Before we get too deep, I want to reiterate something Pastor Will said last week, and it's that what I'm about to share **is not a formula by which we get God to move on our behalf**; this is a posture. **A posture of prayer** that, I believe, according to John 11, **moves Jesus most**. We can't *make* the Spirit move, but we sure can open up our sails and wait for the wind.)

Let's look at this again...

John 11

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent to him...

- **By the way – we all know how this miracle ends, right? Have you ever thought about how amazing this had to be for everyone in the story...except for one person...¹ What a bad break!**

At this point in the story, Lazarus is still hanging on, though. But **put yourself in this family's shoes**...Lazarus is sick. At any moment he could slip into eternity. All cards are on the table for this family. They are in the thick of it as they are being exposed by the greatest enemy of all time: **death**.

It seems as if Mary/Martha have exhausted all of their options; they see this is no job for **essential oils** and **chicken noodle soup**. This is a job **only for Jesus**. You see, there are some jobs that are only meant for Jesus, but you have to know how to get in touch with him.

¹ Thanks, John Crist.

Well they know that Jesus is over in a place called Perea, ~15 miles or so from Bethany, and they send what they believe to be their **best, most convincing, most airtight argument** for why Jesus should come help their brother Lazarus.

Now I want you to think about this – Mary/Martha have **one shot** at getting Jesus's attention, and it is *time sensitive*. They have **one shot** to make their request; **one shot** to ask for help; **one shot** to get Jesus to move on their behalf. So it better be a good argument because Lazarus's life depends on it.

Now, let me ask you, if you have **one shot** at getting Jesus's attention in a situation like this...**one shot** to save your loved one's life. **One shot** to save your husband, wife, mom, dad, brother, sister, best friend.

But seriously, if you have **one shot** to save your loved one's life, what are you **saying** to him? What are you **asking** of him? **How** are you asking it? What would your **argument be for why he should** help?

Here's what I do know: **I'm not writing something short**. I'm going to list Lazarus's entire spiritual resume to Jesus:

- *Jesus, it's Lazarus, your buddy, he's sick! You know, the one who **loves you** dearly...the guy who does his **quiet time** daily...the guy who **tells everyone** he knows about you...the guy who **diligently serves** on the parking team. The guy who **tithes faithfully**. We can't let him die, think about his potential for Kingdom work! It's Lazarus – **the one who loves you**, Jesus – so please help!*

Not Mary and Martha. They knew what would move Jesus. **They knew what kind of prayer would move God in the flesh the most:**

- Verse 3: **"Lord, he whom you love is ill."**

I only have one point for you today: When you appeal to God's heart, you can expect to see God's hand.

Now this is pretty backwards to how we're used to praying:

- *God, **I've been doing** everything **I'm** supposed to do! I'm trying to **love you more**. I've been **having my quiet time**. I've been **tithing**. I've been **praying**. And after all that, I still don't understand why you won't move in my life the way I want/need you to!*
 - *Why won't you heal my mom?*
 - *Why did you let her get the job over me?*
 - *Why won't you provide me with a spouse?*
 - *Why have you withheld children from us?*
 - ***I'm** doing everything **I'm** supposed to be doing! So why aren't you doing what you're supposed to be doing?*

But that's not how to pray. Here's what moves Jesus most: The God of the universe is not moved most by your love or dedication for him, but is moved by **his love** for you.

- I want you to really hear this from me: **God. Loves. You.**
- Regardless of what you've **done**, regardless of what you **think** of yourself, regardless of the **guilt** or the **shame** or the **regrets** you carry around...even with all of that: **God. Loves. You.**

For some of you, this is your biggest hang-up with Jesus and it's your biggest problem with prayer – you just can't fathom that someone, much less the God of the universe, could **love you** and would **listen to you**. But this is Christianity at its most basic level: not that we first loved God; but that **God first loved us**.

The gospel is **not** that *we loved God so much* that he came to save the world...NO! The gospel is that **God loved us so much** that he gave his

only begotten Son, to **die in our place** and to **redeem** each and every one of us to himself, **if only you would believe**.

You are loved unconditionally by the God of the universe. Don't let **society** or **anyone** ever tell you any different. Don't let your **past** tell you different. Don't let **that kid at school** tell you different. Don't let a **bad experience with church** tell you different. Don't let **yourself** tell you any different! Because even in spite of anything you have ever done that **you think** makes you unlovable, let me gladly tell you that:

- **Because he loves you** "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."²
- **Because he loves you** "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."³
- **Because he loves you** "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."⁴
- **Because he loves you**

**There is [now] a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's [Christ Jesus's] veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.**

That is the love of God for you, dearly beloved.

Mary/Martha petition Jesus **based on Jesus's love for Lazarus**, not on Lazarus's love for Jesus, because **that** is what moves Jesus to action: **his love for you**.

⁴But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

² Psalm 103:12

³ Isaiah 1:18

⁴ Romans 8:1

⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (John really wants us to understand this – *Jesus loved this family.*) **⁶So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. . .**

"He loved them so he waited." Hm. I think "but" would be better, yeah? – *"He loved them but he waited."* Rather, what it says is *"He loved them so he waited."*

The reason he waited is because he wants us to know clearly, without a doubt, that by the time he finally arrives in Bethany in verse 17, **Lazarus is truly dead**. Not just 1 or 2 or 3-day dead...but 4-day dead...he is DEAD DEAD.

- It seems as if Jesus is too late. Think about this from the sisters' perspective – they prayed the right thing, but their brother still died. To them it seems as if Jesus has failed them...
 - But actually, if you haven't learned this by now in your life, **Jesus is not so concerned about time as he is with timing**.
- Jesus wants us to know that this was not a **resuscitation** about to occur; no, this was a **resurrection**.

*Let's skip ahead a bit to **verse 23**. We'll come back to verses 21-22 in a few minutes, but they're just **so good** that I want to save them for dessert...*

In verse 23 Jesus arrives in Bethany and sees Martha... **²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."** **²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."**

Well dang, good answer! Martha's been to seminary it seems. She knows the correct theological answer to pain: *"I know everything will be fine **one day**."*

- As Christians when someone is going through something we love to tell them, “*God’s in control. It’ll all be fine. One day every sad thing will come untrue.*”
- Sure, that’s **perfectly true** and can certainly bring you comfort, but that doesn’t always alleviate my suffering *now*. Jesus (who’s fairly good at reading people!) picks up that Martha needs more than a **theological reminder** right now.
- What Jesus is about to do is completely redefine her theology. He is about to move the **doctrine of the resurrection** from being a **future hope** and make it become a **present reality** for Martha.

²⁵Jesus said to her, “**I am the resurrection and the life.** Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die...”

I am the resurrection and the life. Sometimes what Jesus does when he meets us in prayer is to remind us of what we **think** we already believe—but what we don’t *actually, really, truly* believe, or at least don’t believe *for our situation*. This wasn’t some new doctrine for Martha. This was Jesus saying,

“*You know that doctrine about resurrection? **That applies here, Martha. It applies now.** When I’m with you, those stories in the Bible aren’t just fairy tales; they’re echoes of what I’m about to do in you and through you.*”

What Jesus wants us to see here is that **resurrection isn’t just an event or a doctrine; it’s a person** who is standing in front of Martha.

- Listen, no amount of Bible or doctrinal knowledge will save you...only the one the Bible is about – the Redeemer, the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth – when we know him **by faith**, we need not fear the shadow of death, for he *is* the resurrection and the life.

Think of it like this:

- When you are sick, you want a **doctor**, not a medical book or a formula.
- When you are being sued, you want a **lawyer**, not a law book.
- Likewise, when you face your last enemy, **death**, you want a **Savior** and not a doctrine written in a book. The beauty of what Scriptures shows us is that **in Jesus Christ, every doctrine is made personal.**⁵
- The Word became flesh and dwelt among us; and wherever Jesus is, God’s resurrection power isn’t just a doctrine, it is available *now*.⁶
 - So cling to these Scriptures because of the **one they point to** and what **he** is able to do in your life.

So Jesus asks her, ^{26b}“Do you believe this?” ²⁷She said to him, “**Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.**”

- She uses three different titles for Jesus: Lord; Christ (the King); and Son of God. The words “I believe” are in the **perfect tense**, indicating a **fixed** and **settled** faith. “*I have believed and I will continue to believe!*”⁷ Her belief has finally moved from **intellectual facts** about Jesus to understanding the **personal truth** about Jesus.

In the Christian life there is a tension to be managed – **the tension is that truth and fact aren’t always the same thing.**

- Here’s the **fact**: Lazarus is dead, and dead people don’t come back to life. But here’s the **truth**: Jesus is the resurrection and the life.
 - *Oh, that we would understand this*, because **you’re either going to live your life** defined by **what you go through** or by **who you belong to**.

⁵ 1 Cor. 1:30

⁶ Rom. 6:4; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 336). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- *What* you go through may be **FACT**, but *who* you belong to is the **One who speaks a word and all of creation is born** → that's the **TRUTH**.
- It may be a **FACT** that you are lost and confused; but the **TRUTH** is that if you acknowledge him in all your ways, he will make your path straight.
- It may be a **FACT** that you have been praying for the same thing for 5, 10, 15 years and God still hasn't answered; but the **TRUTH** is that you can still have confidence when approaching God, because if you ask anything according to his will, he hears you, and he is working, even if you don't see it right now and even if you don't see it on this side of heaven.
- IT may be **FACT** that you feel alone and not good enough; but the **TRUTH** is that in Christ you have a God who is your **ever-present help in time of need**...a God who will **never leave you nor forsake you**...and a Jesus who stands ready to **be your righteousness** before God the Father when you think you're not good enough.

Whatever your "fact" is right now, you can *always* appeal to God's heart is by praying **biblical TRUTH, which is found in God's Word**. And when you do that you can wait expectantly because **it's biblical truth** that connects God's *past* promises with your *present* situation in hope of a better *future* that God can bring about **right now** in your life.

- Declare his **promises** and expect to see his **power**. **You think this is 'name it and claim it?'** No, when it comes to God's promises, this is **name him and claim them!**
 - I can't tell you **how** he'll answer – I definitely can't tell you **when** he'll answer – but I promise **he's working, he's doing something**, and he has promised to always be with you – **"...I will fear no evil for you are with me."**

And just when you think this story can't get any better, let's go back to those few verses we skipped; the ones I told you were so good.

Look back at **verse 20**. Lazarus is dead and Jesus has just showed up to Bethany.

²⁰So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Has there ever been a more relatable prayer than this?:

- *Lord, if you would have answered my prayers, my husband wouldn't have left me.*
- *Lord, if you would've provided we wouldn't have lost the house.*
- *Lord, if you had intervened, you could have prevented this miscarriage.*
- *Lord, if you had made me differently, I wouldn't be such an outcast at school.*
 - You been there? **Martha's** been there. **I've** been there. And I've read biographies of some of the **greatest saints** in history...guess what? They've all been there.

Lord, if you had done _____, this wouldn't be happening. Oh, here's where it gets good!

Remember: **when you appeal to God's heart, you can expect to see God's hand**...and God's heart is close to those who **fully rely on him by faith**.

Let me ask, how many of you have a **"but God"** story?

- *I was dead in my sin, but God saved me!*
- *I was trying to find satisfaction with a different person every weekend, but God showed me the eternal satisfaction found in Jesus alone!*
- *I was knee deep in sin, drunkenness, pride, debauchery, depression – following the prince of the power of the air; I was a son of disobedience and a child of wrath, but God picked me up and set me on a solid rock named Jesus!*

- How many of you have a “but God” story?
- We’re real quick to share our “but God” testimony of how he’s worked in our **past**. And that’s fantastic...but it’s in the **past**.

What this is – what Martha is about to show us – is how to have a “but God” faith in your **current** situation; when you’re in the **middle** of something and the **pain** is ever so present.

²¹Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²**But even now** I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”

Lord have mercy, y’all need to see this: What you need today is not just a “but God” story; you need a **“but even now”** story, a “but even now” kind of faith.

- Some of you need to write this next part down and put it **above your bathroom mirror**, put it **over your desk at work**, and **make it the background on your phone**. Here it is:

Before anything becomes a “but God” testimony it begins with “but even now” faith.

This phrase that Martha teaches us – “but even now” – speaks **with** faith **despite** circumstances. It’s the kind of faith that **relies on God’s promises** by **appealing to God’s heart**, which thereby **release God’s power** and **expects to see God’s hand move** in your life!

- “But even now” faith says, “God **if you had moved**, I wouldn’t be going through this...**but even now** I believe you have a plan where **I’ll get the help** and **you’ll get the glory!**”
- It says: I lost my job, **but even now** I believe you are the Provider.
- ~~It says: All of my relationships are failing, **but even now** I believe you can bring hope where there’s hopelessness.~~
- It says: The diagnosis came back positive, **but even now** I believe you can heal me.

- It says: I have a list of regrets and one-night stands, **but even now** I believe you can make me clean and white as snow.
- It says: My husband has ridiculed my faith for over 10 years, **but even now** I believe you can still save him and make him new!

“But even now” faith declares **nothing and no one is impossible for God**.

- **Your husband** is not impossible for God. **Your wife** is not impossible for God. **Your parents** and **your kids** are not impossible for God. **Your friends** and **your roommate** are not impossible for God.
- Pray like this: “Jesus, **the one you love** needs you to move. And **in spite of what I’m seeing before me**, **even now** I believe you can work a miracle.”
- Appeal to the heart of God with “even now” faith and watch him turn your situation into a “but God” testimony.

That’s Martha...now it’s Mary’s turn in **verse 32**...

³²Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (she had the same initial reaction Martha had...)

³³When Jesus saw her **weeping**, and the Jews who had come with her also **weeping**, he was **deeply moved** in his spirit and greatly troubled.

³⁴And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”

And then one of the most comforting verses in all of the Bible: ³⁵**Jesus wept.**

Jesus responds differently to Mary than he did with Martha. Mary doesn’t have the “even now” faith that Martha has – but Jesus’s grace abounds, and he knew that just as Martha needed **insight**; Mary needs **comforting**, so **Jesus wept with her**.

- Pastor Derrick said this a few weeks ago, “Just because Jesus knows the outcome of your situation, that doesn’t stop him from weeping with you.”
- Jesus’s weeping reveals his humanity. It’s a reminder that he willingly entered into **all** of our experiences and knows exactly how we feel.
- This has always been one of the most powerful theological truths for me. Because I am **assured** when I remember God is **sovereign** and has a plan for my life and history, and that’s great. But I am **comforted** when I realize that God **sympathizes** and is with me in my pain.

Look down at v41 and you’ll find Jesus praying exactly like we’ve been talking about: appealing to God’s heart and then expecting to see God’s hand. The **sisters** prayed like this; **Jesus** prayed like this; and God desires **us** to pray with this type of confidence and expectancy.

⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me, ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” ⁴⁴The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

This is the power of Jesus. He speaks and creation obeys. One Puritan said **if Jesus had not named Lazarus when he shouted, he would’ve emptied the entire cemetery!**

CONCLUSION (VAMP)

Three words from Jesus and a dead man is brought back to life. Three words and a **miracle** occurs. Three words and **history** is changed forever. But don’t forget, these three words were spoken in response

to **seven words** of a faith that **appealed to Jesus’s heart**: “*Lord, he whom you love is ill.*”

Mary and Martha believed the prayer that would move Jesus most was to appeal to Jesus’s love for Lazarus. They appealed to God’s heart, and they experienced God’s hand.

- *Do you have that kind of confidence in God’s love for you?*
- You should because **while we were yet sinners Christ died for us and instead of us.**
 - At the cross God forever declared: “**I. LOVE. YOU.**” Meaning you don’t ever need to question his love for you again.

Listen to me, history was changed for Lazarus with three words: *Lazarus, come out!* . . . History can change for you today with these three words: **God loves you.**

He already displayed his love for you on the cross, **the only thing left to do is receive it**, and you can do that right now.

Bow Heads

I believe that this same God who spoke the **earth into existence** and spoke **life back into Lazarus**, I believe that same God is speaking those very same words over **dead life, dead dreams, and dead situations** right now so that you might also experience a **resurrection.**

God is speaking **to some of you** right now saying, “*Chris, come out.*” He’s speaking **to your sin** saying, “*Unbind him, and let him go.*” He’s speaking **to your heart** by saying, “*I love you.*”

- He’s telling you that you no longer have to be defined by your sin or your situation, rather, in Christ, you can be defined by the **Savior’s love for you.**

If you want to receive and experience that love today you can pray right now, just repeat after me. . . for the sake of everyone that just prayed that prayer, let's all agree together and say 'AMEN.'

COMMUNION & PRAYER

I want to end by doing two things:

- 1) Taking communion as the physical reminder of God's love for you.
- 2) Praying out of the posture we've seen today in John 11 by appealing to God's heart and then expecting to see God's hand.

[call teams forward & fence table]

As they pass this out, I want **you** to spend a few minutes by yourself praying out of this posture – pray using this phrase, **"Lord, the one whom you love is _____."**

- I'm going to put some things on the screen⁸ as an aid in helping you pray. Find one of these and *really* pray and believe God desires to move in your life in this area **because he loves you.**
- Some of you, the part you need to focus on, is just the sentence itself – **"the one God loves"** – that's what you need to remember today. And the physical representation of that is in your hands right now.
- Take a few minutes to pray while holding this reminder of his love for you, and I'll come back and lead us together in taking the bread and the cup.

⁸ Sick, lonely, in need, divorced, tired, frustrated, guilty, anxious, stressed, sad, uncertain, confused, addicted, depressed

