

Life-Saving Prayers!
1 John 5:16-17

***If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death,
He will ask, and He will give him life (1 John 5:16).***

The joy of fellowship is only for those who abide in Christ by keeping His word—especially His foremost commandment to love one another (1:5-2:27). In his extended discourse on the confidence of the believer at Christ’s coming (2:28-4:19) John exhorts his readers to abide in Him by loving God and their fellow Christians with the pure love of God and promised that the maturity of this love would be a key source of confidence on that Day. In the final segment of his epistle, he links love for one another with love for God.

As he makes his point John dedicates three paragraphs to removing every excuse believers offer for not loving one another with the love of Christ (4:20-5:17):

- Love every believer in Christ: If they confess Christ, they are your brother or sister—*love them because they are His children!* (4:20-5:3a)
- Love with the power you have already received: If you believed in Christ, you have the power to love—*love them because you can!* (5:3b-5:15)
- Love until God takes them home: If they are sinning, God will decide when to take them out—*love them to save their lives!* (5:16-17)

Eventually, all of us will know Christians whose lifestyle is so wicked that we find it almost impossible to love them. John’s final words on loving one another tell us precisely how to express love to the prodigal:

Love the _____ by praying for them until the Father calls them home!

Our Heavenly Father takes sin seriously. Only He knows when one of His children has crossed the line to the discipline that leads to a premature death. Our part in all of this is to pray.

- I. God the Father disciplines His children and brings the hopeless or disruptive prodigal home to heaven (Selected Scripture).
 - A. God convicts His children of sin so that they will *confess* (agree with His condemnation of their sin) and stay in the light of fellowship (1 John 1:9).
 - B. God disciplines His children who persist in sin so that they will repent—turn back to Him—to produce the fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12: 5-11).
 - C. God severely judges His once-mature children whose persistent sin defames Christ and leaves them insensitive to church discipline (Hebrews 6:1-8).
 - D. God finally calls some believers home when their sin-scarred souls are beyond repentance or when the offence is so seriously resisting the work of the Holy Spirit in a local church that it must be dealt with swiftly by death (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 11:30; James 5:14-15; 1 John 5:16-17).
 1. “Premature death” is a better phrase than “sin to death” or “sin leading to death.” The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) and it manifests in two ways: There is spiritual death (separation from God) for all who do not accept Christ’s payment for their sin by believing in Him (1 John 5:11-13). There is physical death (separation from the body) for all except the Rapture generation and the few God translated to heaven in the Old Testament (Romans 5:12).
 2. Some believers in Corinth sinned in their self-centered and calloused worship at the Lord’s Table so that many were sick and some even died prematurely (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

3. James exhorts elders to make sure that sickness is not due to sin (5:14-15) and every believer to confess sin and pray for one another so that this type of death might be avoided (16).
4. Like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), these believers do not lose the salvation of their souls, but their physical life on earth is ended. This is why “premature death” is better.
5. In cases where discipline results in physical death, prayer will not succeed in turning away the divine rod of discipline. The “sin unto death” is not a single, isolated act, but one that has been repeated over and over again by the disobedient child of God. The words “If anyone sees” seem to indicate that the sinning involved some overt action, probably something that affected the entire assembly of believers (1 John 5:16-17).

Helpful Notes, 5:16-17: These verses are speaking of **Christians**: “The fact that John needed to warn his readers against the possibility of sinning and failing to continue in the truth and in the doctrine of Christ (2:24; 2 John 7-11) suggests that he did not altogether exclude the possibility that a *person* might fall away from his faith into apostasy. Nevertheless, it was his clear expectation that his *readers* would continue in their faith without falling away from it” (Marshall). The **subject** of these verses is, “how to pray for the sinning Christian.” The **thrust** of these verses is, “you can give physical life to others if you ask God to be merciful to them.” The **exception** to these verses is, “unless they have sinned in a way that leads to *premature* death.” The **specific words** applied to the exception are, “I do not say he should pray about that.” There is **no command not to pray** for the sinning Christian. “Although there is no guarantee, it always remains possible that God might grant to the sinning saint repentance and relent from His judgment just as He did with Nineveh” (Jonah 4:2, Hodges).

II. God the Father instructs His children to cooperate with Him in this process of maintaining righteousness in the family (Selected Scripture).

- A. Who should be involved in the process of helping the Father discipline His children? Only those who are spiritual, truly walking by the Holy Spirit and growing in the Lord should exercise discipline (Gal. 6:1). We need a spirit of humility, gentleness and patience, looking to ourselves lest we too be tempted (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:24-25). Discipline must be done without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality (1 Tim. 5:21). (1 John 1:9).
- B. What are the steps in helping the Father discipline His children toward **reconciliation** and **restoration** of relationship with Him and His family?
 1. Those who walk disorderly are to be admonished, warned, and appealed to in love (Matthew 18:15; Also: 1 Thess. 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:2). This admonishing, is not restricted to church leaders, but may be done by any person in the body with another if that person is Spirit controlled and spiritually minded (cf. 1 Thess. 5:14 with Gal. 6:1).
 2. If personal concern and confrontation fails, take witnesses to strengthen the effect of the discipline, preferably spiritual leaders, so that if it has to be brought before the whole church it can be firmly proven and established (Matt. 18:16; 1 Tim. 5:19).
 3. If the concern and confrontation of a few loving friends and leaders fails, seek reconciliation and restoration through the whole body. This does not mean an announcement, except for leaders (Matthew 18:17a; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Tim. 5:20).
 4. If this doesn't work, the local body of believers is to treat the unrepentant brother as an unbeliever: removal from church membership and comforting fellowship (Matthew 18:17b). This is, in essence, the Lord carrying out discipline through the action of the entire body under the leadership of the elders or the spiritually mature (1 Cor. 5:4-5). Similar heavenly authority is seen in the ratification of this disciplinary action as spelled out in Matthew 18:18-19.
 5. But keep praying for this Christian! Never assume that the Father is taking them home (sin to premature death). Your prayers could save their life! (1 John 5:16-17)