October 18/19, 2025

Blessed Assurance

Face to Face Series

1 John 3:11-24

Pastor Bryan Clark

Part of the reality of being fallen people living in a broken world, is we all struggle with insecurities. It's just part of our reality. They show up in different ways. They affect our lives in different ways. But there isn't a person in this room that doesn't struggle with their insecurities. The enemy is very clever in knowing how to tap into those insecurities and cause us to question whether we're really traveling the right path. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 3.

Our text this morning is a continuation of the conversation that Tyce started last week. He did a great job of unpacking that passage as he took us all the way back to Genesis 1 and 2 and life in the garden. He talked about the fall of Adam and Eve and the consequences of that. You get to Genesis, chapter 4, and I think the two brothers, Cain and Abel, represent two paths coming out of that. One is the path of surrender to God as God, the path to worship God and to follow Him and find life there. The other path is a path of selfishness. It's, "I'm going to be god; I'm going to do things my own way," which is the path of Cain. But it's also important to understand that as of the sin of Adam and Eve, every human from that time on is born spiritually dead. We all start on the path of death. We are spiritually dead to a relationship with God. But Tyce talked about that, as a result of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, God offers the chance to experience a completely different trajectory in life, to travel a different path, to travel the path of life. So John ends that conversation in verse 10 of chapter 3:

> **By this the children of God and the children of the devil** (These are the two paths. There are only two paths.) **are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother**. (*NASB, 1 John 3:10)

So most of the conversation last week was about righteousness and unrighteousness, sin versus righteousness. But then he hints at this idea of love, which then we pick that up in verse 11:

> **For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;** (Vs. 11)

I mentioned the very first week of our study of 1 John, that contrary, for example, to the apostle Paul, who tends to write in very logical, linear progression from beginning to end in his letters, John writes very differently than that. He writes more in a cycle, or maybe think of it as a spiral. It's very similar to how the book of Proverbs is written. You're introduced to certain themes, and then he comes back around to those themes and lays another layer on, and then moves on.

So in this case you would say, "Wait a minute. We've talked about this love thing before." And yes, we have in chapter two, that ***the path of light, the path of righteousness, is the path of love.*** We learned first that this is an old commandment. This is nothing new, that love finds its origin in

the very person and character of God. It's what has defined God forever. So love is an old commandment. The Old Testament talks about: ***Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself***. This has been around a long time, but Jesus also introduced a new commandment. John was in the room when Jesus said it. The new commandment is ***to love as Jesus has loved***. The *new* of that is as a result of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, we can become a new creation. We can become a new person. We're born again. We have the indwelling Spirit of God in us, what John calls the anointing, therefore empowering us to love in a way that simply was not possible before that. So that's the new part of the commandment. So this is what defines life on the path as children of God. It's the path of righteousness; it's the path of light; it's the path of confession; it's the path of forgiveness; it's the path of love. Verse 12:

> **…not as Cain,** (So here's the other path.) ***who*** **was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous.**

So, notice very specifically all the way back in Genesis chapter 4, the two brothers, Cain and Abel, where the text says Cain **was of the evil one.** That connects back to verse 10, **children of the devil**. Metaphorically speaking, it's the DNA of the devil that is passed on to all those who travel his path. The New Testament calls it *the way of Cain*. He was of the evil one who slew his brother. Now one question somebody might ask is, "Why, for example, does the NASB use what sounds like very King James English: *slew his brother*?" Some of the other English translations say *murdered his brother*. The reason some of the English translations avoid that, is because that's not what the Hebrew word is. It's actually a very graphic term. More literally it means something like *to slaughter* or *to butcher*, mostly implying that Cain probably slit the throat of Abel. So it's very graphic, violent imagery.

Why did he do that? The text tells us**: Because his deeds were evil and his brother Abel's deeds were righteous.** In other words, what he's saying is a theme we've already talked about in John, and that is just by virtue of the fact that Abel lived his life uprightly, he's a *light*. The light exposes Cain's rats. It exposes his evil, and people don't like their rats exposed. Therefore, Cain is left with two options. One option would be to repent, to change his ways and to travel a different path. If you go back and read the story in Genesis 4, God all but pleads with Cain to rethink the path he's on and to make a change, very consistent with the loving heart of the father of the prodigal son that Tyce talked about last week. But Cain won't hear it. So the only other solution is he must extinguish the light. If the light exposes your rats, then you must put out the light. So he slaughtered his brother.

This should sound familiar to us because we've had this conversation before. It goes back to the Gospel of John, chapter 3, when Jesus identified Himself as the Light, and when the Light came into the world, the world hated the Light. Why did the world hate the Light? Jesus said because their deeds were evil. They prefer the darkness where they can hide their rats. It's very important to understand, if we're going to choose the path of light, if we're going to choose the path of righteousness, if we're going to choose the path of the children of God—the path of love—it's naive to think the world will love you for it. Jesus, in the Upper Room, even said to His disciples…directly to John. "John, the world hated Me. The world is going to hate you." Just

simply by walking uprightly, without even saying a word, your light exposes the evil around you, and people don't like their rats exposed. So that's what He says. Verse 13:

> **Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.** (Vs. 13-14)

Now I've mentioned this before. I want to mention it one more time, and that is the consistent use of this word, **know**. The false teachers were claiming to be "in the know". They were claiming they had special knowledge that these believers needed. So John continues to use this play on words, that these children of God had everything they needed to know. They're not missing anything. When he says if **we know that we have passed out of death into life**, this is consistent with the idea that every person is born spiritually dead. There's no exception to that. We all travel the path of death, but as Tyce told us last week, as a result of the death, burial and the resurrection of Jesus, God offers a change in paths, a change in the trajectory to the path of life…the path of love…the path of righteousness. So that's what he's saying. We started on that path of death, but it's obvious we're not on that path anymore, because we love others.

Again, it's important to understand that the terms *love* and *hate,* to us, are terms filled with emotion. Biblically, they're not really filled with emotion. They have more to do with like your orientation in life. To hate is to be self-centered to the core. It's to live your life for *self*. It's very similar to *the wicked* in Proverbs. We're fully willing to disadvantage anyone else to advantage ourselves. That's how we live our lives. Love, on the other hand, is to think of someone else as more important than ourselves. It lines up with *the righteous* in Proverbs, to even disadvantage ourselves, to advantage someone else.

To understand 1 John, chapter 3, you have to understand John's intent. This isn't a warning. He isn't confronting them. He isn't concerned that they might not really be Christians. You just have to go back and read it to see he's confident they are children of God. He just said in verse 10 that the difference is obvious. It's not unclear. The concern is the false teachers have tapped into their insecurities in such a way it's causing them to doubt. "Maybe I'm not really a Christian. Maybe I don't really believe this. Maybe this isn't really true." So what John is doing all through this chapter is he's saying, "Hey, there are two paths. They're not similar at all; they're completely different. And all you have to do is look at your life. Something dramatic has changed. You were on the path of darkness; clearly now you're on the path of light. You used to be filled with selfishness and hate; now you're filled with love. So that's what he's saying in verse 14. Verse 15:

> **Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**

So what does that mean? Let's imagine the path of the devil—children of the devil—who have the spiritual DNA that's passed along to those that travel that path. Jesus once confronted the Pharisees and He said to them specifically, "You are of your father the devil," He said, "And by the way, your father the devil, he's a murderer." This goes all the way back to the conversation regarding Cain. When Jesus walked this earth, the religious leaders of Israel had convinced the people that they were the most righteous, the most holy among them, and the people were convinced, "This is

true." But when the Light appeared and shined into the darkness, it exposed the sin and hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Their rats were exposed. They had the same two choices as Cain. Either they could repent and experience God's forgiveness, or they could choose to slink back into the darkness. And to do that, they must extinguish the Light.

I am always sobered when I think about the fact that the God of the universe is perfect in His love, perfect in His kindness, perfect in His compassion, perfect in His grace and mercy! He's perfect, became a perfect human being, walked on this earth, and those who lived on this earth so hated Him that they tortured Him and then they executed Him, in order to extinguish the Light. So what he's talking about is: If you think of that path of the devil being like a stream or a river that has a current; you go down the current and there's darkness. You go down the current and there's hate. If you keep traveling down the current, it leads to murder. Where does murder come from? It comes from hate, which comes from the DNA of the devil. He's simply saying that's the natural end of this hatred.

Now, I think this is interesting to think about in our culture today. We are a long way down the path of becoming a secular culture, and one of the things that defines the darkness is this rise in hatred. This is what defines us. It's defined us for a couple decades now. Everybody is divided around everything, and there's all this angry hate. The natural flow downstream from hatred is violence and murder. What is somewhat baffling to me today, is why people are surprised at that. It's like we have fostered hate on purpose for decades, and now we suddenly seem surprised that our hate leads to violence and murder.

What's also concerning these days is more and more what you're seeing is kind of a shrugging of the shoulders, kind of a, "Well, whatever! It's just kind of the cost of doing business for our team to win." And I'm pretty sure we're going to see more of that in the future. This is the natural flow and end of hatred. But then he goes on to say, **but no murderer has eternal life abiding in them**. So is he saying that a murderer can't be saved? And the answer is, "Of course not. People can commit any number of crimes, and the grace of God is still big enough to forgive and offer salvation." Let's not forget Moses was a murderer; David was a murderer; Paul was a murderer. That really has nothing to do with the conversation here. What he is saying is that murder, like hate, is completely out of step on the path of light, on the path of love. It makes no sense there.

So think of it this way. If you go downstream of the path of the devil, the path of darkness, it is a logical conclusion that there's darkness there. But there's nothing on that path that can make sense of murder. It's not possible for a murderer to really be aligned with that path of light and be a murderer. That's what he's saying. It's completely out of alignment with that path. Verse 16:

> **We know love by this, that He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

So contrary to Cain, who is the poster child for hate, is Jesus, who is the poster child for love. While Cain's deeds were evil and his brother's deeds of righteousness exposed his evil, his solution was to slaughter him. Jesus, on the other hand, who is righteous, who has no evil—we're the sinners; we're the ones who are evil—chose to lay down His life to cover our sins. So they couldn't be more opposite.

Then the text says, If that's true, **then we ought to lay down our lives for one another**. That word **ought** is an interesting Greek word. It's actually a financial term that carries the idea of owing a debt, paying a debt in a sense. Basically what John is saying is, "If Jesus was willing to do that for us, (We were on the path of death. We were on the path of darkness. We were on the path of destruction.) when we had no chance, but as a result of His love and sacrificing His life to pay our debt, we can travel a different path. The least we could do as His children, is to lay down our lives for others. He goes on, verse 17:

> **But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?**

Here's what I think is the logic of what John is saying here. It is highly unlikely any of us in the room will ever be in a situation where we will give our lives for someone else…probably won't happen. So if you think about the path of darkness, think of it like a river that goes to hate, then downstream from hate is murder. Then you think of the path of life. It's the path of love, and way downstream is this idea to give your life for someone else. But we say that's probably not likely, so we're just paddling upstream a ways and say, "Okay, that's maybe not likely, but how about we at least love our neighbor, and when we see people in need, we do what we can to help them?"

It's very much like the Good Samaritan. If you think about the story of the Good Samaritan, and you imagine he's traveling on a path of light. Therefore, because there's light, he can see the person in need in the ditch. You can't just walk by as if you can't see him. That's what he's saying. That kind of love means we do what we can to help, to care for, whether that's somebody next door or somebody you work with, somebody you go to school with, or somebody in your family. The path of love compels us to do what we can to help the people around us.

There are so many things about Lincoln Berean that I love. One of those things is we have a long track record of being a very generous church. We have poured a significant amount of money into our community for decades. We have hundreds of people that serve in various ministries that help people in need all over the community. We have poured significant resources into people in need around the world. Our critics can say what they want, but we have a clear track record for decades that we have been a very generous people. This is evidence that we travel a different path. We're not traveling a path where we're completely consumed with ourselves and our needs. We're not constantly disadvantaging others to advantage ourselves. We've made a commitment to be a generous people that reflects the path on which we travel. That should be true of us individually. It should be true of us corporately.

> **Little children, let us not love with word or tongue, but in deed and truth.** (Vs. 18)

This sounds like James chapter 2. James says, "If we're people of faith and somebody comes to us in need of food and in need of clothing, and the best we can do is to say, 'Be warm and be filled,' and slam the door, what good is that? That's not really faith at all." He says that's dead faith. To travel the path of light, love, and righteousness is to care about the people around us. Verse 19:

> **We will know by this that we are of the truth.**

Notice that's future tense. **We will know**…what he's saying is you may need this tomorrow; you may need this next week; you may need this a month from now, but you're going to need this. You're going to need the confirmation that we travel a different path.

> **We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure** (could be translated reassure, put to rest) **our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.** (Vs. 19-29)

All right, so that's a very confusing verse. What is he saying? I think it's the word **condemns** that confuses us. The Greek has a word *condemn* that's very strong. It shows up in Romans, chapter 8, verse 1: **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.** It's a strong legal term that means to be tried…there's a verdict…you're guilty…here's the sentence!

That's not the word John uses. John uses a completely different word. Literally, the compound word that John uses is *to know against*. So basically what it means is: I know something against someone else. In this case, the person I know something against is me. This is my own conscience. Here's what it's saying. "Yes, okay, it seems like I'm traveling this other path, but then I blow it; then I sin; then I mess up; then I look at my life and it's like, "I don't love like I should. I don't really look like Jesus." The false teachers are very good at tapping into that insecurity and causing you to doubt, which results in a condemning heart. "I don't know that I really am a Christian. Maybe I'm just a loser Christian. Maybe I'm never going to figure this out."

So when he says **God is greater than our heart,** what he's saying is, "At the end of the story, nobody else gets to judge you." But it's also true that even your own emotions and conscience aren't the final judge. The final judge is God, and even if in your emotions you get confused, God is not confused. God knows what's true. God knows that you were children of the devil. We did travel the path of darkness. We did live in unrighteousness, but something radical has happened. You've been made a new creation. You're now traveling the path of life, the path of light, as children of God. It's the path of righteousness; it's the path of love. Something radical has happened. It's clear there's a difference.

Because here's the deal. If you were still on the path of darkness, those things wouldn't bother you. They don't bother those on the path of darkness. They don't even know they're selfish. They don't even see it. They don't care about their own unrighteousness. They don't care about the way they live. They're just walking in darkness. The very fact that it bothers you, the very fact that you see it, the very fact that you want to do better…"I want to walk uprightly. I want to love as I should. I want to walk in the light. I want to rightly represent Jesus," is evidence something dramatic has happened in me. That's why it bothers me. The key, then, is that I can't think with my emotions, because my emotions will get me in trouble. I need to think with my mind and remember what's true…remember that He has changed my life. I am on a different path. I confess my sin. He's faithful and just to forgive us our sin. He is our advocate. He is the propitiation. All this is true, so I need to remember what's true. Verse 21:

> **Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us,** (meaning we remember what's true) **we have confidence before God;**

We've talked multiple times in our study of 1 John about this whole idea of entering into this beautiful, life-giving relationship with Jesus, to dance with Jesus in the light. But you're never going to dance with Jesus in the light, if you think He doesn't like you. If you think He thinks you're just a loser Christian, you're going to stay out of the light. So that's why we have to recapture what's true and choose to believe it in order to experience the life that God offers. So he says,

> **…we have confidence before God;** (confidence to dance with God) **and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.** (Vs. 21b-22)

John is not saying that this is a Jesus gift card and we get whatever we ask for. He says it's because we walk in obedience. It's because we walk uprightly. It's because we do what's pleasing to Him. In other words, we understand the path we're on, and we seek to walk true to that path. Therefore, our prayer life aligns with the path we're on. Really, the secret to answered prayer is to align our will with His. It's to live to please Him, to walk in obedience to Him. Therefore what we ask for aligns with the path we're traveling down. That's what he's saying. He sums it in verses 23 and 24:

> **This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. (**Vs. 23)

Notice it's one command. Grammatically, it's not two commands; it's one. This is the one command: **we believe** and **we love**. The way to God is not love. The way to God is belief. But when we believe, the outflow is love, because that's the path we're on. You might say what it's saying is to believe, then is to love. It's interesting that he says, **Believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ.** That's the whole name, right there. I think this represents everything that the false teachers are attacking. Son, meaning deity; Jesus, meaning humanity; Christ, the anointed One… the Messiah, the Savior. He's all of that. Verse 24:

> **The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.**

So this is something a little bit different from what John has said before. Basically what he's saying is ***we abide in Him, in His love, but He also abides in us. We in Him, Him in us.*** And it's the Spirit that pulls all this together.

So in chapter 3 he's talked about the Father; it's how the chapter opened. He's talked about the Son. He's talked about the Spirit. We started our study of 1 John by talking about eternal life. It's a life that has defined God forever, this beautiful life-giving dance that has always defined God. We as people made in the image of God, are literally made with the capacity to join the dance. That's the whole point of the story: this beautiful, sweet koinonia fellowship with Him together. He ends chapter 3 by talking about the Father, the Son, the Spirit. Us in Him, Him in us. It's this beautiful, sweet, life-giving dance that our soul longs for. This is all part of traveling the path of life, the path of light, the path of righteousness, the path of love. He's wanting these Christians to realize, "Yes, we blow it; yes, we mess up; yes, we don't always love like we should. It's true we're still a work in progress." But if you just step back and look at your life, it's clear something

has radically changed. You're a completely different person. You're traveling down a different path, and at the end of the story, the path ultimately leads home, in the eternal presence of God, where we will finally experience everything our soul longs for. That's the promise! That's true! That's our blessed assurance!

Our Father, we're thankful for the truth. Lord, we all get discouraged because we mess up, and it taps into our insecurities and we start to doubt and wonder. Lord, we hold this against ourselves, with our own accusing conscience. The next thing you know, we lose our confidence. Lord, I pray that You would remind us what's true, that we might walk in the light, we might cling to the truth, that we might experience the life that You have called us to as children of God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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FALL 2025 // WEEK 7

Life Group Questions

1 John – Face to Face // October 18/19, 2025

Blessed Assurance // 1 John 3:11-24

Introduction

Who among us hasn't felt guilt over poor choices? We can all recognize that sin has consequences, but every believer in Jesus Christ needs to live as a person radically changed and never condemned by God. This week, Pastor Clark reminded us that our love for one another gives evidence to the radical change that has taken place within us.

Study Questions *(to complete on your own)*

1) Read 1 John 3:11-24 in a couple different translations of Scripture. Make note of words or phrases that are repeated and characters that are mentioned. **What do you know about the characters mentioned and how are they relevant to this passage?**

2) Throughout the book of 1 John, we've been exposed to John's writing style – he continues to cycle through 3 elements of Christian community. **What did John say about each of these in his first cycle?**
   Truth, 1:1-4
   Light, 1:5-2:6
   Love, 2:7-11

   How did he expand his teaching about community in the second cycle?

   Truth, 2:18-29

   Light, 3:1-10

   Love, 3:11-24

3) Compare John's words in 1 John 3:16 with Jesus' statement in John 15:12-13. **How is the way of Cain (verse 12) in contrast to the way of Christ we see in these verses?**

4) Summarize the main point of this passage in your own words.

Discussion Questions *(with your group)*

1) The passage this week moves us forward from verse 10 which states that how we treat one another makes it obvious whether we are children of the devil or children of God. Read Jesus' words on the matter in John 13:34-35. **How would you describe the kind of change that takes place in a person who is transformed by this kind of love?**

How have you been transformed by the love of Jesus?

2) John makes a strong statement in verse 15, calling anyone who hates another person a murderer. Compare it to Jesus' words in Matthew 5:21-22. **Based on those verses, discuss the difference between a person who hates and murders another and a person who hates but doesn't act on it**

You don't need to look far to notice our culture is bent toward hate – nearly everyone is running on a short fuse, ready to explode in anger. **When we look through the lens of scripture, what can help us deal with hatred, both outside and within us?**

As Christian brothers and sisters, how can we begin to help one another work through this kind of hate?

3) Verses 16-18 give us a glimpse of what John has in mind for a true spiritual community. James 2:14-18 adds more distinction to what it means to lovingly help one another. **How do we know if we are loving in *deed and truth*?**

Practically as a church body, what does it mean to actively help in *deed and truth*? Are there any limits, considerations of need, or elements of discernment to consider?

How would you explain to someone outside our church what it looks like for us to help those in need?

4) We are told in verses 19-22 that we can have confidence even when our hearts condemn us. **How did Pastor Clark explain what it means for our hearts to condemn us?**

What assurance can you take away from this part of the passage about God's care for you?

5) John explains God's one commandment has two parts: to believe and to love. **Based on what we've studied so far, can those parts be separated? Explain your answer by giving verse references.**

Make two lists based on this passage - one list of what we need to *do less* and another list of what we need to *do more* – to show what it takes to experience authentic Christian community.

Considering our desire as a church to be Intentional to Grow + Multiply this year, what can you begin to put into practice in order to breathe life into our church community, your Life Group, or people in your neighborhood? Is anything holding you back from beginning today?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so that we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit— we invite you to strengthen your souls with exercises that challenge and stretch you in new ways. Choose one and commit to repeating it until you gain strength in that area.

1) **Scripture Reading: to listen and soak in the Word as an experience of the words washing over you.** Read or listen to the entire letter of 1 John at least twice/week. As you take it in, resist the impulse to study and parse the details. The point is not to gain "head knowledge" but a stirring in the heart as the Holy Spirit brings the Word to life in you.

2) **Memorization: to internalize God's Word.** A key passage for this series is ***1 John 4:7-14***. Commit to memorize it yourself and encourage others in your group to do it with you.

3) **Walk & Pray: to actively engage with the scripture passage.** Write out the passage of the sermon each week on a note card and take it with you on a daily walk.

4) **Journal Reflection: to practice remembering what God has done.** Make time in your schedule to put down in writing the feelings and thoughts that are stirring as you interact with the Word of God.

5) **Self-control Exercise: to help you come to stillness from a busy or hurried pace of life.** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Sit upright but comfortably in a chair with your palms open and upward on your lap. Focus on a word or short phrase about the character of God the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. When your thoughts wander to the things on your to-do list or other people's needs, redirect them back to the character of God. When the 10 minutes is up, close in a short prayer of gratitude.

Prayer

Praying together in a group is different than praying alone with God. It's a conversation that can help you grow closer to each other as you are in God's presence. One way to pray follows this often-used pattern in scripture – acknowledge who God is, recognize the need we have for Him, and ask to partner with Him on behalf of others. When possible, use the passage of scripture from this week's sermon as your starting point, then form a prayer that follows this pattern:

God, our Father, this week we learned that you are _____ and _____ .

As I looked into your Word, I understood how I need you to _____. Help me to be faithful to _____ in the week ahead.

Other people are on my heart, and I trust that you have put them there for a reason. I ask for your will to be accomplished in their life as they _____. Help me to know how to respond well to the needs of _____, even as my first step is in praying for them right now.

Each group engages in prayer differently. Some groups go around and allow anyone to pray that desires to do so. Other groups have several people pray or maybe 1 person closes the group in prayer. Still other groups split into smaller groups of 2-3 people and those people pray for each other. How you choose to engage in prayer is dependent on your group and your choice to ENGAGE! We learn to pray by praying and by listening and praying with others!