

Praying with Confidence 1 John 5:13-15

June 4, 2017

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A mother listened as her eight year old son said his prayers before going to bed. He thanked God for the good day, asked the Lord to bless his family and then concluded by shouting, "...and dear God, I pray that I could get a new bike for my birthday next month." His mother said, "Son, why are you shouting? God isn't hard of hearing. He can hear your prayer." The boy replied, "I know mom, but grandma is in the next room and I wanted her to hear that part of the prayer too."

Well folks, I am not sure that boy really understands the purpose of prayer, but I have a feeling he is no more confused than many adults. Most people pray. In fact, most people say they pray every day. A recent survey found that 55% of American adults claim to pray daily, and another 16% pray at least once a week. Only 23% say they seldom or never pray. On Facebook, "Praying for you" is a very frequent comment. Quite a few folks never go to church or read the Bible, but still pray. Even on television shows, people will pray and in certain situations, such as when there is good reason to be afraid, almost everyone prays. The seventeenth century Puritan John Trapp said, "He that cannot pray, let him go to sea, and there he will learn." Sea sickness motivates people to pray. Yet, many folks who pray, are pretty confused about what it involves. Some equate prayer with transcendental meditation. Others pray regularly, but are inclined to think if they really want something, it is better to ask a wealthy relative, maybe grandma, instead of God. Even within the church, many of us are only beginning to appreciate what a great privilege it is to pray.

Friends, I believe God wants that to change. He wants us to know and experience the reality of prayer. The Lord wants it to become a significant part of our lives, so that when we really need something we won't turn to grandma, but to Him. To help us do that, God inspired the Apostle John to write our text today, 1 John 5:13-15. Let's pause and pray the Lord will use His word to help us learn to pray with confidence.

This passage begins with what is a favorite verse of many. **John 15:13** *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. Friends, this is really the main purpose of this letter. John wants to give believers in Jesus Christ confidence that they belong to God both now and through eternity. It is a clear reminder that our eternal destiny, whether or not we are in heaven or hell, depends not on what we have done, but rather on our faith in what Jesus, the Son of God, has done for us through His death and resurrection. Salvation by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone. Yet, here John not only gives a concise summary for the purpose of his letter, but he uses this knowledge that we truly belong to God as a foundation for a whole new attitude about prayer. Our confidence that God is our Father and we are His children, makes us confident as we pray.

1 John 5:14, 15 *Now this is the confidence we have before Him: Whenever 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 Him for.* Did you catch that? When we pray, we can ask anything and He will hear us. And then, when that happens, God will answer our prayer, and we will receive what we have asked of Him. Note first of all there is no limit as to how much we can ask. No request is too big or too small. Some folks don't realize that and seem to think we should ask God for big ticket items. They don't want to use up their prayers on little things, nickel and dime stuff. They don't want to nag God about daily problems. They intend to save their prayers for major concerns. Yet, John says we are to "ask anything." (A woman once inquired of her pastor, "Is it okay to pray about small problems?" He replied, "Is there any such thing as a big problem to God?") C. S. Lewis wrote: *"Those who do not turn to God in petty trials will have no habit or such resort to help them when the great trials come. Those who have not learned to ask Him for childish things will have less readiness to ask Him for great ones. We must not be too high minded. I fancy we may sometimes be deterred from small prayers by a sense of our own dignity rather than God's. No concern is too small for Him."*

Some, however, pray about daily concerns, but feel some things are just too big for God to handle. They believe a situation may be so desperate, a problem so insurmountable, that it would not do any good to pray. Yet, John says, ask anything. This confidence is based on two important truths.

1. The Bible clearly teaches that God is omnipotent. *He can do anything.* Maybe you remember the song, “My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there’s nothing my God cannot do.” This is kind of a kids’ song, but it points to truth all of us need to remember. The Bible says, “The Lord’s arm is not too short.” There is nothing beyond His reach. There is nothing beyond His reach. Though the odds are 10:1, 1000:1, even a billion to one, against you, it is no problem for God.
2. The reason we can ask for anything is the confidence we have that God cares about us. After all, we are His children. As believers in Jesus we have been both born of God and adopted into His family. As He said, in verse 13, those who believe in the name of the Son of God, meaning believing Jesus existed, but trusting in Him, know we belong to God, and nothing can ever separate us from His love. We also know He cares enough about us to answer our prayers.

As a pastor, I sometimes make phone calls where I ask people to help out with different projects. Maybe I call someone to ask if she or he is willing to serve in the kitchen for a particular event. Sometimes I am a little anxious when I make that call because I do not know if the person I am calling has any interest in that event or has any desire to help. If she doesn’t, my phone call may be irritating to her, and she might get mad, and call me bad names or something. I doubt it, but our minds can go in weird directions when we are not confident someone cares. There are other people, however, whom I call with total confidence, because I know they want to help any way they can. They might not always say “yes,” to my request, but they are always glad I asked. Friends, when we pray, we know God is not only

able to help, but more willing to do so than anyone in the world. He is always glad when we ask for His help.

Now, some of you are thinking, “Boy Pastor Dan, this sounds pretty cool. If I want to win ten million dollars in the lottery, all I have to do is buy a ticket, ask God, and I will win. Because if we ask anything, we will get it.” Others of you are thinking, “Pastor Dan, I cannot buy what you have just said. I have prayed, prayed very hard for things, and God has not answered those prayers. I prayed we would win that baseball game and we didn’t. I prayed my parents would not get divorced and they did. I prayed my brother’s cancer would be healed, but he died. Pastor Dan, how can you say God hears and answers any request we make?”

Well folks, we need to take a little closer look at what God is telling us. Listen again to **5:14b** *Whenever we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.* Folks, that phrase is an important qualifier. God will grant our request if it is according to His will. Whenever the Bible promises that God will answer our prayers, this is the condition involved. In **John 14:13** Jesus says, *I will do whatever you ask in my name.* Asking in Jesus’ name is not just saying the words, but it means asking according to Jesus’ will. Some folks think if we pray, “Lord please do this if it is your will” indicates a lack of faith. It means we don’t really believe God will answer our prayer. Now, that may be the case at times, but Jesus makes it very clear that it is certainly appropriate to pray for God’s will to be done, even if it is different from what we want. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays to the Father, **Luke 22:42** *Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.* Or as the NLT puts it: **Luke 22:42** *I want your will to be done, not mine.*”

Now, that doesn’t mean we are required to speak those words whenever we pray. If we are certain God will answer our prayer in a specific way, the words are probably redundant. For example, there is no reason to pray, “Lord if it is your will, help me to resist this temptation.” It is always His will that I resist temptation. So, I can just pray, “Lord, help!” Yet, we need to be very careful about deciding what we think God’s will *certainly is.* Prayer is never meant to be a blank check. It is not intended to be a bottle where a genie comes out and grants us three wishes. It should be obvious that prayer doesn’t work that

way. For example, sometimes in the winter my boys are praying there will be a big blizzard so school will be cancelled, while I am praying that the snowstorm will miss us because I want good roads for driving. Both those prayers cannot really be answered the way the people praying would like. In the NBA Playoffs, I am sure there are Cavaliers' fans praying the Cavaliers will win, and Warriors' fans praying the Warriors will win the basketball championship. The Cavaliers' fans don't think God has been answering their prayers. The bottom line is this: prayer will not make God do something contrary to His will.

Yet, rather than being disappointed by this, we should be encouraged. Why? Because as God's children, His will only includes what is best for us. Never forget this truth: God always accomplishes His plan, and that plan always includes His glory and our ultimate good. Though I might think it would be good if God always did things my way, I really should be glad He doesn't. I might ask God for ten million dollars, but if it is not His will, I won't get it. And part of the reason that ten million dollars is probably not God's will for my life, is because all that money would not be good for me. Good parents don't give their children everything they ask for! Good parents refuse to give their kids what they want, not because they don't love them, but because they do love them. If your eight year old son wants to have Snicker's Bars for dinner, you will say, "No," not because you don't love him, but because you do love him. If your son understood nutrition better, he would be glad you said "No." Friend, if we understood God more, we would be glad He answers those prayers which are not according to His will, with a gentle, but firm "No."

Friends, I don't want to pretend this is easy to understand or accept, but it is important truth. It is foolish for us to want God to act any other way than according to His will. That is a lesson Joni Eareckson Tada learned. About fifty years ago she was injured in a diving accident and became paralyzed, a quadriplegic. For a number of years Joni prayed fervently and faithfully that God would heal her and restore the use of her limbs. She believed He would. Today she realizes God has chosen not to heal her, yet. Oh, she knows God will heal her someday, but very likely she will wait until heaven to experience that healing. Yet, today, through a wonderful ministry to those with disabilities and others,

Joni can see that even her paralysis is a part of God's plan.

Now, this doesn't mean we should be afraid to request something from God. The Lord will not zap us with a bolt of lightning if we ask for something that is not His will. I think we should boldly and confidently ask whatever we desire. Yet, we must always remember that in His wisdom, His absolutely perfect wisdom, God will answer our prayers in His way and in His time, according to His will. So, sometimes the answer to our prayer will be, "No, I am not going to let you win that ten million dollars." Often times the answer will be, "Not yet. Just wait. It is not the right time." Friends, sometimes I look back at the times in my life when God did not follow my instructions and answered my prayers His way instead of mine. My life would be a bit different if God had answered all my prayers the way that I wanted, but I sure don't think it would be a better life. Friends, our goals should be that our desires would become more like God's desires, so that when we pray we ask for things in line with His purpose. When our will matches God's will, then His answers to our prayers will always be a resounding, "Yes!"

So, folks, the main point of this sermon, and I believe the emphasis of what God is saying to us through John's words, is that the confidence we have as God's children should cause us to pray with confidence. Yet, when some folks read a passage like this, the question which comes to their mind is, "But what good does it do to pray, if God is just going to do His will anyway? My prayers don't make any difference. Why should I bother to pray at all?" Number one, we are commanded to pray. God tells us to pray, and when God tells us to do something, we should do it, even if we cannot figure out why. He is a lot smarter than we are.

Number two, we need to pray because that is how God chooses to accomplish His purposes. Theologians say, "God has ordained both the means and the ends of His will." For example, if it is God's will that on June 11, 2017 at 10 A.M., this book would move off the pulpit at Chisholm Baptist Church and be suspended about twelve inches above. That is the end, the result He desires. Yet, it is not God's will that this book will just float in midair. He has also willed that my hand hold it up. He has chosen to use my hand as the means to accomplish the end of

getting the book off the pulpit. Likewise, if it is God's will to provide for a financial need I have or to heal an illness in my family, or to enable a non-Christian friend of mine to believe in Jesus Christ, it is often His will to do these things in response to my prayers. It is not correct to say, "God is going to do His will even if we don't pray," nor is it right to say, "Our prayers or lack of prayers, can change God's will." Instead the Bible teaches God wills that our prayers are the means He uses to accomplish His will.

I suspect what I just said leaves some of you a bit confused. If you have questions I would be glad to discuss this topic with you more. You can just give me a call. Or you may be thinking, "Pastor Dan, I am not sure I understand what you are talking about, but I don't really care how prayer works. I just know I need to do it." If that is where you are at that is fine, just keep praying. Because, that is really the main point today. Because we know we belong to God we should pray, and pray with confidence.

Now, the very pragmatic culture, in which we live, is infatuated with action. Many folks get nervous if they go for any period of time without doing something. If a problem comes up, we ask, "What can I do, *besides pray?*" And yes, most of the time God calls us to pray and act. Yet, we should never dismissively think, "Well, I guess the only thing I can do is pray." Prayer is the most powerful action anyone can take. Asking our heavenly Father, who is also the Creator and Ruler of the universe, to act in a particular circumstance is the most effective thing anyone could ever do. John Bunyan, the great Puritan preacher wrote, "You can do more than pray, after you have prayed. But, you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." That was the practice that Francis and Edith Schaeffer followed at L'Abri, their ministry in Switzerland. Whenever a problem arose, the rule was that one should pray about it before discussing it with anyone else. Talking with God about a problem before you talk to any other human being is a great model to follow.

So, brothers and sisters, pray! Pray for big things, pray for little things. Pray when you feel like praying, pray when you don't feel like

doing so. As you do, pray with confidence. Pray with confidence that God, your heavenly Father, will answer that prayer according to His will.

Now, to have this confidence in prayer, there are three other things we should do. Number one, we should make sure we are trusting in Jesus Christ. Perhaps, even though you are here in church today, you are not really a believer in Jesus. Thus you cannot call God, "Father." What you need to do today is, by God's grace, turn to Jesus Christ. Turn away from your sin and self-confidence, and put your trust in Him. If you are not sure what that means, please talk to me after the service. Number two, we should confess our sins to the Lord. Maybe you are a Christian believer, but have not really been walking with the Lord. Because of sin and spiritual problems you are embarrassed to approach Him. You know the Bible says, "God answers the prayers of righteous man," but you don't feel very righteous. Friend, if you are aware of sin in your life, you need to confess that to the Lord, and then believe the promise the He gives us in **1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Number three, we must rely not on our righteousness, or even our confession of sin, but rather the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is what enables us to approach God with boldness. It is not because I am such a good person, but rather because Jesus is such a great Savior that I can pray with confidence. When Jesus died on the cross the veil of the temple outside the Holy of Holies was ripped in two. Jesus' sacrifice in our place made it possible for us to come before the Lord. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: **Hebrews 4:16** (NLT) *So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.* Friend, I don't know about you, but I am in need of God's grace to help me and people I care about in a variety of situations. Today we have been encouraged, as God's beloved children, to boldly and confidently ask for His help through prayer. May we do that more and more both today and in the days ahead.