



1 John 5:14
Knowing God's Will

For the next couple of weeks we're going to be talking about prayer. Prayer is one of those words that makes people feel stuff. Some people feel very mystical and heightened at the mention of prayer, some become very serious and sober, and others feel afraid and confused like, "uh-oh, please don't ask me to pray."

Personally, I think it's unfortunate, because prayer is really just talking with God.

In some ways, we've messed it up by giving it a name. There's no special word used to refer to a man talking to his wife, or friends – it's just talking, conversation, communication. It's normal. Even the most introverted among us find some people they're comfortable talking to. And if you can talk to people, you can talk to God, that's what prayer is – talking to God.

In fact, I'll go so far as to say this: there's nothing special about 'prayer,' though there is everything special about God.

What do I mean by that? Simply this – the power is not in the words, it's not a spell or incantation. Back in Jesus' day some people thought you could make God listen by praying the same thing over and over. Jesus told people it wasn't true. "Vain repetition" is what He called it.

The power of prayer is not in the exact words you say, or the phrases you use, or how loudly or fast, or quietly or slow you pray, it's not in how tightly you clasp your hands or how much you scrunch up your face. The power of prayer isn't the fact that you get down on your knees and bow your head.

No, the power of prayer is actually the power of the God I'm speaking to and the power of the fact that there is a relationship between us – the simple fact that I can speak and He will listen is tremendous because there are all kinds of powerful men and women on this earth who don't care at all about what I say, who would never be interested in having a conversation with me.

But God does. The mighty and powerful, world-creating, universe-ruling God actually bends down to hear my prayers. And He tells me to pray more – to talk with Him more often. He's the one making all the offers to get together and I'm the one so rarely taking Him up. But when I do, it's not specific words He wants to hear, I don't have to use a special vocabulary or formula, He wants to hear my heart. He wants me to talk to Him like I would talk to my closest friend or relative – with openness, honesty, and trust.

And yes, because He is my Father and the all-knowing, all-controlling, Creator God He wants me to ask Him for things I need, but again, the power isn't in the fact of prayer, it's not in uttering specific words, or a specific number of words, the power is in the God who is hearing

those words. That means I don't need to worry about messing up and doing it all wrong, I need to worry about getting to know Him more.

So, read with me if you will and let's look at what John has to say about the subject of prayer.

1 Jo 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Friend, if you are a Christian, you have a special privilege that most people on this earth do not have. You have confidence with God – you can KNOW that He hears you. You can KNOW your prayers are being received. And more than that, you can KNOW they are being answered, but there is a big if: IF we ask anything according to His will.

That's a pretty important if. God isn't just going around granting wishes for any one who burns a candle or makes a request, He puts boundaries on our prayer lists according to His will. And that's actually a good thing.

Scattered around the world you find fairy tales and myths about people who were given the chance for wishes to be granted by a fairy, or leprechaun, or genie, and the stories are often cautionary tales about the danger of asking for the wrong thing.

Think of the Greek myth of King Midas who asked that whatever he touched would turn to gold – it was great until he realized that he couldn't eat, and then he touched his precious daughter and she was turned into a gold statue.

A similar story is told in Swedish folklore of a woodsman who found a fairy who granted him three wishes. That night he was hungry and forgetting of the wishes he had been promised, off-handedly wished that he had sausage to eat. The sausage appeared, but wife was upset that he had used up one wish and as she berated him she unthinkingly said, I wish you had a sausage for your nose. And instantly it was so. The only thing left to do with the third wish was to wish the woodsman's nose back to normal.

Two separate stories from two different cultures that tell us pretty much the same thing – we need to be careful what we wish for. Either greediness or foolishness can mess up what seems to be the perfect opportunity.

And yet, how much of our prayer could be described as asking God for what we want, instead of asking God for what He wants - asking for His will? That's a small difference at first, but the more you think about it, the more it grows.

Think about what Jesus taught His disciples, when they came asked Him, Lord, teach us to pray. What format did He give them?

Our Father, in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven. (Matt 6:10; Luke 12:47)

And not only did Jesus teach us to pray for God's will, He modeled it for us at one of the most intense moments of His life – in the Garden of Gethsemane, as He is about to be arrested and crucified, He prays to Father asking if there is any other way, is there any other option, if so, He would take it, but Jesus ended His prayer, “nevertheless, not my will, but Thy will be done.”

It's not wrong to ask God for things. Jesus received people who came to Him asking for a miracle. We can come to God and ask for help, healing, and guidance. That's OK. But we need to do it in a spirit of submission that says, “God, I think this is good and I would like to have it, or I would like you to do this for that person, but if it's not good, if for whatever reason it's not Your will, then Your will be done instead.”

Friends, we need to remember that prayer is an amazing opportunity to get to know more of God. It's not just rubbing a lamp and making a wish. So, anything worth praying about is also worth taking the time to think about and ask God, “What *is* Your will on this subject?”

Think in terms of our government - an ambassador never responds on his own situations in his assigned country. No, he or she responds according to the desires and directives of the President and our national foreign policy. It should be the same way with us as God's ambassadors. “Father, this is happening. What is Your will, what is Your policy, and how should I respond?”

Too often though we rush in with the Midas touch – we think we know what needs to happen, we think we know what needs to be prayed, we just need God to show up and fix it. Sometimes, when life goes bad we look at it like the network going down at work and assume what we need to do is call Jesus and open up a service ticket. That's what God does, right? He runs the HelpDesk for life. When you have a problem you put in a service call.

Again, there's nothing wrong with asking for help, in fact, we should. But we need to make sure we don't blindly assume we know how this should all turn out. Sometimes, in prayer, we need to ask: God, what do you want to do here? Why have You allowed this to happen? And let the crisis moments of life become a chance to learn more about God and His will.

John says, “[this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything *according to His will*, He hears us.](#)”

OK, but how are we supposed to know God's will?

Paul says we need to be regularly transformed in our minds if that's going to happen. A change has to occur in us if we're going to know, cherish, and value the will of God instead of our own desires. Turn with me over to Romans 12

[Rom 12:1](#) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, **that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

Friends, I hope you have understood this fundamental truth: the world and society are trying to mold and shape you all the time. Media is all about getting a message to you. People want to influence you – they want to show you things and ideas, they want to tell you things – they want to conform you to their ideas and values. That’s not entirely bad, it’s not all evil. God wants the same thing - to get a message across to you. The point is simply that there is a competition for your loyalty in this life between God and His will and the will and worldview of others.

That competition is so fierce that Paul is begging us to realize it exists and to resist the influence of the world and allow God to constantly renew and transform our minds SO we can know His perfect will. We do that in part by spending time in prayer and reading and memorizing Scripture – washing our minds and desires with the water of God’s Word.

And meanwhile, behind the scenes, God is also just overriding the system at times and writing His will on our hearts.

Make note of:

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

That’s an incredible promise. God is putting new desires in me. As time goes on in my relationship with Him, I find myself wanting things that I never wanted before, because it’s His will bubbling up from within me. And I discover that these new desires are better than anything else I’ve ever desired on my own.

Think about this church we are all a part of – did any of us ever imagine something like this could be? No. This wasn’t the plan or strategy of men, it was God at work in us both to will and do for His good pleasure. And I’m still amazed by all He has done as we followed Him.

But let me say another thing about following God and knowing His will. And that is: we need to understand the nature of God’s will or else it’s going to be terribly confusing for us at times. We need to understand that sometimes God’s it’s a dot; most times it is a circle. Another way to say that is: sometimes God’s will is a pinpoint; most times, it is a set of parameters.

So, if you’re looking for God’s will, don’t assume it’s always going to be a very precise thing, it’s far more likely to be a general approach. Remember, God is far more interested in the process than the end product; He looks more deeply at our hearts than our actions. So when we’re talking about God’s will, it’s not always a precise specific thing, but more often it’s guidance that brings us in line with Him and shows us how to handle many situations, not just one.

I’ll give you an example of what I mean. If you join the Navy, the USMC, or the Coast Guard, one of the first things you will do in boot camp is learn the 11 General Orders for Sentries, commonly called your “General Orders.” Sentries are people who are on duty, on watch. Whether in combat or at home in the barracks, the military always has people who up and about

paying attention to what's going on and responding to anything from a threat or fight to an unwelcome visitor to a sudden fire or burst pipe.

Whenever you are on duty, your actions are guided by the 11 General Orders. Things like,

1. To take charge of this post and all government property in view.
2. To walk my post in a military manner, keeping always on the alert, and observing everything that takes place within sight or hearing.
3. To report all violations of orders I am instructed to enforce.

You learn these verbatim in boot camp and they never change throughout your entire career. They may be added to, but they never go away. They are basic enough and general enough to cover every conceivable guard duty situation, even when you don't know what to do. Order 9 is "To call the Corporal of the Guard in any case not covered by instructions."

When it comes to God's will, most of the time we are to operate according to His general orders – His laws for life that apply to all people at all times in all situations. And then, sometimes He has special orders for us personally at this moment in time in our particular life – we'll try to discuss that next week.

But this week I want to look at what we can learn about the explicitly clear aspects of God's will.

So I want to close this morning by reading four passages of Scripture that clearly tell us the will of God. God's will involves more than just these things, but we look at them as a starting point knowing that [if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us](#).

Think of these as God's General Orders for Christians, things that apply to all people, at all times, in all situations. They aren't in any order, but I tried to grab a few that were right next to each other so they would be easy for us to turn to.

1. It is God's will that we abstain from sexual sin

1 Thes 4:1 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; 2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: **that** you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. 7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. **8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.**

It is absolutely, beyond all shadow of a doubt, God's will that your life be characterized by sexual purity. And in our culture, that's going to make you a weirdo. But here my friends is the

crucial decision you will have to make – will you do what everyone else around you is doing, or will you do God’s will. There’s no playing around, no denying it – no avoiding it – it’s written right there: **this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality.** Now, what are you going to do about that? Especially in light of verse 8:

8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.

Friends, this is why sexual immorality – any sexual behavior outside of the relationship between a man and his wife – is such a big deal. Our culture tries to tell us it’s not. Our culture tells us to indulge, to do what ever feels good, to satisfy any desire that rises up inside us. And God speaks clearly: sexual relationships are only for a married man and his wife. It draws a line in the sand, it’s a testing point for God’s authority and you have to choose – who is right?

God says if you reject His teaching on sex, you reject Him and the Holy Spirit as well. Friends, we need to be reminded of this, we need to be clear on this, we need to know that it is a REALLY big deal.

2. It is God’s will that we rejoice, pray, and give thanks

1 Thes 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. **15** See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. **16** Rejoice always, **17** pray without ceasing, **18** in everything give thanks; **for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.** **19** Do not quench the Spirit. **20** Do not despise prophecies. **21** Test all things; hold fast what is good. **22** Abstain from every form of evil.

Friends, it is God’s will for us to pray, rejoice, and give thanks. If you’d like to see more prayer, joy, and thankfulness in your life, why not pray for them? You can have confidence that God will hear and answer that prayer because you are praying according to His will, and therefore, John has told us, we know He hear us.

3. It is God’s will for us to have a good witness

1 Pe 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, **14** or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good. **15** **For this is the will of God,** that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— **16** as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. **17** Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Are you having some issues at work, at school, with friends or neighbors? This is the will of God – that by doing good, by doing what it right, even if it’s hard, even if others are giving you an excuse not to, by taking a stand for what is right with courage and faith God says He will use the good you to do to shut other people up. It might not happen immediately, and it might not

happen publicly, but you can be guaranteed that it will happen. What is right IS right. But if you find it hard to do it, pray, pray according to God's will, and you know He will hear.

And then trust. Because, again, things might not go well immediately:

4. Sometimes God's will involves our suffering, but when it does He watches over us¹

1 Peter 3:13 And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are* blessed. "*And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.*" 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For *it is better, if it is the will of God*, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Personal hardship is not an indicator that you are "outside of the will of God." In fact, following Jesus led most of the apostles to die a martyr's death. Things probably won't wind up like that for you, but the point is the same – we follow Jesus because He is worthy, not because of what we get out of it.

God's will is what you would choose if you had all the facts. The problem is, we don't always have them – we don't know how this is going to turn out or why He let this or that happen. We don't see the big picture. So, we have to press on by faith, trusting Him with what we don't see. We have to be willing to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done" even when that makes our life hurt.

But, and here's the last thing I want to say this morning – God never leaves us to do His will alone. He hears our prayers for His will, and when we attempt to do His will, He rushes in with help to give us strength. Listen to the benediction of the book of Hebrews:

Heb 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Let's pray

¹ See also: 1 Pe 4:19

Matt 6:9

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

10 Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as *it is* in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

13 And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.