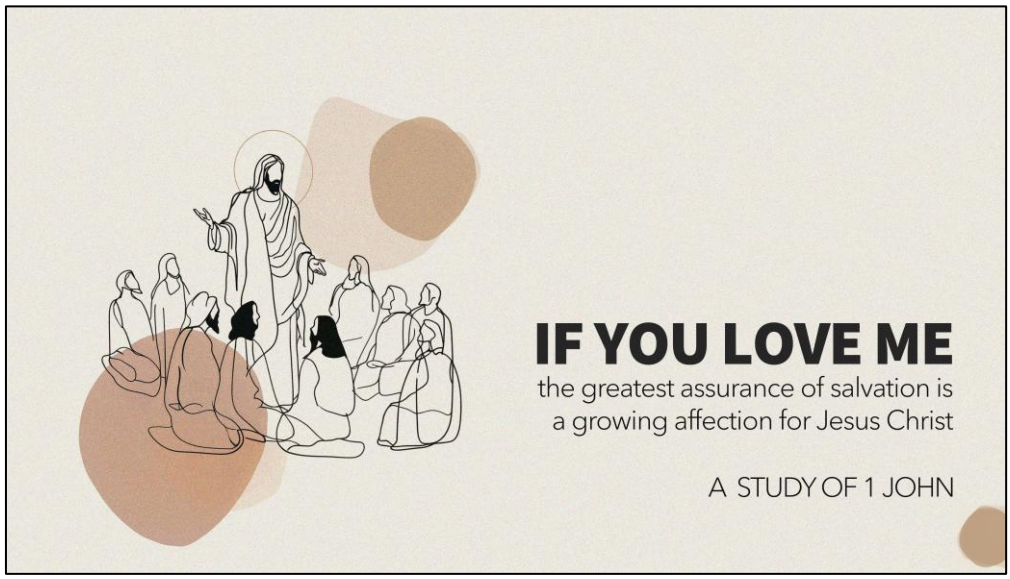


You Can Talk to Me
Anytime About Anything

1 John 5:14-15

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia
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YOU CAN TALK TO ME ANYTIME ABOUT ANYTHING
1 John 5:14-15

A missionary doctor served in the jungles of Africa, and traveled from village to village on a bicycle, often camping out at night along the way. In one village, the doctor treated a man and shared the Gospel with him. The man then confessed that he had been part of a gang who had followed the doctor into the jungle one night and intended to rob him and kill him as he camped. But when the gang saw 26 armed guards with the doctor, they retreated into the jungle.

The doctor laughed, "What armed guards? I always travel alone." But the would-be robber insisted, "No. We counted. There were 26 armed guards with you. And we were afraid and left you alone." The doctor thought it was just a wild story.

The next year, when the doctor was back in the States reporting on his missionary work, he told the story of the would-be robber as a humorous tale. But one of the men in the church interrupted the missionary and asked him, "Can you tell me the exact date when that happened?" The missionary thought for a moment and remembered when it happened.

The man in the church then shared his side of the story. On that same day, he was headed to play golf but had a nagging sense that he was to pray for the missionary doctor. He was so compelled to pray that he called several other men in the church to pray as well. Then the man asked every man in the church to stand up who had prayed for the missionary doctor that day. And 26 men stood up![1]

Do you believe that story? I do. And I believe it's an example of the mysterious power of prayer. If Moses were here, he would tell us that prayer parted the Red Sea. If Joshua were here, he would tell us that prayer made the walls of Jericho collapse. If Daniel were here, he would tell us that prayer shut a lion's mouth. If Lazarus were here, he would tell us that prayer raised him from the dead.

But are those just Bible stories? Can prayer do things like that for us? The Bible says it can. God promises it can.

Yet the topic of prayer raises all kinds of questions, such as …

- If God already knows what we need, why do we need to pray?
- Why do we have to persuade God or beg Him to give us what we need?
- Can prayer do anything about real-life problems? Can prayer bring healing, get someone a job, or fix a marriage?
- Is it selfish to ask God to protect our family? And what are we to think, after we pray for protection, and He still allows something bad to happen?
- Why is God often silent? What does unanswered prayer say about His love for us?

- Does prayer really make a difference? Or does life boil down to coincidence, fate, or luck?

I admit I've asked those questions, and perhaps you have too. We believe in God, we really do, but sometimes we wonder if prayer really works.

Yet the Lord said, "Call to Me, and I will answer you" (Jeremiah 33:3, ESV). The God of the universe says, "Call to Me." And He promises to listen and He promises to respond.

When we add up all the promises in the Bible on prayer, there's no better offer in the universe. And we can sum up God's offer with two words – *relationship* and *request*. Prayer is the means through which we live in relationship with God.[2] Prayer is conversational, as if we were sitting down and talking with Him. Prayer is relationship. Prayer is also request. It is the means through which we share our most urgent needs with God. Prayer is enjoying *relationship* with God and making *request* of God.[3]

Jesus emphasized both in John 15:7, when He said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7, ESV). "If you abide in Me" – that's relationship. "Ask whatever you wish" – that's request.

Sixty years later, John repeated that promise to a new generation of believers. "This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him" (1 John 5:14-15, ESV).[4]

Because of this privileged relationship with Jesus, we can talk to Him anytime about anything.[5]

CONFIDENCE TO APPROACH GOD

In his letter, John assures us that because of this personal, intimate relationship with Jesus, ***we can have confidence to approach God***.[6]

"And this is the ***confidence*** that we have toward him," he writes, "that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us" (1 John 5:14, ESV).[7]

The Greek word for "confidence" refers to freedom of speech, having the right to say what you want.[8] It's the confidence of freedom within a democracy. It's the confidence of candor within a relationship. Before God, we have full rights as His children, we have access to Him, we have permission to approach Him, and we can talk to Him anytime about anything.[9]

And the Bible encourages us to approach Him with confidence. The book of Hebrews says, "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16, NAS). "We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19, NAS). It is through Jesus, Paul said, that "we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12, NIV). We can talk to God anytime we want and about anything we want.

But don't forget who you're talking to. "And this is the confidence that we have ***toward him***."

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught the disciples to begin their prayers by saying, ***"Our Father who is in heaven."*** Which means, Jesus wants us to know that His Father is our Father.[10] When we talk about God as our Father, He is nothing like the absent father or the abusive father or the father who never told you he was proud of you. He is a perfect father. Perfect in His love, perfect in His goodness, perfect in His discipline, perfect in every way. To call God Father puts Him in His wonderful place (as our Father), and it also puts us in our wonderful place (as His children). Because He is our Father, we can trust that He loves us, that He cares about us, that He hears us, and that He will answer in the way He sees best.

God is our Father, but we must remember to whom we are talking. "Our Father who is in heaven, ***Hallowed be Your name."*** We must never forget that we are praying to the Holy One. "Hallowed" means sacred and holy. To "hallow" His name is to revere His name, to respect His name, and to honor His name.

We can have confidence to approach God. Yes, trusting Him as Father, but also revering Him as holy.

CONFIDENCE TO ASK GOD

Confidence to approach God, and ***confidence to ask God for anything***. "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ***ask anything*** according to his will he hears us" (1 John 5:14, ESV).

That phrase is packed with potential. And it's a promise we read throughout the Bible.

- "Call upon me in the day of trouble," the Lord said to David, "and I will deliver you" (Psalm 50:15, ESV).
- "Call to Me and I will answer you," the Lord said to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 33:3, NAS).
- "If you ask Me anything in My name," Jesus said, "I will do it" (John 14:14, NAS).
- Jesus promised, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7, NAS).

Jesus went to great length to explain this when He said, "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you." Then Jesus said, "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:7, 9-11, NIV).

We can trust God to hear our prayers, answer our prayers, and to "give good gifts to those who ask Him."[11]

But we must prayer "according to his will." The most dramatic example of this was the night Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew what was coming, and hours before His arrest, He agonized in prayer. "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, ***yet not as I will, but as You will***" (Matthew 26:39, NAS). Jesus was saying, "Father, I want what You want. Yes, I'm even willing to suffer the cross if that's what You want."

Puritan Richard Baxter captured what it means to pray according to God's will when he said, "Lord, whatever you want, wherever you want, and whenever you want, that's what I want."[12]

Yes, we can pray with confidence. And yes, we can ask God for anything. But when we pray, we must submit our will to His will, what we want to what He wants. And trust that what He wants is best.

CONFIDENCE THAT GOD HEARS

If God invites us to "ask anything," then surely He intends to hear us. Based upon a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, ***we can have confidence that God hears***. "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will ***he hears us***" (1 John 5:14, ESV).

In our humanity, we cry out to God to hear us, and so did David.

- "Listen to my prayer, O God. Do not ignore my cry for help! Please listen and answer me, for I am overwhelmed by my troubles" (Psalm 55:1-2, NLT).
- "Answer my prayers, O Lord, … (Please) take care of me" (Psalm 69:16, NLT).
- "From the depths of despair, O Lord, I call for your help. Hear my cry, O Lord. Pay attention to my prayer" (Psalm 130:1-2, NLT).
- "O Lord, I am calling to you. Please hurry! Listen when I cry to you for help!" (Psalm 141:1, NLT).

We all know what it feels like to cry out to God for help. And if there is any doubt that He hears, listen to the testimony of the other psalmists.

- "In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation" (Psalm 5:3, NIV).
- "I am praying to you because I know you will answer" (Psalm 17:6, NLT).
- "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles" (Psalm 34:17, NAS).
- "Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice" (Psalm 55:17, NIV).
- ***"I love the Lord because he hears my voice"*** (Psalm 116:1, NLT).

Do you have that "confidence"? Do you believe God hears you? The composer of Psalm 130 believed it. "I call for your help. Hear my cry, O Lord … I am counting on the Lord. Yes, I am counting on him" (Psalm 130:1-2, 5, NLT).

And yes, we can count on Him. We can have confidence that God hears our prayers.

CONFIDENCE THAT GOD ANSWERS

But God does not just hear our prayers. He promises to answer our prayers. Based upon our personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, ***we can have confidence that God answers***. "And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that ***we have the requests*** that we have asked of him" (1 John 5:15, ESV).

So much of 1 John is John repeating what he heard Jesus say. Matthew is one of the boldest promises Jesus made about the potential of prayer. "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt … you can even say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it" (Matthew 21:21-22, NLT).

"I tell you the truth," Jesus said. He means what He promises. He is inviting us into a relationship with Him, and He is inviting us to ask. When Jesus talked about throwing a mountain into the sea, He exaggerated to make a point. The point that faith-filled prayer has no limitations. Jesus offers an incredible promise that is crammed with possibilities.

Prayer is not a tug-of-war, where we pry blessings from God's hands. Prayer is not a negotiation, where we persuade Him to give us what we need. Prayer in not nagging, where we wear Him down to give us what we want. God is our Father, and He loves us because we are His children.[13]

Jesus said, "You can pray for anything, and if have faith, you will receive it."[14]

If the Bible contained only one promise regarding prayer, we might be tempted to think that Jesus didn't really mean it. But there are too many promises to ignore. So, what are those promises worth? They're worth the character of the one who made them. And who made them? The Son of God. His character backs up His promises, and the Bible says, "He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23, ESV).[15]

One of the most prolific authors to write on prayer was E. M. Bounds, a pastor and chaplain during the Civil War. His books are still being published today. Bounds wrote this concerning God's promise to answer prayer.[16]

> "The promise makes prayer irresistible.[17] … Each believer can claim the promise as his own.[18] … Either this is so or it's not. If not, then there is nothing in prayer. Then prayer is nothing but words, a verbal performance, an empty, useless exercise. But if it is true, then how vast are the possibilities."[19]

> "The answer to prayer is the evidence of God's being. It proves that God lives, that there is a God, who is interested in His creatures, and who listens to them. There is no proof so clear that God exists than prayer and its answer.[20] … The promises pledge (obligate) Almighty God to answer prayer.[21] … (When we pray) His word is at stake."

Nothing is more exhilarating than answered prayer.[22] Nothing strengthens our faith like answered prayed. David knew from experience. "On the day I called, You answered me" (Psalm 138:3, NAS). "As soon as I pray, you answer me" (Psalm 138:3, NLT). "I will give you thanks, for you answered me" (Psalm 118:21, NIV).

We can have confidence to approach God and to ask God for anything. We can have confidence that God hears and that God answers.

WHAT KINDS OF PRAYERS DO WE PRAY?

When we pray, we pray all kinds of prayers. The note cards you filled out a couple of weeks ago proved that. You asked for prayer for all kinds of things.

Sometimes, we pray for guidance. We pray for God's will, as David did. "Show me the right path, O Lord, point out the road for me to follow" (Psalm 25:4, NLT).

We pray about money. Perhaps a job loss has created a desperate situation. Perhaps bills are stacking up and you're living on a fixed income. Of course, we pray for God to meet our needs.

We pray for world events. Daily, we are distressed with news about war, politics, and natural disasters. And these things compel us to pray.

When we have children, we pray all kinds of prayers. When our children are young, we pray for their health and safety. When they are teenagers, we pray for them to have good friends and make good decisions. Of course, we pray for their salvation, that they would believe and love and follow Jesus. When our children become adults, we pray for continued relationship. When a son marries that daughter-in-law, they form a new family, and your relationship with your own son changes. The rules change. And the greatest sadness that so many of you face is estrangement from your adult children, and from your grandchildren. I don't have enough fingers and toes to count all the friends I have for whom this is true. It's so sad, and it drives us to pray.

We pray spiritual prayers. We pray for the salvation of someone we know and love. If we're growing in our faith, we pray to know Jesus better and deeper. We pray when we struggle with doubt. And when convicted, we pray prayers of confession, desiring to get our heart right with God.

We pray emotional prayers. When we are anxious, worried, or afraid. When we are lonely, sad, or hurt.

And we pray prayers of desperation. When that scary diagnosis comes. When that terrifying phone call comes. When we're in the ER or the funeral home, we cry out, "Oh God, help!"

We pray all kinds of prayers, ***because of this privileged relationship with Jesus, we can talk to Him anytime about anything***. Do you hear that? Do you believe that? You can talk to Jesus anytime about anything.

CONCLUSION

Jesus promised, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7, ESV). And sixty years later, John repeated that promise. "This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him" (1 John 5:14-15, ESV).

Because of this privileged relationship with Jesus, we can talk to Him anytime about anything.

PRAYER TIME

And we're going to do that right now. Every one of us in this room is carrying some burden, some problem, some worry, and we need God's help. So for the next few minutes, I invite you bow your head, to bring to mind your most urgent need, and to share it with God. I don't know how He will answer, but I trust, and I hope you trust, that He loves you and cares about you, and that He is with you. Whatever is weighing on your heart, take a few minutes and talk to God about it.

Oh Father, You know what each of us is going through. You know the burdens and worries we carry. As our Father, we trust that You care about us. So this morning, we've asked for Your help. Some of us have prayed about health issues. Some of us have prayed about financial issues. Some of us have prayed about family issues. Again, you know the burdens and worries we carry. So as David prayed, we pray. "From the depths of despair, O Lord, we call for your help. Hear our cry, O Lord. Pay attention to our prayers … O Lord, we call out to you. Please hurry and listen to our cry for help!"[23] *We place our prayers in Your hands, and we wait on You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

NOTES

[1] David Jeremiah, *Prayer, the Great Adventure* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1997), pages 112-113.
[2] See Exodus 33:11, Psalm 27:4, 8.
[3] As Psalm 62:8 says, "Pour out your heart before Him." As Philippians 4:6 says, "Present your requests to God."
[4] See also 1 John 3:21-22.
[5] Jesus invites us to "ask." As children of God, we have the right to ask for whatever we need and expect Him to answer. Theologian J. I. Packer writes this about prayer. "At the core," when people bend their knees and cry out to God, "prayer is asking."[5] Prayer is asking God to do something for us. We have permission to ask based upon our relationship with Him. [J. I. Packer, *Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), page 149.]
[6] See David Jackman, *The Message of John's Letters*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), page 160.
[7] John elaborated on this "confidence" in 3:21-24. "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us" (1 John 3:21-24, ESV). Notice John gave a qualifier. "If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God." Our hearts do not condemn us and we are in good standing with God ... (1) if "we believe in the name" of Jesus, professing our faith in Jesus, (2) if "we keep his commandments and do what pleases him," and have not drifted into habitual sin, and (3) if we "love one another," if we are Christlike toward one another. So, if believe in Jesus as our Savior, if we are keeping His commandments, and if we love one another, we can have confidence that we are in good standing with God and that He will hear our prayers. John often used the word "abide" and used it here. As we abide in Him, as He abides in us, as the Holy Spirit abides in us, we can have confidence to approach God.
[8] The Greek word is παρρησία (*parrasia*).
[9] Jackman, page 160. "Our conversation with God is to be uninhibited, open and relaxed, yet not without reverence and submission."
[10] Jesus said, "Pray like this, 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Your name'" (Matthew 6:9). That one phrase is packed with theological significance. He is "our Father," which points to His immanence, which means He is near and dear to us. He is "in heaven," which points to His transcendence, which means He is above and beyond us. He is "hallowed" which means He is holy and deserves our reverence.
[11] "The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right" (Psalm 84:11, NLT).
[12] Baxter quoted by David Jeremiah, page 106.
[13] The Lord once said to His people Israel, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance" (Psalm 2:8). What was God actually saying? "Ask Me for the world, and I will give it to you."
[14] Jesus was traveling along the road to Jericho when a blind man yelled out at Him. Jesus asked him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" Without hesitation, the blind man said, "I want to see Lord." And what did Jesus say? He didn't tell him to go to church. He didn't comfort him with religious platitudes. Jesus gave the man what he asked for – "Receive your sight, your faith has healed you" (Luke 18:42).
[15] "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).
[16] E. M. Bounds, *The Possibilities of Prayer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), some quotes have been modified with updated language to be more readable.
[17] Ibid., page 16.
[18] Ibid., page 26.
[19] Ibid., pages 40-41.
[20] Ibid., page 86.
[21] Ibid., page 96.
[22] One psalmist said, "You thrill me, Lord, with all you have done for me! I sing for joy because of what you have done" (Psalm 92:4, NLT).
[23] Psalm 130:1-2, Psalm 141:1, NLT.