

1 John 5:14-17 (NKJV)

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.

16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.

17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death.

OK, remember last week we talked about the value and necessity of assurance, of certainty? Remembered that we said that John was going to cover some serious ground?

He was about to tell us-

We **know** that he hears us—whatever we ask.

We **know** that we have what we asked.

We **know** that anyone born of God does not continue to sin.

We **know** that we are children of God.

We **know** also that the Son of God has come.

We... **know** him who is true. ([vv. 15, 18-20](#))

From verse 14 on we are probably dealing with a **post script** by John. He has covered the ground that he **promised** at the **beginning** of the book. But we all know how we are as people. And those people **who love us** are frequently like our mothers or fathers were, giving us a bunch of last minute advice before we finally drove off for a long term destination.

John is covering the last minute details of what God's children need to be sure about in order to live an overcoming life.

This morning we will focus on verses 14 and 15. We will be talking about prayer.

Now what topic could be more important than the topic of prayer?

It doesn't take much study at all to see how important prayer is in the Christian life.

Jesus said this in **Luke 18:1**

1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

And Jesus not only talked about it. He did it.

Mark 1:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ **Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.**

Jesus also prayed all night prior to selecting the Disciples.

Scripture tells us from beginning to end to **call out to God in prayer**. We are to be in prayer continually.

Martyn Lloyd Jones said that **There has never been a man or woman of God that has been singularly used of God in this world, but that they spent much time in prayer**. I do not know if that is true but I would bet that it is. Now, this is a puzzle isn't it. If God is **Sovereign**, and God knows what we need **before we even ask**, and we know that God will accomplish **His will** with or without our contribution, why pray? If we rely only upon reason, we could easily come to the conclusion that **prayer is not necessary**. And we could definitely conclude that Jesus certainly had **no need to pray**. He was God in the flesh after all.

And all that our perfect reasoning would do in this instance is to **lead us astray**. When we are dealing with God, there are things that we do not understand. They don't **violate** reason, but they **transcend** it.

We often talk about how our reason cannot reconcile the facts of God's Sovereignty and a human's responsibility. How can a man be held responsible for responding to God's call on His life when the man is incapable of doing so without God first performing it. How can this be? Well. We don't know. But we do know that scripture clearly tells us that it is true.

Ok then. Now if God is going to do what God is going to do, how can anything be **dependent** upon someone praying for it? Again, we do not know. But we know that scripture plainly says it.

So how do we think about this? How do we make sense of it?

The God who determines **the ends** also determines **the means**. Part of God deciding **What** He will do is planning **How** He will do it. God determines that some things He will only do **as a result of prayer**. So He determines that **prayer** will be **part of the process** of Him **doing** it.

Would it happen if someone did not pray for it? No, not if God had determined that prayer would be part of the process. Just like, would a person come to Christ if we did not present the Gospel to him? We like to say, yes of course, God will send someone if He determines to save that person. We will just miss out on the opportunity to do so. But there is another way of looking at that.

No, if God determines to save a person by **us witnessing** to that person at some time and space event, it is an impossibility that this event will not

happen. So that person would **not** be saved if we did not witness to him, but it is impossible that **we would not** witness to them.

Do you see what I mean. There is the **theoretical** about principles in the Bible. God does not **need** us. He does not depend upon our choosing the right options so that His plan works out. But neither does He do much of what He does **apart** from our involvement. His will involves **people doing things** that result in the accomplishing the things He determines. He determines both their **obedience** and the **outcome** of their obedience. All the links are connected in His sovereignty.

So are we to pray only because prayer changes **us**? No. That is not a Biblical concept. No, our scripture here says that **whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.**

That is not a psychological statement of the benefit of prayer. That is a statement of the **power** that **accompanies** a faithful prayer. Prayer **does** change things. And it changes more than **just us**. It may change our attitude. But that is not the **primary** benefit.

Mike taught over and over that prayer is asking and the answer is receiving. And we cannot dodge the fact that there is truth to this. There is a certain kind of asking of God that is more than wishful thinking. We ask with a certainty that we are asking the **right God** for the **right thing** with the **right attitude** and we will **receive** that thing we are asking for.

whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

We cannot make light of this scripture just because our prayers may not reflect this truth. We always need to adjust our **perceptions of our lives** by what the **truth** says, instead of adjusting our **perceptions of truth** because of what our **lives say**.

Prayer **involves us** in the process of what God intends to do. And it matters. There is much that God will not do if He has not called people to pray for it. We cannot close the logical loop too tightly where we limit what God **can** or **cannot** do by how well we **cooperate**. But we **should conclude** that normally if God is going to **do something**, He is going to see to it that people are **praying** for it.

Prayer matters because God has **called us to it** in order to **participate** in what He is doing, and to **bring Glory to God** when He has **done it**. Those who pray know when prayers are answered. They know **who** to ascribe it to. And they have been drawn into the very process of **THY will be done on earth as it is in heaven**. So without a doubt, prayer **does** change us. But we cannot limit that effect as being the **only**, or even **primary** purpose God has for it.

Ultimately, in this sense, we **pray** to see **God move**. Then sometimes we cast our cares and anxieties upon Him because He cares for us. Sometimes we cry Abba Father.

We call them all prayer, because we are communicating with God. But the kind of prayer that is **asking and receiving** may well be what is referred to in scripture **most often** as being **prayer**.

OK let's start again at verse 14

14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

Notice the word **Confidence**. Again we are talking about certainty. We are talking about assurance. We are to **have** this confidence. It is assumed, so it must be **attainable**.

Isn't it wonderful that we do not need to go through life like weeds blown by the wind. We can be solid and unmovable in our certainty that **God loves us**. We can be sure that we are His children. And as His children we gain the wonderful benefits of His family. John has drilled the **signs of life** into our heads over and over. We are meant to have certainty.

And we are meant to pray.

John shows us here how we can **pray with certainty**.

Now, for us to pray with certainty there are **several conditions**.

1. We must know that we are IN CHRIST.
2. We must ask according to God's Will
3. We must believe that Christ hears us in a special preferential way
4. We know God will give us what we ask

We must know that we are IN CHRIST.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him,

There is nothing inherently powerful in people praying. Non believers can ask God to do stuff all day long and it will fall on deaf ears.

Jesus said this:

Luke 13:24-27 (NKJV)

24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,'

26 then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and

You taught in our streets.'

²⁷ But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from.

Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'

It is easy to see that prayers, even to the **one true God**, normally have no effect on God when made by people who are **not His**. Now sometimes, God in His grace is calling a person to Himself. And He will answer that person in accomplishing that person's salvation. But human beings outside of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ have no reason to expect God to move in their behalf.

However if a person calls out to God in repentance, God will move swiftly to assure that person's passage into the Kingdom. The only predictable prayer for a person who does not have a relationship with Christ to make is **a prayer asking for God's forgiveness**. That is the starting place of a prayer that is sure to be answered.

But we are different. 1 John has already spoken of our **confidence** before God. **1 John 3:21-22 (NKJV)**

²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

²² And whatever we ask we receive from Him, **because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight**.

This confidence John is speaking of is **confidence in God's presence**, before Him, in prayer. Isn't that wonderful.

If we are in Christ, prayer is more than a wishful exercise. We can know it is a **productive behavior**.

Then next We must ask according to God's Will

Well what does God tell us about asking according to God's will? What does scripture teach us about effective prayer?

First, prayer must be made for the proper motive.

James 4:3 (NKJV)

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

When our hearts are aligned with **what God wants**, we ask for **what God wants**, what will best aid His kingdom. Sometimes those are things that we need. That is all well and good. But sometimes what we ask for is basically **food for our fleshly**, sinful desires. And in that case, we will **not** receive what we ask for. We are not asking according to God's will. We are asking according to **our will** and we want God to **line Himself up** with it.

It is very good for us, from time to time to ask- Why am I really praying for this? Really. Down deep? With complete self honesty. Why am I praying for this? Does it really have anything to do with **God's benefit**? Or am I asking

this thing because it would make my life more enjoyable? Less hassled? Easier? It would increase my comfort and decrease my discomfort? There are some things I ask for that I know would simply make things easier for me. It would remove my discomfort. Oh, I can justify that it would help the other person I am praying for. But deep down I cannot say that the thing is primarily **for them**. It may **not** even be something that God wants done. But I sure **want Him** to do it.

Sometimes, with those prayers, we need to tell the truth about it and finally say, **Thy will be done Lord**. I will accept this thing if you never choose to do it. I do not need this thing for me to be happy in you. Ultimately that is the proper attitude for all prayer. Thy Kingdom Come, They will be done, just like Jesus said. Anything outside of that attitude is already suspect.

The next thing we see about asking according to God's will is that **we ask in Faith**.

Matthew 21:22 (NKJV)

22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

James 1:5-8 (NKJV)

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

OK

What does it mean to ask in Faith?

To ask in faith is first to have **placed faith** in the God that you are praying to. You must be **in Christ by faith**. And then it means **living by faith** in the relationship with Christ. We live from faith to faith. We are looking to this God we are praying to in **the proper relationship**, where we fully trust Him to look out for our best interest and to deliver on every one of His promises for our good.

Then to ask in faith is to ask, as it were, from **inside** that relationship. We are asking for those things that He has revealed are **in His will** for us to have. So we fully expect that **He will give us those things**. We fully expect Him to deliver those things to us. We ask by faith.

The unstable man in James is coming from not one position, but two. Both flesh and spirit are ruling in this man's life. So He asks one day for things of Christ and the next day according to the lusts of the flesh. One day he believes

that what Christ has for Him is the ultimate fulfillment. The next day he wants God to bless an **alternate path** to fulfillment. And that man isn't going to get either of the things he asks. Did you ever have a time in your life where you didn't seem to grow much? Look for doublemindedness. Look for living for 2 things instead of 1 thing.

Now I wanted to add this in because I think it is helpful. There is a lot of confusion about asking in faith. This also pertains to our next topic as well of "asking in Jesus name".

Now there are three ways that people typically understand this prayer of faith.

- 1- The first view says that the trick in **getting** what **you ask for** involves **convincing yourself**, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the thing you are asking for, **you will receive**. They focus on James where it says **you must not doubt**. They take that to assume that you must not **doubt** that **you will receive** the thing **you are asking for**. So the trick in getting what you want is to **name** it and **claim** it. If you can trick yourself into having absolute certainty that you will get it, then wallah, God is impressed by your blind belief and you will have it. While this is often a **sincerely held** belief, it is patently not Biblical and sets people up to be suckers and to have their faith imploded. This is not what the God of heaven responds to and that is not faith in God. That is faith in your own ability for self deception. That is not what is meant by the **prayer of faith**.
- 2- The second view of praying by faith relies upon Divine Guidance. I believe this is exactly what James speaks of when he speaks of the prayer for healing. For this to happen, God must divinely reveal to you, by the Holy Spirit, that not only **should** you pray for a certain thing, but that you **should believe the result** as a direct promise from God to you. This will involve your perceptions. I am uncomfortable with this because there is no way that it can be verified. But God seems extremely comfortable with it, so it really doesn't matter what I feel. God surely does this. I have heard lots of testimonies about healings or prayers for a person's salvation where God led a person to pray for this certain thing and conveyed to the person that it would happen. And then it did. We cannot create a formula for when and where God will do such a thing, but He surely does.
- 3- The third view of praying by faith relies upon **reading God's word to discern His will**. I think this is far and away the most common prayer by faith. This is where we pray the promises of God and claim them for ourselves. This is great because the promises were **made to us**. This is

fitting. This is where we pray the psalms, like our brother Sisler taught us at church camp 2 years ago. We should read to discover what the will of God is that **scripture reveals**, and then we should **pray according to** it. That is a prayer of faith we can pray every day. And should.

OK and one more thing about asking according to God's will.

We are to ask in the name of Christ.

John 14:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*.

John 15:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

We cannot separate this from our understanding of **God's promises** regarding prayer. Now there are lots of charlatans who regard the **name of Jesus** as some kind of **magic chant** that makes God do what they want Him to do. It is as if you **stamp** the name of Jesus to get something, like you would stamp a **diplomatic immunity stamp** on something to get it through customs. But that isn't it at all. Something in Jesus's name is really **in His stead**. It is something He wholeheartedly endorses and stands behind with or without you, but you have aligned yourself with His wishes and desires. **Your will** has been aligned with **His will**, not the other way around. You are not trying to **trick God** into giving you something because now His hands are tied because you said the magic **Jesus** word. Not at all. You are displaying that you have died to your will and now the name, and desires, of **Christ** have taken **first place** in your life. That is praying in Jesus name. And at the end of the day, that is the only way you are heard by Christ.

John 14:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. We usually interpret this to mean salvation, and that is surely true. But it is also true of communication as well. It is only in Jesus name that we ever get to even communicate with God.

Now back to our list-

Now, for us to pray with certainty there are several conditions.

1. We must know that we are IN CHRIST.
2. We must ask according to God's Will

We covered these two and in the interest of time we will cover the next two next week:

3. We must believe that Christ hears us in a special preferential way
4. We know God will give us what we ask

I hope that we have been challenged to pray this week. Imagine that Christ were to call you on the phone. And He were to tell you that **He wants you involved** in several projects He wants to do in your world. Some are little. Some are big. Some He will do quickly. Some may take more than your lifetime. And suppose He were to say He wants you in on this because **He loves you**. He wants you in on this because He **wants your life to be meaningful**. He wants you to have **purpose**. He wants to grant you the fulfillment of **seeing Him work first hand** in your life and in others?

Suppose He were to make that call to you? Would you respond by saying, I am sorry Lord, I have **too much stuff to do** to do that? Or Lord, it would be too hard to set time aside to do that? Or would we say, Lord how do you expect me to do that with all the other stuff I **have** to do and **want** to do?

Do you see the point? Scripture's **calling us to prayer** is exactly what I described earlier. Christ is calling us to be involved in what He is doing. And He is calling us to be involved as His **friends**, revealing what He wills to do. Do you want your life to count? Do you want your minutes to matter forever? If we really believe that the Bible is true, here sits **opportunity** this morning. If we were to do nothing but pray, we would be doing an amazing eternally effective thing. Does this sound like opportunity to you? We will probably have another week to show exactly what we believe.