

How God Answers Prayer – 1 John 5:14-15

We are coming closer to the end of 1 John. He has been writing about the life of Christ – that life that we experience when we are in a living relationship with Jesus Christ. We have seen that the life of Christ abiding in us is characterized by truth, righteousness, and love. Now John closes his letter with an emphasis upon the subject of prayer. Prayer is the perfect expression of these three themes: Love is prayer's motive, Truth is its expression, and Righteousness is its goal.

Perhaps there is no aspect of Christian faith that is so puzzling to many as that of unanswered prayer. Almost all the problems we have with prayer are a result of misunderstanding the nature and purpose of prayer. Prayer is a mysterious thing to many. Some people have lost faith in prayer because, not having a proper understanding of the nature and purpose of prayer, their prayers have gone unanswered.

Prayer is really a very simple thing. It is available to the simplest of people. Even children can pray, and pray very successfully, very effectively. Doesn't it seem like when we were kids it was all so much easier? Listen to some of these children's prayers:

CHILDREN'S PRAYERS:

Dear God: Please send a new baby for Mommy. The new baby you sent last week cries too much. Debbie, 7

Dear God: Who did you make smarter? Boys or girls? My sister and I want to know. Jimmy, 6

Dear God: How many angels are there in heaven? I would like to be the first kid in my class to know the answer. Norma, 8

Dear Lord: Thank you for the nice day today. You even fooled the TV weather man. Hank, 7

Dear God: I need a raise in my allowance. Could you have one of your angels tell my father. Thank you. David, 7

Dear God: This is my prayer. Could you please give my brother some brains. So far he doesn't have any. Angela, 8.

In this closing section of his letter John gives us certain basic, general principles about prayer. Then he follows them with a specific illustration. This morning we will look at the general principles of prayer in Verses 14 and 15. And next week we will learn from the example he gives in verses 16 and 17.

I think there are many Christians who, rather than really taking the time to spend with God in a relationship of prayer, they simply experiment with prayer. They pray for something and then nothing happens. They conclude that prayer changes nothing so why pray? There is no certainty in their prayers.

How many of us have said something like, "Well, things have gotten so bad there's nothing else to do but pray," as though that were the final and last resort? But you do not see that attitude in the Apostle John. What is his reaction to this matter of prayer?

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

I want you to know today that:

I. We can know God Hears our Prayers (v.14).

A. The Confidence of Answered Prayer.

Last week we saw from verse 13 that can you "**know that you have eternal life.**" John now assures us that we can have the same kind of "**confidence**" that God "**hears**" our prayers.

Did you listen to the certainty that John has? For John, prayer is not an experiment, it is a certainty, a sure thing. He knows it works, and he knows how it works.

"Now this is the confidence we have in Him." "Confidence" means "boldness, freedom, lack of reserve." God delights when we boldly come to Him in prayer. Heb.4:16 says, "**Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**"

You cannot read the New Testament without realizing that God delights in bold praying, and in bold people. Jesus teaches on prayer in Luke 11. There he tells this story,

"Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' (then Jesus says) I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Remember in Matthew 15 a Canaanite woman comes to Jesus begging Him to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus ignored her. But His disciples couldn't ignore her because she kept crying out after them. They asked Jesus to send her away. Finally she comes, throws herself at Jesus' feet, worships Him, and says, "**Lord, help me!**"

Do you remember Jesus' response to her? He answered her, "**It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.**"

And she said, "**Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.**"

And Jesus was moved by her boldness, He answered, "**O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.**"

This is what ought to characterize prayer, faith. It should be bold,

confident, certain. Maybe that is why when it came to prayer Jesus stressed faith, believing, and not doubting. He wants us to be confident and certain in our prayer. This kind of certainty arises from knowing of two fundamental principles of prayer, which John gives us here: the certainty of hearing, and the certainty of having.

John says it twice, once in verse 14 and once in verse 15, "**He hears us.**" That's the simplest and probably the best definition of prayer, "**He hears us.**" There are many ways that you can describe prayer and there are many facets of prayer. Sometimes prayer is praise, sometimes thanksgiving, sometimes petition, sometimes confession. But fundamentally prayer is a conversation with God, "**He hears us.**"

B. The Condition of Answered Prayer.

Some of you have noticed that there is a condition, a requirement to heard and answered prayers, it is "**if we ask anything according to His will.**" God doesn't promise to hear any prayer but He absolutely guarantees to hear any prayer that is "**according to His will.**"

God is not like a vending machine where we put in the coins of our petitions, make a selection and expect to receive what we want. Prayer is not some Aladdin's Lamp and God is no cosmic genie granting us wishes and favors.

There are Christians who think that if they follow a particular formula, God is bound to do what they want Him to do.

Consider the presumption to demand that the sovereign supreme Creator and Ruler of the universe bow to whims of a frail, fallen creature. In wonder, David asks in Ps.8:4, "**What is man that You are mindful of him?**"

There are reasons why our prayers sometimes go unanswered. Sometimes God doesn't hear our prayers because of selfish motivation. Ja.4:3 says, "**You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.**"

How do we pray "**according to His will?**" First we need to check that our request is consistent with the Bible. What if I ask God to give me a prestigious position of fame and glory? Would God hear that request and answer it? What does the Bible say? "**But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**"

What if we can't find it in the Bible? What if it may not be bad but we are not certain if it is God's will? Ask anyway, but include what Jesus said in the garden, "**Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done**" (Lk.22:42). Sometimes when I pray about such a matter, God gives me a peace about it. The Spirit confirms it in my heart and I simply wait for God's timing.

II. We can know God will Answer our Prayers (v.15).

In v.15, John says when we have prayed "**according to His will**" we "**know that He hears us**" we can also know that "**we have the petitions that we**

have asked of Him." God never says no unless we pray outside His will. 2 Cor.1:20 says, **"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen."** Ps.84:11 says, **"No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly."**

This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said, **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you"** (Mt.7:7). He gives eagerly and willingly.

As a parent I want the best for my kids. If my son asked for a pack of cigarettes, I would say no! If he asked for some fruit, I'd say yes! If my daughter asked for a revealing outfit, I would say no. If she asked for a modest one I would say yes. If Ricky asked for a book on witchcraft I would say no. If he asked for a study Bible, I'd say yes! God is a gracious Father who gives us everything that is good for us.

God has promised to hear and answer when we pray **"according to His will."** The only question is when.

One preacher wrote:

- If the request is wrong, the answer is NO.
- If the timing is wrong, the answer is SLOW (and we wait).
- If I'm wrong (if something is amiss in my life), the answer is GROW.
- But if the request is right, the timing is right, and I am right, chances are God will say GO.

LITTLE GIRL'S PRAYER

This closing story comes from a missionary in central Africa. She wrote:

One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do she died, leaving us with a tiny premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive, as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator) and no special feeding facilities.

Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous winds. One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst. Rubber perishes easily in hot, tropical climates.

"And it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed.

As in the West it is no good crying over spilled milk, so in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over burst water bottles. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways.

"All right," I said, "Put the baby as near the fire as you safely can; sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm."

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with any of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot

water bottle. The baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them of the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died.

During the prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children. "Please, God," she prayed, "send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby'll be dead, so please send it this afternoon."

While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added, "And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?"

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, "Amen"? Did I really believe that God could do this? Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything. The Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever, received a parcel from home; anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the veranda, was a large twenty-two pound parcel. I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box.

From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys; eyes sparkled as I pulled them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas --- that would make a nice batch of buns for the weekend. Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the could it really be? I grasped it and pulled it out --- yes, a brand-new, rubber hot water bottle! I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He would.

Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, "If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!" Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted.

Looking up at me, she asked: "Can I go over with you, Mummy, and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?"

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months. Packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child --- five months before --- in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year old to bring it "that afternoon."

Before they call, I will answer! (Isaiah 65.24a)