

Series: John's Letters

Title: Praying with Power

Text: 1 John 5:14-15

Date: July 25, 2021

Verse 14

After sharing about how true believers could have assurance of salvation in verse 13, John spoke of another type of confidence. Specifically, he talked about the confidence they could have in prayer. He said, "This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14). John's promise was a monumental one. The faithful remnant in Asia Minor had assurance that God was willing to both hear and answer prayers. His words evoked memories of Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount: "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, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). According to John and Jesus, the problem with most Christians is not one of unanswered prayers; instead, it is often one of un-offered prayers.

Many of John's readers were not praying regularly, because of spiritual insecurity. The Gnostic teaching was discouraging them. John encouraged them to be bold in prayer. He spoke of their need for "confidence." The word spoke of an attitude marked by openness and boldness. It portrayed a sense of freedom and frankness in conversation. Such confidence is a prerequisite for powerful praying. It was not without reason that the New Testament authors often linked the word to prayer. In Ephesians 3:12, Paul said, "In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him." The author of Hebrews encouraged first-century believers, saying, "Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Because of what Christ has done at Calvary, believers never need to be insecure in intercession. The veil of the temple has been ripped open. Through the blood of Jesus, all have access to God (Hebrews 10:19).

After encouraging a confidence in prayer, John described the fundamental nature of prayer by using the word "ask." The term spoke of a request. John's use of the term revealed that prayer, in its most basic essence, is the act of petitioning God for help. His teaching was in alignment with Jesus, who said, "And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22). Many believers are not in tune with this aspect of prayer. Their petitions are marked by a lot of fine-sounding things, but they never actually ask of things from God. Some are actually nervous to do so, assuming that asking of God is presumptuous. Jesus and the apostles reveal otherwise. They continually demonstrated that prayer involves asking. If one never asks of anything from God, it could be said that one has not fully prayed. In asking, one reveals his or her faith and dependency in Christ. Those who never ask exhibit a degree of sinful self-sufficiency.

After talking about the need to make requests in prayer, John made reference for the need to pray in alignment with God's will. He said, "If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." The concept of God's will seems mysterious for many. For some, it is assumed to be unknowable. Believers can be helped by realizing that the Greek word translated "will" is one that simply spoke of a desire. Plain and simple, God's will is what God desires, what God wants. In reference to God's people, God's will is what God wants for one's life. He wills for His people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), and He wants them to live sanctified lives (Romans 12:1-2 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

When applied to prayer, God's will is important. Praying in alignment with what God desires is the key to experiencing answered prayer. Jesus modeled such an approach to prayer. The night before His crucifixion, He sought solace in the Garden of Eden. Struggling with thought of being separated from God at the cross, He prayed for God's will to be accomplished. Matthew's gospel says, "Going a little farther, he fell facedown and prayed, 'My

Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Believers should follow Jesus’ example. Praying in alignment with God’s will provides a guarantee that one’s prayers will be answered. Not only did the Lord model such an approach to prayer, but He also mandated it. In John’s gospel, He said, “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14). Praying in Jesus’ name does not mean one affixes His name to the conclusion of their prayers in a ritualistic way. It means that one asks for things that are in alignment with His character. It involves praying for things to which you could ascribe the name of Jesus. John’s teaching reveals that praying in alignment with the Lord’s character is the secret ingredient of powerful prayer. Such was even true in the case of Jesus Himself.¹ If you want to see a result from your prayers, pray in alignment with God’s will.

John next remarked on the way in which God hears prayer. He said, “he hears us.” The word translated “hears” didn’t just refer to an audible reception of a request. It implied an actual response. In John’s writings, the word portrayed the simultaneous acts of listening and responding (1 John 1:1, 3, 5; 2:7, 18, 24; 3:11; 4:3, 5, 6). The word had profound meaning for his original audience. Though the Gnostics were making many feel spiritually insignificant, the true believers could have confidence that the Lord would hear and respond to their prayers. Each faith-filled utterance, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem, ascends into the heavens into the presence of the Lord (Revelation 5:8). There is never a time in which the Heavenly Father does not listen and respond to the prayers of His people. Believers should be bold in praying, knowing that the Creator of all things stands ready to hear them.

Verse 15

In verse 15, John summarized his teaching on prayer from the previous verse: “And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him” (1 John 5:15). The knowledge that Jesus will answer prayers in alignment with His will should give readers great confidence in prayer. John’s readers did not need to be discouraged or detoured by the teaching of the Gnostics. Prayer was not as complicated as they made it seem. Believers can always be bold in their private worship. They can be assured that God listens and responds to every supplication of every saint. There are only two reasons for unanswered prayer — lack of praying and personal, indwelling sin (James 4:3).

¹ Robertson, [CD-Rom].