

The Prayer God Hears

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[0 : 00] Well, last week we heard from the Apostle Paul about how we are to pray all kinds of prayers for all people or all kinds of people.

And sooner or later, as we get about to doing that, as a matter of first importance in this coming year, we'll run up to the question, what do I pray for people?

What should I ask God to do for people? And so this morning, we're going to be looking at the Apostle John's answer to that question, what should we pray for people?

So we're going to be looking at his first letter, 1 John 5, verses 14 and 15. If you have your Bibles, please open them up and turn there.

1 John 5, verses 14 and 15. John says there, those promises, those beautiful statements.

[1 : 37] The gist of what John is saying there could be summed up like this. We can have confidence that God hears us and will give us what we ask for when we ask according to his will.

And when we say it just like that, hope rises in our hearts. But I'm willing to bet that for some of us, there's a bit of question that we have lingering as well.

That almost sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? Whatever we ask, does God really give us whatever we ask when we ask according to his will?

How does that work? Are there times when there are exceptions to that? Or is it really that true?

And so we're going to dig into what John says this morning and look more closely at it.

But first, as we do, a couple details. Who is John writing to? Is he just writing to about himself and the other apostles?

[2 : 49] He says, this is the confidence we have. Who's we? He actually tells us right before this in verse 13. He says, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God.

So that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence we have. This confidence when it comes to prayer, when it comes to approaching God, is a confidence that those who believe in Jesus have.

It's not a confidence that everyone has. And the reason why is because Jesus has changed everything about our relationship as those who believe with God.

He's changed everything. We talked last week about how we were rebels. We're enemies of God at odds with him. And Jesus came and he did what was necessary to restore that relationship, to bring us together.

And John has been reminding those that he's writing to, even in this letter, that we are now children of God. He is our loving, heavenly Father.

[4 : 03] And this changes everything. This changes prayer. Because the relationship between him and us has changed.

We can now have confidence. This confidence is not just for the apostles or the super-Christians. It's for us, who believe in the name of the Son of God.

The second detail that we notice is the kind of prayer that John is referring to here. Three times he uses the same word. This is the confidence we have in approaching God.

If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. Whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him. Last Sunday, Paul gave us four different words for prayer.

And we talked about all kinds of prayer. This morning, John is drawing our attention specifically to one kind of prayer. Asking prayer.

[5 : 08] Or requesting prayer. And if we stop and think just for a moment about the word ask, we also get a little bit of a glimpse of the attitude that we should have in prayer.

I've had this conversation with my own kids several times. What is the difference between demanding, Dad, get me some milk.

Telling, Dad, I want milk. And asking, Dad, could I please have a glass of milk. As a parent, I can feel the difference between each of those.

And when we ask, God feels the difference as well. Who is it that we are talking to? This is the Almighty, the Holy God.

Telling him what to do for us. Demanding from him. Are out of line. And so this confidence that we have in prayer is for those who believe in the name of the Son of God.

[6 : 19] But it's also for those who come humbly and ask for him to do something. We easily slip into bad habits in prayer.

And I think two things that we can do to just help break some of those. The first is to remember when we pray, right at the beginning, before we begin asking for anything, who is it that we're talking to?

Who is it that we're talking to? The second, as we phrase our prayers, and I'll admit that this is something that I need to work on as well.

Instead of saying, give me this, do this, give me that. Phrase it with a question. Would you help me in this situation?

It might feel a little awkward to ask a question like that sometimes to God, but there's a certain beauty to that. We're just leaving it hanging.

[7 : 21] It reminds us that we're in relationship with him in this moment. We're in need of what he can do for us. We're not just praying through a checklist. We're waiting for him to respond.

And so phrase your prayers with questions. Try that this week. With those few details noticed, let's consider the whole of what John is saying here.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God, 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 what we asked of him. There's kind of a logical flow here.

I kind of refer to this as God's confidence chain, or John's confidence chain. There's ask according to his will.

[8 : 26] If we do that, he hears us. If we know that he hears us, then we know that we have what we asked of him. It's like a three-linked chain. And this is the confidence that we have when it comes to prayer, when we approach God.

Out of these chains, I'm going to call these pieces links. The most important link is the first link. If we ask anything according to his will.

The rest of the links in this chain hang from this one link. If we don't ask according to his will, there's no guarantee that he hears us.

It says that he hears us when we do that. And there's no confidence that we will receive what we asked unless we also know that he hears us.

It all goes together. Without that first link, there is no second link or third link. There is no confidence. And so we're going to focus in on that.

[9 : 36] As we do, maybe we'll even start with the third link. We'll go right to the end of the chain. The end of verse 15, he says this. He says, Whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him.

Whatever we ask. Whatever means whatever. Does that sound almost too good to be true? Does that sound like a blank check?

It is. That's what whatever means. But it's a blank check with one condition. What does he say? Starting at the beginning of verse 15.

If we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him. So being confident that we will receive whatever we ask of him is dependent upon us knowing that God hears us.

Well, what does that mean? What does it mean for God to hear us? Without going into all the details, I'd like to suggest that John means here more than just ordinary hearing.

[10 : 46] More than just that he hears the words of our prayer, that our voices, that he's aware of what we are saying. Because, of course, God hears everything. He sees everything.

Nothing escapes his attention. Nothing can hide from his notice. And so I think John means more than just ordinary hearing.

Even just the way that John uses that phrase, God hears, in connection to these other links, would suggest that this is more. It's a kind of hearing that God has specifically when this condition is met, when we ask according to his will.

And this kind of hearing that John describes is virtually synonymous with us getting what we asked for. Let me read it again and see if you hear that.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God. 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 what we asked of him.

[11 : 56] And so I'd suggest that this isn't just ordinary hearing. What John means is that when we ask according to God's will, we have God's special attention. He hears us and is inclined to act in response.

How can we ever be confident that we have God's special attention and that he is ready and inclined to act in response to something that we ask?

How can we ever know that? John's answer is the first link of the chain. He says, this is the confidence we have in approaching God.

That if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. This is the ultimate condition of this blank check from God.

You can ask for whatever you desire. And I will do it for you. If you ask according to my will.

[13 : 05] And this is not a new thing. This is not a new teaching of John. This is something that John learned from Jesus. Do you remember that time when the disciples went to Jesus and they said, Lord, teach us how to pray.

What did Jesus say? One of the phrases in his model prayer was, may your will be done. Father, may what you desire come to pass.

May what you want to see happen, happen here on earth. John is teaching us to pray the way Jesus taught him to pray.

Many times in prayer. When we're going to ask God for something, the first thing that pops into our minds is what we desire.

What we want from God. And there's nothing wrong with asking God for what we desire. For telling him what we long for.

[14 : 14] He loves to hear our hearts. But what John is teaching us here is that we must move beyond that. Confidence that we will receive what we ask for only comes when we ask according to his will.

When we submit our will to his. Our desires to his. What we want to what he wants.

And Jesus is one of the most amazing examples of this. Do you remember those words? Take this cup from me.

Yet not my will. But yours. Be done. And so. As we think back on last Sunday.

We were encouraged to pray all kinds of prayers. For all kinds of people. This year. As we endeavor to pray all kinds of prayers. For everyone.

[15 : 19] For all kinds of people. The most important question. That we should ask ourselves at the beginning. God. What do you want here?

What do you desire in this situation? What do you desire for this person in my life? What do you desire for me? And my life? What do you want to see happen in my family?

What do you long for in our church? What are your overarching plans and purposes for this world? And how can we participate in that?

All of this drives us to a couple questions. First.

How do we know what God's will is? If we're to pray and ask according to God's will. How do we know what his will is? And second. How confident can we be?

[16 : 20] That if we ask according to his will. We will receive what we asked for. I think that's rolling around in the back of our minds. Let's deal with the first one first.

How do we know what God's will is? This is kind of a. A short version. A simple answer. Right here. That's what this is. Cover to cover. This is. God's word. This is what he has given to us. To tell us.

What he's up to. In making this world. And in everything he does. In our world. This reveals. Who he is. This reveals his heart.

What he desires. It reveals what he longs for. For his people. And for even people who don't believe in him. Everything that we could possibly. Need to know.

[17 : 21] About God. And what he desires. For prayer. Is here. This whole book. Is a prayer. Manual. It's not just an instruction manual. For how to live. It's a prayer manual. He means for us. To read. What he has given us. What he's spoken through the prophets. What he spoke. Through Moses. And penned on the tablets. At Mount Sinai. It's all here. He means for us. To read it. And to connect the dots. From what he has. Said. To our lives. And then to. To pray. According to that. To what he desires. To what he wills. The second question. How confident can we be. That God will give us. What we ask.

[18 : 15] When we ask. According to his will. This is a really important question. Maybe. You're here this morning. And you have read. A verse like this. Or another.

Similar verse. Where it seems like. Well God will just give you. Whatever you ask for. If you ask according to his will. And you prayed for something. That you were sure. Was his will. But it seemed like God didn't give you. What you asked for. Well what's the deal with that? Is there something wrong with. My understanding of this passage. Or did I just not get God's will. Right there. What's going on? Why is it that sometimes. We seem to. We have a clear sense. Of what God wants to do. And we pray. And it doesn't happen. I'd like to suggest. In this morning. That this is still.

[19 : 09] A wonderful promise. From John. That gives us confidence. But that the reason. Why that happens. Is because we misapply it. Sometimes. And. I think that there's.

At least three different ways. That we misapply. His promise here. The first. Is that. We assume. That God's will. Is always. Simple. Let's take for example. What we talked about last week. God says. That he desires. He wills. For all people. To be saved. Saved. To come to a knowledge. Of the truth. God. You said that. You desired that. And I prayed. For my friend. And he. Died. Without giving his life. To you. I asked you to do. What your will was. And. According to this. You're supposed to give me. What I asked for. When I do that.

[20 : 03] Isn't that the guarantee? How come my friend. Wasn't saved. Wasn't saved. Either there's. A problem. With you. God.

And you didn't honor. Your word. Or. There's a problem with me. And I just don't understand. What you've said here. Even though it seems like it. It. Makes perfect sense to me. This is a really big question.

And this passage is all about confidence. In prayer. And yet. Some of these kinds of situations. Have brought us to a place where. Instead of having confidence. We've got doubts. We've got doubts. As to whether this. Is really. True. And I think one of the reasons. Is because we assume. That God's will is always simple. There are many. Situations. Many times. In God's word. Where he lets us know. That his will.

[21 : 02] Is complex. It's multifaceted. And the most important. The biggest example of this. That there is. Is. The death of his own son.

Jesus. We know. That is. Jesus was being. Mocked. And beaten. And spit on. And tortured. And murdered. That everything. Inside the heart of God. Desired. To put a stop to that. Jesus is God's. Beloved son. God is a God of great love. And compassion. How dare they treat my son that way. How dare they.

He willed. That his son should not go through that. That was a real will. Real desire. And yet. Coming back to Isaiah 53.

[21 : 59] What did he say. Through the prophet Isaiah. Yet. It was the Lord's. Will. To crush him. And cause him to suffer.

God's will is not always simple. There are. Many situations. Where God. Desires. One thing. And yet. Decides. That another.

Should happen. Jesus. In the garden of Gethsemane. We've already talked about that. He was. He is. God. And yet. He prayed. In the same prayer.

Take this cup. From me. I don't want. To go through this. Yet. Not. What I want. What. What you want. Jesus.

Had. Conflicting. Wills. Conflicting. Desires. Right there. Those are just two examples. Out of. Countless. In scripture. Where we see that.

[22 : 57] God. Will. Is not always. Simple. And theologians. Have tried to describe this. With different labels. That there are two wills of God. You have his. Moral will.

And his. Sovereign will. Or his. Revealed will. And his. Secret will. Or his will of decree. Versus his. Pleasurable will.

His wish will. Um. Doesn't matter. Whether you're Arminian. Or Calvin. Or anything in between. Everybody has seen this. In the scriptures. I mean. God doesn't desire.

That anybody. Should sin. That anybody. Should suffer. Especially. The righteous. That anybody. Should perish. And yet.

People are permitted. To sin. To do evil. In his world. And we simply. Have to trust. That. His understanding. And his.

[23 : 53] Purpose. Is so far. Beyond. What we can understand. And he would never. Allow. Anyone. To do anything. Evil. Or sin. Or hurt. Another person.

Or suffer. If there wasn't. A perfect. And just. And righteous. Fully. Justifiable. Reason for it. Sometimes.

We must. Just simply. Bow the knee. And admit. That we don't understand. I had a professor. From. Bible.

College. Coming back. To this passage. We're to pray. According to God's will. I had a professor. From Bible. College. That he wrestled. With this. He had.

He was married. And his wife. Had a terminal illness. And he prayed. That she would be healed. And she died. He remarried. And the same thing.

[24 : 47] Happened again. His second wife. Had a terminal illness. And he prayed. That she would be healed. That God would spare her. And she died. And finally. He just threw up his arms.

And said. God. I don't know. What your will is. And I don't want to be found. Praying against. Your will. And so. I'm only going to pray for things.

That I'm a hundred percent sure. Are your will. And so. He would take prayer requests. At the beginning of class. And we would say. I'd like prayer for this.

And he would pray. So generally. About everything. That there's no way. God could ever. Say no to any of that. We kind of were wondering. At the end of the request. The prayer. Like.

Did you actually ask God. For anything there? Or did you just. Tell him what. Some options are. And. Just leave that with you. That's not what John's talking about here.

[25 : 41] He's talking about. Confidence. That God will give us. What we ask for. That to me. Sounds like. Doubt. If you don't ask for anything.

You'll get. What you ask for. That's not what John's talking about here. One of the mistakes. I think that we make. Is that we.

Assume. Assume. That when he says. We should pray. According to God's will. That we pray. According to. His sovereign. Secret. Will. As in. Try to figure out.

What's going to happen. In the future. And then ask God. To do that. But I don't think. God intends. For us. To try to. To. To understand. Exactly.

What's going to happen. What he has decided. Is going to happen. And ask him to do that. That doesn't make sense. Why would he want us to do that? He wants us to pray. According to.

[26 : 36] His revealed will. This has his heart. In it. This tells us. What God wants. Generally. To do. In people's lives. In it.

His. Purpose. And plan. For the world. Generally. Is in it. Pray. According to that. Ask God. To do that. And when you ask him.

To do that. You can be sure. That you have. His. Special attention. And that he desires. To give you. What you ask for. But we must always.

Always. Even with that confidence. Remember. That there are times. When God. Knows. Better. He knows. What is best.

He may say. No. And in those moments. We need to be willing. To say. Not my will. But yours be done. The second way.

[27 : 33] That we. Misapply. This passage. Is we limit. How God can answer. If you live in the city. And you need. You want a bicycle.

So you can get to work. God give me a bicycle. So that I can get to work. And God gives you a car. Instead. Does that count. As the answer. To your prayer. Is God allowed.

To one up. You. Does that still count. As him giving you. What you asked for. It does for me. I hope it does. For you too. But what if it's. The other way around. What if you say.

God. I want a car. To get to work with. Please give me a car. And instead. He says. Well I know. You need exercise. So. Here's a bicycle. Does that count.

As him giving you. What you asked for. Your need for transportation. Is met. And even your need. For exercise. Is now met. So technically. He did. One up. The prayer too.

[28 : 31] It makes us think. About what we ask God for. If we're going to ask. So specifically. Are we open. To his amendments. Before he answers it. And if we're not.

Maybe we should pray. More generally. Lord. Please give me. Transportation. That's a good prayer too. That leaves it open. For him to meet it. In any way.

Maybe you'll get an offer. From some co-worker. Hey. I'll pick you up every day. And take you to work. Never know. What his purpose. Would be. In something like that. The third way.

That we misapply. And I totally. Understand this. Myself. I've wrestled with this. This seems like. Such a clear. And straightforward. Guarantee.

If we ask anything. According to his will. He hears us. If we know that he hears us. Whatever we ask. We know that we have. What we asked of him. It sounds like.

[29 : 27] A straightforward. Guarantee. Doesn't it? No exceptions. So I prayed. And I asked. For the Lord. To save my friend.

He says. He desires. All people. To be saved. And yet. My friend died. Never giving his life. To the Lord. He died. Shaking his fist. At God. God.

How come God. Didn't answer my prayer. When he says. Right here. That he will. When I pray. According to his will. Some of you. May have a hard time. With my.

Thought here. My understanding. Of this. And if you do. That's okay. And I want you to know. That I. Hold this. Openly. If God wants to change. My mind on this. He can.

And I'm willing for that. Is it possible. That we have pressed. This. Promise. This. Statement of confidence. Beyond. What it was meant.

[30 : 24] To assure us of. Is it possible. That we have. Pushed it. Too far. Prayer. And that it. Never was meant. To be taken. Like a mathematical.

Formula. Pray. According to God's will. Always. Equals. You get exactly. What you asked for. Is it possible.

That we've. Reduced. Prayer. In the way. That we've. We've treated. This statement. To. Kind of like. A vending machine. I put in a prayer. According to God's will.

I dial up. What I want. And whatever it is. That I ask for. That's what I get. Every time. Let me give you. Another example. That may.

Help illustrate. What I mean. Psalm 121. Is a beautiful psalm. In it. It says. The Lord. Watches over you. The Lord.

[31 : 20] Will keep you. From all harm. He will watch. Over your life. Does that mean. That God. Will never let. Anything bad.

Happen to his people. It says. The Lord. Will keep you. From all harm. No. It doesn't mean that. We know. It doesn't mean that.

Because. That's never been true. Even in Jesus. The one. Who had nothing. To disqualify him. From the Lord's. Watchful care. Ever. He suffered. He was harmed.

Terrible things. Happened to him. It's because. It was never meant. To be taken that way. It's a general principle. The Lord. Generally. Watches.

Over his people. He protects them. And if he should decide. In any moment. Nothing. Nobody.

[32 : 16] Can lay a finger. On my child. No power in hell. Or heaven. Not the devil.

Nobody. That's what it means. It's a general principle. It's a statement. God. Watches. Over. His people. He protects them. You think of the Proverbs.

Many of them are. Are really. Wonderful. Sayings of wisdom. That. Generally. Do apply. To a situation. But it doesn't mean. That they're law. Without exception. They're wisdom.

And I think. That's the way. That we're meant. To take. This. To. On the whole. Generally. When we ask. God. To do something.

That. He. Has already told us. He desires to do. He longs for. It's his will. We have his. Special. Attention. We can be. Confident.

[33 : 13] Of that. And generally. He will. Give us. What we ask for. He will. No. And he does. His default.

Answer. Is. Yes. He is. Our. Heavenly. Father. And he loves us. He delights in us. He wants. To give us. Good things.

And. When we ask him. For the very thing. That he's already told us. He wants to do. His default.

Answer. Is. Yes. Sometimes.

He says no. Though. But it's only. Because he knows. What is best. It's only. Because he knows. Better.

What we need. I think that's how we're meant to take this. We can have confidence. That God will give us what we ask for. When we ask.

[34 : 11] According to his will. And if he doesn't. It's only because. He knows what is best. I'm willing to bet.

That at the end of the story. We will get to heaven. And we will look back on that. Certain prayers that we prayed. And we will say. Thank you. God. That you didn't answer my prayer.

I had no idea. What the consequences would have been. If you had said yes to me. Isn't it amazing. That we.

As sinners. With what we deserve. Can have a relationship with God. Like this. That when we ask. What he desires.

He gives us what we ask for. Generally. On the whole. Yes. That we. As undeserving as we are.

[35 : 12] Can have confidence. Before him. Like that. What a gift. Let's pray. Father in heaven.

Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. That. As we've celebrated this morning. You have changed everything. For us. You are our father. We are your children.

And you love us. Lord. Thank you. That you're not cheap. You're not stingy. With us. Your answer. Your answer. Is yes.

Help us. Increase our faith. Restore to us. The confidence. If we've lost it. Lord. That we should have. According to this. The faith in your goodness.

And in your wisdom. And in your great. Sovereign power. We ask in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 12] Amen. Amen. Amen.