

Asking According to His Will

1 John 5:14-15

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Our text today is 1 John 5:14-15, . *“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.”*¹

Our goal is to enjoy this confidence the Apostle John is talking about in this verse. We are searching the scriptures to understand more fully how to prevail in prayer. We want to be a people who pray, who pray in such a way that God hears and answers our prayers. Is it possible for common people like you and me to be mighty in prayer? Is it possible for us to be people who shake the world around us with the power of God? Yes, God is calling us to that. Elijah was a man of like passions. He was just as human as we are. Yet he prayed and turned a whole nation around.²

But why do some prayers get answers and others do not? Does anyone here have an unanswered prayer? What have you asked God to do that has not happened? I suspect that every one of us can identify at least one pressing need that we have brought to the Lord in prayer and not received the answer. You may be praying for a loved one’s salvation. You may be praying for someone’s deliverance or perhaps a healing. Why isn’t the answer coming? What can be done about unanswered prayer? How do we deal with that?

We have already found in previous studies that our relationship with God is very important. We have learned from the Lord’s Prayer that we need to approach God with a certain mindset. The way we think about God; the way we think about other people; the way we think about sin—all of this affects our prayer life. *“When you pray”* (Jesus said) *“say, ‘Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven’”* (Luke 11:2). The Lord’s Prayer defines the attitude of heart that positions us before God to receive answers. An essential element is this posture is *“Your kingdom come. Your will be done....”* That’s an all-out commitment to the will of God—not just for the specific request but for everything. It is a mindset based on absolute confidence in the goodness of God.³ No outcome could be better than the one He chooses. I may think something needs to happen; but I always remember that His wisdom is way above my level of understanding. So I want His will for my life and for everyone else. And I understand that prayer is an important factor in that happening.

Let me read the text in the Amplified version, *“Now this is the confidence (the assurance, the privilege of boldness) which we have in Him, [we are sure] that if we ask anything (make any request) according to His will (in agreement with His own plan), He listens to and hears us. 15 And if (since) we [positively] know that He listens to us in whatever we ask, we also know [with settled and absolute knowledge] that we have [granted us as our present possessions] the requests made of Him.”*

Of course, the “we” in these verses is people who believe in and follow Christ. This is not a promise to any and everybody; it is a promise to God-followers.

¹ All Scripture quotes are in New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² 1Kings 18:39; James 5:16-18.

³ Hebrews 11:6; Psalm 145:9.

The key phrase is *“according to His will.”* The promise of God to answer the prayer is very certain; but the kind of prayer that carries this promise is one that lines up with the will of God. *“...if we ask anything according to His will...”* So how do we know that our prayer qualifies? How do we know that this prayer is “according to His will”? How do we enter into the confidence that the Apostle John expresses here? That’s our focus this morning and I want to address the subject with four questions. If my prayer is not being answered I want to process these four questions.

I. Is this request clearly the will of God according to Scripture?

There are some things that are unquestionable the will of God. The Bible specifically tells us they are *“according to His will.”* Let me give you a few examples.

1 Thess 4:3 *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification....”* The Greek word translated sanctification mean purity or consecration to God. Paul specifically addresses sexual purity in this passage and integrity in our treatment of others. *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification....”* So any prayer for sanctification is without question *“according to His will.”* If you are asking God to deliver you from any sin, any habit, anything that is contrary to your consecration to Him—you don’t have to add the words “if it be according to Your will.” The Bible has already told you that your request is *“according to His will!”* Let’s say someone has a problem with gossip. And this person is convicted by the Holy Spirit and in humility begins to ask the Lord for deliverance from that problem. God is 100% behind that prayer. You may not get an easy, immediate answer; but you certainly don’t have to wonder whether your prayer is on target. You can say with the Apostle John, *“Now this is the confidence that we have....”* I am asking You God for something that I know You want to do—that gives me holy boldness in my prayer.

Luke 11:13 Jesus says, *“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”* Are you praying for the Holy Spirit? If you are, then you are praying *“according to His will.”* Because it is already what God wants to do, *“how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”* There are two qualifications here (1) be a child of God (2) ask your heavenly Father for the gift. God has no hesitation about whether He wants to answer that prayer. Ask and receive!

2Peter 3:9 *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”* Are you asking for God to grant repentance to a son or daughter? Are you asking for the salvation of a friend? God is *“not willing that any should perish.”* God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.⁴ His delight is in their salvation. Therefore, if I am asking God to deliver someone from evil, if I am asking God to turn someone from self-destruction, I am praying *“according to His will.”* I should not even question that. I should be praying with much boldness and confidence.

These are three examples where the Scripture leaves no question about the will of God in the matter. Of course, others could be given.

We get a general understanding of the will of God from other things God tells us in His word. For example, when James and John wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans, Jesus gave them

⁴ Ezekiel 18:32. Also see 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

a statement about His will. Luke 9:55 *“But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.”* God’s orientation toward humanity is redemptive, not destructive. So when I pray I want to pray in that spirit. Yet Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at the apostle’s feet for their lies. Paul pronounced blindness on Elymas.⁵ On the surface, those two cases might seem contrary to the general will of God—and they were in this sense. It was God’s will that Elymas, Ananias & Sapphira repent. Since they refused to do so, this was the consequence. Paul and the other apostles had to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to discern that. The point is this. Although we can learn the general orientation of God on a matter from Scripture, we may still need the guidance of the Holy Spirit on what He is doing in specific situations.

As a general statement, it is the will of God to heal our physical bodies. You don’t see Jesus going around making people sick. Instead you see Him healing the sick.⁶ When someone is sick, our first instinct should be to pray for their healing. Instead of expecting God to not heal them, we should be expecting God to heal them in answer to our prayers. This is the general pattern in the Bible. Why doesn’t everyone get healed then? There are other dynamics at work as well. It is *appointed unto man once to die*. At some point it is better that the believer pass on so that he or she can live forever in a resurrected body without the limitations of mortality. God works His priorities in our lives. It may be the will of God to heal my body; but He might not raise me up immediately because He is dealing with something else more important first. That might have to be resolved before the healing happens. I’m going to be talking more about priorities in a moment. In general we may know from Scripture what God wants to do; but we still need to be listening to the Holy Spirit for instruction rather than just mechanically approaching the problem.

Our first question is what does the Word of God say about this matter? Does the Bible clearly state the will of God concerning the prayer?

II. Does the request line up with the priorities God has for my life?

Matt 6:33, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* The request may not be evil in itself; but will the answer advance me in the kingdom of God and His righteousness or could it divert me from those more important things. I would like to have a billion dollars. It seems to me a lot of good things could be done with a billion dollars. But only God knows how that would affect my spiritual wellbeing. Does God want me to have my needs met? He certainly does. He provides for sparrows and flowers in the field; and I’m far more important to Him than a sparrow; my needs are important to Him. So if I were in a place where I could manage a billion dollars and be in better spiritual condition as a result of it, I might be praying *“according to His will”* by asking for a billion dollars. On the other hand, Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 6 that greed can take us down a path of destruction, not the money itself but the love of it can get us into trouble spiritually. So I believe God wants to bless us with the material things we need and then some. He also wants to protect us from unnecessary temptation. So in my prayers I want to make sure I’m keeping His priorities for my life.

James talks about prayers that don’t get answered because they are selfishly motivated. I’m sure I have prayed my share of selfish prayers, sometimes not even realizing the depths of my own motivations. James 4 *“...You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your*

⁵ Acts 13:11

⁶ Acts 10:38

pleasures” (NIV). Getting our priorities lined up with God’s priorities is a major key to being effective in prayer.

Life makes a lot more sense when we understand what God is doing and what His priorities are for us. Look with me at Rom 8:26-29.

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Three observations from that passage:

(1) God is working things together for our good (verse 28). The events in your life are not happenstance—God is at work in our lives. Sometimes what we want would actually produce less for us in the long run than what God is giving us. Job would have chosen a different path for himself. We know from his discourse that he would have avoided all the troubles he went through if it had been up to him. But God was trying to give him double and at the same time reveal some very important things to him.⁷ God wasn’t punishing Job as his friends assumed. God was actually working all things together for his good.

(2) God’s priority for each and every one of us found in verse 29 *“...to be conformed to the image of His Son....”* So I ask God to make life more comfortable for me. Instead He takes me through difficult situations that deal with my selfishness. I ask God to make me successful. Instead He leads me through humbling circumstances so I can deal with my pride. Job was understanding the priorities of God when he said *“...when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”* (Job 23:10 KJV). God’s priority had to do with what Job himself was becoming. God will sacrifice some of your comfort for your development. God is more concerned with your eternal wellbeing than how much fun you have in this very brief life. So when I am discerning the will of God on a matter, I must always put it under this umbrella—does it facilitate me being *“...conformed to the image of His Son....”*

(3) We *“do not know what we should pray for as we ought.”* If our prayer life is just the fruit of our own thinking, we will often ask for the wrong thing. We need the Holy Spirit to help us pray *“according to God’s will”*—to help us ask for the right things. We also need the Holy Spirit to empower our prayers so that they prevail and are answered. As a reminder to ourselves, it would probably be good to ask the Holy Spirit during our prayer time to help us pray. In a sense, effective prayer may be the hardest thing you and I ever do. It’s difficult because we don’t know how to go about it. It’s difficult because we could easily be barking up the wrong tree, asking for things that are not even helpful. It is difficult because only the Holy Spirit can enable us to persevere in prayer the way we need to. *“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of*

⁷ Job 42:5, 10-12.

God.” He never misses the will of God. If He is guiding our prayers they will be “*according to the will of God.*”

So question #2 is “Does this request line up with God’s priorities for my life?” And we know that God’s priority for each of us centers on what we are becoming, more than what we get. It is eternal rather than temporal in its perspective. God’s priority is that you be “*conformed to the image of His Son.*”

III. Does this request fit within the plan God has for my life?

His general priority for every one of us is that we be “*conformed to the image of His Son.*” But He has a specific plan for each one of us—that is uniquely designed for us to fit into His eternal purposes.

Jeremiah wrote 10:23 “*O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.* (10:23). That is contrary to what most Americans believe. We think we can be or do anything we pursue. Jeremiah says, “No, God is ultimately in charge of my life. I can choose to go my way or His way; but I cannot dictate to Him where I fit in His plan. “*The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord*” (Psalm 37:23).

So in Acts 16 Paul is following the will of God in general. He is a passionate missionary. He is trying to go to Asia and that’s not working. Then he heads for Bithynia and God puts a stop to that. At that point it had to be getting frustrating. Here I am trying to spread the gospel and every thing I try to do gets stopped. Acts 16:6-10,

“*Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.*” Sometimes prayer is bouncing off a couple of closed doors before we find the open one.

Here is the point. Paul did not get to dictate to God the plan and God answer his prayers accordingly. Paul’s prayer life had to be a discerning of God’s plan and then operating in that. It is absurd to think that I, as a tiny dot on a tiny planet, would be telling God how to make things work. Yet some people think that is what prayer is about. No, prayer is a conversation with God in which the Holy Spirit helps me discern the will of God so that I can cooperate with it.

Eph 2:10 “*For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (NIV).

Known unto God are His works from the beginning of the world (Acts 15:18 KJV). God is not flying by the seat of His pants. He is not making this up as He goes. He is operating according to plan. Eph. 2:10 says that we are His workmanship (He is shaping and molding us into the image of His Son) and we are created to do good works. What good works?—the ones He “*prepared in advance for us to do.*” So He already has a plan for what He wants me to be and do. He has given me the gifts necessary to do those good works. My prayer life has to do with me walking with Him in those good works.

But what if I look over here and see somebody doing something that seems greater. Let’s say I am impressed with Benny Hinn and I want to duplicate what Benny Hinn is doing. So I pray and

I pray. Then I try being like Benny Hinn. And I don't get the same results as Benny Hinn does because God did not create me to be that. If I will pray and pray in cooperation with the Holy Spirit—here is what will happen. I will become the best Richard Tow that I can possibly be. I probably won't have an international healing ministry. But I may preach and teach with more unction, clarity and authority than ever before. I may become more caring and loving toward my wife and congregation than ever before. If I'm praying so that I can be another Benny Hinn, I am not praying "*according to the will of God*" and I will wind up frustrated. If I will pursue the works God has prepared for me to do and do those in the strength of the Holy Spirit, I will get prayers answered. The plan, the plan—what is God's plan for your life?

1 Cor 2:9-12

"But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."

It's easy to miss the practical value of that passage because we read verse 9 "...*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*" And we get excited about heaven. Wow! Who knows what God has prepared for us there? And all of that is valid, except there is a lot God has prepared for us for the here and now. And that is what we need the Holy Spirit to help us see.

The natural eye, the natural ear, human reasoning can't discern what God has prepared for us. But look closely at verse 10 "*But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit...*" God's plan for you, the good works He wants to do through you—these things are knowable—not through the natural senses—but the Holy Spirit makes them known to us. If we pray in submission to the Holy Spirit, He will help our weaknesses—what weaknesses? Rom. 8:26 "*For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought...*" He will show us what to pray for so that we ask "*according to His will.*" If I'm just operating out of my carnal mind, I will likely pray amiss. But if I enter into the relationship with the Holy Spirit that God has for me, if I learn to follow His lead in prayer, if I ask His help and rely upon it—I will find myself praying the right prayer at the right time for me. 1 Cor. 2:12 "*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*"

We may know the will of God by the revelation we have in our Bibles. But in addition to that God has sent His Holy Spirit to open our eyes to additional specifics. What good things has God prepared for Richard? What good things has God prepared for Glenda? The Holy Spirit searches through the knowledge of God and knows the answer. Not only that, but He shares information with us so that we can pray "*according to His will.*"

Come back with me to the text in 1 John 5:14-15

"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."

That verse not only promises answered prayer; but it even promises that we can know the prayer is answered even before it occurs in the material realm. We can know that we have been heard

on a matter and the request is granted before we see it happen in the natural.⁸ When I was planting the church in Amarillo I had been praying for a building. I drove by an occupied church building and God told me He had given us that facility. I stopped the car, walked up to the front door, laid my hands on it and said, “OK, Lord, I receive it.” Two days later the owners contacted me and tried to sell the building to me—which was not even for sale. I told them God gave it to me—they eventually conceded—and we got a free building. I’m talking about the confidence that comes when God lets you know that you have prayed “*according to His will*” and He has heard.

So we have talked about three questions to ask about our prayers to make sure they are “*according to His will.*”

(I) Is the request clearly the will of God according to the Bible. Some things are specifically spelled out as the will of God. We should pray those things with great confidence.

(II) Does the request line up with the priorities that God has for my life? Sometimes just getting those priorities right in our own hearts releases the answer.

(III) Does the request fit within the plan God has for my life? The Holy Spirit can reveal that plan to us and He can enable us to pray “*according to the will of God.*” Since praying “*according to His will*” is the stated condition for answered prayer—it becomes important to address these matters. We may have to process these very questions in prayer with God so we can enter into a stronger level of faith.

I have not asked the fourth question and it is perhaps the most important. We will address it next week.

Embrace this confidence in prayer, “...*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.*”

⁸ In the early 1900’s people referred to this as “praying through.” They prayed until they knew in their inner being that God had granted the request. Then instead of continuing to petition, they gave thanks for the answer and confessed it so. The reason the confession of their mouth was effectual was because it was consistent with what had occurred in the Spirit and was affirmed in the heart.