

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Let's start today with an "agree or disagree" question: God hears and answers the prayers of everyone. (Repeat.) I think our first inclination when we hear such a statement is to agree. Almighty knows all things and hears all prayers. Certainly he answers all prayers. But the truth is, our first inclination is wrong. There are dozens of passage in Scripture that tell us without question that God does *not* hear and answer all prayers. Listen:

- Deuteronomy 1:45 Moses in rebuking the Israelites for the rebellion said: "You came back and wept before the LORD, but he paid no attention to your weeping and turned a deaf ear to you."
- When David sang song of praise God for deliverance from his enemies, he declared, "Psalm 18:41 They (his enemies, who were the Lord's enemies) cried for help, but there was no one to save them— to the LORD, but he did not answer."
- And the Psalmist had it right when he observed, "Psalm 66:18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."
- James 4:3 says: "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

In other words, the prayers of some are completely ineffective. They can pray earnestly. They can pray often. They can pray in poems and beautiful of words. They can pray with great emotion and fanfare. And... God... does... not... listen. Their prayers are useless. They have no impact. No effect.

In today's message, then, dear brothers and sisters, I pray you will go away knowing how to pray effectively... how to pray so God both hears and answers your prayers. There are two keys to effective prayer, and they're found in our text for today:

**1 John 5:13-15 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. 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.**

First key to effective prayer: Pray with confidence to Almighty God. Easy to say, but how do you do it? Maybe it would help if I explained what I *don't* mean. Praying with confidence to God does *not* mean creating a feeling of conviction and certainty in your heart. Kind of like building up the confidence to ask your boss for a raise. If you go in and say, [with a wimpy, hesitating voice], "Um, sir... I was just kind of wondering, you know, if maybe I might get a raise." Versus: "Sir, I'm a valued member of this company who has made countless contributions. My

salary does not remotely reflect my contribution to this company. I demand a raise.” First time wimpy. Second time forceful and demanding. That is NOT at all what I mean by praying to God with confidence. No one in the world past, present or future has the right to speak to God in a demanding and forceful way. No matter who you are what your relationship to God is, he is still the almighty Creator, and you are still a lowly creature. So please don’t think this is what I mean when I say that effective prayer is confident prayer.

No, our confidence is very different than this. We pray confidently and therefore effectively when we know and are certain about our standing with God. John in this letter has thoroughly described how we can *know* our standing with God in the verses immediately preceding the words of our text. **“And this is the testimony [of God]: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”**

This short passage tells us how to have confidence in our standing before God. Listen to the absolutely vital questions answered by what we just heard:

- Who took the initiative when it comes to our right standing with God? Who is the cause?  
A: GOD.
- How do you get it?  
A: “God has given” It’s a gift!
- What is this gift?  
A: Life! New spiritual life, a revitalization of your inner spirit. AND a new life for your physical body too when Jesus returns in glory.
- Who gets to receive this life?  
A: “He who has the Son.” In other words, whoever believes in Jesus Christ as Savior.
- When was this gift given?  
A: It was given to the world when Jesus died on the cross. It was given to you personally when you became a believer.

Let that last point sink in. When was this gift of life given to you? The moment you believed. For many of you that was when at your baptism, God poured out his grace and forgiveness on you by connecting you to Christ. You already have eternal life. Your life already is changed. Your status with God is: child. Dearly loved child. In Christ your sins are forgiven. Your standing with God is: saint.

So, getting back to this first key of effective prayer. You pray with confidence. What kind of confidence? The confidence of knowing that your sins are forgiven, and that all barriers between you and the Father have been removed. Knowing for a fact that God loves you and accepts you and is enamored with you. He smiles upon you, enjoys you, and therefore is absolutely engaged in anything and everything that you say to him.

And on the flip side, who cannot have confidence when they pray? The person who does not have the Son has no confidence. Without the Son, you remain a rebel at war with God. Without the Son, the barrier between you and God (Sin) remains in place. Without the Son, the Father will not listen or act on your behalf. If the Lord Jesus Christ is not in your heart, you cannot confidently pray.

But you have confidence in Christ: **“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.”** Jesus loves me, this I “think”? This I “hope”? This I “wish”? No! This I “KNOW” for the Bible tells me so.

When you know your standing with God, you then have confidence that God will hear you when you pray. Isn't that a fear deep down in all of us? What if God isn't listening? What if our prayers are falling on deaf ears? What if my prayers go out and fall flat to the ground, rather than going up to the throne room of God? Part of the reason we wonder is that sometimes our prayers aren't always answered immediately. We live in a world that demands immediate response and gratification. But know this for a fact. God hears and answers. God gave up his only Son as a sacrifice on the cross in order to make us his very own... that God will certainly be listening to attentively to every prayer. God invites us to pray. He commands us to pray. He rebukes us when we don't pray. He instructed us how to pray. Yeah... he's listening!

So, the first key to effective prayer is to pray with confidence. Confidence that you are right with God through Christ, and therefore God is listening carefully and answering rightly every single prayer we pray.

Now, what's the second key to effective prayer? You must pray and ask things according to *God's* will. God has obligated himself to do us good. Because of this, when we ask for something that is harmful to us, God will not do it. And isn't that great? He loves us so much he won't give us what harms us, even if we beg for it? More than one of my kids enjoys playing with fire. Would I be a good father if gave them a box of matches, a lighter, a gallon of gasoline and a bunch of paper and kindling wood, set it all in the middle of our living room and said, "There you go, my children! I'm giving you what you want!" No. Because I love them, I greatly restrict contact with fire to campouts and fire pits... and even there only under close supervision. Our heavenly Father also will not give us what harms us. Thank God he doesn't!

It is vital, then, that we know what God's will is so that we can pray according to his will. Every prayer we pray that is in line with God's will is *always* granted.

Do you want to your prayers to be effective? Do you want God to answer? Then learn what his will is and pray for those things. Is winning the lottery God's will for your life? If you don't know, maybe that shouldn't be at the top of your prayer list. Is it God's will that you be completely healthy? We don't know, do we? So maybe that shouldn't be at the top of the prayer list. Jesus said it this way, "**Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.**"

What do we know to be God's will? Well, the Lord's prayer sure helps us a lot.

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation.

But deliver us from evil.

Pray these things first which we know to be God's will, and your prayers will be effective! Now you can pray for other things as well, but understand that God's will is unknown to us. Listen to his guidance in Scriptures when it comes to the other things you pray for. What does he say about money management? About the kind of spouse you should look for? About a career that will bring him honor and glory with your time and talents? God isn't silent about these things. When you pray about them, don't pray for something you know God would disapprove of. Know

his will, and pray accordingly. Your prayers will be effective, and God will act for our good. Sometimes he says “No.” Sometimes “Yes.” And sometimes, “Wait.”

Dear friends, remember these two keys to effective prayers. (1) Pray with confidence knowing your status with God in Christ and God’s desire and promise to listen and act for Jesus’ sake. (2) Pray according to God’s will, not according to your selfish, earthly desires. Seek God’s will and know what he reveals of it in Scriptures. Pray in this way, and you have God’s word that your prayers will be powerful and effective. Amen.