

Main Idea: According to 1 John 5:14-15, we who know Christ have two privileges when we pray, privileges based upon the certain and reliable nature of the promise of God.

The Context: We can know three things for certain.

1. We can know we have eternal life (11-13).
 2. We can know we have power in prayer in this life (14-15).
 3. We can know what we’re supposed to do with what we have (16-21).
- I. Because of God’s promise we have confidence (14).
- A. Because of Christ we can approach God.
 - B. Because of Christ we can ask God.
 1. Our petition can be for anything.
 2. Our petition must be according to His will.
 - We have the promise of a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13).
 - We have the promise of a good outcome (Rom 8:28-29).
 - We have the promise of forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
 - We have the promise of God’s provision (Matt 6:33).
 - We have the promise of God’s guidance (Prov 3:5-6).
 - We have the promise of a harvest (Galatians 6:7-10).
 - We have the promise of wisdom (James 1:5).
 - We have the promise of sufficient grace (2 Cor 12:10).
 - C. Because of Christ we can be sure that God hears us.
- II. Because of God’s promise we have answers (15).
- A. We know nothing is too small to bring to God.
 - B. We know we have it before we have it.
- Make It Personal: What should we do with this promise?
1. We should pray for others to experience eternal life (16-17).
 2. We should affirm what we have in Christ (18-20).
 3. We should reject rival substitutes (21).

We move ahead on our knees. That was last week’s message from Ephesians 6:18-20. Prayer is indispensable. If we are to move ahead as a church, we must pray. I’m encouraging us specifically to ask people in our community what we can pray for them. This morning I’d like to return to the subject of prayer, first by reading Jesus’ teaching on prayer, and then exploring a passage on prayer in 1 John.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:6-15

Everyone in this sin-cursed world suffers, but there ought to be a noticeable difference in the way Christians suffer. Why is that? It’s because we who know Christ have some things that the non-believer doesn’t have, things that give us stability and joy regardless of our circumstances. We have a personal relationship with the God whose own Son suffered for us. We have a Savior who right now is interceding for us in heaven. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit who empowers us for a God-honoring life. And we have something else that God has given to us in His Word. Promises.

There’s one particular promise I want us to consider today by turning to 1 John 5:14-15. The title for this message is, “*Praying and the Promise of God.*”

There’s a beautiful relationship between prayer and the promise of God. God has made promises to us recorded in His Word. When we pray, we are to approach His throne with these promises in mind, putting our full weight into them. We trust Him and ask. He answers, just as He promised, and gets all the glory for what He does.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the “Promises to Live By” series message at WBC 1/20/13.

We see this all over the Bible...

1 Kings 3:5 “At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you.’” Why did Solomon pray? Because God promised to answer him when he did. But not just Solomon...

Psalms 34:17 “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.”

Matthew 7:7 [Jesus is speaking] “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

Matthew 18:19 “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 21:22 [Jesus is speaking] “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

Mark 11:24 “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Luke 11:10 “For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

John 14:13 “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.”

John 15:7 “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

John 16:24 “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”

James 5:16 “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

So this is no isolated promise. Warren Wiersbe remarks, “What breathing is to a physical man, prayer is to a spiritual man.”² That’s because a spiritual man will take God’s promise to heart and act on it.

Remember when Jesus flipped over the tables of the money changers in the temple? Remember the reason He gave for such controversial behavior? He told the religious crowd in Matthew 21:13, “It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer [citing Isaiah 56:7],’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers [citing Jeremiah 7:11].’”

What’s supposed to happen in God’s House? What does the Lord say He wants His place of worship to be called? A house of *prayer*. Did you come to church today expecting to *pray*? Yes, we gather to do other things too. Study His Word, sing His praises, fellowship with one another. But the early church devoted itself to prayer (Acts 2:42). It moved ahead on its knees, and so must we.

Now let’s look at a particular promise from God. It’s found in 1 John 5 where the key word of the chapter, as of the whole book, is *know*.³ The apostle John wants his readers to *know* something, or more specifically, know they *have* something.

It’s called *assurance*. Do you have assurance this morning? One, assurance that you are God’s child? Two, that God hears you when you pray? And that three, God is using you to help others? These are the very issues that John addresses throughout this letter, and particularly as he wraps up the final chapter.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (1 Jn 5:14). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ You’ll see it seven times in chapter five and some thirty-five times throughout.

The Context: We can know three things for certain.

John finishes his letter by emphasizing we can know three things for certain.

1. *We can know we have eternal life (11-13).* He says in verses 11-12, “And this is the testimony: 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.”

Eternal life is a gift of God, and who has this gift? The person who has the Son does. And the person who doesn’t have the Son doesn’t have this gift. So what does that mean, to *have* the Son? To borrow two synonymous phrases from another verse penned by the same apostle, John 1:12, to have the Son means to *receive* the Son, Jesus the Christ, and to *believe* on His name. And the person who does that, who receives and believes in the Son, is the person who has been *born of God*, says John in John 1:13.

That person has eternal life, says John. And God wants that person to know he or she has eternal life. That’s what this letter is all about, as John emphasizes in verse 13, “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.”

There’s that word *know*. John says that eternal life is something we can know we have, and our assurance is based, not on our feelings, but on the presence of the Spirit-produced evidences John identifies in this letter. There’s something else we can know.

2. *We can know we have power in prayer in this life (14-15).* We don’t just have eternal life in some future sense, but a very specific demonstration of eternal life in the present, namely, prayer that produces results. John says in verses 14-15, “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.”

Whatever we ask? Does John mean that? We’ll explore this promise carefully in a moment, but for now, notice the third thing John stresses we can know for sure.

3. *We can know what we’re supposed to do with what we have (16-21).* These promises of assurance and answered prayer are ours for an intended result, which John addresses at the end of his letter, as we’ll see at the conclusion of this message.

Now let’s meditate on this promise-text. According to 1 John 5:14-15, we who know Christ have two privileges when we pray, privileges based upon the certain and reliable nature of the promise of God.

I. Because of God’s promise we have confidence (14).

Verse 14—“This is the confidence we have.” Here’s privilege number one. We who know Christ have *confidence*, a confidence that results in three things.

A. Because of Christ we can approach God. “This is the confidence we have in approaching God.” John uses the Greek word *parresia*, translated “confidence” in the NIV. It means “courage, boldness, frankness, candor.” It refers to “plainness of speech that conceals nothing and passes over nothing.”⁴ To speak “in *parresia*” means to speak “in public, with openness of speech, boldly,” as in Ephesians 6:19 where Paul asks, “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will *fearlessly* make known the mystery of the gospel.” Paul uses the term in Ephesians 3:12, “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and *confidence*.”

⁴ BAGD

That's what we have, John says, *confidence*, and specifically, confidence in *approaching God* [lit. *toward God*]. Here he's talking about prayer. Earlier in the letter John talked about this confidence in another meeting with God, in 1 John 2:28, "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be *confident* and unashamed before him at his coming."

That's going to happen, my friends. Jesus is coming, and if we abide in Him now, we can be confident in His presence then. And if we're abiding in Him now, here's something we'll be doing now, *approaching God in prayer*.

John talked about this back in 1 John 3:21-22, "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have *confidence* before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him."

Beloved, this is a privilege that Christ won for us. Because of His perfect life, death as our substitute, and victorious resurrection, we can now approach God, not in fearful trepidation, but with *confidence*. As Ephesians 3:12 says, "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."

What does approaching God confidently sound like? We find a helpful insight into this word in John 16:29, where the disciples said to Jesus, "Now you are speaking *clearly* and without figures of speech." That's what John says we now have as we approach God in prayer, the privilege to speak clearly and without figures of speech.

He's our Abba Father, and we're His little children. No need to try and impress Him with flowery talk. Because of Christ we can confidently approach God.

But that's not all. John says...

B. Because of Christ we can ask God. Verse 14 again, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."

Ask. Any parent with a toddler knows what this word means. *Ask.* "Mommy, I need!" "Daddy, can I have?" In some contexts this Greek word *aitometha* means not only *request*, but *demand*. Jesus says we can do this with God in Matthew 7:7, "Ask, and it will be given you." John repeats Jesus' charge and says, "If we ask, He hears."

In the next verse John will use the related noun form, *aitemata*, "requests, petitions," but in this verse he emphasizes two things about the petitions we bring to God.

1. *Our petition can be for anything.* "That if we ask *anything*," says John. It doesn't matter how big it is, for as the poet put it, "We're coming to a King, so large petitions with us bring." Or how small, for no need is trivial to the One whose heart is filled with mercy. It's important to remember, as Wiersbe puts it, "We are not beggars; we are children coming to a wealthy Father who loves to give His children what they need."⁵ So we can ask for anything, says John. But there is an important stipulation.

2. *Our petition must be according to His will.* "If we ask anything *according to his will*." It starts with our will—that's why we're requesting it. But it must also be consistent with His will. As Jesus taught, "Thy will be done." Or in light of Philippians 4:19, our needs, not our greeds.

And what happens when our will lines up with His in a petition? He *hears* us, says John. The Greek verb for "hear" (*akouo*) carries a broad range of meanings, from "be able to hear as opposed to being deaf," to "pay attention to, believe, and respond," to "obey and conform to what was said."⁶

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (1 Jn 5:14). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁶ DBL Greek

So this isn't just, "Okay, I *hear* what you're saying. Now stop bothering me." It's rather, "I hear you, my child, and I will do what you have requested because what you want is what I want."

George Mueller knew the power of this promise. Mueller fed thousands of orphans with food provided in answer to prayer. He said, "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of God's willingness."

Robert Law wrote, "Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting man's will done in heaven, but for getting God's will done on earth."

You may ask, "Well, if it's God's will for me to have something, why should I even pray about it?" It's because prayer is the way God wants His children to get what they need, for He ordains not only the end, but also the means to the end, and that is prayer.

"Okay," you say, "so God wants to use our prayers to accomplish His will. And that means we need to pray according to His will. But how do we know what His will is?" A vital question. Mueller said that prayer is laying hold of God's *willingness*, so if we're going to pray with confidence and boldness and expectation, we must know what God's will is.

So what is God's will? It's not complicated. God's will is always in line with God's Word. If we want to know His will, we must know His Word. And if we know His Word, then we can bring Him bold petitions because we know those petitions are according to His will.

Think of it this way. In His Word God tells us things He that He will do...*guaranteed*. They're called *promises*. I love Romans 4:20-21, speaking of Abraham, "For he did not waiver through unbelief regarding the promises of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He had promised."

Friends, when we pray in line with the promises of God, we can be sure God will hear and answer. Here are some of my favorite examples.

-We have *the promise of a way of escape* (1 Cor 10:13). "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

-We have *the promise of a good outcome* (Rom 8:28-29). "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

-We have *the promise of forgiveness* (1 John 1:9). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

-We have *the promise of God's provision* (Matt 6:33). "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

-We have *the promise of God's guidance* (Prov 3:5-6). "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

-We have *the promise of a harvest* (Galatians 6:7-9). "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from

the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

-We have *the promise of wisdom* (James 1:5). “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

-We have *the promise of sufficient grace* (2 Cor 12:9). “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

Brothers and sisters, these are God’s promises, expressions of His will. If we pray in accord with these promises, we can know we are praying in accord with His will, and therefore, we can know He will hear and grant our petitions.

To put it simply, because of Christ we can approach God, and we can ask God.

C. Because of Christ we can be sure that God hears us. That’s the flow of verse 14. We approach. We ask. He hears.

But not just hears. What’s assumed in verse 14 is then stated in verse 15, and that brings us to the second privilege that makes all the difference in the world when we pray. First, we have confidence. That’s verse 14, “This is the *confidence* we have.” Second...

II. Because of God’s promise we have answers (15).

John says in verse 15, “And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” Twice John uses the word “know.” If we *know* that he hears us, then we *know* that we have what we asked. We know two things.

A. We know nothing is too small to bring to God. Again, John emphasizes, “*whatever* we ask.” Jesus said to ask for daily bread. Bread, that’s pretty basic. And we’re to live, says Jesus, by daily bringing our most basic needs to God.

Right now some of you are in a season of suffering. When that happens we have all kinds of needs. We need strength to function, wisdom on what to do next, forgiveness for our bad attitude, help for work we’re not able to accomplish, all kinds of needs. And nothing is too small to bring to God. *Whatever* we ask. Here’s something else we know.

B. We know we have it before we have it. “We know that we *have* what we asked.” We *have*. Not *will* have, but *have*. It’s present tense. The Greek verb *echo* means “to possess, to hold on to, to experience, to wear, to have.”⁷ John says the actual answer to the prayer request may still be in the future, but the confidence and assurance that the prayer will be answered is ours as soon as we ask, as long as it’s in accord with His will.

Some in the “name it claim it” circles will abuse a promise like this and try and turn God into a Genie in a bottle. And so they won’t take their sick kids to the doctor, and they won’t look for a job, and they won’t seek biblical counsel for turmoil at home, with the justification, “I asked God to take care of it, and He promises He will.”

But that’s presumption. God doesn’t promise to do everything we ask Him to do. He promises to do everything we ask Him that’s *according to His will*.

Many of you will recognize the name, Chris Spielman. Spielman was an all-American linebacker at Ohio State back in the 80s, then became an all-pro for the Detroit Lions, and now works as an ESPN commentator. What you may not know is that Spielman is a follower of Christ who’s been through his share of suffering. His dad died

⁷ Louw-Nida

of cancer. His father-in-law died of a brain tumor. He had a neck injury that forced him to retire early. And most challenging of all, he walked into the shadow of death with his wife.

A few years ago I read, *That's Why I'm Here: The Chris and Stefanie Spielman Story*, and I recommend it. Spielman tells how he married Stefanie, his high school sweetheart, and was on the top of the world as a well known professional athlete, when his world took a major turn. His wife, Stefanie, at the age of 30 discovered she had breast cancer. Chris decided to put his NFL career on hold and took a year's leave of absence to care for her and their two small children during her chemotherapy.

Following the initial treatment, Stefanie seemed to recover and the couple poured their lives into raising funds for cancer research. The Lord blessed them with two more children. But the cancer returned, and more chemo followed. Then more cancer, and more treatments. In all, Stefanie battled her disease for twelve years, with Chris caring for her and the kids, until the Lord took her to her eternal home in heaven.

What I appreciate about the book is Chris's transparency about the suffering, and his testimony to Christ's sufficiency in the suffering. He tells the story of how they called for the elders of the church to anoint Stephanie with oil and pray for her healing. And God gave her a respite of healing. And then God allowed the cancer to return.

He tells another story about what happened right after he was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2009. Ohio State planned an on-field celebration at halftime of the OSU-Navy game. Chris and the four kids were there, and so was Stefanie in her wheelchair. Chris tells what happened:

When they announced my name, the crowd roared and Stef began pumping her left arm and waving her fist in the air. The fans rose and gave us a standing ovation. With all my heart, I believe the fans directed their applause more toward her than me. I believe that because afterward every comment I received referred to Stefanie and the courage she showed going out there. She earned that ovation because she always had proven herself the toughest warrior in our family. I hoped that those who witnessed that scene realized where we stood with our faith. Even though we faced a difficult situation, God had given us the strength. None of that came from my power or Stef's ability to endure tough circumstances. The strength came from God. Stef always said that when she prayed, she rarely received what she asked for, but she always received what she needed.⁸

I love that line, *rarely what she asked for, always what she needed*. Chris includes a great example of this in the epilogue of the book, a testimony written by a former classmate of Stefanie:

I believe some of Jesus' best friends are called to suffer with and for Him for the salvation of others. It is a huge and, many times, unwanted cross. I think we'll understand it better when we get to heaven and see all the souls we positively affected. It is no surprise to me that Jesus called you to do this with Him. You have already positively affected so many people before the cancer, and now the number of people that you have had an impact on is incredible. I admire your strength and sacrifices through it. I hope you realize how much kindness you have

⁸ Spielman, Chris (2012-05-08). *That's Why I'm Here: The Chris and Stefanie Spielman Story* (Kindle Locations 2663-2665). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

brought to so many of us and how you have brought so many closer to Christ through your acceptance, hope, love and perseverance.⁹

That's good. It's a vivid reminder that God didn't give us the promise of answered prayer so we could escape suffering, but so we could honor Him and see His purposes advanced through our suffering. Again, the church moves ahead on its knees.

Make It Personal: So what should we do with this promise?

The promise again is that if we ask anything according to God's will, He hears us and will give us what we're asking. So if it's not "name it claim it," what should we do with this promise? John himself tells us in the very next verses. Three things.

1. *We should pray for others to experience eternal life (16-17).* "If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death."

Notice that the way to deal with sin in the congregation is to pray. That's the first application of this promise, according to John. Since we have the assurance of answered prayer, we should pray for the brother we see who is committing sin. Prayer is not the only thing we should do, but it's where we must begin.

You say, "Wait a minute. John says to pray about a brother who is committing sin that *does not lead to death*. And then he says we shouldn't pray about a person whose sin *leads to death*. What's that all about?" There's a lot of discussion about this in the commentators, but I think the simple approach of the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* makes the most sense: "Sometimes a Christian may sin so seriously that God judges that sin with swift physical death: 'a sin that leads to death.' Ananias and Sapphira are cases in point (Acts 5:1-11).¹⁰ You don't see Peter calling the church together for a prayer meeting in behalf of Annanias and Sapphira. According to God's assessment, they had crossed the line and sinned a *sin unto death*, and prayer wouldn't change that.

Could that happen again? Could a church member today sin in such a way that physical death will result? Paul warned the Corinthians that it could (1 Cor 11:30), and if a person is in that situation, no prayer chain is going to change what God says is coming. But because of God's amazing mercy, it doesn't happen very often. Most sin does not lead to death in the physical sense, not right away. There's the opportunity to repent and change. And that's what we should pray for when we see a brother sinning.

Beloved, it's our God-given duty to pray for members of this church when we see them sin. We're not to gossip. Nor are we to turn the other way with the notion, "Well, he got himself into that mess. It's none of my business." That's Cain's way of thinking, "Am I my brother's keeper?," and the Lord confronted it head-on. When we see a brother sin, we're supposed to take action, starting with this action. Pray.

Pray what? What do we want God to do? John tells us, "He should pray and God will give him life." That's what we're after, to see our brother turn from his sin and experience the kind of life God intends.

I was praying for a man that I knew had been struggling with sin issues whom I hadn't seen him in months, so I contacted him. He responded, "Your ears must be

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bible Knowledge Commentary

burning. I was reading yesterday thinking about calling you.” And we took steps to get moving in God’s direction again.

Do you think we’d see more wayward saints repenting and being restored if we just asked? John says we would. *Pray and God will give him life.* This is the first application John gives of the promise of answered prayer. We ought to be praying for our brothers and sisters who aren’t walking with Christ. Again, that’s not all we should be doing for them, but it’s the best thing we’ll ever do.

[Let’s do so right now.]

John finishes by identifying two other responses that flow out of this promise.

2. *We should affirm what we have in Christ (18-20).* That’s verses 18-20, but for time’s sake, just look at the first part of verse 20, “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true.” What do we have? Understanding. Why do we have it? Because the Son has come and given it to us. We have other things too, like the assurance of salvation, and the assurance of answered prayer, just to mention two. And what we have we must affirm when we pray and always.

Friends, Jesus Christ came to give us what we could not earn or achieve, a relationship with God Himself. Because we are sinners, we enter this world cut off from God, but through Christ and His work on the cross, we can be restored, reconciled, brought into the family of God. Do you hold that position today?

If not, repent and trust Christ and it will be yours.

If you do, affirm it, and live in light of it. And one more...

3. *We should reject rival substitutes (21).* “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.” If we’re bowing down to rival gods, it will certainly short-circuit not only our prayer lives, but all of life as God intends it. So if God seems distant when we pray, check here. Are we putting something in front of God? It may be a good thing, like family or a job. But as it has been said, “When a good thing becomes a god thing, that’s a bad thing.” So let’s say no to rival substitutes and keep moving ahead on our knees.

Community Groups -- Potential questions to discuss from this morning’s sermon:

1. This morning’s message was entitled, “*Praying and the Promise of God.*” Read again this morning’s text, 1 John 5:14-15. It’s a very hope-giving text. How so? What does it say that encourages you?
2. What do we learn from this passage about prayer? Specifically, how can we have confidence when we pray?
3. It’s possible to misuse a passage like this, as those in the “name it, claim it” camp have done. What is this approach to prayer, and why is it dangerous?
4. This passage emphasizes the importance of praying according to God’s will. This is why studying and learning the promises of God is vital. What are some of God’s promises and how should they affect the way we pray?
5. Share an example of how God has answered prayer in your life with the person sitting next to you. Then have two or three share examples of answered prayer with a whole group, giving God the glory for what He has done.
6. Spend some time in prayer, putting into practice what we have learned about praying with God’s promises in mind.