

Main Idea: I 1 John 5:14-15, we learn about the important connection between prayer and the promises of God. God has made it possible for His people to pray with confidence.

The Context: We know three things for certain.

1. We know we have eternal life (11-13).
 2. We know we have power in prayer in this life (14-15).
 3. We know what we’re supposed to do with what we have (16-21).
- I. 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. 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).

A change! The message I had planned to preach on January 25 was from Ephesians 6:10-20 as part of our “Redeemed People Pray the Word” series. However, in light of a snow storm that is scheduled to hit on Saturday, I plan to preach a different message today, from 1 John 5, so we can listen to the Ephesians 6 message and ponder it in our community groups on February 1.

Praying the word is an emphasis for us at WBC in 2026. A vital way we can pray the Word is by praying the promises of God. We’ll learn today how to do that in 1 John 5 where we find *the promise of answered prayer*.

Do you remember when Jesus flipped over the tables of the money changers in the temple? Do you 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*. Redeemed people *pray*. And the Lord doesn’t just tell us to pray. He’s given us something wonderful to help us pray. His promises.

^{**}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 message preached at WBC in 2013 in the “Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering” series.

Now let's look carefully at today's text. The key word in 1 John 5, as of the whole book, is *know*. You'll notice it seven times in chapter five and some thirty-five times throughout. The apostle John wrote this letter so its readers would *know* something, or more specifically, know they *have* something, namely *assurance*.

Do you have assurance this morning? Do you have assurance that, one, you are God's child? That, two, 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 specifically, as he wraps up the final chapter.

The Context: We know three things for certain.

Our promise text has a context, and we need to see it. John finishes his letter by emphasizing we who are Christians can know three things for certain.

1. *We 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 the 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, according to John.

2. *We 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, power-producing prayer. 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 know what we're supposed to do with what we have (16-21)*. This promise of assurance and this promise of answered prayer are ours for an intended result. There are some things we're supposed to be doing with these promises, and we'll consider what they are at the conclusion of this message.

Now let's place ourselves under our promise-text. According to 1 John 5:14-15, we who know Christ have two privileges when we pray, and if we grasp these two privileges it will change the way we pray this year and beyond.

I. We have confidence (14).

Verse 14 (NIV)—“This is the confidence we have.” Here’s privilege number one. We who know Christ have *confidence*. What kind of confidence? John says it’s 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.”² 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*.”

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.”

Brothers and sisters, 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 cowering in fear, 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 look like? We find a helpful insight into this word by John’s use of it in John 16:29. There Jesus’ disciples said to Jesus, “Now you are speaking *clearly* and without figures of speech.” That’s what John says we now have in approaching 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. Because of Christ we don’t just *approach* God.

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 who’s ever raised a needy toddler knows what this word means. *Ask.* “Mommy, I need!” “Daddy, can I have?” In some contexts this Greek word *aitometha* can mean not only to *request*, but to *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, as the poet put it, “We’re coming to a King, so large

² BAGD

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.”³ 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. Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy will be done.” As Wiersbe reminds us, with Philippians 4:19 in mind, “God has promised to supply 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.”⁴

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, then why should I even pray about it?” It’s because prayer is the way God wants His children to get what they need. He not only ordains 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 you want to know His will, you must know His Word. And if you know His Word, then you can bring to Him bold petitions because you know those petitions are according to His will. Redeemed people pray *the word*.

You see, in His Word God tells us things He wants to see happen. He also tells us things that He will do *guaranteed*. They’re called *promises*. Back in 2012 we did a series “Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering.” Here are some of those precious promises, eight of them. Brothers and sisters, when we pray in line with these eight promises, we can be sure God will hear and answer.

-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.”

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (1 Jn 5:14). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ DBL Greek

-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.”

Again child of God, these are God’s unchanging promises. They are expressions of His will. If we pray in accord with those 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, and thirdly...

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 stated in verse 15, and that brings us to the second privilege that makes all the difference in the world when we suffer. First, we have confidence. That’s verse 14. “This is the *confidence* we have.” Now the second.

II. 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 about our prayers, dear friends.

A. We know nothing is too small to bring to God. Again, John emphasizes, “*whatever* we ask.” Jesus said to ask for daily bread. Whatever we need.

When we’re in a season of suffering 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. And 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.”⁵ 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 eventually worked as an ESPN commentator. Spielman is also a follower of Christ who’s been through his share of suffering. His dad died 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.

I read and recommend his book, *That's Why I'm Here: The Chris and Stefanie Spielman Story*. 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

⁵ Louw-Nida

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.⁶

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 brought to so many of us and how you have brought so many closer to Christ through your acceptance, hope, love and perseverance.⁷

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 in and with our suffering.

Make It Personal: 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).⁸ You don't see Peter calling the church together for a prayer meeting in behalf of Ananias 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

⁶ Spielman, Chris (2012-05-08). *That's Why I'm Here: The Chris and Stefanie Spielman Story* (Kindle Locations 2663-2665). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Bible Knowledge Commentary

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.

Beloved, it's our God-given duty to pray for members of our church who are in the clutches of sin. We must not sit by idly thinking, "Well, he got himself into that mess. It's none of my business." That's Cain's was of thinking, "Am I my brother's keeper?," and the Lord exposed that fallacy. We're supposed to take action, and the first action and the best action is to pray.

Pray what? What are we after? John says, "He should pray and God will give him life." That's what we're after, the experience of real life for this person presently caught up in sin.

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

John identifies two other needed responses.

2. *We should affirm what we have in Christ (18-20).* 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 need to affirm.\

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 you pray, check here. Are there rival substitutes in the way? It may be a good thing, like your family or a job. But as someone has well said, "When a good thing becomes a god thing, that's a bad thing." Get rid of rival substitutes.