

**EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 1, 2021
SERMON: PRAYING GOD'S WILL: THE ONE WHO PRAYS
TEXT: 1 JOHN 5:13-20**

I get a kick out of reading humorous articles about how children interpret everyday life. It can be particularly funny when you read about children and church life. I found an Ann Landers article from the Chicago Tribune edition on May 13, 2002 that shows how kids think:

Dear Ann Landers: I loved the letters you printed about misinterpreting the Lord's Prayer. When my twin daughters were young, I taught them to say this prayer before going to bed. As I listened outside their door, I could hear them say, "Give us this steak and daily bread, and forgive us our mattresses."

My husband and I always had a good laugh over this. That was over 50 years ago, and the memory still remains in my heart. -- Mrs. K in New Jersey

Dear Mrs. K: What a charming story! I was surprised by the number of readers who had unusual interpretations of prayers. Read on for more:

From San Francisco: When I was a child, I learned this prayer as, "Our Father, who are in Heaven, Howard be thy name." I always thought that was God's real name.

St. Louis: I worked as a preschool teacher and was next to a child who recited the Lord's Prayer as, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, Harold be thy name." I've been laughing about this for 30 years.

The article continued on with examples from different faith communities and rituals that the children misunderstood.

Learning to pray! It seems like such a simple task. As children, your first prayers might have been:

***Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord, my soul to keep..***

Of at mealtime:

***God is great, God is good.
Let us thank Him for our food.***

As we grow, we continue our prayers, but often we become creatures of habit and we say the same thing to God every night without variation. We need to remember that prayer is a conversation. At times, prayer can be a time when we cry out to a God who can, is able, and will act on our behalf or the behalf of others. We have looked at ancient foundations, the prayers of Jesus and the New Testament church, and we have even looked at improper ways to pray. As we have done this, the one thing we have emphasized is that we need to always pray according to the ***“will of God.”*** So what exactly does that mean? Over the next several Sundays, we will examine this. We will start with looking at the “one who prays” and then move on to the “prayer.”

Let’s begin with our scripture lesson today. If you have your bibles, turn to 1 John 5:13-20:

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. ¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: 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 what we asked of him.

¹⁶ If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them 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 you should pray about that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

¹⁸ We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. ¹⁹ We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 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. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

In his Gospel, the apostle John's focus is to bring people to a saving faith in Jesus. He meticulously defines who Jesus is and gives us a wonderful foundation. Of all the gospels, John's best defines who Jesus is and why you need to have a personal relationship with Him. In John's epistles (or letters) we see that John continues his evangelistic work by shifting the theme from bringing people to faith to encouraging those who believe, with every fiber of their being, to KNOW that they possess eternal life. John wants believers of all ages to know the quality of what they possess. They don't just gain life but they gain life eternal. It is the believer's inheritance and it can be possessed NOW not just as future promise.

How does this apply to our prayer life? When we really study this passage, we see a pattern immersing.

1. KNOW JESUS

The different Greek words that are translated as "to know" appear many times in John's writings, but here in 1 John 5, they are used more frequently than anywhere else in the New Testament. Whether you are a new believer or a seasoned follower of Christ, you are meant to KNOW that you have eternal life. There are many religions and belief systems out there that keep their followers in a constant state of uncertainty. Whether you have favor with their deity or if you will arrive in whatever form of paradise their afterlife promises, you can not be sure. Are you good enough, devout enough, are you giving enough money,

passing out enough magazines? You can never be sure that you are doing enough! John, right from the start in verse 13, states his reason for putting ink to paper:

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.

This absolute knowledge is an ongoing theme for John. We read in John 17:3:

³ And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.

Again in 1 John 1:3-4:

³ We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

This “life eternal” that John talks about is a promise, an inheritance, a reality that you can live today! For John, eternal life is the ongoing act of having fellowship with God.

2. BOLD CONFIDENCE

The pattern continues that a rock-solid belief in Jesus moves the believer into having a bold confidence before God, particularly as we pray. Verse 14 of our text tells us:

¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

Practically and logically, this works itself out in many aspects of our lives. I remember the first time that I preached in a church. I was nervous, I was out of my comfort zone, I had sung many times in church, but now I was speaking. Not only was I speaking, but I was preaching a sermon I had written. I remember the jitters, the fear, the nervous flutter in my voice. Now 30 years later, I can stand up and speak and preach with very little worry about nerves. I have a confidence due to my schooling and my years of practical experience. When you know your craft, your calling, your skills, and your talents – it provides a bold confidence!

This bold confidence before our God impacts our prayer life and moves us into the realm of praying the will of God. As we know God's holiness and his righteousness intimately, and as we discover and rediscover God's character, our prayers start to conform to His will. We will be less self-centered and more God-focused. One writer put it this way that our conforming to the will of God:

"...consists not in bringing God's will down to us, but in lifting our will up to His."

If you find yourself complaining to God (or others) that your prayers weren't heard, that God wasn't listening, or you wonder if prayer even works, you need to look at your relationship and understanding of who God is and what prayer is meant to be.

The key to praying the will of God is a thriving, growing spiritual life that will unlock the power of prayer.

Once again we turn to the bold confidence that Jesus modeled for us. His will was always one with the Father, He always did the Father's work, and he always spoke what the Father wished him to say. Jesus models the fact that

an intimate closeness with the Father will take our prayers and intertwine them with His will.

SIN

John is very quick to change the mood of his message in verses 16-18. As a close, intimate relationship with God will allow us to pray successfully as we pray the will of God, so too will serious sin obstruct spiritual vitality thus impede our prayer life. John gives us clear borders that allows us to discern our own character as vitally growing or backsliding obstructed follower of God. This boundary that John lays out is based in his emphasis of recognizing sin and righteousness for the church. A growing Christians:

- Acknowledges their sin
- Do not persist in sinful habits.

Unbelievers, by contrast, sin consistently but often refuse to admit it. Not much has changed from John's society and our 21st society. Sin, then and now, is often seen as an archaic belief.

John goes on to tell us to pray for our "brother" which literally translated is "fellow believer." We are to pray for each other, especially for their "sins that do not lead toward death" and God will respond to our prayers by granting them "life." What is John saying? Are we talking physical life and death or something deeper? Generally when combining the ideas of death and sin, the death we are talking about is spiritual death also known as the second death...total separation from God for eternity.

By reading this passage we see that John differentiates between two types of sin – those not leading to death and those leading to death. We must remember that John is writing to a largely Jewish audience. The Old Testament makes a distinction between inadvertent sins and intentional

sins. In the old temple sacrificial system, the only sins that were forgivable were accidental or unconscious sins. When someone sinned intentionally and willfully in the Old Testament, the sinner was either exiled or put to death. This dual classification continued on into the Judaism of John's day. So, what type of sin is John talking about?

John is telling us that part of praying in the will of God is to pray for our fellow believers as they struggle through the temptations of life. John is urging prayer for individuals whose lives are marked by a degree of sin that has not led to their eternal death. He distinguishes these sinners from those whose sins are intentional, whose lives have separated them from the community, who no longer have divine life in them. Sadly, there are those who profess a belief in Jesus who allow themselves to step over the line of light and darkness who are perilously close to falling away from God permanently. For those who are flirting with darkness, John has hope for them.

As this section of John's letter is finished, the apostle concludes with three bold statements about Christian assurance. Three times, he starts a point with the phrase "We know!"

1. We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin...(v.18)

Does a Christian NOT sin...no! A growing Christian striving to live in the will of God should not have the "habit" of sinning. We do not live in a continual, habitual, state of sin. John is telling us that a follower of Christ does not engage in "sins that lead to death" namely, intentional, willful acts against God. Why? Because all people who are genuinely Christians have been "born of God." There are no exceptions to this rule. John reminds us that Christ, himself, protects his followers. As we seek to "be Holy as God is holy," Jesus supports us, encourages us, and sustains us.

2. We know that we are children of God...(v. 19)

This is particularly important! As children of God, our Father protects us from the world which is in the grasp and influence of Satan. The world isn't being attacked by Satan, the children of God are the ones who are under siege. The world quite easily and happily gives into the temptations and evil that Satan introduces. Like it or not, John draws a sharp boundary between the church and world, light and darkness, God and the evil one. Today the church lives in Satan's backyard but our security is assured because Jesus resides there with us.

3. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true.

If the world is being devastated by the influence of Satan – what hope does the church have? John reminds in his gospel:

¹⁴ So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. (John 1:14)

Jesus has infiltrated the world as spy would infiltrate the enemy. Jesus is sabotaging the evil systems showing that evil will be reversed. What is Jesus doing to bring change? He is bringing knowledge of ***"the way, the truth, and the life..."***

FOR TODAY

John's formula for a breakthrough, dynamic prayer life still rings true for us today. We must:

KNOW JESUS – do you know you have a place with Jesus when you die? If not – this lack of assurance will keep you from the God given assurance that knowing Jesus will bring. If you aren't sure if you are saved...you

can...easily. Please talk to myself or someone you know who has a thriving relationship with Jesus.

EMBRACE THE FAITH AND ASSURANCE – Jesus lived, died, rose again. He conquered sin and the grave. He is coming again. These facts allow us to boldly live out our faith. This faith energizes our prayer life on behalf of our brothers and sister in Christ and for a world needing a saviour. By ignoring the flawed (and often evil) logic of the world and by embracing what the Holy Spirit has shown you to be true, Your prayers which are conformed to the will of God can dramatically change the world around you. May your battle cry every day be “This I know...”

Let’s pray....