

1 John 5:13-18—You Have Confidence Before God

Jacob wrestled with God all night long. And God blessed him. The widow knew the type of guy the judge was. He saw himself answerable to no one except himself. He couldn't care less what anyone—even God—thought of him. She struggled with him. But she wouldn't give up confidently trusting she would have justice. This is how God calls us to approach him in prayer. You have confidence to do just that.

The apostle John writes to a group of Christians who had plenty that threatened the confidence they had in Jesus. These Christians were hearing all sorts of false teaching that Jesus wasn't the Savior who they thought they knew. They were hearing that sinning was of little consequence and didn't really matter because it, supposedly, only affected your physical person. They were hearing that they still had to find this secret, hidden knowledge to be really saved. Who were these Christians to believe? Uncertainty and doubt always eats away at confidence.

So here is John writing to those he loves and cares about to set them straight. As he closes out his first letter he assures them, **“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. ¹⁴This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him”** (v.13-15).

It's as simple as that. John gives no qualifiers or tries to hedge what he says. This is a done deal and fact: you know that eternal life is yours right now today. He doesn't say at some point in the future this might be your reality. You have the knowledge; therefore, you have eternal life! How? Through faith that believes in the name of the Son of God. The name of the Son of God is everything that he is and everything that he accomplished. This faith God creates grabs onto and makes that your own personal saving possession. Son of God from eternity took on flesh and blood, was born of the virgin Mary and is our Lord. He has bought us back from Satan, set us free from sin, rose from the dead and gives us life with him. Again, this isn't at some point in the future but right now, today. Through faith he creates we believe that God loved the world that he gave us Jesus so that instead of eternal suffering in hell and death, we have life.

Because this is most certainly true, John insists that you have confidence before God: **That if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.** Again, it's really this simple. I hear this and I almost automatically want to start overexplaining it and say what God really means. But here it is. This is God's

promise. We dare not try and put him in a box and say what God can and cannot do. Of course, God places his own limitations on this promise: ask according to his will. But this should give us even more confidence. When we know that we are praying according to his will revealed to us in His Word, we then also confidently know he hears us. The almighty God who is able to do all things, he hears you personally, stops for you and listens. Go to him in prayer. He calls us to be persistent having confidence before him. He invites us to wrestle and struggle with him.

So, do you struggle with God in prayer, or do you struggle to pray? She might because she says she doesn't know how to pray and whether she is "doing it right." Like so much else, she allows busy life to get in the way and keep her from the one who gives us all we need for that body and life. Maybe that's you too.

One might struggle to pray because you wonder, "Who am I to approach God in prayer?" Is my life noteworthy enough that I should demand God's attention? Or should I just "suck it up" and be thankful I don't have it as bad as them.

Maybe you feel like you are being a bother and want to be independent. You'll wait until you've decided that it's too far out of hand; until then, "I can figure this out on my own." But then we carry around these burdens instead of placing them on the one who promises to give you rest. We hold onto the worries just in case and what if, instead of casting them on the one who cares for you. Do we do that because it fuels our pride wanting to show what we think we've handled on our own? Do we have a little martyr-complex, "Look how I've suffered."? Are you saving up our personal suffering, your endurance, your work thinking you might be able to bargain with God to convince him that he really needs to listen to me now? Or do you make promises to him as if you can take out a loan on his blessings to pay him back later? "Lord, you do this for me, and I promise that I won't...I'll be better...I will give..."

Or maybe you struggle to pray because of your struggle with the baggage of past sins that hangs on to you and the stain of sin you feel covers you. You know your current temptations that pester and needle at you—how could God want to listen to me when I'm tempted by **that**? How could I dare step into his presence and pray when I've done that same sin again?

To a certain point, you wouldn't be wrong. On our own we have no business approaching God's throne. That's what we are doing in prayer. We are stepping into his throne room, standing before the Almighty God, pleading our case. You are standing face-to-face placing your needs before him. Left to ourselves with the rags of sin hanging off from us, with unclean lips that reveal a sinful heart that

produces works that are worse than filthy rags, we have no chance no matter how much we beg and plead. We have less than nothing to try and bribe him, including your promise of some change in the future. That's not going to persuade him. We have nothing to offer him that isn't already his. We have nothing to impress him with that doesn't already belong to him. All we have is more needs that only he can address.

But you aren't on your own. You have one who speaks to the Father on your behalf. This is Jesus Christ, the righteous one. You hear him remind the Father about you, "You've already forgiven him. I gave myself up for him. I have made him holy cleansing him by the washing with water and the word. You have to listen to him. I'm not ashamed of her and neither can you be. I claimed her sin from her so she is now right with you. Look: she's without stain of sin or wrinkle or blemish but holy and blameless because I died specifically for her. I've given her new clothes: my righteousness and perfection." And it's not like Jesus is twisting the Father's arm to do it. Jesus' will and the Father's will are one in the same; he wants to listen to you in prayer.

Yes, on your own before God's throne you could not stand. But Jesus has died and rose again. He has gone through the heavens knowing very well the struggles you face; he's dealt with them himself. This same Jesus has ripped open heavens doors and invites you to come to God's throne promising God will not treat you as your sins deserve. Jesus already was punished for them. Instead, before God you will find your Heavenly Father who showers you with grace, that love we don't deserve but he freely gives. You aren't just another person. You are God's child. You are Jesus' bride. You are his brother and sister.

So go to Him as he comes to you. The fool says in his heart there is no God who listens to prayer or answers. The fool says it matters little if you pray, God will do what he wants. Don't listen to the fool. Listen to the one who gives us the way to the Father, who speaks the truth and gives you life. Go confidently knowing that whatever you ask according to his will, he hears you. God is not a divine vending machine that you just punch in your order. He's not your butler waiting at your beck-and-call. No, when we pray, pray according to his will. That means we need to know what God's will is. That means being in the Word. That means growing in the Word. That means setting aside what you think...or you just feel...or what you really want...and understanding what God's will is. After all, prayer is not about trying to bend God's will to ours but God teaching us to trust him.

Admittedly we don't always know exactly what's God will is for a situation. He doesn't give us a point-by-point manual for what to do with every issue in life.

He's set us free from the bondage of the Law! So, yes, prayer is struggle as we wrestle with trying to understand what the right decision is. Sometimes you are faced with two God-pleasing choices, but you have to choose one. So, we wrestle in prayer asking for his guidance with the promise that he will bless it. Sometimes he answers those prayers with a "Yes" and we thank him for it. Other times it's, "No, I have something better." And we wrestle with him some more to give us patience and understanding. So, we pray, "Your will be done." And teach me to trust and accept your will is done and is for my good.

God doesn't have to listen or do anything. But he chooses to listen for the sake of his own Son who lived, died, and rose again for you. Then he even lets us see how our prayers are answered. We pray for Daily Bread and then we see him give everything we need for body and life because he is our good and merciful Father in heaven. We pray for forgiveness of sins and that he keeps us in the true faith. We pray for strength to resist the devil and sin along with deliverance from self-righteousness and despair over sin. We pray he work through His Word and Sacrament to keep us in the true faith. And then we see Jesus give his body and blood in the Lord's Supper again. We hear him say through a called servant: your sins are forgiven. We receive the Lord's blessing that he will keep you, shine his face on you, and he gives you peace. And he does.

Right now we may not be able to see how or why God answers our prayers the way he does. But one day, when we will be with him for all eternity, our first question won't be, "Why didn't you do this or that?" But it will be praising him and thanking him because we will see why he did that and this and worked it all for our good.

These aren't just maybes or empty wishes. This isn't just throwing good vibes and thoughts your way. This is what you have today. Go to him in prayer. You have confidence before God. Amen.