

CHRISTIANITY *(defined)*
A Study of 1 John
“You CAN Pray with CONFIDENCE”
1 John 5:14-15

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INTRODUCTION: I heard a funny story about a lady who was very religious. She went to the pet store and she bought a parrot. She said to the owner, “I want to buy a religious parrot to take to my home.” And he said, “Well, I have a female parrot, and all she ever says is, ‘Let us pray. Let us pray.’” She said, “That’s the one for me.” So she took it to her home. And every day that parrot would say, “Let us pray, let us pray.” And that would remind that lady to pray.

Not long after, this lady began to date this man, and it just so happened that he had a boy parrot. And the man said, “I’m coming over for supper tonight. Would you mind if I brought my boy parrot so that he could get to know your girl parrot?” And she said, “Sure, bring him along.”

He brought his parrot in the cage and set it down beside that girl parrot. And that boy parrot only had one thing that he knew how to say. He said, “Let’s kiss, let’s kiss.” And when the girl parrot heard that boy parrot, she said, “My prayers have been answered!”

If you want to know how to get your prayers answered, the answer is not a parrot. The answer is in the word of God. Let’s read what the Bible has to say about in **1 John 5:14-15: This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him.**

In over 45 years of being a pastor, I’ve never met anyone who said that they are totally satisfied with their prayer life. It’s like golf. We never attain perfection, but we’re always striving to improve. Here’s a little history of my personal prayer life. In 1970, 51 years ago, I totally surrendered my life to the Lord. I was saved when I was nine years old, but there was a period of backsliding in my life when I was a teenager. But when I was a senior in high school in 1970, I sold out to the Lord

and I said, “Lord, for the rest of my life, I'm going to try to live faithful to you.” And I knew I needed to pray several times a day, but it was a struggle for me. So to remind me, I took a large poster board, and I wrote the word PRAY! with an exclamation point. Then I taped that poster to the ceiling above my bed. Every morning when I woke up and every night before I went to bed, I would look up and I would see that poster to remind me to pray. But even to this day, praying regularly doesn't come easy – it is something I have to make myself do every day. Maybe you're frustrated with your prayer life. It may seem that your prayers aren't being answered. I've met some people who have given up on prayer. They say, “I've tried praying and it didn't work.” That's like walking into a dark room and flipping the light switch and nothing happens. You don't curse Thomas Edison and say, “I've tried electricity and it doesn't work.” Instead you start looking for the reason why the light didn't come on. Is the bulb blown? Is the power off? Has a breaker tripped? You seek to find out WHY the light didn't come on. When your prayers are unanswered, you should start looking to find the reason why.

Think of it this way. There are natural laws that govern our world. For instance. You probably know that **water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit**. But that law is actually conditional. Water boils at 212 degrees at Sea Level at Standard Barometric pressure which is 29.92 inches of mercury. If you change the altitude, the temperature required to boil water changes. For instance if you are in a cabin on a mountain at 8,000 feet above sea level water will boil at around 198 degrees Fahrenheit, depending on the air pressure. That's why some recipes have a different set of instructions for higher altitudes.

In other words the natural law that says “Water boils at 212 degrees is conditional.” There are spiritual laws as well. Here's one: **God answers prayer**. That's true, but there are conditions that must be met. So, in this message, I want to share five conditions for answered prayer.

(1) PRAY TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER. You can learn to pray more effectively. When the disciples watched Jesus, they only asked Him to teach them one thing. They said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus said the way to begin is to say, “Our Father who is in Heaven.”

When you pray, you're not talking to "the man upstairs" or you're not praying to Mother Earth or the Great Spirit. Jesus taught us that we have a Heavenly Father who is generous to His children. In Matthew 7 Jesus said, "If you have a son who asks for bread, are you going to give him a stone? Or if your son asks for a fish, are you going to give him a snake?" Then in Matthew 7:11 Jesus said, **"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him."**

Every religion practices some kind of prayer. Buddhists pray to Buddha. Muslims pray five times a day to Allah. Hindus pray to a multitude of different gods and goddesses.

Through the years, as I've traveled to Asia, I've seen dozens of statues of Buddha. There are always people praying there. They are usually praying out loud. Because it is a place of prayer, I always pray a prayer like this, "Father show these people that Jesus is Lord and that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

Once when we were in Bangkok we visited the famous reclining Buddha. The room was crowded with people kneeling and praying. I prayed my usual prayer and a Thai man dressed in a business suit heard me and asked, "Are you from America?" I said, "No, we're from Texas." He smiled and said, "Even better." He was a nice guy and I asked him how often he came to pray. He said, "I only come when I am about to take a business trip, I always come and ask Buddha for good luck and good fortune."

I thought that it was sad that he only prayed when he wanted something for himself. Then I realized that there are a lot of Americans who only pray when they have a personal need. For many people, prayer is like calling 911. But prayer means having a relationship with God as your Heavenly Father. Jesus said we may call God "Abba" which means "Papa." Effective prayer must be directed to our Heavenly Father.

(2) PRAY IN THE NAME OF JESUS. Not only must you pray to the Heavenly Father, but you must pray to Him in the name of His only Son, Jesus. This means we have access to God through Jesus. Listen to this promise from Hebrews 4:16. Because of what Jesus did on the cross the

Bible says, **“Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.”** The only way to approach the Father is in the name of Jesus. In John 14:6 Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

Think of it this way. Let’s say that prayer is like writing a letter. On the envelope you will put the name of the person you are writing and then the address. God the Father is the recipient and the correct address is through Jesus Christ our Lord. The post office won’t deliver mail if the address is not correct – and prayers not prayed in the name of Jesus never reach their destination.

Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:13-14)

Not long after arriving in Tyler I was invited to a group of leaders in Tyler and Smith County. I recall one of them took me aside as the new kid on the block. He put his arm around me and said, “Whatever you do, if you’re asked to pray in public, don’t pray in the name of Jesus.” I said, “Thanks for the advice.” And then I never attended that group again.” Today, when I am asked to pray at any public function like the Rose Festival, I will usually say something like, “While I deeply respect the rights of all citizens to have different religious beliefs, as a follower of Jesus, I will be praying in His name.”

Praying in the name of Jesus isn’t a secret code or phrase like “Shazam” or “Open Sesame.” It means more than just adding those words before you say, “Amen.” Praying in Jesus’ name means you are praying in the authority of Jesus. You are praying by His permission.

My friend Ron Dunn wrote a great book on prayer entitled *Don’t just Stand There, Pray Something*. In it he tells the story that illustrates what it means to ask in the name of Jesus. Once he had taken his three kids to a county fair where there were carnival rides. So he bought a bunch of tickets, and as his kids entered each carnival ride, he would tear off one ticket for each of his three children, one for Kimberly, and one for Ron Jr., and one for Stephen. This system was working great for several

rides. But Ron said he had just torn off the tickets at the tilt-a-whirl and given them to his three children. But after his son, Stephen, got his, there was a boy he'd never seen before who stepped out and held out his hand for a ticket. Ron said he pulled those tickets back and said, "I'm sorry, son, I don't know you." Then Steven turned around and said, "Dad, he's my friend. I told him you would give him a ticket to ride with me." Ron said that even though he didn't know the boy, and even though the boy didn't deserve a free ticket, Ron gladly gave him one. He said he did it because his son had told him to ask his dad and his dad would give him a ticket. In essence the boy was asking for a ticket "in Stephen's name." And Ron said he was just making good the word of his son. When we go to our Heavenly Father in prayer we can ask in the name of Jesus. God doesn't hear me because of what I have done or because of who I am. But He will move heaven and earth to honor the name of His Son.

(3) PRAY WITH A FORGIVING SPIRIT. If you are harboring bitterness and resentment toward someone, you might feel like your prayers aren't getting past the ceiling. And there's a reason for that. Jesus taught that we must be willing to forgive others. When He taught the model prayer He said, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

Jesus made it even more clear in Mark 11:25 when He said, **"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing."**

In Matthew 5:24 Jesus said it this way. I'll paraphrase it. **"If you're in church and you're about to make an offering. And in that moment, you suddenly remember that there is someone who has something against you. Leave your offering right there and go at once to that person and make things right. Then come back and make your offering."**

One of the reasons people don't have their prayers answered is because they have allowed bitterness to spring up in their hearts. The Bible says

in Hebrews 12:15 **“Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up.”**

Bitterness is like an acid that burns the bottle that contains it. Bitterness will destroy you. Bitterness is rooted in your heart, but it usually doesn't stay there – it eventually manifests itself as anger toward the person against whom you hold a grudge.

There are a lot of mean, bitter people in the world. Aesop tells the fable of a man who had been wronged by his neighbor. He was angry and bitter at his neighbor. The angry man was visited by Zeus who said, “I will grant you any wish that you want. The only stipulation is that I will grant to your neighbor, whom you hate, twice as much of whatever you ask. If you ask for 500 diamonds, your neighbor will receive 1,000.” The bitter man agonized over the wish he should request of Zeus. So intense was his hatred for his neighbor that finally he said, “I know what wish I want and you can double it for my neighbor. I wish you to make me blind in one eye.” That's a sad example of bitterness.

Your heart of forgiveness may start in your own family. You may be surprised by this, but Peter writes that the state of your marriage can affect your prayer life. Peter has just admonished wives to respect their husbands, then he writes in 1 Peter 3:7, **“Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”** The word “your prayers” is plural, so that includes husbands and wives. Let me ask you couples, what is the state of your prayer life? Husbands are you fulfilling God's role as the spiritual leader of your family? If not, your prayers will be hindered.

(4) PRAY IN FAITH. Another important condition for answered prayer is praying in faith. Jesus said, “when you pray, believe that you will receive it, and it will happen.” He said, “If you have enough faith, you can say to this mountain, be moved into the sea, and it will take a dive in the ocean.” That's mountain-moving faith.

One of the things I've prayed for thousands of times is for God to give me wisdom. Because that's not a prayer that God answers once-for-all.

We need wisdom for every new situation we face. I know that this is a prayer that God loves to answer.

We read this great promise in James 1:5-8: **“Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.”**

Some time ago I was driving around Loop 49. Up ahead I saw a red plastic cup that someone had thrown out. Every time a car passed it, the cup would be blown to one side. Then it got blown right into the center of my lane and I drove over it. In my rearview mirror, I watched as the cup twirled up in the air settled back down on the highway. Then when the car trailed me passed it, it blew it off the road.

When I saw that red plastic cup I thought of this verse from James. That cup is like a lot people who pray, but don't pray in faith. They are tossed by the wind. “Should I pray for this? I'm not sure. Maybe I should, or maybe I shouldn't.” They vacillate between faith and doubt; belief and unbelief. Their prayers are as erratic as that cup. We must pray in faith. I once read a story about a little town in the South that didn't have any liquor stores or nightclubs. A merchant bought some property and built a nightclub just outside the city limits. The members of one of the churches were concerned about this den of iniquity, so they had several prayer meetings in which they prayed for God to burn the nightclub to the ground. They wrote letters to the owner asking him to close it down or they were praying for God to burn it down.

Not long afterwards, lightning struck the nightclub and it was completely destroyed by the fire. The owner of the club sued the church for destruction of his property. The church hired a lawyer to fight the charges.

Both sides made their arguments before a judge. The owner said, “These people prayed for my club to be burned down and it happened.” The lawyer for the church said, “Their prayers had nothing to do with the

lightning strike.” Finally the judge made his ruling. He said, **“I can’t rule on where the guilt lies in this lawsuit. However, I am convinced that the nightclub owner is the one who really believes in the power of prayer, and the church members do not!”**

Somebody has said, “When you pray for rain, you’d better take your umbrella, or you’re not praying in faith!”

(5) PRAY ACCORDING TO GOD’S WILL. You can ask God for anything, but as you ask, you must always ask God to bend your will to match His will, not the other way around. You can have faith to move mountains, but if it isn’t God’s Will, it won’t happen. John wrote in 1 John 5:14, **“If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”**

I had a friend in college named Brad, who was on fire for God. He got a little sidetracked into the name-it-and-claim-it faith movement. This heresy demotes God to vending machine that teaches if you plug enough faith into it, whatever you ask for will pop out.

I remember he showed me Psalm 34:7 which says, **“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”** Brad said, “The desire of my heart is to have a Corvette. And I’m delighting myself in the Lord, so I’m claiming that I’ll have a Corvette.” He was serious. And I said, “Go for it.” He kept delighting himself all semester. After the Thanksgiving holidays, he came back driving a used Toyota. I asked him, “What happened to the Corvette?” He smiled and said, “God showed me that the Corvette was my desire not His desire.” Brad got it. When we pray, we can ask God for anything we desire, but we need to always be willing for God to change our desires to His desires.

CONCLUSION: One of the greatest Christians of the 19th century was George Mueller of Bristol, England. He became concerned for the orphans of Britain, so he started an orphanage with only two pence in his pocket. For over 60 years his orphanage cared for over ten thousand orphans. He kept a prayer journal and recorded over 4,000 pages of answered prayers.

Once, he was sailing from England to Boston to speak at a Christian conference. The ship stopped in the North Atlantic because of thick fog. The captain announced the ship would be late reaching Boston so Mueller spoke to the captain. He told him he believed it was God’s will

for him to speak at the conference and he couldn't be late. The captain was a Christian who knew George Mueller, and he respectfully told him he didn't understand the operation or navigation of the ship and it was impossible for them to proceed in such thick fog.

Mueller asked the captain to join in prayer for God to lift the fog. The captain explained all reports indicated the fog would last for several days, but he would be willing to pray with Mueller. They went below deck and Mueller prayed a simple prayer asking God to remove the fog so he could make his speaking engagement. After his prayer, the captain asked him if he would like for him to pray as well. Mueller said, "No captain, you don't need to pray for two reasons. First, I don't think you really believe God will lift the fog, and second, I believe that He already has!" Sure enough, when the captain returned to the bridge, the fog was lifting and they arrived in Boston in time for Mueller's conference.

God answers prayer. So pray to the Father in the name of Jesus, with a forgiving heart. Pray in faith according to God's will and you can have CONFIDENCE that God will answer your prayers.