

Whatever We Ask

Confidence In Prayer

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Jesus Christ makes it clear that prayer is absolutely essential to the spiritual success of our lives. He said, 'that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.' We are certainly in a time in history where it is easy to lose heart. The suggestion being that, if we do not pray, we will become discouraged. Jesus Himself spent a lot of time in prayer, 'rising up a great while before day,' for prayer.

If Jesus, who was perfect, needed to pray to have an intimate relationship with God, then certainly we, who occasionally sin, need more so to pray often. But, there may be times when we go to God in prayer without the confidence we should have, because our heart condemns us.

I John 3:19-23 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

Here, the apostle John continues with his theme that loving one another is a proof that we are of the truth. It is a confirmation that the truth of God is really in us and is abiding in us.

But, this actual love of the brethren is also of tremendous importance in a very practical sense, and that is from the perspective of our own experience, and especially with respect to our experiencing fellowship with God in prayer.

John's point here is that we must be perfectly certain in our minds as to the effect that prayer and access to God has on our loving one another. There are certain laws in our spiritual lives that require that sooner or later the truth will manifest itself. The truth must come out. Sooner or later, our sins will find us out.

However long we may go on, apparently living a double life of sorts; no matter how good we are at conforming intellectually to a system of doctrines, but failing in practice; sooner or later we will be exposed or revealed for our true commitment, or lack thereof.

We cannot go on being deceitful forever, because a situation will arise, especially in this matter of prayer, when we find ourselves missing out on true fellowship with God; that is by neglecting prayer. The apostle John is dealing with the place of prayer in the life of a Christian in this world.

If we do not pray we will become discouraged, and I think that everyone in this room can attest

to that fact. The thing that keeps us going in our Christian life is prayer. Communion and fellowship with God is absolutely essential. In fact, the Christian life is impossible without it. This is emphasized throughout the Bible.

Look at the Psalms, for example. How often does the psalmist tell us that his friends had let him down, his enemies were attacking him, and people he had relied upon most of all had forsaken him, but he thanks God that the door is still open, and that he still had that connection with God through prayer.

Psalms 27:10 When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.

The point there is that anyone can forsake a person and that happens, but God is always there.

As we read about the men and women of God in their trouble, we see that the one thing that keeps them going is their access to God in prayer.

We find it in the Old Testament, and in the same way we see it in the New Testament. We see it in Jesus Himself; in the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane, He was praying to God.

Matthew 26:36-43 Then Jesus came with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said unto them, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death; stay here and watch with Me." And He went a little farther, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said unto Peter, "What, could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, a second time He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me, unless I drink it, Your will be done." And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples, and said to them, Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Here we see the example, humanly, of how hard it is to stay awake and alert, and if you are like me occasionally after a long day you find it hard to stay awake when you are praying before you go to bed.

Here He was saying that the disciples should have been able stay awake with Him during such stress and in need of such comfort, yet they still fell asleep. He expresses to them the importance of prayer, and shows them that they need to be intimate with their relationship with

God in prayer.

Hebrews 5:7 is a comment on Jesus' prayer in the Garden and shows that He was very distraught during this prayer before His crucifixion. There are times also when we become distraught as well. Jesus of course was facing an awful death and beating, but at the same time we also fear certain things that happen in our lives.

Hebrews 5:7 Who [Christ], in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear.

There was fear in Jesus Christ, He feared His Father, but there also was an element of fear in what He was about to face, humanly.

Barnes Notes has this to say about the word "cries" here:

This word does not mean "weeping," as the word "crying" does familiarly with us. It rather means an outcry, the voice of wailing and lamentation. It is the cry for help of one who is deeply distressed, or in danger; and refers here to the "earnest petition" of the Savior when in the agony of Gethsemane or when on the cross. It is the "intensity of the voice" which is referred to when it is raised by an agony of suffering.

We see there that Jesus was in great agony, and He was expressing it to His Father in heaven

Read the histories of God's people down through the ages, and you will find that this is something that stands out in a clearly identifiable way. They were conscious of their dependence on God, and they relied on access to Him in prayer.

So, what is prayer? What exactly are we doing when we pray? Often we rush into and out of prayer without realizing what we are doing. We are far too easy to talk about "saying our prayers." I have been guilty of that with our children, saying, "Did you say your prayers?" But, after doing some research I find that that is not a good way to refer to it. We do not 'say a prayer.' There is nothing automatic about it; other than we probably have a set time in the morning and evening to pray.

For most people, one of the most difficult things to do is to pray. The intention of prayer is not some process to make us feel better; although it usually does. Prayer is not just a repetition of certain phrases. In the world, children are encouraged to memorize certain prayers that they repeat over and over again.

Please turn back to I John 3:19. There may be no better way of describing prayer than the last two words in verse 19:

I John 3:19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

That is prayer; prayer is coming before Him. Granted, in a sense, all that we do, we do in the presence of God. We live, and move, and have our being under His eye. But prayer is something more special than that.

Prayer is having a special audience and going directly to Him—"before Him." Prayer is something in which we turn our backs on everything else, and for the time being, we find ourselves face to face with God alone.

That is the first thing we have to realize when we pray—that we are one-on-one in conversation with God. It is essential that we realize that we are 'before Him.' The saints have always talked a great deal about this.

That is what is hard; other thoughts keep interfering, and our imaginations will wander anywhere and everywhere. Certain ideas, desires, and needs will intrude, but all that must be resisted and refused. We have to start by realizing that we are actually coming before the presence of the living God—Before Him, and our intercessor Jesus Christ is there making intercession for us!

It is when we come there before Him that we begin to realize the importance of what we are doing with the rest of our lives and with the rest of our time. We begin to see the relevance of brotherly love. So always and at all times, whether alone or together at Sabbath services—that is something of great importance. Realizing God's presence causes us to remember that we are fellowshiping with Him, and that our fellowshiping with each other should be of the highest quality and sincerity.

If that is the general idea of what is meant by prayer; what is essential to true prayer?

It is essential to true prayer that we have freedom from a sense of condemnation.

Earlier in I John 3: 20-21 we read, "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God."

If our heart is condemning us, or if our heart is against us, our prayers will be greatly hindered. So we need a deliverance, a freedom from a sense of condemnation, from a guilty conscience that prevents us from going to God confidently in prayer. Probably everyone in this room at one time or another has gone before God in prayer feeling too guilty, or too unworthy to ask for His aid.

There may be nothing that tests us as much as being in the situation or the attitude of prayer. When we are truly praying before Him we realize what we are. This is a much more thorough test than a conversation or discussion with another human being.

We can be tested by talking to people about spiritual things, or as we discuss them together; even preaching a sermonette or sermon is a means of testing. These things do test us, but in a sense, they do not test us in the same way that prayer does.

Prayer is a more thorough test than thought or meditation. These things do test us, and we should spend time thinking and meditating; and from there we go on to self-examination, but

prayer tests us in a way that even self-examination does not.

Self-examination can be a very painful process as we look at the New Testament description of the Christian, and examine ourselves in the light of the Word of God. But it may be that nothing makes us see ourselves as we are—as being there in prayer before the supreme power of the universe, and how small we feel. We know in Scripture that individuals have come before God and felt His presence in a great way and they just wanted to flatten themselves out flat on their faces for fear of the greatness of God compared to them as a human being.

When we are in this attitude of prayer, we are no longer in control. The fact that we get on our knees in prayer is an act of submission. So immediately we see the value of kneeling. We are there submitting ourselves, we are ignoring ourselves, that is if we are genuinely there in sincerity and truth.

On the other hand, while we are talking with other human beings, we are in control to a certain extent, and while we are discussing something we are in control—that is, the person doing the talking. Someone may be examining us, but we as the speaker are still able to defend ourselves. When we are involved in thought and meditation, we are still in control.

But, when we get on our knees in prayer, then, in a sense, we are doing nothing, we are submitting ourselves, and we are ignoring ourselves before Him. He is the One in control; He is doing everything. And that is why prayer tests us in a way that nothing else can, because we are there humbly before Him.

When we shut the door and are alone in our room, or wherever it is, and we kneel down and we realize that we are before Him—it is humbling to submit. Something within us begins to speak; it is what the apostle John calls the 'heart.' It is the conscience, but it is something more than the conscience. The conscience begins to act and to speak.

We remember things that we have done and said. We had forgotten them, but back they come. The angry expression; the negative thought; the harsh criticism. As we are alone with God, these things—the things we failed to do, the broken promise and so on—come back and they condemn.

And this guilty feeling says, 'Who am I to come into the presence of God?' We are made conscious of our unworthiness and our failure; our hearts condemn us. They bring up all these things against us, and there we say, 'What right have I to ask God anything—what right have I to submit my requests to God?'

I John 3: 20 again, "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

Earlier in this chapter, John emphasizes brotherly love, as he does throughout this epistle.

I John 3:10-11 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest, whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

We are to come before God and not be condemning ourselves and we must love one another

We also find that throughout this epistle its whole purpose is to search us and to make us examine ourselves and to warn us against assuming that all is well when it is not. Its purpose is to warn; and not only that, we are not to silence the voice of conscience. That is a conscience that has been guided by God and that is obedient to God.

The way we are to reassure our heart when it does condemn us is by loving the brethren in deed and in truth and not merely in word and in thought. John says if we do that, we will be able to reassure our heart.

So when we pray—here we are on our knees in prayer. Lives are being searched and examined as by some invisible searchlight, almost like an X-ray searching us. The eye of God is on us; all these things are brought to the surface, and our hearts are condemning us.

While our heart condemns us, we have a major hindrance to prayer. We put ourselves in the position of having to convince and assure ourselves that we have this access to God. Our hearts are there reminding us of all these things, and condemning us, and so it is a hindrance.

The apostle John tells us in verse 22, that the way to approach God humbly in prayer is to, 'keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.' And in verse 23, He adds, 'that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another.'

So all of these things should be done before we get down on our knees in prayer, so that we can come before God without our hearts condemning us. If we do these things continually, we are assured of access to God in prayer; we are able to confidently come 'before Him.' It is always that sense of coming before Him.

I John 3:21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

There have been seemingly very dedicated members in God's church who are there to help everyone at all times, they may even shed tears over an emotional sermon and then continue in their sinful, hypocritical life. Many of us saw that in our previous church affiliation.

There is a terrible danger here; men and women may make intellectual assent to truth and then fail, but John's test makes it possible. If we are truly loving the brethren, that is not something intellectual, it is something genuine, and something that God is pleased with.

John puts forth a more thorough test, the test not only of experience, but of experience proving itself in practice—not just in public, but especially in the privacy of our own home as well. To love the brethren openly and visibly is not enough, it has to be something permanent that is internally in there that we do naturally, according to God's promises, His blessings, and His grace.

Being in a state where our heart does not condemn us is not enough of and by itself, with regard to prayer.

Again, I John 3:21, 'Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.'

When our hearts condemn us we are in a negative state, because while we are unhappy about ourselves and our whole position we cannot pray with confidence, the sense of condemnation holds us down, and we have a hard time taking our requests to God.

Everyone has suddenly found himself in a crisis—maybe we were ill, maybe someone dear to us is ill, or we may be confronted by some critical situation because of something that has happened to us, and we are at the end of our rope.

So we decide to pray to God; and we get on our knees, and the moment we do—a thought comes that we are not worthy to pray; we have forgotten God, we only turn to God when we are in trouble. So we find that we have no confidence in our prayer; uncertainty has crept in.

That is why John tells us that we cannot pray properly and we cannot have fellowship unless we have confidence. Confidence is absolutely essential to genuine prayer. Scripture expresses this thought often, by using the word "boldness" in connection with prayer.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

So that is how we are to go before God.

Hebrews 10:19, 22 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

This is the boldness that we have with respect to Him. So we never have to be uncertain about going to Him in prayer.

Consider what Paul says:

Ephesians 3:12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

That is the way to pray; if our requests are to be of any value, we must have boldness and assurance and confidence. And this has to do with our relationship and God's work through Jesus Christ.

In his first epistle, the apostle John was concerned about the condition and the happiness and the welfare of the people of God; he was especially concerned about genuine prayer.

I John 5:14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hear us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we asked of Him.

We see there that it is critical that we ask according to God's will. So, it is certainly appropriate to ask God why He has not answered.

With regard to prayer, God gives us a view of His infinite authority and kindness. It is His way of bringing us into, and giving us, a share in the work and in the glory of God.

In Paul's epistle to the Philippians, he explicitly tells them that God is doing this 'through your prayer,' so that they can come in for a share of the glory and rejoicing. Paul, who knew the mind and will of God and was so pleased to be in the hands of God, still pleaded with the Philippians to pray for him and for his release from prison. He knew that the prayer of the brethren had a major impact on how God handled his own life.

This is God's way of doing things. He has decided to order and maintain the creation through various laws that He has put into nature; so He has decided to work in the spiritual realm through prayer. God could maintain the universe without the laws of nature, but He does not choose to do it that way.

This is cause and effect; instead of doing things directly, He does them indirectly. And prayer is involved in some way in that. It is for us to observe the lives of the faithful of God and to see that prayer was the very breath of their life. If we are to walk as Christ walked, then we must spend quite a bit of time in prayer.

In light of these two verses in I John 5, we see some obvious principles regarding prayer.

The first is that if we want to have real confidence in prayer, then, we must know that we are accepted by God. If we have any doubts as to whether we are accepted by God, then our prayer will be ineffective. Because it is the prayer of faith that will save the sick, not the prayer of doubt. So we must have confidence.

How can we pray about anything if we are doubtful as to whether God is there and whether He is listening to us and is prepared to accept us?

If we are God's children, we have the ear of God. We can be confident that He is always ready to listen to us. This was put very clearly by the blind man who was healed by Jesus Christ.

After he had been healed, the Jews questioned him as to who had done this, almost trying to prove to him that it could not have happened like that, because, they said, 'This man is a sinner.' So he replied, 'Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him' (John 9:31).

The blind man replied that 'God has heard this man [Jesus]; otherwise, I would not have been healed. So he cannot be a sinner because God does not hear sinners.' God does not do what sinners ask of Him; God's ear is not open to them.

If we are always ready to listen to Him, and do what He says, then we know that God is always ready to listen to us. God is our Father and He loves us with an everlasting love. Each single hair of our head is numbered; He is very concerned about us.

We must not only know that we ourselves are accepted—we must also know that our prayers are accepted.

I John 5:14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him: 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 the petitions that we have desired of Him.

This is a very important principle regarding prayer—we must ask according to His will. This means that we have to know His will, which He spells out in His inspired written Word revealed to us by His Son Jesus Christ, the Word.

We know God cannot lie and that He promises to fulfill the desire of those who fear Him.

What are the conditions that must be observed before we can be confident and assured that our prayers are accepted by God?

The first condition is that our motive in praying must be a correct and true one. We should always ask for God's blessing so that we will be better able to serve others, not just for our own selfish satisfaction, and desires, and benefit but primarily for the benefit of others.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

If we are not careful our prayers can be selfishly motivated; we can want a blessing for ourselves or for our family—rather than for the glory of God. When we are troubled because our prayers are not answered—we have to search our heart. Why are we praying? Why do we want this specific prayer answered? Our motive must be right, and clean, and pure.

Are you concerned that your heart is spiritually clean? Then, offer David's prayer:

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Pray this sincerely and with humility and with every true intention of overcoming—and He will answer you. And, the blood of Christ will cleanse you from all sin and all unrighteousness.

God's way is the way of giving—of being concerned about the interests of others as we are about our own. God will act on the prayers we make on behalf of other people's needs. If we need God to bless us in some way, we should think of how we can turn the blessing not only to our good but to the good of others. That is why it is so important that if we receive blessings, that we pass some of that on to others whenever we can.

The second condition is that we must believe and have faith.

Jesus said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

My question to you is, "What is your mountain?"

There is tremendous power in believing prayer—it produces astounding answers that cannot be produced or explained by physical means alone. If our prayers are to be answered, we must believe that God will answer them.

Matthew 21: 22, In Jesus' own words—"And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

If we waver in faith, God is not obliged to answer. James tells us that without faith our prayers will not be answered.

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting; for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

We have to examine ourselves, not condemn ourselves, when we are on our knees in prayer. We must be free and in the right frame of mind when we beseech God.

Do we really believe, or is it a desperate cry in the dark?

If you lack faith, do what the concerned father did when he asked Jesus to heal his demon-possessed son. When Jesus asked him whether he believed, he cried out, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!" We have to ask God to give us strong, unwavering, mountain-moving faith!

The third condition is that we must abide in Christ and be obedient to God.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Christ cannot abide in someone who is a habitual and flagrant sinner. But millions today expect God to intervene in their lives and help them, even though they refuse to keep God's laws, and often they claim that God's laws have been done away, as we hear so often in mainstream Christianity.

If we are not obeying some point of God's law even though God has shown us that He wants us to, then listen to what Isaiah tells us:

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
and your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

Those are the words to those that are flagrant sinners.

You remember what John said earlier:

I John 3:22 And whatever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

We have no right to expect our prayers to be received and answered if we are living in known sin, or if we are doing anything that we know to be contrary to the will of God. We have to keep His commandments; we have to abide in Him, and His words must be abiding in us.

The fourth condition is that our prayers must be in the name of Jesus Christ.

Jesus gave His followers the privilege of praying to God the Father in Jesus' own name.

The apostle John records Jesus' promises numerous times in his gospel account:

John 16:23 And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you.

To ask in Jesus' name means that we ask as one who is dedicated to the same purposes that Jesus Himself was dedicated to; as one who is allowing Jesus Christ continually to work through us; as one who is striving to live the same way of life Jesus lived.

God the Father respects the name of His Son. There is no other name under heaven by which we may be saved. When a true follower of Jesus Christ makes a request to God in the name of Jesus Christ, God takes notice and will respond.

John 14:13 And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you.

So we see there that it is not only to be in His name, but that we are to go and bear fruit. We are to have good works, because faith without works is dead.

There is no value in prayer unless we realize the importance of the life and death of Jesus Christ in our lives. There is no value in prayer unless it is given in the name of Jesus Christ.

If we want the right kind of fellowship with God in prayer, we have to realize that we are before Him—we are in His presence. When Christ gave His life for us, the veil of the Temple was torn vertically and completely. This symbolizes that access to the Father was completely open to Him.

Now we have this same access to the Father through Jesus Christ. We appear 'before Him' at His throne when we approach Him in prayer. We have intimate access to the Sovereign King of the whole universe. This access to His power and authority does not mean that our prayer itself has any power, but that we have access to the King who has the power.

We have to be careful what we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, or we may be sorry if it is not the best thing for us and others. God wants us to pray for our daily needs, but not for

extravagant material possessions or for things that are selfish in nature. He wants us to pray that His will be done, and that He be glorified and that we pray for others.

The fifth condition is that our prayers must be asked according to God's promises.

If we are fulfilling the other conditions for answered prayer, we can go boldly (not arrogantly) before God's throne in prayer, and confidently claim His promise.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Barnes Notes makes this comment, about coming boldly to the throne of grace:

God is seated on a throne of mercy. The great High Priest of the Christian calling, having shed his own blood to make expiation, is represented as approaching God and pleading for the pardon of people. To a God willing to show mercy He comes with the merits of a sacrifice sufficient for all, and pleads for their salvation. We may, therefore, come with boldness and look for pardon. We come not depending on our own merits, but we come where a sufficient sacrifice has been offered for human guilt; and where we are assured that God is merciful. We may, therefore, come without hesitancy, or trembling, and ask for all the mercy that we need.

I thought that he said that well. That is why I used his words exactly.

The sixth condition is that our prayers must be persistent and fervent.

While God promises to answer faithful prayers, He reserves to Himself the decision as to how and when He will answer.

Sometimes, He may not answer immediately, because He wants to make sure we are really committed to what we are asking Him for. He wants to know how seriously we want Him to act.

Jesus illustrated the need to be persistent when He gave the Parable of the Persistent Widow. This widow (as you recall) ceaselessly petitioned a certain judge for justice, until the judge was forced to act.

In Luke 18:1 the account of The Parable of the Persistent Widow, Jesus spoke a parable to His disciples, "that men always ought to pray and not lose heart," So, obviously there is a lot of effort that needs to be done, and we have to be persistent and fervent.

God, of course, is not an unjust judge who does not want to act on behalf of His people. He wants to respond and help. He wants us to prosper in all things and be in good health. God promises:

Jeremiah 29:13 And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

So, there is a qualification to answered prayer, we must seek Him with all our heart, and that takes a great deal of effort. Now that is not to say that we cannot send up a prayer to God as we are walking somewhere, or as we come across something in our work where we need help. We can certainly ask for God's help at that time. What I am talking about here is the earth-moving types of prayers that we do more. Some may be when we rise from being asleep, or before we go to bed, or when we set aside a time when we go and kneel before Him.

True hope is based on the revealed Word of God, not on philosophy or the traditions of men. God has given us a gracious promise to deliver us, and He keeps His promise. He makes His plans that ultimately bring hope and peace for us. So, there is no need to be afraid or discouraged.

We have the responsibility to seek God and pray and ask Him to fulfill His promises, because the written Word of God and prayer go together. The purpose of chastening is so we will seek God, confess our sins, and draw near to Him.

The seventh condition is that our prayers must be thankful.

One of the most common sins in this society is ingratitude. We should always give God thanks for all He has already done for us and, in advance, for future opportunities to present Him with various requests.

The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians, "In everything give thanks." Thank God for listening to you. Thank Him ahead of time for answering, because you know, that if you have prayed according to His will through faith, that He will respond. It is guaranteed, it is a promise that He gives us.

And especially when God has answered, be sure to thank Him for being a reliable, generous, and loving Father who wants to help you with every problem and see you succeed now and enter His coming Kingdom.

Psalm 100: 4-5 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise! Be thankful to Him, and bless His name! For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endures to all generations.

This is something that we can always be thankful for in prayer.

To pray with assurance, we have to not only know that we are accepted, and that our prayers are accepted, but we have to believe, and we have confidence that our requests are granted if we observe the conditions we have just viewed.

Mark 11:24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

Many in mainstream Christianity have a superstitious belief in this and believe that their own

power in believing is a superstitious way that they will receive what they are asking.

Mark 11: 24 must be understood considering Romans 8:

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

So, if we look at those two passages together, Mark 11:24 in the light of Romans 8:26, we find that when we feel compelled to pray, if we believe that we have received that from God through the Holy Spirit, we can be confident that we will have our request granted.

So often we do not know what we should pray for as we ought. But what happens? 'The Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' It is something created in us by the Spirit of God, and the Spirit knows and is the mind of God. So when we do not know quite how to ask for something or even quite know what we need to ask for, the Spirit in us, Jesus Christ in us, intercedes for us and asks God for what He knows that we need. We have to be in the right attitude and we have to follow the conditions that we went through earlier.

When we believe that our prayer comes to us from the Spirit of God, we can be sure that an answer to our prayer will also be given by God. If we are submissive and obedient to God, and if our one concern is to please Him, as we pray we feel and know that this petition has come to us from God, and we pray with confidence, we pray with assurance.

The actual answer, in practice, may not come for weeks, or for years. But we know that God has heard us and is intervening, and that He will handle it at the proper time.

There are some things that are absolutely and clearly God's will, which makes it easier for us to pray with confidence and assurance. We can pray that all the precepts and all the promises with respect to ourselves may be fulfilled in us.

It is God's will that we may know His love; ask Him to reveal His love to us by the Holy Spirit, and we can be certain He will do so. And the same with all the various promises that are contained in Scripture.

Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Go through your Bible and make a list of the promises of God to you; then take them to God, use them in His presence, plead them, and you can be sure that you have your petition. You already have it, and in His own time and way, God will give you a full realization of it, and a full enjoyment of it.

John put it in terms of assuring our hearts before God. And now, he shows us that in addition to

our confidence is our right of access. We have to have assurance with regard to our requests.

The basis of assurance should never be our own biased experience, because we can waver with fear and doubt. True assurance is founded on the Word of God alone—the Holy Spirit bearing witness to our spirits that the Word of God is true and reliable.

Romans 8:26-30 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. For He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

We have been forgiven by God in Christ and are now free to forgive others, to love as we have first been loved by God.

Assurance is not just a "theological" concept but a practical matter. As long as we are doubtful about our own standing before God, we are defensive and self-centered. But when fully assured of God's salvation, we can begin to walk in the footsteps of Christ.

I John 4:17-19 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

Are you concerned that you do not love as much as you should? Tell God about it, ask Him to shed His love abroad in your heart, and He will do it.

If we are doubtful or hesitant and lacking assurance in our request, we will not receive a positive response to our request. Listen to what the psalmist reveals:

Psalms 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

If we go to God with a double mind, holding on to our sin and knowing that we are living a wrong life habitually and intentionally, we will not have confidence in our prayers.

Are you concerned about some sin that plagues you? It is the will of God that we should be delivered from sin—so pray for it.

John recorded Jesus' answer to this in his gospel account in John 15:

John 15:7, 16 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it will be done for you. . . .You did not choose Me, but I have chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you.

In his epistle, John puts it like this, 'Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we [go on] keeping His commandments and we [go on] doing those things that are pleasing in His sight.'

He does not mean that as long as we live a good life, anything we ask God in prayer we are guaranteed to receive.

He means that if we are keeping the commandments; if we are really doing His will; if we love God and our neighbors as ourselves; if we really are living God's way of life, then we can be certain that our lives are directed by God through the Holy Spirit, and therefore we know that our requests are according to the will of God and are acceptable and pleasing to Him. If our requests are produced by the Holy Spirit, we can be certain that they will be answered.

But, if we are not living God's way of life, then our requests are probably arising from the flesh, from our own human nature, and we should not be surprised and disappointed if our requests are not answered and granted to us.

We see the example of prayer perfectly done by Jesus Christ Himself. He obeyed God's commandments perfectly, and He received the Holy Spirit without measure. He was led and guided by the Spirit. Jesus prayed continuously, and at times all night long.

He had put aside His own eternal glory, and He came to live as man. Then He received the Spirit and was guided and led by the Spirit and was able to live this life of prayer.

Luke 22: 42, records how He prayed, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.'

His ultimate object and desire was to do the will of His Father, and as long as that is our ultimate will and desire, as long as we are concerned about that, and are submitting to the leading of the Spirit, our requests will be granted. God answered Him and granted His requests, and the nearer we are to Him, in the same way we can be certain that our requests will be granted. "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

These are the things that are necessary; we reassure our heart, we get rid of condemnation, we are confident as a child of God, and above all we have the assurance that is given by the Holy Spirit indwelling in us and by Christ's life in our life and in our requests.

We get down on our knees, and we know that we speak to our Father, the Father of our Savior Jesus Christ, the One who loved us so much as to send His Son to the death of the stake for us. We go to Him knowing that; and then, knowing that our prayers are according to His will, we pray with confidence.

We believe that we have the answer, and we rise up calm, quiet, and rejoicing, and go on our way, leaving it to Him to grant us the precise performance of the petition or request in practice, but being sure that He has not only heard us, but that He has even answered us.

What could be a more wondrous thing than this, to any human being? We come before Him, we have audience with the Sovereign King, and we speak to the living God.

May God grant us this assurance, this boldness in prayer so that whatever our condition, we may take it to God in prayer and do so confidently.