

Praying with Boldness
Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 5:14-15

Good afternoon! We're on the second part of our series on prayer called "Plugged In". Last week, we looked at how to connect with God. We learned from the Bible that when praying, a person should be still, be simple, be sincere, and lastly, be sure that God will answer prayers. Today, I'm going to elaborate more on the last part, how to be sure that God will answer prayers. And that's why I've entitled this message, "Praying with Boldness".

If there's anyone since the Apostle John or Paul who has prayed with boldness, that would be Martin Luther, the great Christian leader who was at the forefront of the Protestant Reformation. When did the Reformation begin? On October 31, 1517. That's why a few days from now, while the world celebrates Halloween, Christians will celebrate the start of the Great Reformation 502 years ago. On that day, Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. It was a momentous event because this started the wheels of changes that occurred in Christian doctrine especially as it relates to our salvation. The Reformation, as you know, emphasized that we are saved because of the grace of God through faith in Christ alone.

Luther faced tremendous challenges as he led the Reformation. He was under intense pressure from the Catholic Church and innumerable critics. But from where did he derive his strength? From God through prayer. This is what he said, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." He also said, "Pray, and let God worry."

Let's look at two verses: **Hebrew 4:16; 1 John 5:14-15**

Many versions of the Bible use “confidence”, while others use “boldness”. Like in the KJV, it says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace”. The Greek word used in the New Testament can mean both.

Now, I’m sure everyone of you will agree that prayer is a natural thing. Because given enough stress, given the right circumstances, it will come out. When you are going through a difficult time, somehow you will blurt out, “God, help me.” That is why it is said, "There are no atheists in fox holes." Under the pressure of danger there is a deep-seated desire in our soul to cry out to God for help. I remember reading of a sea captain who described the violence of a storm by saying, "God heard from plenty of strangers that night."

Perhaps there is no aspect of Christian faith that is so puzzling to many as that of unanswered prayer. Prayer is a mysterious thing to many, and, because they do not understand it, they make experiments in the realm of prayer. But because they don’t pray the right way, their prayers have gone unanswered. They conclude then that prayer doesn’t work and God himself doesn’t work.

Prayer is a simple thing. Everyone can pray. Even children can pray, and pray very successfully, very effectively. Yet understanding the nature of prayer is quite complex and requires some considerable knowledge before prayers are answered regularly.

As I’ve mentioned, for many Christians prayer is a venture, an experiment. There is nothing very certain about it. We often pray because we do not know what else to do. Who of us has not at one time or another said, "Well, things have gotten so bad there's nothing else to do but pray," as though that were the final and last resort. But you do not see that attitude in the Apostle John. What is his reaction to this matter of prayer? "This is the confidence which we have in approaching God," he says, "that if we ask anything according to his will, we know he hears us." There is a great and ringing note of certainty there. Prayer is not an experiment,

prayer is a certainty with John, a sure thing. He knows it works, and he knows how it works. That's why we can boldly come to God in prayer. We can be confident.

Now you cannot read the New Testament without realizing that God delights in bold praying, and in bold people. Read the book of Hebrews and you'll see how many times that word appears. We already saw that in the verse we read earlier. And again, in Hebrews 10:19, it says "we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way..." (Hebrews 10:19 CSB). This is what ought to characterize prayer. It should be bold, confident, certain.

The boldness that is mentioned here is not something that means being arrogant or smug and feeling like you have God under your control. Unfortunately, that's the impression you get from some ill-advised preachers or teachers who say that you just name it and then you can claim it. No, not that type of prayer if that's even a prayer at all. Praying boldly means you have no hesitation at all to come to the presence of God because you know in your heart that he is real and personal and will hear your prayer and will respond. It's like coming to your mom or dad who you know will listen to you and speak to you.

This afternoon I'd like to share with you a few things why you can come to God boldly in prayer. And why God will answer your bold prayers. First of all,

1. There is Power in Prayer

No one can really explain how prayer works. But one thing is sure. It works. The Bible is clear that it is our lifeline to God. The Bible is clear too that our prayers reach heaven and enters the throne of God. Another version of the Bible puts Hebrews 4:16 like this, "So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help." (CEV)

We will find help. Help from God through prayer. Because prayer works, even the secular world has taken notice of the power of prayer. Scientists, for

example, have been studying prayer's role in healing people who are sick. In general, these studies have suggested that people who are religious seem to heal faster or cope with illness more effectively than do the non-devout. In fact, a study was conducted in 1988 about intercessory prayer at San Francisco General Hospital. That study, one of the only published studies of its kind, found that prayer was beneficial because patients who were prayed for and didn't even know they were being prayed for were able to go home from the hospital sooner than those who weren't prayed for.

Now to have a sense of where prayer fits into the whole picture we need to get a heavenly perspective on just how powerful prayer really is. There was a time when a missionary named Irene Webster-Smith was working in Tokyo. This was in the early years after World War II. She was working in Tokyo and she was working with Interservice Fellowship, teaching Japanese college students about Christ. They needed a center for the student work in the city, and so she went and talked to a Japanese woman about a piece of property there in Tokyo and the woman said, "I'm sorry. It's not for sale anymore. Someone has already agreed to buy it." And so Irene said to her, "Well, in case it falls through, please let me know." The woman said, "It's not going to happen because we already have an agreement."

A day or two later the woman contacted Irene and said, "The deal fell through; so I am offering it to you, do you have the money for it?" At which point, Irene said, "No, I don't. I don't have a penny of it, but I serve a God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. I will pray about it. Would you be willing to take \$3,000 a month for the next six months for us to pay?" And the woman said yes she would.

So, on the last Friday of every month, Irene was supposed to make a deposit in the bank and it was to be transferred to the woman's account. And she made that

payment, holding on to the verse from the Book of Philippians, the fourth chapter that says, "Don't be anxious about anything but through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your request known to God" and so she did, and so she made the payments month after month. But there came one month that that final Friday came, and she did not have the money. On that day, the bank called her saying, "We are doing an audit and doing some inventory in the bank. We are not taking any new transactions today. Could you wait and do your deposit on Monday?"

On that weekend she spoke to a bunch of American GI's there in Japan and she raised \$3,000 and the next day went to the bank to make the final payment. When it was all over, and she had paid for it all and the property was hers, she talked to the woman who owned the property and the woman said to her, "When you said that you didn't have the money, but that God would give it to you, I made the decision to let you do that because I have been a Shinto believer my whole life, and I have made countless prayers and none of them have been answered. I have lost my husband and my sons to the war and I made a decision at that point that if your God would answer this kind of prayer, then I would follow that God." And so at that point, Irene Webster-Smith led this Japanese woman to know Jesus Christ.

Prayer is powerful. That's why you should not hesitate in coming to God in prayer. The second thing we must understand is that

2. God answers prayers according to his will.

The power of prayer is not the result of the person praying. Rather, the power resides in God who is being prayed to. As our verse says, and I'm now quoting from the NASB, 1 John 5:14-15 (NASB) tells us, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." No matter the person praying, the

passion behind the prayer, or the purpose of the prayer - God answers prayers that are in agreement with His will. His answers are not always yes, but are always in our best interests.

This kind of certainty arises from the knowledge of two fundamental principles of prayer, which John gives us here: the certainty of hearing, and the certainty of having. Notice the words. "If we ask anything according to his will, He hears us." Perhaps the major reason for most of the unanswered prayers of the world is they are not according to God's will, and therefore they are not heard. John makes it explicitly clear that a prayer that is according to God's will is always heard. Thus, at one stroke he demolishes all those concepts of prayer which imply that prayer is a means of getting God to do our will. Prayer is never that.

You see, if we pray outside the will of God there is no assurance at all that our prayers are heard, and certainly they will not be granted. Sometimes our prayers are not according to the will of God because our motives are wrong. Sometimes we pray, as James says, "amiss, in order to consume it upon our own lusts," (James 4:3b KJV). We want what we want, not what God wants.

I came across a wedding prayer that illustrates how subtly this can be done. This is a girl praying on her wedding day.

"Dear God. I can hardly believe that this is my wedding day. I know I haven't been able to spend much time with You lately, with all the rush of getting ready for today, and I'm sorry. I guess, too, that I feel a little guilty when I try to pray about all this, since Larry still isn't a Christian. But oh, Father, I love him so much, what else can I do? I just couldn't give him up. Oh, You must save him, some way, somehow.

You know how much I've prayed for him, and the way we've discussed the gospel together. I've tried not to appear too religious, I know, but that's because I

didn't want to scare him off. Yet he isn't antagonistic and I can't understand why he hasn't responded. Oh, if he only were a Christian.

Dear Father, please bless our marriage. I don't want to disobey You, but I do love him and I want to be his wife, so please be with us and please don't spoil my wedding day."

That sounds like a sincere, earnest prayer, does it not? But if it is stripped of its fine, pious language, what it is really saying is something like this:

"Dear Father, I don't want to disobey You, but I must have my own way at all costs. For I love what You do not love, and I want what You do not want. So please be a good God and deny Yourself, and move off Your throne, and let me take over. If You don't like this, then all I ask is that You bite Your lip and say or do nothing that will spoil my plans, and let me enjoy myself."

Folks, we cannot usurp the throne of God. He is God and we are not.

But how do you align yourself with God's will? By delighting yourself in God. The Psalmist says, "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4) To delight in the Lord is to find your happiness and contentment in him. Many delight in wealth, status, material possessions, and other temporary things of this world, but they are never satisfied. They never truly get what they want, hence the reason they are always wanting more. This is the lesson King Solomon learned in his pursuit of earthly treasure: "Everything is meaningless!" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). On the other hand, delighting in the Lord is true treasure indeed: "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).

When you delight in the Lord you get so close to him that you're able to know what he wants for your life. What he wants for your life becomes the desires of your heart and you'll find out that those are the things you actually pray for. So, why wouldn't God answer your prayer if those are things he exactly wants you to have?

Delighting yourself in the Lord means to make him your priority in life. Make him your #1. As Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." God will bless your life in ways unimaginable if you just make him first in your life.

Folks, we can pray with confidence or boldness because there is power in prayer, God answer prayers according to his will, and

3. God grants our request when we need it, not when we want it .

The reason why some people give up on prayer is because they can't wait for the answer. They're not confident in God's faithfulness. Hebrews 4:16 says God will surely answer but note, "in our time of need" not when we want it. You see, God's ways are always better and usually bigger when He answers. God says in Isaiah 55:9, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." The reason God often delays an answer to prayer is so He can answer in a way bigger than you thought originally.

Let God answer in His own time and you let God answer in His own way. If God had answered some of my prayers exactly as I'd asked them, I would have gotten shortchanged. His answer was much greater than what I asked for.

God says, "Let me answer in My time and My way." You're praying about a job. You want to get this job change and all of a sudden it falls through. Don't sweat it! God's got a better idea. You're praying about a situation. All of a sudden, it doesn't work out. Don't worry about it. God's got Plan B. Actually it is Plan A - - yours was Plan B! Let God answer in His time and His way.

Sometimes the worst thing in the world for us is to get our requests answered. Remember the prodigal son. What did he say? "Give me my inheritance!" He got it and it ruined him.

Let me illustrate this further by citing the Old Testament story of Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob. Joseph was hated by his brothers because as a teenager he was arrogant but at the same time he was the favorite of their father.

One day, they plotted to kill him but eventually they decided to sell him to merchants who in turn sold him as a slave in Egypt. He ends up as a servant of Potiphar, a ranking official in Pharaohs' government. Joseph served his master well for quite some time. However, one day, when his master was gone, his master's wife made advances on him but he ran away. The wife told Potiphar that Joseph tried to take advantage of her and Potiphar had him thrown in jail.

I'm sure Joseph prayed to God. I'm sure he really prayed hard. I mean, if you were in prison like that and you were innocent, wouldn't you really pray hard? He must have even cried and all that. He must have said, "God, I'm innocent. Please release me from this prison. I don't deserve this." I'm sure he wanted to get out but God thought that it wasn't his time of need. He let him stay there for some time because he had a purpose for him. Throughout that time, God never left him. God was watching over him. Let's turn to Genesis to chapter 39, beginning in the second part of verse 20. The Bible says, "But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there." (Gen. 39: 20b-22)

Afterwards, the baker and cupbearer of Pharaoh were put in prison and put under the care of Joseph. Both had a dream and they asked Joseph for the interpretation. Joseph said that the cupbearer would be restored to his position and that the baker would not be restored and would be put to death. Both events happened just as Joseph had foretold. Now, the cupbearer had promised that if he were restored to his position, he would tell Pharaoh about Joseph in the hopes that

the latter would be released. Unfortunately, as the Bible says, the cupbearer forgot him. Was that intentional or not? We'll see later. But, to be forgotten, that's very tough. Joseph must have waited and waited but he received no word from anyone, especially from the cupbearer. That must be devastating for Joseph. You know, he thought that God was moving and that he had set up circumstances so that he could find favor with Pharaoh and suddenly nothing happened. Joseph must have cried out, "God, where are you? Did you forget me, too? I thought you were with me?"

But God had grander plans. After two full years, that's how long Joseph waited, God began to move again. He gave Pharaoh two dreams and Pharaoh became agitated and wanted an interpretation of the dreams. His magicians and wise men couldn't interpret them. That's when the cupbearer said to him, and this time I want you all to please turn to Genesis 41:9. Follow along as I read these verses...

Did you notice? The cupbearer intentionally forgot Joseph. "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings." Other versions say, "I remember my offenses today" (ESV), "I must confess today that I have done wrong" (GNT), "I remember a promise I failed to keep" (NOG). God has a way of rebuking and convicting people. So, if you feel like you're being shortchanged or you were hurt by someone, don't seek revenge. Let God work it out for you. He hasn't forgotten you. Another lesson is, don't be like the cupbearer. Let your "yes" be "yes", your "no" be "no". Be committed to what you have committed to. Or God will make you remember and it will be a painful remembrance. If you can't commit, then forgo it. Like in marriage or serving in church.

Going back to Joseph, so Joseph, through God's help, was able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. As a result and as a token of his gratitude, Joseph was made second in command in the whole of Egypt. He supervised the whole of Egypt

while it went through a season of prosperity and then followed by a season of lack as famine swept Egypt and the surrounding nations for seven years.

The Bible says, “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.” (Rom. 8:28)

What the enemy has intended for evil, God has turned to good.

What we see here is that God let Joseph languish in jail, so to speak, because he wanted him to learn humility and patience and faith in God. He needed those qualities as a leader in Egypt. He needed those qualities to save not only the people in Egypt but most especially his own family in Canaan. God answered Joseph’s prayer not when he wanted it but during his time of need.

If you’re going through a difficult time, please don’t think that God has forgotten you. He has always you in his mind. The Bible says you’re the apple of his eye. And, therefore, you are special to him and he loves you more than you’ll ever realize.

Let me end this message with another quote from Martin Luther, “No one can believe how powerful prayer is and what it can effect, except those who have learned it by experience. Whenever I have prayed earnestly, I have been heard and have obtained more than I prayed for. God sometimes delays, but He always comes.” I guess that sums up my message.

So, pray with boldness to the Father. Don’t be shy. Converse with him. He is waiting.