

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH
1 JOHN: THE FATHER HEART OF GOD
BEING CONFIDENT IN PRAYER
1 JOHN 5:14-15
04/02/2017

MAIN POINT

God promises us that when we pray according to His will, He will hear us and answer our prayers.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

If you were to discover a magic lamp and genie to grant you three wishes, what would you wish for?

What might be the danger of getting anything you wished for?

Would there be anything wrong with wishing for a billion dollars? What about long life and good health? How would you decide what to wish for?

It would be very difficult to decide what to ask for if we were granted three wishes. We could wish for lots of money, but the Bible warns us that “one in a hurry to get rich will not go unpunished” (Prov. 28:20). The author of Hebrews tells us that our “life should be free from the love of money” and that we should “be satisfied with what (we) have” (Heb. 13:5). In fact, any wish we make might endanger our souls in ways we cannot foresee. Thankfully, God is not a magic genie; He is much better than that. There is no limit to the requests that we may make of Him, and He will answer our wishes better than we could hope. Because He is God and always knows best, He often does not answer our requests the way we might like or in the timing we wish He would. But He always works for our eternal good, and while that may not satisfy our immediate gratification, we will someday see the wisdom in how our Father answers our prayers.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 JOHN 5:14.

Where does our confidence to approach God with our requests come from?

If we are confident that God always hears us, what keeps us from praying all the time?

Our confidence in approaching the Lord with our requests comes from the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Because Jesus is a sympathetic high priest, the writer of Hebrews tells us that we may “approach the throne of grace with boldness” and “receive mercy and find grace to help us at the proper time” (Heb. 4:16). We know that we are sinful

in ourselves, so if we relied on our own merit for our requests we would not have any confidence in God hearing us. But because Jesus gives us His righteousness through the cross, we can be confident that the Father will hear and grant our requests.

What does it mean to “ask anything according to His will”?

We always ask “according to His will” because the point of praying (and living!) is to glorify God. We shouldn’t be asking to grant our own selfish whims, but only asking for those things that will glorify Christ’s kingdom. If what we ask for will glorify Christ, we can be sure that God will hear and grant those requests.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 JOHN 5:15.

Will God really give us whatever we ask for? If this is true, why are there so many unanswered prayers?

Why might God say “no” to a prayer for healing? Or for employment? Why does God say no to requests for “good” things?

Sometimes, God does not give us exactly what we ask for. Often, after some time passes, we can come to understand and might be grateful that God did indeed say, “No!”

Read James 4:3. What insight does this verse give us into why God sometimes tells us no?

The reason that God says no is outlined by James. James wrote, “You ask and don’t receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires!” (James 4:3). James doesn’t mince words. The reason that God says no is because we may be asking for things that will bring us harm. It could be that the job we ask for would be a horrible situation, or worse, it could fill us with pride. We ought to trust that when God says no, it is because we are asking for something that might actually harm us at the time. The good news is that if we ask for wisdom, patience, love, and mercy, God will always hear and answer us. We know that the Father loves to glorify His grace through us, so we can be confident to come and ask the Lord for these things. In fact, we ought to be confident enough to ask the Lord for anything! If it will harm us, He will not give it to us, but He will give us what we need. Jesus’ teaching on this type of persistent, confident prayer gives us one more motivation for taking our requests to God.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 7:7-11.

How are asking, seeking, and knocking similar? How are they different?

What did Jesus say the results of these actions would be? Share an experience when you have found this to be true.

Based on these verses, why can we have confidence in God’s answers to our prayers?

Do you give your kids everything they ask for? Why or why not? How does this ideal impact your view of God?

When we go to God in prayer, He always treats us with the same concern a good father has for his children. If we have a need, He will take care of it. Just like a father would never give his son a poisonous snake, neither will God give us anything that misaligns with His purpose and His good, whether we ask for it or not. God is our Father, and He is a good Father. He delights to give us what we need. The power of prayer doesn’t depend on the goodness of the prayer, but on the goodness of God.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What hinders you from praying more regularly and confidently?

What are some of the things you typically ask for in prayer? What are some other things you think you should be praying for?

How can our group hold each other accountable to praying faithfully and praying for the best things? Make a list of things like wisdom, love, and patience and ask God to help you grow in these things for the glory of Christ.

PRAY

Thank the Father that He is gracious to hear our requests any time we wish to make them. Ask the Lord to increase our faith in His goodness and willingness to grant our requests so that we will spend more time in prayer. Pray that the Father will help us be a wise, discerning people who will glorify Christ. Close by asking the Lord to give us opportunities to influence others in the gospel this week.

COMMENTARY

1 JOHN 5:14-15

The Christian may have confidence in approaching God in prayer. Our confidence in prayer is a natural consequence of our assurance that we have eternal life (vv. 12-13). We may ask anything according to God's will, and we will receive it. This leads many Christians to ask, How can I know what the will of God is? Sometimes Scripture will tell us what the will of God is, either explicitly or in principle. It may take spiritual maturation and discernment to learn which principles of Scripture should guide our prayers. Elsewhere, we are told that if we "abide (remain, NIV) in Jesus and God's Word abides in us, we may ask what we will and it will be given" (John 15:7-8,16).

Prayer must be viewed not as our attempt to get God to see things from our point of view but as our attempt to see things from God's point of view. When we grow, mature, study, and meditate on Scripture and seek the will of God, we try to ask ourselves not what we want, but what God wants. Then we make progress in prayer.

MATTHEW 7:7-11

7:7-8. The principle of persistent reliance on the Father as loving provider certainly applies to all these good things. But Jesus probably had the disciples' temporal needs in mind. This is the simplest, most obvious meaning, and it would further underscore Jesus' teaching against anxiety over daily needs (6:25-34). This is Jesus' third of four "final exhortations" (7:1-12), addressing possible misconceptions people might take away from the sermon.

Verses 7 and 8 have six symmetrically arranged verbs paired first in a triplet of commands (7:7) and then in a triplet of affirmations (7:8). There is no need to try to distinguish different kinds of activity between ask, seek, and knock. Jesus was probably using the three verbs to refer to the same activity of petitioning the Father. His use of three different verbs added emphasis to his message. This three-pronged approach, together with the fact that all three verbs are in the present tense, conveys a clear picture of persistence in prayer.

The other three verbs in 7:7 ("will be given," "will find," and "will be opened") are in the future tense, while in 7:8 "receives" and "finds" are in the present tense, and "will be opened" is in the future.

With these tenses in mind, we could translate 7:7-8 as, "Keep on asking, and it will be given to you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking will continually receive, and he who keeps on seeking will continually find, and to him who keeps on knocking it will be opened."

Some other passages on prayer (e.g., Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 14:13-14; 15:7), emphasize the manner in which the human activity is to be conducted. Here the emphasis is on the generosity and faithfulness of the Father. There is no condition placed on the promises (as "if you believe" in 21:22). James 4:2-3 gives some reasons why prayer sometimes

does not “work.” Other passages that teach persistence in prayer are Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8.

7:9-10. Verses 9 and 10 are rhetorical questions, implying that no parent would pull such tricks on their sincere children. A stone can resemble a loaf of “bread” (4:3), and some “snakes” can resemble “fish.”

7:11. Jesus brought His argument of verses 9-11 to a point. Because even the most evil parents provide the basic necessities for their children, how much more can we trust the Father in heaven, who is free from sin. Jesus’ description of humans as “you . . . who are evil” disproves the modern concept that people are basically good. Although Jesus acknowledged that humans may perform gracious acts like providing for their children, He insisted that they do so contrary to their sinful nature. God’s gracious acts, on the other hand, express our Heavenly Father’s perfect nature. (Note the assumption here of universal sinfulness; see Rom. 3:23.)