

Introduction

As I was studying, preparing, and praying about John 17, the next passage in our study of John, I sensed a leading of the Holy Spirit to go a little deeper on a few of the verses that we covered the week before in John 16. Jesus had given the disciples three expectations for when He went back to the Father. He said their lamenting and grieving would turn to joy. Second, He said that their relationship with God would change. They would pray directly to the Father in His name, and the Father would answer them. Jesus said, “I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.” This was a paradigm shift for them. They had gone to Jesus, their mentor, for all their questions and requests. Now, they would go directly to the Father. The third expectation was that in the midst of tribulation and persecution, they would have peace.

Today, we are going back to the second point, and talk about our prayers to the Father. We will look at directing our prayers to the Father. Second, we will look at praying in the name of Jesus. Third, we will look at the fruit of our prayers, fullness of joy. Our text is John 16:23-28.

Our Prayers to the Father

1. Our prayers are directed to the Father
2. Our prayers are in the name of Jesus
3. Our prayers bring fullness of joy

(Jn 16:23–28) “In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. {24} Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. {25} “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. {26} In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; {27} for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. {28} I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.”

1. Our prayers are directed to the Father

Jesus begins by saying, “In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you.” Jesus is going to be arrested in a few hours, condemned, and crucified. In a little while after that, they will see Him again, and a new day or time has come. Jesus will not be there in person to answer their questions. In that day, the disciples would not question Jesus about anything. In that day, they will pray to the Father in Jesus’ name.

(Jn 16:23) “In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you.”

Jesus has been teaching the disciples to pray to the Father. In the Sermon on the Mount, which He taught in Galilee, one of the topics that Jesus taught was prayer. He taught what we call the “Lord’s Prayer,” which is really an outline of prayer topics. He began, saying, “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name...’” He was teaching them to address their prayers to the Father, and to begin their prayers by hallowing His name.

(Mt 6:9–13) “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. {10} ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. {11} ‘Give us this day our daily bread. {12} ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. {13} ‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’

About a year later, the disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. They had just had supper with Martha and Mary, who lived in Bethany, which is just outside of Jerusalem. Most scholars believe that Jesus stayed with them during His visits to Jerusalem for the various feasts. Mary was sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to Him. Martha was getting bothered by this, because Mary had left all the serving for her to do. The very next scene that Luke gives is His instructions on prayer. He gives them nearly the same outline for prayer that He given them a year earlier in Galilee. He said, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come...’” Notice that He taught them again to address their prayers to the Father. We address our prayers to the Father. We don’t address our prayers to Mary. We don’t address our prayers to anyone but God the Father.

(Lk 11:1–4) “It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.” {2} And He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. {3} ‘Give us each day our daily bread. {4} ‘And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.’”

Here are a couple observations from looking at these two passages. First, the outlines are not identical, but they are very similar. These were two separate messages on the same subject, how to pray. Second, the disciples did not get everything the first go-round. They were there in Galilee when He taught on prayer. A year later, Jesus had just finished praying in a certain place, probably the Garden of Gethsemane, and the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray just as John also taught his disciples. They recognized the priority that Jesus had made prayer in His life and ministry. They recognized that there was fruit from His time with the Father. They also recognized that they had not learned what He taught a year earlier, and they asked Him to teach them again. It is okay to hear more than one message on something, particularly if we have not yet grasped the principles and applied them into our lives.

As we come to God in prayer, we should address our prayers to the Father. When we have received Christ into our lives, we are adopted and become the children of God. We have the privilege of addressing our prayers to the Father. In Romans 8:14-17, Paul says that those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. We have received a spirit of adoption by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” Abba is an affectionate way of saying Daddy. When we receive Christ, we are adopted and now have a Father/Child relationship. He is now our Daddy. The Spirit bears witness that we are children and heirs. As His children, we have the privilege of going to the Father for all of our needs.

(Ro 8:14-17) “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. {15} For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” {16} The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, {17} and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”

When we address our prayers to the Father, we need to do it a certain way. It is not a formula; it is a principle. In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus taught them to hallow the name of the Father as they begin their prayers. We come to the Father reverently and humbly. The word hallow means to be holy or to make holy. When we come to the Father with our requests, we treat Him as holy, because God is holy.

In Psalm 100:4, we are taught to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. As we draw near to God in prayer, we should begin with thanksgiving and praise. Throughout the Old and New Testament, we are exhorted to give thanks and praise.

(Ps 100:4) “Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.”

The author of Hebrews tells us that we should continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. My heart is that we learn to be a thankful church. We should learn to give thanks to one another, and we should continually give thanks to the Father.

(He 13:15) “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”

It is not enough to give thanks; we are to continually offer up sacrifices of praise. We are to hallow the name of God. Our Father has many names and attributes that we can praise Him for. Years ago, I put together a prayer manual. The section on hallowing His name was a result of many years of recording different names and characteristics of God that I saw in the Scriptures. The list is so exhaustive that I cannot possibly go through those every day in my prayer time.

Some days I go through some of the names in an alphabetical order, and spend time praising God for each name. For example, I praise You Father because You are the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I praise You because You are the Almighty God. You are Adonai, the Sovereign Lord. I praise You because You are Abba, my Father, who is in heaven. Thank You for adopting me and for bringing me into Your family. Jesus, I praise You because You are the Anointed One, the Christ, the Messiah. I praise You because You are the Apostle and High Priest. I praise You because You are the Author and Perfector of our faith. I praise You because You are the Advocate and You promise to defend and protect me. These are just some of the names that begin with “A.”

Some days I pick out a few different names and characteristics and praise Him for those. I try to praise Him thematically; it is easier to pray together that way. For example, we could focus on Jesus, our Shepherd. Lord, we thank You for being our Shepherd. You are Jehovah Rohi, the Lord God our Shepherd. You are the Good Shepherd that laid down Your life for us. You are the Good Shepherd that does not flee like a hireling. You stay and protect me. You are always watching over me. You are the Shepherd who speaks to me so that I know Your voice. You lead me beside still waters.... That is just a short sample of a combination of thanking and praising Him for being our Shepherd.

In our morning prayers together, my wife and I can easily spend 15-30 minutes just thanking and praising the Lord. I consider this time every bit as important as any petitions that we might offer up. He already knows our needs before we ask Him. Honoring the Lord with our thanksgivings and praises is time well spent. We want to be a people who love God with all our heart, mind,

soul, and strength. We can show that love to the Father by continually offering thanksgivings and praises to Him.

Why do we go to the Father? We go to Him because He provides everything that we need. In fact, everything that we have has come from Him. God is sovereign, ruling over the heavens and the earth. He has unlimited resources, and has promised to meet all of our needs. So, it makes sense to go to the only One that can meet all of our needs, and answer any request that we have. It is pretty special to be able to address the God and Creator of the Universe as our Father, to address our Father, who has all power and all authority, and to be able to ask Him to provide for our needs.

George Muller was a man of prayer. He lived in Bristol, U.K. He determined that He would not go to men for His needs, but would take God up on meeting his needs. George did not live by himself; he opened up an orphanage, and eventually he ran five large orphanages. He housed more than two thousand (2,000) children at the same time, and over the course of his life, he housed over ten thousand (10,000) orphans. He not only provided food, clothing, and shelter, he also schooled them. He did all of this without asking people directly for money or support. He chose to pray and trust God for provision. In his journal he wrote, "The primary object of the work was... that God might be magnified by the fact that the orphans under my care are provided with all they need only by prayer and faith."

In one of his accounts he wrote, "The children are dressed and ready for school. There is no food for them to eat... After I had given thanks, a baker knocked at the door and said he could not sleep because he felt the Lord wanted him to bake bread for the orphans.... Soon after, a milkman's cart broke down in front of the orphanage, and the milk would spoil before repairs could be made, so he gave it to the orphanage."¹ Muller often stated that his goal was "to show that God is still the living God and that He hears our prayer."

George Muller did not go to men, but to God. He went to the One who had the ability to meet every need. He went to the One that had unlimited resources and power. He went to the One that promised that He would give us our daily bread, and that we were not to worry or be anxious about it. We begin by addressing our prayers to our Father, who has the ability and desire to meet all of our needs.

Let's look for a minute at a few examples from Jesus' life, and how He addressed the Father in His prayers. In Luke 10:21, Jesus had sent out seventy to preach and heal, and when they came back, they gave Him a glorious report. Luke records that they returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." Jesus gave them some feedback about not rejoicing about the demons being subject to them, but that they should rejoice that their names are recorded in heaven. Then, Jesus rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit and praised the Father, saying, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight." Notice how Jesus hallowed the Father in His praise and prayer.

(Lk 10:21) "At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight."

¹ The Autobiography of George Muller

Let's look at John 17 and how Jesus addressed the Father in the High Priestly Prayer. While Jesus was praying, He addressed the Father in verse eleven, saying, "Holy Father, keep them in Your name..." Then, in verse twenty-five, He prayed, "O righteous Father..." Jesus was reverent when He addressed the Father, and praise Him for being holy and righteous; He hallowed His name when He prayed. Jesus hallowed the Father's name throughout His prayers, and did not just partition off His prayers, and just hallow Him at the beginning. Both approaches are scriptural and should be used.

(Jn 17:11) "I am no longer in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* which You have given Me, that they may be one even as *We are*."

(Jn 17:25) "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me;"

I have found over the years that trying to train people to come before the Lord with praise and thanksgiving is not an easy task. It requires a shift in our attitude about prayer and in particular, who we are approaching. God is not our servant; we are His servants. We do not go to God to tell Him what we want Him to do; but we agree with Him about the things that He is wanting to do, i.e., His will. When we come to Him, we must remember that He is the God of heaven and earth, and that He is the King of Kings. Many people come to a prayer meeting with a list of things that they want God to do. I love lists, but I believe that our requests of God should be made after we come before Him with thanksgiving, praises, and reverence.

2. Our prayers are in the name of Jesus

If we are to pray to the Father, and the Father knows us, why do we need to pray in the name of Jesus? There are several reasons that we pray in the name of Jesus. First, our access to the Father is through Jesus. Second, our authority is in the name of Jesus. Third, our power is in the name of Jesus.

a. Our access is through Jesus

Our access to the Father is through Jesus. Jesus said in John 14:6 that He is "the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." The only way that we can go to the Father is through Jesus; He is our access.

(Jn 14:6) "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

Sinful man cannot come in the presence of God, who is holy. Therefore, in order for us to come before God, we had to have our sins forgiven, and the only one that could forgive us of our sins so that we can stand before God the Father is through the blood of Jesus. In John 8:24, Jesus told the Pharisees that they were going to die in their sins unless they believed that He was the Messiah. Jesus is the only one who can forgive us of our sins.

(Jn 8:24) "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins."

In Jude 24-25, Lord's half-brother, Jude, wrote, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." We go to God our Father, because He is the only one that can keep us from stumbling. He is the only one that can make us stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy. It is through Jesus Christ that all of this is possible.

(Jud 24–25) "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, {25} to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

In Acts 4:12, Peter told the Sadducees, ruler, elders, and scribes that there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. Jesus was the only one who lived a sinless life and could pay for our sins. We have our access to God the Father, who is holy and righteous, is through Jesus. We come before the Father in Jesus' name.

(Ac 4:12) "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

In Ephesians 2:17-18, Paul wrote that through Jesus we have both our access in one Spirit to the Father."

(Eph 2:17–18) "And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; {18} for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father."

When Jesus was on the cross, and gave up His Spirit, the veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recorded that the veil in the temple was torn. The temple was not at Golgotha, so this discovery was made later and people realized and understood that it happened at the same time that Jesus had breathed His last. We must understand the design of the temple and the holy of holies to understand the significance of this. The high priest was allowed to go into the veiled area where the ark of the covenant was only once a year, and that was after making sacrifices for Himself. When Jesus had paid the price for our sins, there was no longer a need for the veil because we were made holy by the sacrifice that Jesus had just made. We now have access to the presence and glory of God at all times because of the one-time sacrifice that Jesus made. This is a huge benefit and blessing to us, that we can have intimacy and fellowship with the Father at all times. We have access to God the Father through Jesus. We come to the Father in Jesus' name.

(Mt 27:50–51) "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. {51} And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split."

(Mk 15:37–38) "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. {38} And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

b. Our authority is in the name of Jesus

The second reason that we pray in the name of Jesus is that our authority is through Jesus. When Jesus was getting ready to go back to the Father, He gathered the apostles together and commissioned them to preach the gospel and make disciples. He told them that all authority had been given to Him, and that He was sending them in that authority. When you and I carry out the Great Commission, and are doing His bidding here on earth, we are doing it in the authority that we have that was given to us by Jesus, who had all authority.

(Mt 28:18–20) “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. {19} Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, {20} teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

When you and I are engaged in doing kingdom business on behalf of Jesus, we are doing it in the name of Jesus. When we witness to people, give our testimony, share the gospel, teach them the commandments of Jesus, or pray, we are doing these things in the name of Jesus. We have been given that authority to accomplish the work given us to do.

We have not been given authority to pursue selfish endeavors, destroy, or to tear down. In 2 Corinthians, Paul talks about the authority given to him in two places. In 2 Corinthians 10:8, he said that the authority given to him was for building up the Corinthians, and not for destroying them. Then, in 2 Corinthians 13:10, Paul said that he hoped that he did not have to use the authority given to him to discipline the church with severity, “in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.” Our authority is given to us to accomplish God’s purposes, which includes building up others.

(2 Co 10:8) “For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame,”

(2 Co 13:10) “For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I *need* not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.”

In order for us to have authority in the name of Jesus, we must be under His authority. We get under His authority by believing and receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior. When we receive Christ, we are transferred out of the kingdom of darkness and into His marvelous light. We come under His rule and reign in our lives, and then, when we act, we are acting under His authority.

(Col 1:13) “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,”

(1 Pe 2:9–10) “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; {10} for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Conversely, when we sin and are not submitting to Jesus, we are out from under His authority. In James 4:6-8, God tells us that He “is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” The

word for oppose is antitasso (Strong's G498). The root word is tasso, which means proper order and arrangement. It is a military word and a battalion of soldiers in formation, i.e., proper order and arrangement, is a good picture of the word. Antitasso means against that order and arrangement, and in context, God brings His forces, who are in proper formation and arrangement against us when we are proud or are in sin.

(Jas 4:6) "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Then, James wrote, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." The word for submit is hupotasso (Strong's G5293). Again, the root word is tasso, but it has a different prefix. This time the prefix is hupo, which means to be under. Instead of being in opposition to proper order and arrangement, we are to get under proper order and arrangement, which we do by submitting to His rule and reign in our lives. We are to repent of all sin and draw near to God. When we get under His authority, we can now operate with authority in the name of Jesus.

(Jas 4:7-8) "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. {8} Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

A good example of this is in Acts 19:13-17. Paul had been casting out demons and healing people in Ephesus. There were seven sons of Sceva a Jewish chief priest, who attempted to name over those who had evil spirits in the name of the Lord Jesus. Unfortunately, they were not believers, and so they were not under the authority of Jesus. When they attempted to operate in that authority, without being under His authority, they failed miserably. "The evil spirit answered and said to them, 'I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?' And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." You have to be under the authority of Jesus to use the authority in the name of Jesus.

(Ac 19:13–17) "But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." {14} Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. {15} And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" {16} And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. {17} This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified."

c. Our power is in the name of Jesus

Third, we pray in the name of Jesus because there is power in the name of Jesus. Authority and power go hand-in-hand. Without the authority, there is no power. The authority gives you the right to use the power of God. Many people today have authority, but do not use that authority. Most of us do not fully grasp and understand the authority that has been given to us.

After Peter told the lame man, “in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!”, the man stood upright and began to walk. He entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. When the religious rulers arrested them for healing the lame man, they inquired, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, told them that “by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, who God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health.” There is power in the name of Jesus. There is power to heal, power to save, power to do more than we can think or imagine.

(Ac 4:7–10) “When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” {8} Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people, {9} if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, {10} let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health.”

Jesus said that they have asked for nothing in His name up until now. In this upcoming season, they are to ask in Jesus’ name, and they will receive what they are asking for. This is not a blank check that can be used for anything that we want. We have to keep the promise in context, the context of the rest of Scripture. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are doing business on behalf of Jesus. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are praying for the will of God to be done. If our requests are not in accordance with God’s will, we will not receive what we are asking for. We have to keep this promise in context.

(Jn 16:24) “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”

Consider what James said, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.” He was giving us the proper context for having our prayers answered. Praying with wrong motives, selfish or fleshly motives is not going to get our prayers answered.

(Jas 4:3) “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

On the other hand, John wrote that we could pray with confidence when we ask anything according to God’s will. He wrote, “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.” We need to ask the Father for things that according to His will, and ask in the name of Jesus. We have access to the Father through Jesus Christ.

(1 Jn 5:14–15) “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. {15} 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.”

How do you find God’s will? We find God’s will primarily in the Scriptures. We need to read, study, and know the scriptures so that we can quickly identify God’s will. When we talk about God’s will, there is a General Will of God, which many call the moral will of God, and then there is a specific will of God, which some define as the sovereign will of God. I prefer to use the

terms General Will and Specific Will. God's General Will applies to everyone, and this is found in God's word.

When God tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6 that His will is for us to be sanctified, and to abstain from sexual immorality, that applies to all of us. When God tells us to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in everything, this is God's General Will for everyone.

(1 Th 4:3–4) “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; {4} that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,”

(1 Th 5:16–18) “Rejoice always; {17} pray without ceasing; {18} in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

However, God's Specific Will does not apply to everyone. For example, in Jeremiah 1, God tells Jeremiah that He has appointed him to be a prophet to the nations. He has not appointed all of us to be a prophet to the nations. There are not many Jeremiahs in the world. When God told Paul that He has appointed him to be an apostle to the Gentiles, this is not God's Specific Will for everyone. We are not all apostles, and we have not all been sent out as apostles to the Gentiles. It was God's will, but not His General Will, that would have applied to everyone.

(Je 1:5) “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

(Col 1:1) “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,”

When John wrote that when we pray according to God's will, He hears us and we can know with certainty and confidence that we have the requests which we have asked from Him, this applies to both His General Will and His Specific Will. What is different is that we learn of God's will differently, and what may be God's Specific Will for you may not be God's Specific Will for me. Therefore, a prayer that you pray may be according to God's Specific Will in your life, but not according to God's Specific Will in my life.

(1 Jn 5:14–15) “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. {15} 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.”

God uses His Word to communicate His General Will. God may use many different ways to communicate His specific will for us. He used a dream with Joseph, when sending him to Egypt to escape Herod, and He used another dream when bringing him back. God used a vision to send Paul to Macedonia, and it is referred to as the Macedonian Vision. God is not limited in the ways that He can communicate His specific will in matters. His specific will cannot violate His moral will, which is contained in the Scriptures. The scriptures are always the ultimate test.

When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are praying in the authority of Jesus and we have the power of Jesus to carry out the will of God. It is a blank check to be used for kingdom business, but it is not a blank check to use for selfish or fleshly desires.

3. Our prayers bring fullness of joy

Our prayers are directed to the Father. Second, our prayers are directed to the Father in the name of Jesus, who is our access. Third, Jesus encourages the disciples to ask for things in His name, because they will receive, and their joy will be made full. Our prayers bring fullness of joy.

(Jn 16:23–24) “In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. {24} Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”

About forty years ago when my wife and I were living in Florida, we went to a prayer conference. They taught on how to spend an hour in prayer. Every session was about one of the topics in the Lord’s Prayer. It was an excellent conference, and I learned a lot, and was encouraged to spend time each day in prayer, and to keep a prayer journal. Over the next few months, my journal was filled with answered prayers. I was pretty excited about all the answered prayers, and it encouraged me to pray for even more things. Unfortunately, I lost the pages in my prayer journal with all the answers to prayer, but I still remember many of them. Since Jesus said to ask the father for anything in Jesus’ name, I did exactly that. I wanted to see the Father answer my prayers and uniquely provide for us. Here are a few examples.

- In 1989, we needed a bigger vehicle because we were not going to be able to put everyone in our station wagon, so we prayed for a fifteen-passenger van. We also knew that Ken and Gail Barnes, members at our church, needed a back bench for their tan van. We prayed specifically for a fifteen-passenger van with a tan back seat that we could give to the Barnes. While shopping, we saw a van that would meet our needs, but it was burgundy, and was missing the back bench. We asked the dealer about the back bench, and he said he would give us a back bench. He said, “Unfortunately, the only bench I have to give you does not match the others in the van; it is tan. Will that be okay with you?” I told him that would be fine with us, and this was a confirmation that this was the van God had for us. God answered that very specific prayer, and we were able to bless the Barnes. We were full of joy, and so were the Barnes.
- The grass in our yard was Bahia, and it was not very nice. I wanted a nice-looking yard with St. Augustine grass. To buy new sod for the yard would have been very expensive, well out of our budget at that time. I prayed for St. Augustine grass. One of the deacons in our church had St. Augustine grass, and I mentioned that I wanted it for my yard. I did not tell him I was praying for it. He told me to come over after he edged his yard and plant the cuttings in my yard. So, for a few weeks, I gathered his cuttings and sprigged them in the yard. St. Augustine is a fast-growing rhizome grass, which means that it spreads from the roots. Within a few months, my yard was full of St. Augustine grass, and God had answered that prayer. I was full of joy at seeing how God answered my prayer.
- We did not have any trees in our yard, so I prayed about some trees. I prayed for an oak tree in our front yard. I prayed about a cocktail tree in the back yard. A cocktail tree is one where different types of fruit have been grafted into one tree. In Florida, we had citrus cocktail trees. Further north where it is colder, there are other types of cocktail trees, where you might have several varieties of plums, or apples, or pears on the same tree. I prayed for a cocktail tree that had oranges, grapefruit, and lemons. In August 1989, when my son David was born, I got a call from Dunn’s Nursery in Apopka, Florida. I had never met Fred Dunn, the owner,

but he had heard that we just had our seventh child and he wanted to bless us. He told me he wanted to give us a cocktail tree. He told me, “You have probably never heard of a cocktail tree, but that is what I would like to give you.” I told him that I had been praying for one. We arranged a time for me to drive to Apopka and pick it up. Again, God answered that very specific prayer, and I was full of joy.

- Another day in 1989, I came home from work, only to find a notice on my front door of how to take care of my newly planted oak trees. The county had come out and planted not one, but two oak trees in my yard. No other person in our subdivision got any oak trees from Orange County. I had not called, written, or told anyone that I was praying for an oak tree. Only God knew what I was praying about, and He answered that specific prayer. My neighbors were all curious about why I got two oak trees and none of them did. I pulled out my prayer notebook and showed them that I had been praying for an oak tree. It was a great testimony to them, a blessing to us, and we were filled with joy.
- I prayed for a Maple tree in the back yard, and God provided a maple tree for us. I prayed for ceiling fans in each of the bedrooms. I prayed for a new kitchen floor. I prayed for a screened-porch in the back of our house. I prayed for all kinds of things, and God answered all those prayers.
- Some prayers were not answered in that first wave of answered prayers, but they were answered. I prayed for our house to be paid off. I saw that the longest debt in the Bible was seven years, and that the seventh year was a year of remission of debt (Dt 15:1). So, I prayed that our forty-year mortgage would be paid off in seven years. We were paying 12.25% interest at that time, so most of our payments went towards interest, not equity. While praying one morning, the Holy Spirit spoke clearly to me that I should pray that it would be paid off in three years, so I changed my prayers to three years. I prayed many verses with that request. Proverbs says that “house and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.” So, I prayed that our fathers, which included grandfathers on both sides of the family, would be led to help us out. Exactly three years later, my wife received a call from one of her grandfathers, and he asked how much we owed on our house. After she told him, he sent a check to her for that amount. God answered a very specific prayer for us to get debt free, and were full of joy.

(Pr 19:14) “House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the Lord.”

I could give many more testimonies of the different prayers that God answered. I believe that He answered them for several reasons. First, I believe that God was teaching, encouraging, and motivating us to pray. Second, I believe that He wanted to bless us. Some of our prayers were legitimate needs for our family, and He promises to provide for His children. We could have lived without the grass, oak trees, or cocktail tree, but we needed a bigger vehicle for our family. Third, I believe that God answered our prayers because He promised that if we ask the Father for anything in Jesus’ name, He would give it to us, so that our joy would be made full. God is faithful to His word and His promises. In Numbers 23:19, God tells us that He is “not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” God always does what He says and promises.

(Nu 23:19) “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”

Conclusion and Applications

In Isaiah 56:7, God said, “For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.” Jesus quoted this verse in His teaching, and it is recorded in Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, and Luke 19:46. Jesus taught about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. Later, at the end of His ministry, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them about prayer again, and He essentially gave them the same outline as He gave in the Sermon on the Mount.

(Is 56:7) “Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.”

In Jesus’ final hours with His apostles, He again talked to them about prayer. He told them that they needed to pray to the Father, and that the Father would hear their prayers and answer them. He told them that they needed to pray to the Father in His name. It is in Jesus’ name that we have access to the Father.

Third, Jesus told the disciples that if they asked anything in His name, the Father would give it to them. Jesus is encouraging the disciples to pray and ask for things. He went on, saying, “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”

(Jn 16:23–24) “In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. {24} Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”

Our first application is an exhortation to pray. Begin to ask the Father for things. Don’t be timid or slow to ask the Father for things. The average American spends two minutes a day in prayer. The average pastor spends about thirty minutes a day in prayer. I think that Jesus could say the same thing to us today, “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive.” I exhort you to pray and ask God for the things that you need in your life. God wants you and I to have fullness of joy, and answered prayers bring a fullness of joy. Seeing our prayers answered builds our faith and confidence, is a testimony to others that we serve a living God, meets our needs, and brings joy in our life. Pray!

Our second application is to pray in Jesus’ name. To pray in Jesus’ name, in His authority and with His power, you must be under His authority, and doing His will in your life. If you have never received Christ, I encourage you to receive Christ, and get under His authority. Tell Jesus that you believe that He is the Son of God, that He died for our sins, and was raised from the dead, and that you would like for Him to come into your life, forgive you of your sins, and to be the Lord of your life.

If you are already a believer, I encourage you to be under God’s authority. If you have been living in sin, confess your sins to the Lord, repent, and submit your life to the Lord. Get under Jesus’ authority so that you can pray with authority and power. When you pray in Jesus’ name, pray for His will to be done in your life, not your will. When we pray His will, we can pray with confidence and be fully assured that He will answer those prayers.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for this passage about prayer. Thank You for Your promises to hear our prayers and to answer them. Thank You for Your encouragement and giving us fullness of joy when You answer our prayers. Help us to devote ourselves to prayer. Help us to follow Jesus' example, the example of the apostles, and the early church. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- What are some specific answers to prayer that you can share with us?
- What are some reasons that people do not spend time praying?
- What are some reasons that churches do not spend time praying, and are not "houses of prayer"?
- God tells us to pray and that He will give us the things that we ask for. What are some reasons that prayers do not get answered? Are all of your prayers answered the way that you want them to be answered?
- Why does Jesus not need to request of the Father on our behalf?
- If Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, always making intercession for us, how is that different than Him making requests to the Father on our behalf? (Romans 8:34)
- What is one or two take-aways that you have from this message?
- What is one application that you are going to make after hearing this message?

Our Prayers to the Father

Introduction (Jn 16:23–28)

- 1. Our prayers are directed to the Father** (Jn 16:23, Mt 6:9-13, Lk 11:1–4, Ro 8:14-17, Ps 100:4, He 13:15, Lk 10:21, Jn 17:11, 17:25)

- 2. Our prayers are in the name of Jesus**
 - a. Our access is through Jesus** (Jn 14:6, 8:24, Jud 24–25, Ac 4:12, Eph 2:17–18, Mt 27:50–51, Mk 15:37-38)

 - b. Our authority is through Jesus** (Mt 28:18–20, 2 Co 10:8, 13:10, Col 1:13, 1 Pe 2:9-10, Jas 4:6-8, Ac 19:13-17)

 - c. Our power is through Jesus** (Ac 4:7–10, Jn 16:24, Jas 4:3, 1 Jn 5:14–15, 1 Th 4:3–4, 5:16-18, Je 1:5, Col 1:1, 1 Jn 5:14–15)

- 3. Our prayers bring fullness of joy** (Jn 16:23–24, Pr 19:14, Nu 23:19)

Conclusion and Applications (Is 56:7, Mt 21:13, Mk 11:17, Lk 19:46, Jn 16:23–24)

- 1.
- 2.