

**I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. <sup>14</sup> This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.**

Dear friends in Christ,

Don't you hate uncertainty? Don't you hate it when you don't know what's going to happen, how things will turn out? I mean, suspense is okay if you're watching a movie but who wants that kind of drama in their own life?

For example, how many of us as we went through school—or maybe you're in school right now—how many of us really enjoyed having to wait for the teacher to correct the tests so we could see what we got? Whether we thought we did great and wanted to confirm our “A” or whether we waited in dread, fearing the worst, the waiting wasn't always easy. Do you like having a medical test and having to wait a week or two to find out whether you have cancer or not? Or what about the girl waiting, waiting, waiting to see if he'll ever pop the question? Do you like not knowing if you'll have enough money to cover the bills? Isn't it wonderful to have the job interview and wonder if you're ever going to hear from the company? Are you comfortable sitting there wondering day after day, “*Am I doing the right thing?*”

It is in times of uncertainty that many of a Christian's prayers are offered to God. Wouldn't you agree? Aren't those just the kind of situations that you and I tend to send up lots of prayers to God? We would like to have some assurances. We would like to know for sure what is going on. And as we pray and pray and wait and wait, we can even begin to wonder if God is hearing us. Or are my concerns so minor to the Almighty God that they don't even appear on his radar? If he does hear me, what is taking him so long? Maybe this prayer thing is overrated.

The Apostle John speaks to us today about some things that are certain, things that you can trust, that you can rely upon—sure things. In case there is any question in our minds, any doubt at all, we are given this assurance about God and our prayers:

**YES, HE IS LISTENING**

1. Because you are his child
2. Because you ask according to God's will
3. Because he wants to answer you

The Apostle John was the last living disciple of the 12 and was the only one to not die a martyr's death, according to history. It seems that he wrote this letter to Christians in general and it was shared among the congregations of believers. As an aged believer, John in these letters calls Christians "my children" and also "my friends," obviously writing to people who put their trust in Jesus as their Savior. In the first verse of our text he does the same: **I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God.** So these words are also intended for you today since you also believe in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

And he tells us why he is writing to us: **I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.** God had John write these things so that we can have confidence! God does not wish for there to be uncertainty in your mind about whether you will be in heaven one day! If someone asks you or me "*Do you think you'll go to heaven when you die?*" the answer is not "*I don't know*" or "*I hope so!*" God has given us the Bible with the message of salvation that comes by faith in Jesus Christ—his perfect life, his death on the cross as payment for sin, and his resurrection from the dead on Easter morning—so that we can KNOW that we will be in heaven one day, so we can live with that confidence!

So if you want to know if God is listening when you pray, the answer is YES because you believe in his Son Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus makes us children of God. It is *only* by faith in Jesus that anyone has access to God's ear. Only the prayers of Christian people are listened to by God. In both the Old Testament and in the New, God says this: **For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (Psalm 34:15-16; 1 Peter 3:12).** It is by faith in Jesus that you have this 24/7 access to God, the opportunity to pray to him, and that comes with the assurance that YES, HE IS LISTENING! He is listening because you are his child.

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And there really is only one way that a Christian ought to pray to the Lord—with humility. A Christian prays with the confidence of a child going to a loving father with any concern, any request—but ALWAYS praying "**according to his will.**" That means that we may *really* want the thing we are asking for and we may pray for it constantly—with the persistence of the widow who went before the judge in our Gospel lesson or Jacob, who wrestled with God and pushed for an answer—but finally we are willing to accept whatever answer God says is best.

We might recall the Apostle Paul's prayers to God to take away the very difficult thing he had in his life. We don't know what that was, but it wasn't good; Paul called it **a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me (2 Corinthians 12:7).** But he bowed to the will of God and accepted a "no" answer from him. Paul was actually able then to rejoice over that and boast about his situation in a way that honored Christ and showed Christ's strength in his life!

Listen to how John explains this: **This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.** YES, HE IS LISTENING because you ask according to his will! When we truly love God and trust him with our lives and our very souls, we will pray like Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. You think you have things on your mind and stuff going on in your life! Jesus was hours away from what he knew was coming—bearing the pressure and suffering of the entire world's sin on the cross and having his Father turn away from him as he hung there. Yet how did he pray? **“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will (Matthew 26:39).”**

There are two things we should take note of there. Certainly we should see in Jesus the example of how to pray according to God's will. Jesus did it perfectly and under a burden we, thankfully, will never know. And that's really the second thing—his perfectly doing that paid the price for our imperfections when it comes to prayer. In Jesus' perfection we find forgiveness

for the times we don't take our concerns and request to God at all,  
for the times we are not persistent in our prayers,  
for the times when we blame God for not caring, not listening, not being there,  
and for the times we pray according to our will and not God's.

Jesus did perfectly what we have such a hard time doing and when he offered up his perfection and shed his blood, it was to take away all our wrongdoing when it comes to prayer...and everything else. We have a Savior who loves us so much that did that for us. If he was willing to do that, don't you think that he will do whatever is best for us in life? The humble, thankful prayer of a Christian trusts that HE IS LISTENING and that he will.

John gives you yet another reason you can be confident in your prayers and know that HE IS LISTENING: because he wants to answer you! He assures us—**And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.** We have a loving God who is there, listening and giving us what we ask for!

*“Really? Okay, I ask for \$5,000,000 then!”* Hold on a minute. God is not some storybook genie, there to grant my every wish. I don't get to boss God around and make him do MY will in every way I demand! I don't get to impose my will on God just by speaking my desires.

Well, if that's not what it means...just what does it mean? Let's think about what John explains here. When a child of God goes to him in prayer and asks for something according to the Lord's will, they know that they have what they ask for. So if YOU ask for something from God, according to his will, YOU have what you ask for. *“But my friend died after battling cancer—that's not what I asked for.” “We ended up losing our house—that's not what I asked for.” “My child is still making horrible decisions—that's not what I asked for.” “My team lost—that's not what I asked for.” “My classes aren't going so well—that's not what I asked for.” “Is this promise right? Is God even listening?”*

Listen again—if you ask for something from God, according to his will, you have what you ask for. What a humble Christian is saying is that they are willing to accept whatever answer God gives. God could say “Yes.” He could say “No.” He could say “*Not right now.*” He could even say “*How about something better.*” A Christian—who is praying according to God’s will—says, “*I will accept whatever your answer is, God.*” And if I’m saying that, then I am getting exactly what I am asking for! I may or may not get the “thing,” but I do have what I have asked from him—I have his will done in my life. Is God listening? Intently. Is he *doing* anything? Absolutely.

He is, in fact, doing exactly what you asked AND he is doing exactly what he knows is best for you! What more could you and I possibly want? God wants to answer you and he does answer you. How wonderful is that?!

Should God listen to us and do the exact things that we ask for every time no matter what? We sometimes sinfully think so! We’ll charge God with unfairness if he doesn’t. We’ll claim that he must not really be powerful or loving or even paying attention to us if he doesn’t. But try applying that reason to your life and you’ll see how ludicrous that is.

If you’re a kid, do you think your parents should do everything *you* think is a good idea? What if you wanted to have a campout in your living room? Mom and Dad say it is okay so you set up some blankets as tents and roll out sleeping bags and then you go out to the backyard and grab some wood so you can start a campfire on the living room carpet because every campout has to have a campfire! A loving parent wouldn’t let you do that! They would say no!

A child sometimes doesn’t understand, sometimes doesn’t think everything through, sometimes just doesn’t know any better, and sometimes even gets angry at mom or dad for not letting them have exactly what they want. You and I really are *children* of God, aren’t we?! And so here we are again, thankful for Jesus’ forgiveness. And in the joy of our forgiveness and the eternal life in heaven that comes with it, we find comfort in knowing that we will receive just what we ask for—whether that comes in the form of the exact thing we’re asking about or in an answer that different but is according to God’s loving will for us—which is also what we asked for! God wants to answer us and he does.

You and I don’t see what God sees and we don’t know what God knows so we pray. We pray with the confidence that HE IS LISTENING because we are his children. We pray with the certainty that HE IS LISTENING because we ask according to his will. We pray with the assurance that HE IS LISTENING because he wants to answer us. God tells us these things in his Word and we trust them as we pray. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.