

## **Praying With Confidence**

### **John 16:23-28**

This morning we're going to look at a short teaching about prayer that Jesus gave his disciples in the Upper Room. He ended his time there with them with a long prayer in John 17, but before that, he taught them a few things about prayer and that's what we're going to look at this morning.

How do you do when it comes to asking for help in your life? Are you good at asking for help? (Picture) Back in the day before we had cell phones, one of the things people had to do from time to time was to stop and ask for directions. Some of you remember those days and we used to give men a hard time because they just wouldn't do it. I don't know what it was, but a lot of us had a really hard time stopping and asking for directions. It just didn't feel like a manly thing to do I guess.

I remember one time when Amy and I were dating, we were trying to go to a restaurant called the Old Spaghetti Factory in downtown Minneapolis. (Picture) I knew about where it was and had been there fairly recently, but for whatever reason, that time, I just couldn't find it. We drove around those streets for a long, long time and were about ready to give up, when I pulled over to decide what to do, and I think we both turned our heads at the same time, and there it was, right next to us! I don't know where it had been hiding before that, but we ended up wasting a lot of time driving around – time we could have saved if I had just stopped and asked for directions. But no way!

I don't know why that's so difficult to do, but it is. And I think it's similar to the struggle we have in general when it comes to asking for help... We can be really hesitant to ask for help – probably because we don't want to be a burden to other people, or maybe we don't like to admit there's things we can't do or aren't good at. But a lot of times we lack confidence when it comes to asking for help.

The same thing can be true when it comes to prayer. It's very common for people to lack confidence in their prayer lives. Maybe we're not sure that God is listening, or that he cares about what we're asking for. Maybe we feel selfish for what we're asking. Maybe we don't think he'll say yes. Maybe we

aren't really comfortable with prayer, or we're so used to trying to solve our own problems that we don't even think about it.

I've felt that lack of confidence and I've seen it in others, and I think the disciples were in the same boat in the Upper Room. They had seen Jesus praying and observed his confidence but weren't yet at a point where they were confident themselves. So in the passage we're going to look at today, we're going to see Jesus give them three things that would boost their confidence, and these will also help us grow in our confidence as well.

Jesus just finished talking to them about a day coming when their sorrow would turn into joy, which would be on the day of his resurrection, and then he continued by teaching them about prayer. We read these first two verses last week, and today I'm going to explain them a little bit.

Read John 16:23-24.

*In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. <sup>24</sup> Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*

There are two things related to confidence in prayer that I want to point out in these verses. Jesus first tells them that on the day of his resurrection they would ask nothing of him. The word for "ask" in that sentence has to do with inquiry – asking for clarity and explanation. Up to that time his disciples were asking him to explain things all the time. They didn't understand a lot of things Jesus was teaching because they didn't understand his death and resurrection and what God would accomplish through that. But Jesus says that after his resurrection, that kind of asking would stop – probably because many, many things would make a lot more sense to them, and because the Holy Spirit would teach them and bring to mind all that Jesus taught them.

But then he starts to talk about prayer, and he says, "Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you." This time the word "ask" has to do with petition – asking for help. Jesus encourages them to petition the Father, saying that whatever they ask in his name, the Father would give it to them. Jesus was very confident and he was helping his disciples to be confident as well. And his confidence in prayers being answered was based on one little

phrase that he repeats a couple times in these verses – it’s the phrase “in my name.” They were to ask the Father “in his name” and if they did, they could be confident that he would give it to them.

What did he mean by that? One of the things we’ve done with this teaching is to add a tag line to the ending of our prayers. How do you end your prayers? “In Jesus’ name, Amen.” Right? That’s very common, probably automatic for many of us to do, but why do we do that? Probably because of these verses. But do you know that’s not what these verses are teaching us to do? Saying “In Jesus’ name” at the end of your prayer really has nothing to do with praying “in Jesus’ name.” It means something different.

Here's an explanation I found in the ESV Study Bible: *“Praying in Jesus’ name means praying in a way consistent with his character and his will. A person's name in the ancient world represented what the person was like. It also means coming to God in the authority of Jesus. Adding “in Jesus’ name” at the end of every prayer is neither required nor wrong. Effective prayer must ask for and desire what Jesus delights in.”*

So in order for Jesus’ disciples to have confidence that the Father would give them what they asked for, they would need to ask in a way consistent with Jesus’ character and will. And we do too. When you pray, are you praying and asking the Father in a way that is consistent with Jesus’ character and will? Are you asking for and desiring what Jesus delights in? That’s the first thing Jesus teaches about confidence in prayer.

The second is in those same verses, at the end. Jesus said, *“Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”* The implication is that God wants us to ask and receive, *because he wants* our joy to be full by receiving what we ask for. Now, we already talked about the importance and necessity of actually asking for the kinds of things that the Father will give us, but if we are asking for those things, it is also clear he wants to give them to us so that our joy may be full. He wants us to pray and receive because he wants us to be filled with joy. You can grow in your confidence in prayer by knowing that God wants to give you the things you ask for so that your joy will be full.

What kinds of things will that be? More money? Better health? A new sports car? A husband or wife? Those can bring some joy for a little while, but fullness of joy comes from asking in Jesus' name and receiving the things that Jesus delights in. God created our souls to find fullness of joy in those things. What are those things? Well, you can look at Jesus' prayers to find examples. We'll be looking at his prayer in John 17 for the next couple weeks. In that prayer Jesus prays that he would glorify God, that God would keep his disciples in his name and that they would be one, that he would keep them from the evil one, that they would be sanctified in the truth, that all of his disciples would abide in him, that the world would believe that the Father had sent him, and that they would be with him in heaven to see his glory.

Do those sound at all like the kinds of things you pray for? You can look at other prayers as well. These are the things that will bring fullness of joy, and it's by praying for the kinds of things Jesus prayed for and knowing that God wants to give those things to us because he wants our joy to be full that we can be confident that we will receive what we ask for.

The third way to grow in confidence in prayer is in what Jesus says in verses 25-28.

Read John 16:25-28.

*"I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. <sup>26</sup> In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; <sup>27</sup> for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup> I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."*

He makes an interesting statement in the middle of these verses – "I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf." In other words, "I'm not going to ask the Father for you, you need to ask yourselves." Why? Jesus says, "Because the Father loves you. The Father LOVES YOU. Because you love me and believe that I came from God, the Father wants you to come to him directly to ask in my name."

Did you know the Father loves you and wants you to come to him in prayer, just because he loves you? If you love Jesus and believe who he is, the Father loves you. You have been justified and forgiven and adopted into his family as his beloved son or daughter. This fills me with thoughts of a father's love for his children and how he wants them to come to him when they need help because he loves them and wants to help them.

When my kids come to me with a need, my gut reaction is to help them and give them what they need (as long as it's truly a need). I want to help them just because I love them. They're my kids! And God the Father is the same way.

Jesus said something similar to this in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:7-11 says, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup>Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven (WHO LOVES YOU!) give good things to those who ask him!"*

It's so much easier to ask for help when we know the person we're asking loves us and delights in us and wants us to ask for help and that's what it's like with our heavenly Father.

So we have three ways to grow in confidence in prayer: 1) Know you will receive what you ask when you ask for things in Jesus' name. 2) Know you will receive those things because God wants your joy to be full. 3) And know that God wants you to ask because he loves you and delights in you.

Let's not shy away from asking for God's help like many of us are so naturally good at. But let us embrace this invitation to come to our heavenly Father every day and present our requests before him.