

Introduction

Personal doubts

Does God listen when you pray? Listen to Martin Luther's struggle with prayer. "I often find myself praying without knowing whether God is listening or not; nevertheless, I must pray, for God has commanded it" (*Table Talk*). Similarly, John Calvin wrote, "For the saints, while they pray, do not always feel assured that God hears them. Nay, they are sometimes troubled with the fear that He has turned away His ears" (*Institutes*).

Is it reasonable for us to question if God listens to our prayers? Listen to God's rebuke of Israel in [Isaiah 1:15](#) "15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, **I will not listen...**" Similarly, Solomon wrote in [Proverbs 1:28](#) "28 Then they will call upon me, but **I will not answer**; they will seek me diligently but will not find me." [Micah 3:4](#) "4 Then they will cry to the Lord, but **he will not answer** them; he will hide his face from them at that time..."

Have you ever questioned if God listens to your prayers? After all, how do we know that He listens. We know He hears, but does he listen? Does He care? Does he respond?

I try to be reasonable. If I make a request of God, I do not expect an immediate response. I **want** God to solve my problem immediately, but I don't think it is reasonable to **expect** an immediate resolve. However, 3-4 months later, when I am still praying for God's help and the situation is still unresolved, shouldn't I begin to question if God is paying attention?

Main idea

If you question whether God listens to your prayers or if God is concerned about your prayers, 1 John has a word of encouragement for you. [1 John 5:14-15](#) teaches us about how our relationship with God relates to our prayers. The main idea of this passage is that **God answers prayers**. We have to read this point in its context to understand it fully. I hope that you walk away from these verses with **confidence (based on your relationship with Christ) that God answers your prayers**.

God hears His people

First, God hears His people's prayers. [1 John 5:14](#) "14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us." Notice that this passage focuses on **confidence**. That means that these verses are written in response to our natural **doubts** about God listening to our prayers. But verse 14 says that we can have **confidence that God hears our prayers.**

Context

If we do not read these verses in their context, we will likely misinterpret them. This letter was written to a church who had recently struggled with false teachers who had led some from the church away. The letter was written to **encourage** those who **remained** to be faithful to Christ and to one another. If we look back to the beginning of the chapter, [1 John 5:1-4](#) states that those who are reborn (who know God) through faith in Jesus live by faith, love, and holiness. [1 John 5:5-10](#) explains that God's testimony about Jesus, through water, blood, and the Spirit, gives us confidence of our faith in Jesus. [1 John 5:11-13](#) states that those who have faith in Jesus can have confidence of eternal life.

Our confidence

Why is the context so important? Verse 14 is written to those who have been born of God ([1 John 5:1-4](#)), who have believed God's testimony about Jesus ([1 John 5:5-10](#)), and have confidence of eternal life in Christ ([1 John 5:11-13](#)).

So, as we read about God's response to prayer in verses 14-15, **we must read it in the context of a relationship with God through faith in Jesus.** Our confidence in prayer completely hinges on our faith in Jesus. Only in Christ are we made righteous and reconciled with God. Only in Christ can we draw near to God. Only in Christ can we have confidence in prayer. In fact, all of those verses we read from the OT ([Isa 1:15](#); [Prov 1:28](#); [Mic 3:4](#)) where God stated He would not listen to their prayers were addressed to those who had rejected God, not those who had faith. **The basis of my confidence in prayer is my relationship with Christ.**

According to His will

Notice the qualification given in [1 John 5:14](#) "... if we ask anything according to his will ..." *How do we pray according to God's will?*

First, we must acknowledge that **we do not know God's will** in every circumstance. We often read in Scripture about circumstances that only make sense **after** the event. For example, **Joseph** spent 13 years in slavery and prison, although He was innocent. Yet [Gen 50:20](#) says that these things were God's plan for saving Jacob's family. When you pray, acknowledge that you do not know God's complete will.

Second, we do know **God's revealed will through Scripture**. The best way to pray "according to His will" is to spend time reading and praying about Scripture. A great example of this is [Daniel 9](#). In [Daniel 9](#), Daniel reads the book of Jeremiah, in which God said Israel would be in Babylonian captivity for 70 years. Daniel understands that the time is nearly complete, so he prays. He confesses that God's judgment was just because they were sinning and rebelling against God and he prays for God's mercy.

If we pray something that blatantly contradicts Scripture, we are not praying according to God's will. If we immerse our time, our minds, our hearts into Scripture, we will be better equipped for praying in God's will. Far too often, we allow circumstances, not Scripture, to shape our prayers. To pray in God's will, **let Scripture shape your prayers.**

He hears us

In what way does our relationship with God through Jesus give us confidence? [1 John 5:14](#) "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us." **We have confidence that God hears us.**

This means more than 'God knows the words we pray.' God knows all things. He knows our thoughts. He knows our prayers before we express them. Listen to [Psalm 139:4](#) "4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether." This is not limited to those who have a relationship with God. He **hears** everything that is prayed or even considered.

Verse 14 indicates that God **listens** to our prayers. That is, God is concerned about what we say. [Proverbs 15:8](#) "8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the **prayer** of the upright is **acceptable** to him." [Proverbs 15:29](#) "29 The Lord is far from the wicked, but he **hears** the **prayer** of the righteous." Doubts in God's silence are natural. But **those who know God have confidence that God listens to their prayers.**

God answers His people

Second, God answers His people's prayers. Not all of our prayers should be requests from God. In fact, from the examples we read in Scripture, I would suggest that the majority of our prayers should be a response to Scripture, not a request for blessing. Nonetheless, God desires that His people seek Him when they have needs (e.g., [Heb 4:16](#)). [1 John 5:15](#) “15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.” Today, I hope you find comfort in the fact that when you need God, **God answers the prayers of His people.**

Clarification

Does this mean that God will grant every request I make? This is the claim that many people make. People suggest that if I add “**in Jesus' name**” to **anything** I ask, God will grant it. **Prosperity Gospel** preachers will claim that if my faith is strong enough, God will grant me any desire, including health and wealth. And they will all point you to [1 John 5:15](#) as evidence that God will give you anything you ask.

It is important when we study (or discuss) Scripture that we do not interpret a verse outside of its immediate context or outside of the context of the whole of Scripture. [1 John 5:15](#) does not mean that God acts as a genie who grants our wishes.

Here are two specific examples where Scripture teaches that God will not listen to our prayers. First, God does not listen to our prayers when we ask **selfishly**. [James 4:3](#) “3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” Second, discontent marriage hinders our prayers, meaning that God does not listen to us if we are **not honoring him in our families**. [1 Peter 3:7](#) “7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Instead, our prayers should be guided by [Psalm 37:4](#) “4 Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” We should let our desires be shaped by a delight in the Lord. **Those who delight in God and desire Him will pray in such a way that brings glory to God.**

We have the requests

Why does God answer the prayers of His people? First, God answers the prayers of His people because **He is good.** [Matthew 7:7-11](#) “7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 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 give good things to those who ask him!” **God’s response to prayer flows from His own character.** Because He is **good**, He answers His people’s prayers.

Jesus intercedes

Second, God answers our prayers because this **glorifies God.** Jesus taught on this same subject in [John 14:13-14](#) “13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” **Praying by our faith in Jesus brings glory to God.** It displays our faith in Him and our dependence on Him.

It is important to acknowledge that we only have one intercessor between us and God. Mary does not pray on our behalf. Priests do not pray on our behalf. [Romans 8:34](#) “... Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” [1 John 2:1](#) “... if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” [Hebrews 7:25](#) “25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” [1 Timothy 2:5](#) “5 For there is one God, and there is **one mediator** between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” You do not need to go to a person or a place to pray. You can “draw near” to God through your relationship with Jesus.

In the Church

What are the implications of this passage for the church? Remember, this letter (1 John) was written to a church, not an individual. It was written to them and written for us.

Prayer should not be just individual. Churches should pray together. [1 Timothy 2:1](#) “1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,” [Acts 2:42](#) “42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Just as we can have confidence that God hears the prayers of individuals who know Him, we can also have confidence that God hears the church when we pray.

What should we pray about as a church? The short answer is everything. But if we are to pray specifically in response to Scripture, then we should pray in response to what Scripture says about the church. We should pray for unity ([Eph 4:1-6](#)). We should pray for fellowship ([Acts 2:42-47](#)). We should pray that we would make disciples of all nations ([Matt 28:18-20](#)). We should pray for holiness ([2 Cor 6:14-7:1](#)). We should pray that Christ would be glorified in the church ([Eph 3:20-21](#)). We should pray that God's Word is faithfully proclaimed in the church ([2 Tim 4:1-5](#)).

A church who does not pray is a church that does not believe we need God. A Christ-exalting church will be a praying church.

Conclusion

Personal Reflection

Do you read Scripture and allow Scripture to shape your prayers? Do you seek God's will above your own will in your prayers? Do you pray with confidence that God loves you and hears your prayers? Do you trust God's will above your requests? Do you rely on God for help in times of need (or rely on your own ability)? Do you pray with and for the church?

[1 John 5:14-15](#) is written to give us assurance. You may **feel** like God is not listening and God is not responding. But [1 John 5:14-15](#) reassures us that **God answers prayer**.

Closing Scripture: [Hebrews 4:14-16](#) “14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”