

Be Purposeful in Prayer

Passage: 1 John 5:14-15 | Speaker: Steve Grothoff | Date: July 26, 2026

Summary

Transitioning from the Daniel series, Steve opens a short series on prayer, landing this week in 1 John 5:14-15: if we ask anything according to God's will, He hears us. Building on earlier looks at prayer in James and in Daniel's own example, the message centers on three points about what makes prayer truly purposeful. Listen in for Steve's full walkthrough of what those three points mean for how we pray.

Key takeaways

- **Prayer is a powerful, underutilized tool.** It should be our first choice, not our last resort, and most of us underuse it because we don't see immediate results from skipping it.
- **There is no secret formula for answered prayer.** The real condition in 1 John 5:14 is asking according to God's will, not ours; an unanswered prayer is not proof of insufficient faith.
- **A real correction of the "name it and claim it" misreading of Matthew 7:7-8.** Some teach that faith alone guarantees you get what you ask for. Scripture never promises that, and it isn't the case.
- **Proper prayer is personal, meaningful, sincere, and humble,** not rote repetition or performance. God knows the posture of your heart even when you can't find the words.
- **Corporate prayer, the church praying together for the same things, is the most effective prayer there is.** The early church grew from 18 people to 120 to 3,000 while staying prayerfully united around one mission.

Transcript

of Daniel. So what we've decided between a bunch of us is that the last little bit of Daniel is a lot of information and not really a lot of like sermon and application. So we wanted to jump to things that are a little bit more applicable for us, but also our Sunday night we're going to continue going through Daniel. So if you guys have been enjoying that and like the the historical background and like the information, continue to come. We are not meeting tonight though because hymn sing is tonight.

So we will start that again next week just to take care of some of those things so that you guys know. But yes, we are going to have just be on the on the heels of of Daniel's prayer. I wanted to do another sermon just on purposeful prayer. So we went through in James the power of prayer. We went through in Daniel a good example of what prayer looks like and why we should confess in our prayer. So this morning I want to go through purposeful prayer.

So we will be in first John chapter five verses 14 and 15, not a whole chapter. So if you guys want to stand with me for just a second, we will read this and we will get started. First John five, 14 and 15. Now this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him.

All right. Thank you guys. Father, we we come to you. We just come to you and talking today about the the privilege that we have to pray and the purpose that we have in praying and and the the power that that has, Father. And just knowing like we talked about in the mystery box, Father, that that that coming and being able to just lay those things at your feet, the the feet of the creator of all things and almighty God, a holy God, a just and righteous God.

And that we just as as as mere human beings, being able to come to you and come to your throne and sit at your feet and ask of things. Father, just how amazing of a thing that is. So Father, be with us as we go through your word. Father, be with with the the words that that I speak and let them be edifying not only to each and every one of us, but also, Father, just true to your word and what your word is. So Father, thank you.

Thank you for your word. Thank you for the ability to come to you in prayer. And we ask all these things because they're only possible through the power of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. All right. We all have desires. We all have plans, dreams. We all have things that we want to do with our lives. Do we not? Does anybody in here not have any desires at all? Does anybody in here not have anything that they want to do with their life? No future that they have planned out?

No, we all do. That's that's part of it, because if you didn't have anything that you were pushing towards or looking forward to, then I would wonder what's wrong with you. We each and every one of us has something different that we want to do with our lives. We each and every one of us has a desire, has a passion, has a drive to be somewhere, to go somewhere, to to to. There's a destination to our journey. But to what end? For what purpose? That's what we want to talk about today.

That's that's what he's getting at here when John and John in this letter is what what are you asking for? What are you wanting help with? What what is your means? What is your motive? What is your drive for these things? Now, we hear these verses a lot. Verses like this get taken out of context, sectioned out, parts left out, misread. You know, the the Matthew 7, 7 and 8, where it says, asking you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened.

And there are people out there, I don't even I hesitate to even use the word pastor. There are people out there that that use that as their means of, well, because you are a Christian now, you're going to get everything you want. Because you've got this, because you've got Jesus, you've got this superpower, like we talked about with the kids. And that's that's not the case. The Bible doesn't anywhere tell us that. The Bible tells us that if we come to Christ, guess what? We're going to suffer like Christ suffered.

And and there is there is something in that. And and they they they misuse this and they they make it sound like if you ask and God doesn't give it to you, it's because you didn't have enough faith or it's because you didn't ask properly or didn't use this formula that you should have used to do this. Well, I'm not going to give you any of that today because it doesn't exist. There is nothing. You're not going to say something, some magic word. You're not going to tell God, ask God, please.

And and whatever you ask, he's going to give it to you. That's not how it works. These guys misconstrue this is because you asked and you didn't receive it. It's because you didn't have enough faith or maybe you're undeserving of this. And while that's, again, not the case, this this is not at all the case, because what we see here in the word is that if we ask, we shall receive. But there's that little piece that everybody leaves out according to his will, not ours. It doesn't matter what we want.

It's not what we want. It's what what we want to use to further the kingdom for the will of God. So today we're going to talk through this and we're going to I've got three main points I want you guys to to to take from this. One, prayer is a powerful tool. Prayer is a powerful tool. We're speaking to the almighty God, creator of all things, and he hears us and he answers. Prayer is a powerful tool. Two, we're going to talk about how to properly ask God in prayer.

I just told you I didn't have a formula for you. I don't. But I do have what the Bible prescribes for us as to what we should be doing when we pray. Number three, I have been reading a book and I have passed that book out to the deacons and I have been really thinking about this and praying about this a lot. And I want to talk a little bit about this. Corporate prayer is the most effective type of prayer that there is. When we come together as a church and when we pray for the same things together as a body, it makes a difference.

A praying church is a powerful church. Prayer is a powerful thing. We have that power and we, if we come together, have that power and it just magnifies that. So let's get into it. First one, prayer is a powerful tool. As Christians, prayer should be our first choice, not our last resort. How often do we pray when we're in the midst of something as opposed to praying daily? Praying first thing when we wake up in the morning. I'm talking to myself here too. I have problems with that.

Prayer is one of those things that is easy for us to set to the side because we don't see any immediate results or consequence from not doing it. Not always. Two, prayer is one of the most powerful yet underutilized tools that we have as Christians. Something that is, again, we are talking to God. We have the ability to go to Him and ask Him for things. Do we do it all the time? Is it something that we do often? How often do we talk on the phone with friends of ours?

How often do we catch up with people after church that we haven't talked to in a while? What do those conversations look like? Is it you coming to somebody and like, oh my gosh, I need you to be doing this for me. I need a favor from you. I'm in desperate times. I need something. No. We come together and we talk. And prayer is that, just that. Prayer is communication with God. We talked about that a little bit last week. We mentioned that prayer is just a general term for fellowship with God.

We mentioned the different types of prayer. We talked about praise and worship and how worship is the inward acknowledgement of who God is. Praise is the outward acknowledgement. We just sang three songs for that reason. You can do both of those at the same time. You can outwardly praise God and inwardly praise God and worship Him at the same time. Thanksgiving. We talked about that. Gratitude for what God's done for us. Gratitude for what God's going to do for us. Confession. Confessing our sins. Intercession. Praying for other people.

And supplication. Asking God for wisdom and guidance. Or even making requests to Him. When we trust and lean on God, it's always more beneficial than us trusting and leaning on our own. Proverbs tells us that. Lean not on your own understanding, but in all things acknowledge Him. In all things acknowledge Him. And He will direct your paths. We need to remember the importance of prayer as communication with God. Like I said, not just coming to Him and asking for things. I know people, and I'm sure each and every one of you does, that when that phone number comes up on your phone, and you look at it, and you're like, I haven't talked to them in months.

What do they want? It's not a, it's not a, you know that it's them asking for something. It's not them calling, hey, how you doing? Hey, how's everything going? No, it's, hey, can you, can you help me out with something? That's a, that's, that's a, that's not a good, that's not a good friendship. That's not a good relationship. Now, I've known most of these guys for years, and I do the same thing to them, and there are times that that's just the relationship that you can have with somebody, but that is not what we want in our relationship with God.

We don't want our conversations with God to sound like we're sitting on Santa's lap. We don't want our conversation with God to sound like, okay, hey, these are the things that I want, and no. We need to be going to God, and we need to be prayerful in all things. We need to be thankful to God. We need to be confessing. We need to be doing all of these things, but there is something to be said, and there is a lot of verses that talk about asking for things, going to God, and, and, and seeking things.

It's the same way that, that you would, as a, as a parent to a child, when your child comes to you, and says, hey, and, and comes to you, and, and, and makes a request, because they know that they can trust you. They know that you are the one that can help them get what it is that they need. Same goes for our relationship with God. We build our friendships through meaningful conversation, through trusting, through speaking truth into one another, sharing stories, and then by taking accountability, apologizing, and forgiving each other when we do something wrong to one another.

We need to be doing the same. That needs to be, all of those things need to be in our conversations that we have with God as well. If we read there in 14, it says, anything, if we ask anything. In 15, it says, whatever we ask. We can request anything of God. We can go to God with anything. God, I, I need help with this. God, I need your assistance here. God, I would really like to be able to this, that, A, B, C, D, whatever it is.

When we pray, we can be assured that he hears our prayers. There's multiple verses. Psalm 34, 17, 145, 19, Jeremiah 29, 12, just to name a few. Those are just a few of the many verses that talk about when we pray, God hears us. Again, we can ask God for anything, whether that be forgiveness, whether that be praying for somebody else, whether that be thanking God for what he's done for us, or it could be for the wisdom and guidance in a decision. Could be, hey God, this is what I would like.

Help me. Yes, no, maybe. And he will answer. I told the, the Bible study group last Sunday night about a conversation I had with God. I was at a church. I went, I was, I had been going, um, preaching at a church for a while. They were looking for a pastor and I was like, all right, Lord, if this is where you want me, make it clear. Lord, if this isn't where you want me, make it clear. Ouch. I wasn't expecting the conversation that I had with a friend of mine, the one who had gotten me that position in the first place.

Um, he called me that Sunday afternoon after one of the first couple of times that I preached there and had kind of had a somewhat of a conversation with them about, I would really like to be your pastor. Well, I got a phone call from a buddy of mine who got me that position. He said, he's like, well, hey, how's it, how's it going out there? I said, oh, it's going really good. You know, I've been talking with them and I think, I think I'm going to put my, my resume in.

And he's like, yeah, about that. It's like, oh, what does that mean? Um, he said, so the, so the way that the Baptist convention works, they have regions and you've got a DOM. So you're director of mission. So he's your pastor over pastors essentially is the best term for that. Um, for that area, the DOM for that area said, I absolutely positively under no circumstances whatsoever want anybody that has ever been through any kind of a divorce. Well, I got divorced almost, gosh, almost 18 years ago now, long before I was a Christian, long before I was living the way that I do now.

And, and, and I told him, I said, so you're telling me that, that I found the one sin in life that, that God's grace won't cover. And he said, well, I get it. He said, I disagree with them, but they don't want you. That crushed me. When we pray, we will get an answer. Sometimes that answer is yes. Sometimes that answer is no. Sometimes that's a door gently closing in your face. Sometimes that's the door slamming in your face, but it's God's way of saying, Hey, this isn't what I want for you.

When we pray for something and we don't get an answer, we don't think we get an answer. That answer is probably no. We just, it's sometimes we don't want to accept that. We need to learn how to accept that when we pray for something and we don't immediately get it. Sometimes that answer is no, but persistence in prayer is key also. So there's the, the, the other side of that razor's edge of persistence is key. We were, you know, as we go through Daniel, um, the next chapter, as we got into

chapter 10, we hear that Daniel starts praying and it took, he prayed for three weeks for three weeks, for three weeks, Daniel prayed for this thing.

And Gabriel shows up and says, Hey, sorry, I was on my way here and I had other things I had to deal with, but your prayer gave me the strength to continue. When, what if Daniel had stopped praying after three days? Would, would that, would, would Gabriel have even showed up? We need to be mindful of that. And if it is truly something that we want, if it is truly something that we feel is going to be something that we can use to glorify God with, then we should be persistent in praying for that.

Now here comes the caveat. We need to ask for these things according to his will. We need to remember this part. We need to understand what that means. And the easiest way to understand that what his will is for your life is to read, know, and understand this right here. By reading his word, we can discern what God's will has been for his people throughout history, as well as the promises he's made and kept with humanity through the years. With that in mind, with that as our scope, we can look and think to ourselves and pray, God, is this what you want for me?

Is this what you want for me? God, this is something that is on my heart. This is something that I feel very passionately about. This is something that I desire, but I desire it because I want to use it to glorify you. It can help us get a better idea of what that looks like. We can start aligning our will with God's will, but this also helps us to learn that we can trust that God is leading us in the right direction and protecting us no matter what.

When we acknowledge that God is in control, we can begin to pray with more confidence. We can begin to properly pray. First line of today's passage says, now this is the confidence that we have in him. So where's our confidence? Where's our confidence when we pray? Our confidence when we pray is in Christ. Our confidence is in the fact that we know that he has bridged the gap between us and God. We can communicate with God because Christ has bridged that gap. His perfect life, sacrifice for our sins and atonement for our transgressions, gives us the ability as filthy, depraved sinners to go and approach the throne of a perfect and holy God, bow at his feet and boldly ask for anything, knowing that he will hear us.

That should help us to understand that God answers our prayers. When God answers our prayers, it has way less to do with our faith in it and way more to do with God's grace and mercy towards us. Our faith has something to do with it. Don't hear me wrong. Our faith, prayers without our faith are just as powerless, but we need to remember that it isn't just our faith that makes our prayers powerful. It is God's grace. It is his sufficiency. It is his power that makes our prayers what they are.

Let me put this into perspective, give you an idea, give you kind of a way to think about it like this. What if God only blessed you for the things that you asked him for? How would your prayer life be then? What if the only things that you got were the things that you directly asked God for? What if you had to pray every night? God, I pray that you can wake me up tomorrow morning so that I can have another day. God, I pray that I can continue to have good health.

God, I pray that you can take care of me and mine. What if that was the case? How would our prayer lives be then? What if we had to ask? What if everything that we did we had to ask for? No, we don't because God is gracious. God, we say all the time, I'm alive today because of the grace of God. Well, that is absolutely true. Each and every day, each and every breath you take is because of the grace of God because if God was only just and not gracious, not one of us would be here.

Humanity would have lasted about two pages in the Bible and that would have been God's doing and then the first thing that we that recorded that recorded that we did as a humanity, as people, we ruined it. That's the first thing recorded from people is we took what God gave us and we immediately screwed it up. A just God only would have ended it right there because that's what we deserved. So do we focus our prayers on aligning with God's will or do we focus more of our prayers on this is what I want?

Where is our desire? Where is our heart at? It's what we pray for. Is our prayer on giving God glory or is our prayer on bringing us glory? So what is proper and purposeful prayer? Proper prayer to God is four things. It is personal, it is meaningful, it is sincere, and it is humble. These four things are very closely tied together but they're all individually just as important as well. We need to not only acknowledge God for who he is but we also need to acknowledge who we are when we come before him.

What we bring to the table which is nothing other than our sin. That's all we bring to the table which is why confession is important in prayer which is why most of Daniel's prayer was confessing the things that they as a people had done wrong. Not necessarily just Daniel but they as a people had done wrong. As we deepen our knowledge of God the more confidently and honestly that we can go before him that we can go before him and pray. He's almighty, all-knowing, perfect in justice, infinite in grace, and righteous, yet wrathful.

So prayer is to be personal, meaningful, sincere, and humble. I'll give you a great example of those first three being absolutely positively not the case for a lot of people. And I am going to talk trash on the Catholic Church for a little bit. I grew up Catholic. I know what that looks like. When you repeat things that you don't really truly know what it is you're saying, when you use words that you that are not coming from you they're just something that somebody else more eloquent than yourself had wrote down.

That's not personal. That's not meaningful. And that's not sincere. We don't come to God with prepared prayers or with repetition or with empty words. Our personal side of our prayer is us coming to God with our own thoughts, our own feelings, and our own words. Sometimes our prayers don't even have to be words. Sometimes all we can do is sit in the presence of God in our anguish or in our brokenness and just weep or rejoice in something that God has done for us. It doesn't always require words.

God knows the posture of your heart. So if you are in a place where you are praying and you cannot find the words, understand that God knows what it is that you are trying to tell him. Prayer with

meaning. Again, this is not empty repetition or faithless words. These are, this is, isn't God being concerned with our outward presence, the displays of us praying. This is, this is when we fall down on our faces in private, cry out. This is when we approach God in a real way.

There's something spiritual about those moments. There's something very deep. There's something very real in the moments where we go and we bear all to God and we just say, this is what I need. This is where I'm at. This is what is going on in my life. God wants our honest prayers. He doesn't want ceremony. He doesn't want display. He wants private spiritual worship with you. He wants time with you. Not sharing words that you don't get. Sharing passages that you don't quite understand. Prayer is sincere.

When we are in need, we approach God with urgency. When things are going well, we often forget to approach Him at all. And when we do, that Thanksgiving can sometimes seem less sincere and more of an obligation. Kind of like a kid, like, all right, you need to go tell them thank you for that Christmas present. Like, thanks. And then they walk off. Like, it's, it sometimes just feels obligatory to go to God and ask and be sincere about it. So I have, I'm going to let Charles Spurgeon say this way better than I could.

And instead of me trying to regurgitate what it is that he said, I'm just going to read to you out of this book, one of his sermons about prayer. And he says, take for instance, a man who is very poor. He has lost his job. He has worn out his shoes and trying to find work. He does not know where his next meal is coming from for him or his children. If he prays in this situation, it is likely to be a very sincere prayer. He would be in real earnest because of real trouble.

I have sometimes wished that very comfortable Christians, those who seem to treat religion as if it were a bed of roses, could have just a little bit of roughing it and really come into actual difficulties. A life of ease breeds hope, hosts of falsehoods and pretenses, which should soon vanish in the presence of matter of fact trials and tribulations. Many a man has been converted to God by hunger, weariness, and loneliness, who, when he was a wealthy man surrounded by frivolous flatterers, never thought of God at all.

Many a man on board a ship out in the ocean has learned to pray in the cold chill of an iceberg or in the horrors of a tidal wave, out of which the ship could not rise. When the mast has gone by the board and every timber has been strained and the ship has seemed doomed, then hearts have begun to pray in sincerity. God loves sincerity when we mean it, when our soul melts into prayer, when we say, I must have it or be lost. Then it is no sham, no vain performance, but a real heartbreaking, agonizing cry, then God accepts it.

So how do we find a way to be just as sincere with God in the good times as much as we are in the bad times? That's difficult. It is. I get it. I'm the same way. There are times that, like he said, when things are going good, I forget to pray at all because things are going good. I don't have that nag of, oh man, I need help. Praying with humility is the last one. When a person has reached a low point, it's easy to become humble and admit we need help.

But we should approach God with humility because we are sinners, not just because we need help, but because we need his help, no one else's. Later, earlier in this book, in the book of John, 1 John 1, 9, he says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We talked last week about how that confession, how giving those things to God removes that barrier, opens that door, and there are quite a few verses about the hindrance, the hindrances of prayer, the things that can hinder prayer.

Things like unconfessed sin, unrepentant sin that you may admit, but, well, yeah, I know I got a problem with this, but I'm going to keep doing it because it's too hard for me to quit. Things like that. We need to come to God with humility. Final point. Corporate prayer is the most effective prayer. Corporate prayer. When we come together as a church and pray, those prayers become that much more effective. The illustration that I had was, you guys remember what the Christmas Eve service, when you have candles and one person lights a candle and then they start all lighting the candles, how bright the room gets for one with all of those candles, but how warm the room gets pretty quickly just with all those little flames.

How much of a difference all of those flames make as opposed to just one or two or even five. When you have a room full of them, how much brighter and how much warmer that makes everything. We can take examples from the early church. The early church was often described as of being of one accord or being of the same mind or of the same spirit. They were all laboring towards the same goal and doing so quite prayerfully. Pentecost. After Jesus was resurrected and they had ascended, there were 11 men, seven women in an upper room that met together and prayed.

They were prayerful. Acts tells us they were continued in one accord in prayer and supplication. These 18 people were the church. This was the church at this point. There was 18 people in prayer praying for what Jesus had done to blow and blow up into something bigger, to become that church that he had come to them and said, go and make disciples of all nations. And they were like, we're gonna have to pray about this because we don't know how that's going to happen. There's 18 of us.

How are the 18 of us going to change the world? Well, a chapter later, you find out there's 120 of them. And then a chapter later, there's 3,000 of them come to Christ. Exponential growth immediately because they were prayerful from the beginning. It's easy for church, churches, to have different ideas about the trajectory of the church and have competing affections for what they think church should look like. Diversity is a healthy thing in a church. It is. But it can also lead to division. Diversity isn't a bad thing when you think about the fact that there are different wisdoms and experiences coming from different walks of life, coming together and sharing those experiences and having a variety of backgrounds that people come from.

A variety of people coming together for a common goal is the main point of that. For a common goal. When we all focus what we are doing in the same direction and we are prayerfully aiming our mission towards the glory of God, that is when things happen. So my challenge to you is the week goes through

this week. How do we as a church ensure that we are of one accord? How do we as a church stay unified in our vision for what Bethel is, for what Bethel should be, for what Bethel is going to be?

We do things like that by coming together as a church and praying for the future of our church. We do things like pray for the aligning of our desires as a church to the will of God. We pray as a church to ensure that our focus is on Christ. Not on our own ideas of what we think it should or shouldn't be, on what Jesus wants for this church, on what God wants to do with this church. Church isn't a spectator sport. This isn't all that there is to it.

This isn't come sit in a seat, see a show, and go home. That's not church. We need to be actively involved in all the happenings of the church. Same goes for our prayer life in the church. We need to all be actively praying as a church for the same things. We have a prayer list. I know we do, but I think that we need to step up a little more. I think we need to do more, take some more ownership, and we need to be more prayerful for the well-being of Bethel as a group, together, corporately.

It doesn't need to be individually and on our own time. We need to be doing it together. And I come to you saying that knowing full well that that may or may not include me. And that's fine. That is not at all what I want this to be. I would like for us to come together as a church for the future of Bethel, whether that is me standing up here or somebody else standing up here, because I want what God's will is for this church and every church as much as I do anywhere.

That also means that we need to be praying for each individual congregant at Bethel. We need to be in prayer for the people, look around, think about who we were sitting near, and be praying for them. That means we need to know each other. That means we need to be in each other's lives. We need to know what each other have going on, and be able to pray for one another. Then we need to broaden that out, and we need to not only be prayerful for our church, we need to be prayerful for our community.

We need to be prayerful for our state, for our nation, and we need to be prayerful for our brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world, because each and every one of those things, in some way, shape, or form correlates to the well-being of us right here, right now. Each and every one of those things. It also is us taking the time and taking the responsibility to be prayerful for the well-being of not only this church, but all churches. Christ's bride, the church, Big C Church.

Again, like I said, a prayerful church is a powerful church. If we are in prayer together, focused on what God wants for us, then nothing's going to stop that. God's will will be done. So in conclusion, prayer is a communication with God. Prayer is a powerful tool. As Christians, it needs to be our first choice, not our last resort, and we need to not underutilize it. We need to do it more often. We need to be much better about it. Prayer should be purposeful. Our prayers should be confident and bold, yet meaningful, sincere, and personal.

The deeper we know God through his word, the more confidently we can pray. And corporate prayer is highly effective prayer. Praying as a church helps to unite the church. Again, a prayerful church is a

powerful church. So with that, let's pray and let's have a good week and let's think through that this week and let's focus on what does that look like for each and every one of us individually and what does that look like for us as a church moving forward? Father, we thank you.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for prayer. And Father, we thank you just for the ability to just speak directly to you. Father, help us as a church, as Bethel, and Father, as the bigger, broader spectrum, the church, the church, your bride. Father, help us all to be prayerful for what the future looks like for each and every one of us, for each and every one of your churches, for each and every one in your church. Father, just help us to use prayer properly.

Help us to utilize it well and to utilize it often. Because Father, that is one thing that we just, I feel like in every Christian's life, it's something that we all agree we can do better at. So Father, help us, each and every one of us, to be more prayerful. And help us to keep our eyes focused on you and your will for each and every one of us. We ask all these things in your son's name. Amen.

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