

Podcast 277 Praying According to His Will

This is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us.

Scott: So are you doing the quarantine beard thing? I haven't seen you in a while.

Steve: Clean-shaven head, clean-shaven face.

Scott: Well, I won't ask about your legs.

Steve: Well, it's interesting you bring that up. My wife and I practiced a form of courtship many, many years ago, and our first phone call went for over 3 hours. It was very special, very meaningful, and at one point, I must have been feeling very comfortable with her, I told her that when I was a senior in high school, I received a senior superlative. Not "most likely to succeed" or "most athletic" but best legs. Now maybe they misread it and thought "longest legs." But, whatever the reason, I told her that, and she immediately shot back at me, which I loved, "Jehovah taketh no pleasure in the legs of a man." I loved her spunk. Here I was boasting about my legs, and she brought me right back to earth very quickly.

Scott: I do not know how to respond to that, so we might as well just move on.

Steve: We're going to do prayer part 2 today because after we finished our last podcast, I had so much in my heart about this topic and we had run out of time. I want to share the most important lesson that I've learned about prayer.

Father, help us today once again to draw near to You, counting on that wonderful promise that says that if we draw near or come close to You, You will come close to us. We look to You this morning. Help me to convey these thoughts from Your Word accurately, and give us soft hearts to receive what You have for us today. In Jesus' name, amen.

If I was asked to give a talk on prayer to young people who perhaps were just being introduced to the concept of prayer, I would say that the #1 verse is 1 John 5:14-15: "And this is the confidence that we have toward 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 that we have asked of Him."

Very simple, and very meaningful at the same time. Prayer that is going to receive God's attention is prayer that's according to His will. How do we know what's according to His will? Well, we know what's according to His will by what He's revealed in Scripture. Heaven and earth are going to pass away, but My Words will endure forever. God's Word is God's revealed will. If you have any questions about God's will, go to God's Word. Which is why it's so important to read God's Word, to understand His purposes and His will.

A wonderful example of somebody who was familiar with God's Word and then acted on it - which is what prayer is, prayer is active faith, it's faith in action - is Daniel. I'm

going to read two portions of Scripture which illustrate this point very clearly. Daniel 9:1–3: “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans – in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books” – he was reading Scripture. He “perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the Word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet” – so, this was God’s will, it was according to His will, according to what Jeremiah the prophet prophesied. Back to reading – “must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.”

We know Daniel was in Babylon. He was living there during the captivity, when the two tribes, the southern kingdom, had been taken captive by Babylon. They’d been moved, and Daniel was now living in Babylon. He was a part of that prophecy, and he’s reading Jeremiah’s words that they were going to be there for 70 years. Let me go back and read Jeremiah 25:11–13: “This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.”

Thus Daniel, in his daily reading of Scripture, which included the writings of Jeremiah, perceived that the seventy years were almost up. So, in the third verse of Daniel 9, he says, “I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” Daniel read Scripture, believed what He had read, and then instead of just packing his suitcase and sitting by the bus stop for the next bus to Jerusalem, he said, “I now am going to pray that God’s Word will come true.”

He knew Jeremiah 1:12, “The LORD said to me, ‘You have seen well, for I am watching over My Word to perform it.’” Not only was Daniel watching over God’s Word and asking God to fulfill it; God was watching over His Word to perform it, but He needed somebody to mix it with faith.

That’s an expression that’s very meaningful to me. Let’s see if I can explain it a little bit. It comes from Hebrews 4:2, and it says, “Good news came to us just as to them” – apparently there’s two groups of people, and they both heard the good news. And then the Scripture goes on to say, “But the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not mixed with faith” – or, modern translations say, “united by faith with those who listened.”

Jeremiah spoke God’s Word at God’s direction. What he uttered in the Spirit was now the Word of God. A lot of people knew this portion of the Word of God and had heard it when it was first prophesied, but Daniel believed it, and he said, “This is going to

happen! These seventy years are almost up, and now I'm going to put my faith in action and I'm going to pray that what God said will come to pass."

There's a faith component as well. As we know in Mark 11:24, "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ."

We read the Word of God for direction to discover God's will, and then pray based on what we've read, and pray with faith because we believe that God is watching over His Word, His revealed will. Somehow He needs us – I'm not sure if "needs" is the correct word – but He calls us, perhaps is the better word, to cooperate with Him and mix it with faith and believe it, and He wants us to be reminding Him of His Word.

He doesn't mind our bugging Him, because it honors God when we believe His Word. It honors Him when we are praying according to His will. Now, let me give you an example. There is a prayer meeting that I'm a part of. We meet Tuesday nights. And last week we were praying for the peace of Jerusalem. Why do we pray for the peace of Jerusalem? Well, it says in Psalm 122:6, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!" It's a command.

It's also a command in Isaiah 62:6–7. I use the word "Jehovah" instead of "the Lord" here. I just feel like it has more teeth. "You who put Jehovah in remembrance" – see, we're reminding God about the peace of Jerusalem. He told us to pray for it, and we're reminding Him. "Jehovah, in the name of Jesus, I pray for the peace of Jerusalem." And here's what the rest of 62:6–7 says: "Take no rest, and give Him no rest until He establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth."

God puts prayer for Jerusalem on people's hearts. They're called "watchmen" in that 62nd chapter. He says, "I want you to put Me in remembrance. I want you to keep being like that widow we talked about in the last podcast who just keeps knocking, who persists, who keeps at it." And we want to keep at it and keep reminding God to make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

One of the prayers that I pray for Jerusalem is based on Zechariah 12:10, which says, "I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on Him Whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over Him, as one weeps over a firstborn." That's called conviction of sin.

There's going to be a time – because we know that from Zechariah 12 – when God will pour out the Spirit of grace and pleas for mercy on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and He's going to convict them, and all of a sudden, they're going to go, "Oh! We killed the Messiah! We killed Jesus!" And they're going to mourn, and they're going to repent, and it's going to be a wonderful time.

Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of Christ. So we read the Word of God to give us faith, but we also read the Word of God to give us our bearing, to reveal His

will. Let me see if I can give you some more examples. I know that you – everybody that’s listening, I’m sure, is praying for somebody to be saved, somebody to know Jesus who doesn’t know Jesus. Sadly, sometimes our theology gets ahead of us and we start thinking, “Maybe they aren’t part of the elect. Maybe God hasn’t called them.” I fight that little myth with Scripture. 1 Timothy 2:4 says, “Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” All people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth!

You and I have no clue who God has called, who He hasn’t called, and all that. If we’re going to resort to that kind of thinking, that’s just pure laziness and unbelief as far as I’m concerned. I’m going to keep badgering God. I’ve got a list of people that I pray for, I pray for them on Sundays because Sunday is a good day to be saved.

I can pray with confidence for all of those people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, and the rest of that verse says, “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” I want them to believe in Jesus. I don’t care if they think that there’s multiple ways up the mountain. There is one way up the mountain. It’s Jesus Christ. And He is the way, the truth, and the life. And I’m praying for them to experience salvation, conviction of the Holy Spirit pointing to Jesus of the Holy Spirit. I have full confidence when I pray.

Here are some other personal examples of praying according to His will. This recording is being made in April. I like April. To me, April is like the beginning of the year. When I was in seminary, I attended a retreat. And at this retreat, God moved by His Spirit. People were visibly moved. I don’t know how else to say it. You know when God shows up. God showed up. To everybody, it appeared to me, except me.

I came back from the retreat and was searching my heart to see if I’d sinned. I didn’t know what was going on as I was still a young believer, but I was not connected with what God had done during the weekend. I went to my missions professor, Dr. Christy Wilson, a godly man, and described my predicament. He recommended I read a sermon by Charles Finney about breaking up the fallow ground. It’s the ground after the farmland sits all winter. It’s crusty on the top. This expression is found in Hosea 10:12, “Break up your **fallow** ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD.”

I sought God I asked Him to work in my heart and break up the hard parts and soften my heart. I didn’t realize until I read that little sermon that I had a hard heart. I also found this wonderful Scripture in Ezekiel 36:24–27, “I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules.”

My problem was that I had a heart of stone. The solution was I needed to ask Him to give me a heart of flesh. In April of that year, I began each day by asking God to give me a heart of flesh. He is the expert heart surgeon. I was praying according to His will. I was asking Him to do something for me that He said He would do when He said, "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh."

A couple years ago, I was having trouble believing God's love in the mornings. I was waking up under a cloud. I didn't know what to make of it, and then I ran across this wonderful passages of Scripture in Psalms, that say, "Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." Psalm 90:14. The other verse reads, "Let me hear in the morning of Your steadfast love, for in You I trust." Psalm 143:8.

When I awoke in the morning, the first thing I would do was pray, "Let me hear in the morning of Your steadfast love!" I prayed Scripture, I prayed God's will, I prayed according to His inspired Word. I prayed that way for a long time. Months, maybe even years. And now I don't have to do it anymore, because God's Word came to the rescue, and I was praying according to His will, and I know that if I pray according to His will, He hears me.

Another example in my life occurred when I asked God in 2011 to help me to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I knew that God would answer that prayer because of Deuteronomy 6, which is quoted in Matthew 22. I didn't know how He would answer that prayer, I didn't know when He would answer that prayer, but I knew He would answer that prayer because it was definitely according to His will. God wants us to love Him with everything in us.

When I pray, "Father, help me to love my wife as Christ loved the church," I know that God will answer that prayer. I know that He will turn my heart towards my wife in a special way. I know that He's going to reveal ways that I can love her as Christ loved the church, because that is the command for husbands in Ephesians 5:25. Recall that prayer is faith in action, faith based on His Word, faith according to His will.

Sometimes I hear people pray for things, and I have no idea if it's God's will for them, and I'd like to back them up with an Amen, but when somebody uses God's Word in prayer, it helps me. I like it when we pray and say, "Father, You say in Your Word that I am to love my wife as Christ loved the church, and I'm asking You, I'm reminding You of that. And I'm mixing faith with that, and I'm believing for You to help me because You're the One that said You would do it, You're the One that's called me to do it."

I was talking to someone the other day, and I said, "God designed us to love our wives. God designed us as men to lay our lives down for our wife." I don't believe God would have called us to do it if He hadn't designed it, or if He hadn't provided a way for us to do it with the help of His Spirit. Whichever way you want to put it, when we're praying, let's make sure that we're praying according to His will. Amen?

Now Scott can you give me an example of how you pray according to his will?

Scott: Certainly. 2 Peter 3:9 says, “God is not slow in keeping His promise as some understand slowness, but He is patient with you, wanting all of us to come to repentance.”

Scott: It’s just like the one you were saying where, you know, there’s a list of people I pray for to come to Christ, and it’s been years for a lot of these people, and they’re still not there to my knowledge, so I keep praying and trusting in Him.

Steve: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” Wonderful verse, that’s a good one. Good job.

Scott: Another one is Ephesians 6:4, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” I pray for that. It’s not like I have that scheduled to pray every week, but it comes up about every week, I think, because I need help with it all the time. Sometimes daily. Yeah, trusting in Him to help me train them in His ways and not to exasperate them, because I have a strong tendency to exasperate my children. So I pray for that one a lot.

Scott: And almost daily the armor of God from Ephesians 6, just praying, actually praying through putting on the armor. The helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and all that. Like, these are weapons to do battle in the spiritual realm, and that has taken on a lot more meaning in the last five years or so, as it feels to me like we’re heating up. And, you know, it’s probably always been that way. I’m just more aware of it now. But praying against Satan, resisting the devil so he will flee from me and my family, I mean, that, man, he hates us, and he’s coming after our children, our marriages, he’s coming after the truth. And we need to be praying against him constantly.

Steve: Thank you! Good job. Well, I’ll give you one last one, and then we’ll close it up. Sometimes, God commands us to do stuff: “Put on the whole armor of God.” “Resist the devil, and he will flee.” We even get our marching orders for prayer from Scripture. It’s not like we’re just reading through Scripture looking for something to back up something that we want. We’re following His lead, which honors God. We’re taking seriously His commands. It’s part of the Christian life.

I was in a bad place after we had our son with disability, and was in survival mode. I didn’t even know what my problem was. I just was trying to make it from day to day and hoping things would improve. And this went on for some time, and I was reading though the Psalms for the better part of two years. One day, I came upon Psalm 55:22, which says, “Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved.”

When I read that verse, a couple things happened. First of all, I saw the command: “Steve, you can’t carry this burden yourself. Let God carry it. Cast your burden on the

Lord.” Secondly, I saw that my fear of casting my burden on the Lord was, I was afraid that I would be moved. I was afraid I would fall apart. I hadn’t articulated that, but the Scripture, which is the sword of the Spirit and it rightly divides soul and spirit, bone and marrow as it says in Hebrews, the Scripture revealed my problem. The problem was, I was afraid to really cast my burden on the Lord. I was afraid to ask people for help because I felt like I would fall apart. I was trying to hold myself together.

So that verse met me at so many different levels. “Cast your burden on the LORD. He will sustain you.” And He promises He will never permit the righteous to fall apart or be moved. And I knelt down by my bed, and I began to weep, and I just put my burdens in His lap, and He carried them, and I began to heal from that point. It was all upward after that.

The Word of God reveals our needs, the Sword of the Spirit. It also points us to our Savior, it gives us faith, and it helps us to know how to pray. So, thank God for His Word. Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Your revealed will. Thank You that it’s faith–building, and it’s directive, and it’s promises, and we are so grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with You, and to work along with You, and to remind You of Your Word and Your promises, and to bring them up before You. I believe this honors You. Help us as we move forward to pray according to Your will, to believe Your will, and to bring it to pass. Give us the faith of Daniel and the insight and discernment of Daniel. In Jesus’ name, amen.