

13 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. 14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

If you have any children in school here at St. Paul's, or you happen to be swinging by the building from around 8 to 8:30 am, you would probably recognize a couple of guys standing out in the front of the building. As often as we can, Pastor Kampman and I like to stand out in front of the school and greet the children as they come in for the school day.

And at the beginning of the year, there is a group of children that are interesting to watch as they come in. It's those little preschoolers who are starting their first time in school. You see little boys and girls with charming adaptations and strategies to get into the building. Some are quiet and staring down at the ground, being dragged along only there because they have to be, some glued to grandma's hand and they enter the door because it's new and scary, some covering their faces with a hat or their shirt as they make slow paces through a brand new place with two big scary grownups standing out in front of. For those first couple of days or weeks, those preschoolers are pretty timid.

Could these timid children be a description of your prayer life? Do you pray like a preschooler? Throughout the pages of Scripture, prayer is spoken of as a hugely important, yes even vital, aspect in the life of every Christian. It's encouraged in the epistles; it's modeled by great heroes of faith and lesser known; it's the avenue that God has given to us to speak with him. He speaks and talks to us through his perfect, inspired Word in the pages of the Bible, and we, in turn, talk to him in our prayers.

But even after recognizing its importance, even knowing that it's something that God tells us to do, it's very common for many, if not all, to look at ourselves and say, I really need to pray more. And for some, even some lifelong Christians, it could be more accurately: I need to pray, period.

We often have a relationship with prayer, like those preschoolers. Timid, uncertain, and even a little scared. The barriers to prayer can be varied, but many of them are centered around a lack of confidence. For many, it is a brand new thing, it's something that I really haven't done before, and I don't really know how. I feel like I can really only pray when I have someone more experienced take me by the hand and sort of do it for me. Others may be worried that they can't pray for things that are going on with them, that they're just a little too small, too trivial, too unique to just me, not worthy of putting before an infinite God who probably wouldn't care too much about them—putting our hats over our tiny faces. Others may see it as a last resort. It's only after all other options have been exhausted, every last human solution has been sorted out, and every possibility checked

into. It's only then that we fold those hands and utter some words of desperation, not really sure of the good or the outcome that those words will bring just because there's really nothing else we can do.

Fast forward to the end of the year however, the same two guys standing outside of the building, same Pre-schoolers, walking into the same building. Oh, how much is different, though. There you see these little boys laughing and jumping on the way inside, little girls with eyes bright saying 'good morning' as they pass by, little ones outsprinting their parents to get into school that day. Over time they have learned that school is not a scary place; it's a place that they get to see their friends, have teachers who care about them, a place that they get to learn new things, play games, and have fun. They are confident.

And how do we pray like that? How do we pray with confidence? It happens with time, to be sure, but our confidence in our prayer life comes from the knowledge of who it is that we are praying to. **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.** We are praying to our God; we are praying as his redeemed children. We are talking to a God who saw us as so important that he sent his own Son to die on the cross. A God who saw you and selected you to be one of his own even before the world's creation. A God who gives you his word to strengthen your faith in him and to continuously provide you with the assurance of your forgiven status before him.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

This is how we can pray. With confidence. Here we see the amazing, gracious God that we have. God doesn't say that you need to pray with any particular eloquent words to pray to him. If we ask anything. You don't need any special training or tools that you don't already have; you use your thoughts and words that you already possess.

And with those words that you speak out loud or in private, something amazing happens... God hears YOU. God listens to YOU. Those words come before God himself in heaven, and he pays attention to them. Those things that you speak, God himself, the creator of the universe, sits in attention and listens to you speak. When you offer silent words, the Savior himself, who paid for the sins of the whole world, hears and listens.

God cares about what's going on with you, and you can pray to him about things that are going on with you. Get specific in your prayers. Are you sick of the drama in school? Pray that God ends the drama in school. Are you worried about the choices your child is making? Pray that God would help them make better choices. Are you upset because your cat is sick? Pray that the cat gets better. Are you concerned about the weird noises coming from the car engine? Pray that God holds the 2005 Dodge Caravan together until

you can afford a newer car. Are you afraid of dying? Pray that God would give you the serenity to focus on what comes after death. God invites you. God calls you. God wants for you to speak with him, to ask him things, to tell him your thoughts, your worries, your joys, your concerns.

But it's not just that. God isn't just a good listener. No God is far more powerful than that. John writes: **And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.** God answers those prayers. Those things that may have seemed trivial, in line with God's will, he hears them and answers them. When you pray that God will help you finish your big project on time and it is in line with his will, the project will be completed on time. When you pray for guidance in dealing with interpersonal conflict, and it is in line with God's will, he will give you that guidance in traversing your situation. When you pray that God would provide a moment's respite from the insanity of the world, and it is in line with his will, that respite will be yours.

Brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, pray like a preschooler. You don't need to hide your face, you don't need someone 'special' to do it for you, and you certainly don't need to be scared. Go to him with joy and excitement, knowing that he cares and hears you. Go to him on any and every occasion knowing that he answers your prayers. Amen.