

Pray for Wisdom, Doubting Nothing

James 1:5-8

9/5/1999

James, chapter 1. We'll read together verses 5 through 8. James, chapter 1, verses 5 through 8.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

Now we have been considering together in our Sunday evening studies how we as Christians should respond to trials. We have considered our attitude towards trials in verse 2, and we have seen that it should be one of joy. We have considered together the benefits that flow out of trials in verse 3, and we have seen that it is an increase in the virtue of patience, among other virtues as well. We have considered together the caution regarding trials in verse 4, that we need to persevere in a godly response as long as the trial goes on. And last Lord's Day evening, we considered the resources available to us *during* trials in verse 5, which is the gift of wisdom from God. We need wisdom, and God will give liberally to all who ask for it. And He will do so without rebuke and without reproach.

Now last time in our study together of verse 5, we considered together the problem stated. The problem stated is that we lack wisdom. “If any man lack wisdom”—that's the problem. And then we considered the remedy prescribed, and that is, “Let him ask of God.” God is the possessor of all wisdom, and if we but ask Him, He will give. And then we considered the encouragement that was given, and that is, is that He gives to all men liberally and He does not upbraid.

Now today, having considered together the problem stated, the remedy prescribed, and the encouragement given, we want to consider together the warning issued—the warning issued, with reference to this subject of the need for wisdom. And that is contained in verses 6 through 8, when it says, “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

Now this warning that is in verses 6 through 8 has to do with the nature of acceptable prayer. Having just exhorted us to pray for wisdom, James now tells us that there is a proper and an improper way to pray for it—or for any other thing, for that matter. Because the warning that is given to us in verses 6 through 8, while it has peculiar reference to the exhortation in verse 5 to pray for wisdom, this warning also is a universal warning which applies to all prayers, whatever their subject matter and content may be. And what James is telling us is that not just any prayer will do. It must be offered in the manner that God prescribes, and James tells us what that manner is.

And so in the first place then this evening, we want to consider together the warning stated—the warning stated. And we're not going to have a second place this evening. I had arranged four heads for this sermon: the warning stated, the warning illustrated, the warning enforced, and the warning concluded. And I did the first point, and I thought, well, that'll certainly use up my 35 or 40 minutes this evening. So you'll have to wait for points 2 through 4 for subsequent Lord's Days.

But we're going to consider together the warning stated, and that is in the first part of verse 6, when it says, "But let him ask in faith." That is the warning stated. And so James uses the very first word in this sentence, the word "But," and this word "But" is a word of qualification. Having just made this phenomenal promise in verse 5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that gives to all men liberally and upbraids not, and it *shall* be given him," he now, having made that general promise, adds a qualification. He says, "But"—"But let him ask in faith." And James now qualifies the promise of verse 5, that wisdom shall be given, with his statement that the request *made* for wisdom must be made in faith, without wavering.

Without faith, there is no true prayer. Hebrews 11, and verse 6, says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." And so a prayer that is not *pleasing* to God certainly will never be answered by God. And Hebrews 11:6 tells us "without faith it is impossible to please God."

And so there must be this element of faith that says, "God *is*," and not, "God rewards those who diligently seek Him." You see, we may outwardly pray. We may say the words and go through the motions. But there is no true asking of God—as James says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God"—there is no true asking of God *if* there is no true faith *in* God. God cannot be pleased by a pray that lacks faith in who He is, as to His attributes, and that lacks faith in what God will do, as to His response to those who seek Him with diligence. If we don't believe what He says about Himself, and if we don't believe what He says He will *do*, then it is utterly impossible for us to ever have God be pleased with our prayers, and therefore impossible for God to answer our prayers. On the other hand, prayers that are set forth with a distinct hope and trust in God, as to His willingness and His ability to answer them, are prayers that avail much.

Turn with me in your Bibles please, if you will, to Mark, chapter 11. And reflect for a moment upon this astounding statement in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 11, and in verses 22 through 24. Jesus saw a fig tree, He came to it, it had nothing on it, He cursed it. And the people came back, He and His disciples, the next morning; the fig tree was all withered up. It says, beginning at verse 20, "And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith to him, Master, behold, the fig tree which you cursed is withered away. And Jesus answering said unto them, Have faith in God." Now you would think, Well, don't these people have faith in God? Well, certainly they did. They were Christians. They were believers. They were followers. And yet, what Christ is saying to them is that they need to strengthen, develop, and deepen their faith in God, as to its stability and constancy.

He says, verse 23, "For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but believe that those things which he has said shall come to pass; he shall have whatever he says. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever you desire, when you pray, believe that you shall receive them, and you *shall* have them." And so Jesus makes a very clear connection here between *doubt* and the *failure* to prevail with God in prayer and obtain the thing we request, and *belief* and having what we *ask* for. In fact, in verse 24, He says, "Believe that you receive them, and you *shall* have them." And so clearly, belief is the pivotal element—having faith when we pray is the pivotal element to obtaining answers to our prayers.

Now perhaps one of the most striking illustrations of this fact is contained in Matthew, chapter 15. In Matthew, chapter 15, verses 22 through 28, we have here the story of the Canaanitish woman who came to Jesus. Matthew, chapter 15, verses 22 through 28. It says, “And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same borders, and cried to Jesus, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon. But he answered her not a word.” So here’s a woman who prayed, and no answer. “And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she cries after us.”

So He sort of complies. He says to her, “But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” And you would think that this woman would say, Wow. He’s sending me away. He’s not sent to me. I’m not of the lost sheep of the House of Israel. I’m just a Canaanitish woman. I’m not a Jew.

But, she didn’t quit. Verse 25, “Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.” She prays again. “But he answered and said, It is not fitting to take the children’s bread, and cast it to the dogs.” Once again, He says, No. “And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” Now notice verse 28. “Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

Now the passage is very clear: that her success in prayer was directly attributed to the quality and constancy of her faith, and was a direct result of it. He says, “Great is thy faith,” and because thy faith *is* great, “be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” He told her yes, after telling her no twice, and also giving her a message that He would just as soon that she leaved because she was not of the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And I believe the reason why this event occurred, and why it is recorded here for us, is to make the point to us that God can deny faith nothing, because faith glorifies God’s attributes and promises, and when God is glorified, God acts. And by our trust, His power is engaged in our behalf. In short, God cannot say no to faith.

Well, then, you may ask, what specifically does it mean to pray in faith? If I want to have God answer my prayers, and I’m to ask in faith, nothing wavering—or, as it says in Mark, chapter 11, “nothing doubting”—then how can I pray in faith? What does it mean to pray in faith? Does it mean that if I just believe hard enough and long enough that God will answer my prayer—that He will do so?

Well, there are three guidelines I want to give to you with reference to what it means to pray in faith. First of all, to pray in faith means to pray in dependence upon the grace and merits of Christ. To pray in faith means to pray in dependence upon the grace and merits of Christ.

Now we can have no hope of acceptance before God without recognizing that Christ alone enables us to come *before* Him, and enables us to find favor *with* Him. Only believers in Christ, therefore, can draw *near* with a true heart in full assurance of faith, because they alone have *exercised* faith; they alone have their *sins* forgiven; and therefore, they alone have access to God.

In Ephesians 2, and verse 18, it says, “For through *him*,” that is through Christ, “we both have access by one spirit unto the Father.” And our access to the Father is based upon and flows out of the grace and merits of Christ. Therefore, *no one* can pray in faith *except* believers in Christ. They alone can come boldly to the throne of grace with any true grounds or hope of obtaining

mercy and grace to help in time of need, because they alone are made acceptable to God by the merit and sacrifice of Christ.

Now we all have the sense of being wretched sinners, of being utterly unworthy to come before God. And this awareness can cause us to doubt as to whether God will hear us or not. But faith remembers the perfection and sufficiency of Christ's work on our behalf. It reflects on the mercy of God to sinners, the power of God to save sinners, and the grace of God to enable sinners to find favor in His sight because of the work of His Son. And therefore, faith in Christ and His works and merit *alone* can help us to come believingly before the throne of grace, that God would receive sinners such as we—and that He would hear our prayers. And so therefore, because of faith in Christ, we come *humbly* because we are sinners. But we also come *boldly* and confidently because of Christ's work on our behalf.

So to pray in faith means to have faith in Christ and His work to make us acceptable to God, so that we do not doubt of our acceptance before Him, or His willingness to receive us and hear us, when we come before Him. One who doubts of his acceptance before God, or of God's willingness to hear him, is someone who lacks faith in the work of Christ and in God's approval of that work. And such a low regard of God's Son and of the work of His Son will never cause God to look upon our prayers with favor.

And this is the reason why we pray in Jesus' name. We come in the merit and sufficiency of Christ's work for us by virtue of His grace and mercy, and it is that which gives us the confidence to not doubt that God will hear us, that God will receive us, and God takes delight in our persons and in our prayers. If you cannot come before God with that confidence, you are not coming in faith.

Secondly, to pray in faith is not only to pray in dependence upon the grace and merits of Christ, so that we can believe and not doubt that God will receive and *hear* our prayers and that we can come before Him with confidence, but secondly, to pray in faith means to pray in confidence in God's promises. It means to pray in confidence in God's promises.

Now James tells us, and Jesus does as well, that prayer is to be in faith. Okay? Faith is to be regulated by God's word, because faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing *by* the word of God, and so therefore, the word of God which *brings* faith also provides its contents, its limits, and its definition. And so we can never divorce faith from God's word, because God's word is what brought faith in the first place, it is what defined faith, and it is what provided faith with its content.

So if we are to pray in faith, it simply means that we are to pray in accordance and harmony with God's word. If we have a promise of God in His word, and believe that promise as we plead it before God in prayer, then we may be completely confident that this prayer will be heard and answered, even though it is in God's time and in God's way.

In First John, chapter 5, and verses 14 through 15, John instructs us with reference to prevailing prayer. And he says, "[T]his is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us: And if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petition that we desired of him." Now, you need to believe God's word. Either what John just said is true or it isn't. And if it *is* true, that if we ask according to His will, then we *will* have the thing that we ask of.

Now how do we know what God's will *is*? Well certainly God's will is His word. It is His promises. And when He comes to us and He says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and upbraids not, and it *shall* be given him," that is a promise. And if we *believe* that promise as we plead it before God, then we can be confident that we absolutely will, without exception, have a positive answer to that prayer.

If our prayers are according to God's word, then the success of the prayer is absolutely certain. But if you doubt that God really means what He says, "Yeah, God, I know that you said you'd give me wisdom, but I'm not really sure if you will or not," or if you treat any of the other of God's promises in that fashion as you pray, then that doubt will deafen God's ears to your cries and His promises will not be true for you; they will not be fulfilled in you, because you are not exercising *faith* in God and in His word.

When we have a definite promise in God's word, we must not doubt its *fulfillment*, because to doubt is to say either that God is a liar and He *will* not keep His promise; or that God is powerless and He *cannot* keep His promise; or that God is ignorant and does not know *how* to keep His promise; or that God is not sovereign, and is prevented by the will of *others* from keeping His promise.

You see, unbelief is really blasphemy against God. If you went up to somebody and you wanted to borrow some money from them, and you went up to them and said, "Hey, you stupid idiot, would you give me some money?" Do you think that they would loan them the money if you insulted them at the very time you're asking them for money? Fat chance.

And in the same way, when we come to God, we ask Him to fulfill His promises, but we come with an attitude of doubt, what we're saying is, "God, you know, I really think you're a liar and you're powerless and you're ignorant, and you're not really sovereign, but could you keep this promise, just this one time, and fulfill it for me?" "Let not *that* man think he shall receive *anything* of the Lord."

I thought it was a kind providence of God that our Scripture reading this evening was Romans 4, for I incorporated that passage into my message at this point. In Romans, chapter 4, verses 18 through 21, it says here, speaking of Abraham, "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be."

You see, God made a promise, and the promise to Abraham was is that he would be the father of *many nations* through he and Sarah. And yet, all of the external circumstances pointed up to the impossibility of the fulfillment of that promise. And you see, if Abraham didn't believe, what he would really be saying is that God was a liar and would not keep His promise; or that God was powerless and could not overcome the deadness of Sarah's womb to keep His promise; or that God was ignorant and couldn't figure out how to get all that stuff working again, so it would produce a baby; or that God was really not sovereignly in control over the outcome of natural events and circumstances.

And so against all of outward appearance that said God can't keep this promise, Abraham said, Oh yes, He can. In his heart, that's what he said. He *believed*. It says in verse 19, "And being not weak in faith"—that is, he didn't vacillate. He didn't for a while believe, and then unbelieve, and then believe, and then unbelieve. It says, "he considered not"—he didn't take into his

calculations—“his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old”—neither did he take into his calculations the deadness of Sara's womb. He did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief; but he was strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, God was able also to perform.

And the example that he sets before us is the example of the kind of faith that we need to possess in order to have prevailing prayer with reference to the promises of God. Will God give wisdom? You say, “Boy, that seems mighty impossible to me. I’ve never been much of an intellect. My brain doesn’t work too good. I’ve abused it a lot. I’ve done a lot of pretty dumb things. I don’t think I’ll ever get smart.” Well you see, that’s what sense and reason says. But *faith* says, God gives wisdom. And He gives it liberally—“and it *shall* be given.” Now, God is either telling the truth or He isn’t. And if He is, then we need to not *stagger* at that, in spite of our own intellectual incapacities.

We need to be strong in faith and give glory to God and say, “Yes, God, I believe in you. I believe in your faithfulness; I believe in your power; I believe in your wisdom; I believe in your sovereignty; I believe you can keep what you’ve promised. And so therefore, I am asking for this thing, and I’m *fully* confident that what you have promised, you’re able also to perform.” Now we are not saying that in a way of somehow demanding of God or dictating to God, but in a way of expressing confidence in God and faith in God. It is confidence and faith in God that we are expressing, and that is precisely what Abraham expressed.

And so when we pray in the confidence of God’s promises, we can say with David in Psalm 119, and verse 48, “Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.” Now why do you have any hope? Do you have any hope that you’ll be saved? Do you have any hope that things are working together for your good? Do you have any hope that He which has begun a good work in you will continue to perform until the Day of Christ? Why do you have that hope? It is because you have put your confidence in the word of God.

And you go to God in your prayer, and you say, “God, remember your word. Remember your promise to your servant upon which you, God, have caused me to hope. Now God, I believe that you’re going to keep your promise. And God, I’m trusting you to keep your promise. And God, I know you can. And I sit here and humbly wait, recognizing that the fulfillment of this promise is—not because I’ve demanded it, not because I’ve merited it—because you are the faithful covenant-keeping God, and because you are a God who keeps your promises. And so, God, I’m not going to stagger in unbelief, but I’m going to be strong in faith, and I’m going to declare the glory that you possess which enables you to keep what you have committed yourself to. And God, I’m fully persuaded of it.” Now is God going to say “No” to a prayer like that? Never. Never will He do so.

Thirdly, to pray in faith means not only to pray in dependence upon the grace and merits of Christ, it means not only to pray in confidence in God’s promises, but thirdly, to pray in faith means to pray with *reference* to God’s attributes. It means to pray with reference to God’s attributes.

Now when we pray, we must consciously remind ourselves of God’s attributes and characteristics, and *use* that reminder and knowledge to *combat* the doubt and the unbelief that does so easily beset us. To pray in faith is to have proper and right thoughts of God in prayer—

right thoughts of His love, His power, His mercy, His goodness, His faithfulness, His wisdom, His sovereignty. All of these things rightly understood and embraced make our faith strong and full and stable in the face of difficulties that are the cause of our prayers, in difficulties that would seem to indicate the impossibility of the *answer* of our prayers.

What do we do when we pray in faith? Well, we *plead* before God His own attributes, that's what. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 9. Matthew, chapter 9, verse 27. A couple of blind guys here, Matthew 9:27, "And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." Well, there's their prayer. "And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus said to them, Believe ye that I am able to do this?" Tell me, gentlemen, what do you think of my attributes? Do you think that I have the *power* to do this? Do you have faith in my power? Do you believe I'm *able* to do this? "They said unto him, Yea, Lord," we do. "Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened..."

Once again here, Jesus appeals to the content and the nature of their faith. And He says to them, "Do you have faith in my power?" And they said, "Yes, we have faith in your power." And it was specifically faith in God's attribute of power, His *ability* to do this, that brought the answer to their prayer.

Now we have a problem when we get away from specific promises of God. Is there a promise anywhere in the Bible that says, "All blind men will be healed of their blindness"? Is there any promise like that? There isn't one, is there? Do we have any promise to plead before God with reference to blindness? We don't have one promise. And so, if we have no definite promise in His word, with reference to our situation, then we ask, "How can we pray in *faith* if I truly do not know what His will is *in* my situation?" Well the answer is, number one, if you do not know what God's will is in the situation, then plead before God what you *do* know, namely His attributes.

Turn back a couple of chapters to Matthew, chapter 8. If you do not know what God's will is in a situation, then plead before God what you *do* know, namely, His attributes. This is what it means to pray in faith. Matthew 8, verse 1, "[W]hen he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou *wilt*, thou *canst* make me clean."

Now this man didn't know what Christ's will was. He had no promise declaring what God's will was in this situation. And though he did not know what Christ's *will* was, he *did* know what Christ's *ability* and *power* was, and *that* is precisely what he pled before Christ. What he pled before Christ is, "You *can* make me clean. I *know* that for a fact. I will *affirm* that by faith. God, you *can* do it. And though I don't know what your *will* is in the matter, I do know what your *abilities* are with reference to the matter, and I can exercise faith in *them* and express faith in them."

And so instead of saying, "Lord, I don't know what your will is in this matter—I guess you can do whatever you want," he says, "Lord, I know you can do this, if you will." It says in verse 3, "And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." And so when we come to God in prayer, instead of saying, "Lord, how can these things be," we need to be saying, "Lord, these things *can* be, if you *will*."

And so when we pray without knowledge of God's specific will in a situation, what we need to do *in* our prayers, is glorify, exalt, magnify, and express *faith* in the power of God with reference to our desired outcome, and simply leave the will, as to whether He will do it or not, to Him. You see, it is not lack of faith to say, "God, I don't know what your will is," because in many situations, we have no specific promise, and we *don't* know what His will is. That's not a lack of faith. It would be presumption for us to say, "God, I know what your will is. I *bind* you to do this and that," like the charismatics do in their presumptuous way.

We don't know what the will of God is in many situations, but we *do* know the attributes of God. And so in our prayer, we can appeal to God's goodness, to His love, to His reputation, to His faithfulness, to His power, and to all His other attributes in relationship to the matter we are praying about. And as we express faith in all of those things, we're praying in faith, even though we don't know what His *will* is in the particular matter.

Turn in your Bibles, please, for an illustration of this to Numbers, chapter 14. The children of Israel were in deep trouble. The spies had gone into the land; ten brought back an evil report, two, a good report, as you recall. And the people turned on Moses and on God, and murmured, and expressed unbelief, and they were going to go about to kill Moses and Joshua and Caleb. God is furious. Verse 11:

"And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them?" God may be asking you the same question this evening. How long is it going to be before you believe me? Look at all the times God has kept His promises to you in your life. And do you *still doubt* Him? You see, there's nothing that makes God madder than unbelief, because it is a direct assault upon the integrity of His character. Look, verse 12, "I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they."

Look, is a lack of faith serious business with God? It's *really* serious. You may express frustration to God, but don't you ever express unbelief to God—not *ever*. "And Moses said unto the Lord"—and now Moses begins to plead. Now, does Moses have any promise from God that God is going to forgive these folks? He doesn't have any promise at all. But notice what he starts doing. He can't say, Oh, God, you gotta promise. You gotta do this. He had no promise to plead. But what he starts pleading is, he appeals to the reputation of God, and to the attributes of God, and in appealing to all of these things, he then asks God to forgive these people.

Notice verse 13, And Moses said to the Lord, "Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou Lord is among this people, and that thou Lord art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness." What's he doing? He's appealing to God's reputation and His standing in the eyes of others. God, what will become of your reputation and of your Name if you destroy this people?

And now he begins to appeal to His attributes. Verse 17, “And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and the fourth generation.” And what is doing here? He is glorifying God. Remember a little bit earlier, Moses said to God, “God, show me your glory.” And God said to him, “I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you: the Lord, the Lord God, who is longsuffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, by no means clearing the guilty...,” and you know what Moses is doing here? He’s quoting God’s own words right back to Him. And he’s saying, God, this is the kind of God you were. You *said* you were this kind of a God. I *believe* you’re this kind of God. O, God, deal with these people in light of these characteristics, as you have proclaimed of yourself.

Verse 19, “Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according”—to your promise? Is that what it says. No, it says, according to “the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people”—he appeals to His history of forgiveness—“from Egypt even until now.” And so what he does is he pleads before God, not a particular promise, but God’s reputation, God’s attributes, and he expresses faith in those attributes and asks God to *exercise* those attributes in relationship to this situation. Verse 20, “And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word: But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.” And you see, it is as Moses glorified God in his prayer, when God was glorified, God *acted*.

And so when we have no definite promise from God, we can pray in faith by praying with reference to God’s attributes and appealing to *them* in faith and belief and confidence, and without any wavering with reference to what they are, and then apply those to our particular situations, and say, “Lord, I don’t know what your will is, but I know what your ability is, I know what your characteristics are, I know what your nature is, and I know what your history is—and God, I believe in those things and I plead those things before you in light of this situation.”

Secondly, if there is no definite promise in His word, you can pray in faith, not only by pleading before God what you *do* know, namely, His attributes, but secondly, when you have no definite promise in God’s word regarding our situation, we *can* pray according to the *general* promises in God’s word with reference to our situation. We can pray with reference to the *general* promises in God’s word with reference to our situation.

For example, one of those general promises that covers *every* situation without exception is Romans 8:28. “And we know that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to his *purpose*.” And so we can pray, “God, you *promised* in this situation you’re going to work it out for good.” And you can *plead* that promise before God and *believe* that promise, and go away from that prayer in the confidence that God *absolutely* will work that together for good.

We can pray with reference to the promise in Matthew 28:20, in which Jesus said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” And you say, “Oh, Lord, I feel deserted in this situation. I feel helpless. I don’t know where to turn. I don’t know what to do. But God, you promised to be with me. God, manifest your presence to me as you have promised, and Lord, I’ll be looking for your workings in my heart and my conscience and through your word and in providential circumstances for the manifestation of your blessed presence with me in this situation.”

Or Romans 8:29, where God says He has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son. Philippians 1, and verse 6, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in you will perform it to the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 4:13, “My God shall supply all of your needs according to his riches in Christ.” And we can go on and on. There are many, many general promises in God’s word. “And call upon me in the day of trouble,” Isaiah 50, and verse 15. “And I *will* deliver thee, and thou shall glorify me.”

And so if we don’t have specific promises, we certainly have general ones, and those general promises can be pleaded before God. And you know what? If all of those general promises are fulfilled, we don’t have to worry about the specifics, do we? It’s no big deal how God handles the details if He takes care of the general promises in His word. So we can pray in faith with reference to all of these things. This is what it means to pray in faith.

Now let me ask you a question. When someone puts their trust in you with reference to something, do you not have an aversion to violating that trust? And do you not have a propensity even as a fallen person to fulfill that trust and prove faithful to that trust? When someone puts their trust in us, it naturally draws out of us a desire and a response to fulfill that trust and to meet that need.

Well if that is true in fallen humanity, how much more in God? God loves to be trusted. And He loves to prove Himself worthy of that trust, and does so continuously by the keeping of His promises. Do you believe that? Do you have faith?

I want to say to you, when you get down on your knees tonight and pray, you believe God for what you ask Him for. And you come to Him in the confidence that you are accepted before Him in the merit and worth of Jesus Christ. You plead before Him His specific promises. And in areas where you don’t know His will, you plead before Him His attributes and the general promises He’s given with reference to that. And I want to say to you, that kind of a prayer will avail much. God will answer your prayers. And it’s precisely unbelief in that that makes it that He doesn’t, so often.

I’m not talking about some kind of a wild charismatic, “Whatever I ask for if I believe strong enough, God will give it to me. Oh, God, I believe you for a Cadillac!” That’s *not* what it means to pray in faith. What it means to pray in faith is what I’ve told you this evening—that you come with confidence in God’s Son, in God’s promises, in God’s attributes, with reference to your situations, and you *plead* them, and then you’re praying in faith.

How can you doubt *those* things? You can doubt about the Cadillac, but you can’t doubt about God’s word and promises and attributes. There’s no *room* for doubt there. And the person who *does* doubt is a blasphemer. And that person receives nothing from God.

Well, that’s the warning issued. May the Lord help us to *heed* that warning and ask in faith, nothing wavering.

Shall we pray together. Oh, our Father, thank you for your dear Son and that the blood of Jesus Christ Your Son *cleanses* us from all sin. Oh, Father, thank you that we can come boldly before the throne of grace, in full assurance of faith, having our consciences sprinkled from guilt, and

our bodies washed with pure water—to be able to come before you spotless and pure. Oh, Father, what a blessing that is. Thank you for the merit and the work and the worth of Jesus, Who enables us to stand in your presence with exceeding joy.

Father, thank you for the promises you've given. Lord, we ask that you might help us to be diligent in learning them, remembering them, and pleading them before you. You have promised, Father, that your Spirit would bring to remembrance whatever things that Jesus has said to us. And so, Father, we ask that He would *do* that, and we would remember the things we've learned and read, and that they would form the basis and foundation of our prayers.

Father, thank you that you are the faithful and covenant-keeping God, and that Father, you have provided sufficient promises, both in the specific and the general, to give us peace and assurance in any situation we might find ourselves. Father, increase our faith. Help us to believe. We are ashamed, Father, that our faith is so weak. And so often the rebuke of our Savior to the disciples, “O ye of little faith—O fools, and slow of heart to believe,” applies to *us*. Father, you are worthy of the strongest sort of faith and trust, for you have never betrayed. And Father, you have all faithfulness. Indeed, as the Scripture says, “Great is thy faithfulness.”

And so, Lord, we do believe you. And we do trust you to keep your word and to consistently exercise your attributes on our behalf in our situation. Where we don't know your will, help us to simply trust your wisdom, because we do know all about that, and we're confident in it.

Lord, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.