

Heavenly Father, Your promises to us are sure and certain. Therefore we take You at Your Word and bring all our requests and needs before You in prayer in the *sure* confidence that You will hear and answer them. ... On this basis may our prayers be always pleasing and acceptable to You, in Jesus' name. Amen. (*Luther for the Busy Man*, ed. P. D. Pahl, pp. 197 & 199.)

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.*

In Christ Jesus, who enables all our prayers to be heard and answered at the divine throne in heaven, dear fellow redeemed:

Do your prayers change the mind of God? Well, consider the prayers of Abraham for Sodom and Gomorrah, when it was revealed to him that God intended to destroy those cities because of their great wickedness. Abraham was allowed to approach the throne of God and plead for the sake of the righteous believers who still lived there, including his nephew Lot and his family. He started with 50 and worked his way down to 10, but stopped after not even 10 could be found. It is suggested that he did not go any lower, since he knew God did not spare the world from destruction when there were only 8 believers left in the world at the time of the Flood. But what if there had been ten, would Abraham have changed the mind of God?

Then after Aaron built the Golden Calf to placate the Israelites while Moses was up on Mt. Sinai and they were worshiping it as if it was the god who delivered them out of Egypt, God announced His intention to destroy them all and make a new nation from the line of Moses. Moses then pleaded with God to relent and He did. It is impossible for us to know the hidden will of God, but we could at least say that God was testing Moses in his divine calling as the advocate of God's people. King Hezekiah became ill and God told him through Isaiah that he would not recover. Hezekiah pleaded with the Lord to extend his life and God did for another 15 years. Did Moses and Hezekiah change the will of God?

Luther teaches in his explanations of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer: God's name will be hallowed, His kingdom will come, His will will be done, daily bread will be given to us without our prayer, but nevertheless we are instructed to pray. Let us examine this truth from our text: **The Prayers of God's Saints Are Truly Effectual.**

I

James offers another example of fervent effectual prayer when he writes: "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit." Now we are not informed that God had announced a different plan with the result that Elijah's prayer altered that announced will. All these examples are prayers spoken to God in faith, trusting in Christ the Savior, and with that kind of confident faith even mountains can be moved into the sea.

The righteous person or saint is the one who believes in Christ Jesus as Savior. You and I, believers that we are, stand right and holy before God in heaven clothed with Jesus' holiness. This gives us boldness in our prayers. If we had to approach God in all our unworthiness, of course we could not rightly be bold. In truth, if we have not Christ's righteousness, we are unbelievers. Prayer of the unbeliever is not heard by God. Boldness would simply be sinful arrogance.

We are forgiven of all our sins and declared to be holy. We are encouraged to be bold in our requests. Since our prayers as believers all come to the Father in Jesus' name, we can ask with boldness and confidence as earthly children dare ask their earthly fathers.

Dear fellow holy children of the heavenly Father are you praying with bold confidence these days? Sadly as human beings living in this world, we tend to focus on asking for mostly physical needs. Certainly they are included, but as our Lord Jesus taught us in His model prayer, our deepest fervent concerns should be spiritual, not physical. Hezekiah asked for physical blessings although conditionally, since he knew he did not deserve to have his life spared. Abraham, Moses and Elijah while seeming to pray for the physical were actually concerned about the spiritual needs of others.

II

Now the second half of our text may seem at first to be disconnected to the first, but in truth, they are connected. When we are told: "if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will

cover a multitude of sins" we see our ultimate concern should be the eternal welfare of one who at one time was a brother in the faith.

What are some of the instruments used through which spiritual reclamation takes place? Certainly the Word of God as a means of the Spirit's working is, but also the effectual prayer of the saints of God is proper tool in this regard. So while prayer is not the means God uses to create and keep faith in Christ, prayer is a vital supporting activity.

Consider how Paul called upon the prayers of God's saints as he and the other missionaries would go about their work. He asked for their prayers so that God would provide opportunities for them to speak clearly the saving Gospel and that it be heard. (*Col. 4*) He asked for their prayers so that they would know what to say and to be bold and unafraid. (*Eph. 6*) He asked that this work would be fruitful, so that those who heard would believe and be saved. (*2Th. 3*)

So pray for your brothers and sisters in the faith who you have observed are wandering away from the faith. Pray for opportunities to speak to them yourselves in gentleness and love. Pray for your pastors and elders that they may be fervent and bold in their efforts to reach out to them as well. Pin God to His promises that as His word goes out from His mouth through ours "it shall not return to Him empty, but it shall accomplish that for which He sent it." Or in the same way, if you have wayward children whom you faithfully brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord – pin God to His promise "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Jesus told His disciples in our Gospel lesson and consequently He tells you and me today as well "whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you. ... Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." The effectual prayers of the Church are fervently offered before God in heaven with the full confidence that for Jesus' sake our prayers are heard and acted upon through the gracious will of the heavenly Father for our eternal welfare.

Praying is described in one of our hymns as the Christian's vital breath. In other words, it is as natural as our physical breathing. But our Lord does find it necessary to urge us to breath, yet He still finds it necessary to urge us to pray. So if you, my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, have been wandering from the truth with the evidence of this wandering being your lack of praying, not to mention lacking confidence for what you ask, know that you are forgiven by the blood of the very One in whose name you pray – Jesus, your Savior.

Now if you have been neglecting prayer or have been timid in your asking, do not wallow in your failures. Today is a good time to recommit yourself to praying fervently and confidently in the name of Jesus, who washes all your sins away with His holy precious blood and clothes you with His perfect righteousness. As Jesus also said to us: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.”

The power of Jesus’ name in the hearts and minds of His precious saints knows no bounds. As we are promised: “God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” What confidence you now have in approaching the Almighty God in the name of His Son, whose holy sacrifice made you a true child of the heavenly Father! Pray boldly as a child asks a dear father in Jesus’ name. Amen.