

5 Assurances that We Are Praying According to His Promises

by Todd Owen

The faith that Abraham had in God's promises was so great that in the absence of the written Word of God, in the absence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, in the absence of the church or a national identity based on fealty to Jehovah, Abraham believed God would do what he said he would do--and it was credited to him, by God, as righteousness. In the previous article entitled *Promise and Prayer*, I reflected on the faith of Abraham and posed this question: "How can we be confident that we are indeed praying according to His promises and not merely according to our personal aspirations or desires?"

This question is important to answer because PRAYER IS THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH OUR HEARTS ARE ALIGNED TO GOD'S HEART. While our hearts and minds are informed by the word of God and our faith is worked out in practicing good deeds (rooted in right attitudes), our hearts, operating from those right attitudes, apply the Truth in the prayer closet. It is in the prayer closet that we confess our sins to God. It is in the prayer closet that we petition Him for a new heart—a heart of flesh instead of stone. It is in the prayer closet where we verbally submit our hopes and dreams, our intentions and desires, to his (as Jesus did at Gethsemane). It is in the prayer closet that we lay aside our personal agendas to take on His agenda for us. It is in the prayer closet that the words of Scripture become the catalysts of our hearts.

I believe that there are at least five components to answering the question, "How can we be confident that we are praying according to His promises?"

First, we must practice confession of sins and the clearing of our conscience before God. Hebrews 3:12 and following states: "*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*" This is done both privately in the prayer closet and also in community. Elsewhere we are exhorted to "*confess your sins one to another and pray for one another that you may be healed.*" (James 5:16) If we are to be aligned with the desires of God, we cannot be walking in rebellion and hardness against Him.

Second, closely related to the first but slightly different, don't put your own agenda ahead of God's agenda for you. Jesus was wholly honest before His Father as he knelt there in the garden, "*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.*" He dreaded the hour of his torture and murder, yet knew that God's desires for him were preeminent. He submitted to the unthinkable to fulfill God's purpose for his sojourn on earth. We must be very careful when facing difficulty and challenge not to assume that it is God's will for us to avoid suffering. It is vital that, having confessed and cleared our conscience, that we lay our agendas on the altar before God and give Him the opportunity to choose our destiny. Sometimes we find ourselves in the crucible because He has created us for

such times.

Third, keep the Bible before you--test the prayers you pray against the revealed will of God as found in the Scriptures. *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."* (Hebrews 4:12-13, ESV) As we confess our sins, as we submit our own agenda to His, we also must submit ourselves to the scrutiny of the Scriptures. The Word will sift and penetrate our attitudes, our thoughts and intentions. We must be yielded to the Word. When our heart's agenda is found to be at odds with the Word, we must repent or change our course of action.

Fourth, do not assume that His promises are fulfilled in keeping with our timing. Abraham waited twenty-five years from the time of the first promise to the time of its fulfillment. Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land. Indeed, ". . . with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 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." (2 Peter 3:8-9, ESV) Don't become discouraged and stop praying because of impatience. Don't think that He is not answering your prayer because it is slow in coming. He alone has view of all past, present, and future and He alone has the wisdom to coordinate all things for good. If you are confessing your sins as needed, are submitting your agenda to His, are testing yourself with the Word of God (the whole counsel of Scripture--but that is another article ☺) then be constant in prayer on whatever matter you are bringing before God.

Finally, and perhaps this goes without saying, don't assume that every answer is "yes". There are times when we pray that the answer is clearly "no" and we need to accept that answer from the Lord. Jesus' prayer in the Garden was "No, this cup will not pass you by . . ." Consider the experience of Paul and company as recorded in Acts 16:7ff (ESV): *"And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."* The Lord did not say "yes" to their good and right desire to take the gospel into Asia and Bithynia because He wanted them to go to Macedonia to preach. He had the plan. They submitted to his plan.

I believe that as each of us applies these basic principles of prayer in our lives, we will be transformed in the secret place and will be real threats to the enemy of our souls. I believe that as we find ourselves walking in faith, in submission, in brokenness, and in humility we will shake the gates of Hell.