

AN ENCOURAGING VOICE FROM THE PAST

Read [John 14:7-14](#)

[John 14:13-14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

¹⁴“If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”

There is a distinction between general prayer and definite prayer. By definite prayer I mean prayer after the pattern of [Matthew 21:21–22](#) and [John 15:7](#), where a definite petition is offered up and definite faith exercised for its fulfillment.

[Matthew 21:21-22 \(NASB\)](#)

²¹“And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen.”

²²“And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

[John 15:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

Now faith must be in exercise in the other kind of prayer also, when we pray for many and varied things without knowing the will of God in every case.

In general prayer I am limited by my ignorance. But this kind of prayer is the duty of us all ([1 Timothy 2:1–2](#)), however vague it has to be.

[1 Timothy 2:1-2 \(NASB\)](#)

¹“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,

²for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”

I may know very little, in detail, about the object of my prayer, but I can at any rate commend it to God and leave it all with Him. It is good and right to pray, vaguely, for all people, all lands, all things, at all times. But definite prayer is a very different matter. It is in a special sense “**the prayer of faith.**” A definite request is made in definite faith for a definite answer.

1. *The breadth of the territory.*
2. *The government encourages immigration.*
3. *There are fixed limits.*

- 1) Do we always do this in our prayers and claims?
- 2) Do we consult the heavenly government at the outset, or do we pray the first thing that comes to mind?
- 3) Do we spend time waiting upon God to know His will before attempting to embark on His promises?

That this is a principle upon which God works He has informed us very plainly in [1 John 5:14-15](#).

1 John 5:14-15 (NASB)

¹⁴ **“This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.**

¹⁵ **And if we know that He hears us *in whatever we ask*, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”**

I cannot but feel that this is one cause for many unanswered prayers. [James 4:3](#) has a broad application, and we need to search our hearts in its light.

James 4:3 (NASB)

³ **“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.”**

Unanswered prayers have taught me to seek the Lord’s will instead of my own. I suppose most of us have had such experiences. We have prayed and prayed and prayed, and no answer has come. The heavens above us have been as brass. Yea, blessed brass, if it has taught us to sink a little more of this ever-present self of ours into the cross of Christ.

Sometimes our petition has been such a good one, to all appearance, but that does not insure its being of God. Many **“good desires”** proceed from our uncrucified selves. Scripture and experience agree that those who live nearest to God are the most likely to know His will. We are called to be **“filled with the knowledge of His will”** ([Colossians 1:9](#)). We need to know more of the fellowship of Christ’s death. We need to feed on the Word of God more than we do. We need more holiness, more prayer. We shall not, then, be in such danger of mistaking His will.

The wonderful promise of [John 15:7](#) is prefixed by a far-reaching **“if.”** I wonder if that verse might not be paraphrased: **“If ye abide *not* in me, and my words abide *not* in you, *do not* ask whatsoever ye will, for it shall *not* be done unto you.”**

John 15:7 (NASB)

⁷ **“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”**

Perhaps if we examined ourselves more thoroughly before God we might even discover, in some cases, that the whole course of our life was not in accordance with His will. What right would a man have, in such a case, to expect his prayers to be answered? But is not this the fact with regard to much **“good”** Christian work? **“Get your work from God”** is a good injunction.

How often Christian leaders make their own plans, work hard at them, and then earnestly seek God’s blessing on them. How much better, as **Hudson Taylor** felt, to wait on God to know His plans before commencing!

Much Christian work seems to have the stamp of the carnal upon it. It may be “**good,**” it may be successful outwardly, but the Shekinah glory is not there. Now all this applies to the prayer of faith. We must have the assurance that we are in the right place, doing the right work. We must be sure that God is leading us, when we enter upon specific prayer.

It does not follow that because a thing is the will of God, He will necessarily lead *you* to pray for it. He may have other burdens for you. We must *get our prayers from God,* and pray to know His will. It may take time. God was dealing with **Hudson Taylor** for fifteen years before he laid upon him the burden of definite prayer for the foundation of the China Inland Mission. God is not in a hurry. He cannot do things with us until we are trained and ready for them. We may be certain He has further service, further burdens of faith and prayer to give us when we are ready for them.