June 2013, Issue III
Theme: God’s Will

Got something to share? 😊

If you have any questions, concerns or suggestions regarding this newsletter, OR if you’d like to share any of your personal testimonies or devotional articles, please email us at tampa@tjc.org.

Ask, Seek, and Knock!

ASK
"God is greater than our heart, and knows all things"; "for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (1 Jn 3:20; Mt 6:8). God wants us to willingly humble ourselves before Him, to shut out the world and communicate with Him from our inner depths. "Call to Me and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jer 33:3). If we recognize our limitations and His surpassing greatness, we will seek what God seeks and work with Him.

SEEK
"Seeking" is getting to the source and foundation of what you ask for. Since we seek what God seeks, we only care for His will—following the principles and teachings in the Bible instead of rushing or dictating God. We should understand the necessity of having a "thorn in our side" (2 Cor 12:7-10), for what God gives us is never second best. Thus, apart from a "Yes" or a "No," His reply may just be, "In a little while."

KNOCK
Since we know what God wills, the narrow gate to the heavenly kingdom is right before us. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev 3:20). Glory awaits us behind those doors. Let us heed the call of our Lord, keep our robes clean (Rev 20:14), lift up holy hands (1 Tim 2:8) to receive "every good gift and every perfect gift... from the Father" (Jas 1:17), and enter into the glorious holy city.

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Prayer is not an attempt to convince God to grant you what you want. Neither is it an attempt to get God to act according to your own will. Only a prayer aligned with God’s will can glorify Him. A person carrying out God’s will can enable others to see God’s power, and prove that the principles and teachings in the Bible are true.

Learn the skills of **asking** in all humility, **seeking** with patience and willingness to wait, and **knocking** with holiness and obedience.

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**Praying According to God’s Will**

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 Jn 5:14)

As Christians, we have the privilege of praying to God, and we all want our prayers to be effective and heard by Him. Jesus promised us that “everyone who asks receives” (Mt 7:8). In order for our prayers to be effective, however, we need to learn to ask God according to His will, not our own. When the twelve disciples followed Jesus during His ministry, they asked Him for many things, but not all their requests were granted. Jesus corrected their direction of prayer and showed them how to pray according to God’s will.

**God’s Will in Our Relationship with Him**

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’" (Jn 14:8-9)

Philip had been with Jesus for several years, but he still did not understand who Jesus was and the purpose of following Him. Jesus said that He is the way, the truth, and the life. He told the disciples plainly that they had seen the Father, because Jesus Himself is the exact manifestation of the True God in heaven. Hearing this, Philip earnestly asked for something that most of us would also ask for; that is, he asked Jesus to show him the Father. Philip longed to see something that was tangible. Maybe he expected Jesus to manifest the glorious image of the Father, just as the prophets saw Him in the Old Testament.

Sometimes our faith, like Philip’s, is dependent on things that are visible. Our faith is strong when we witness a miracle, see glorious light during prayer, or experience a loving member taking care of us. When we see all these positive things, our faith seems to improve greatly. Therefore, we always ask for things that are visible in order to strengthen our faith. We always want to see something new, hear a new teaching, or experience some other exciting thing to stimulate our faith.

Jesus did not encourage this attitude of prayer, however, because if our faith is dependent on visible things, we will one day be disappointed. Rather, Jesus pointed out the truth that He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him. The disciples could only understand this profound truth by elevating their focus from visible
things to the level of faith and spiritual eyesight, so they could understand that "it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell" (Col 1:19).

Are our prayers today often focused on asking Jesus to show us something that we can see? We may ask God to change the environment so we can experience His abidance and existence. But as our faith continues to grow, it is His will that we ask for the fullness of the Holy Spirit and inner peace that transcends all understanding, so we can have the strength to move forward by the power of understanding the truth.

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. (Jn 14:16)

God’s Will in Our Relations with Others
Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him...

And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ”Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ”You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.” (Lk 9:51-56)

Human emotions and the external environment often influence our prayer. We tend to pray earnestly for those who love us; however, we may also pray that God will discipline those who mistreat us.
After James and John saw that the Samaritans did not receive Jesus, they prayed according to their own will, asking for Jesus’ permission in their impulsive and fleshly prayer. They were very frustrated by the Samaritans’ rejection and wanted to prove their authority by requesting the fire of heaven to consume them.

We often commit similar mistakes. When we are mistreated, rejected, misunderstood, or attacked, we tend to pray to God to show His righteous judgment and vindicate us. We may ask God to teach someone a lesson so the person will know his or her mistake. We may be impatient with someone and start to ask God to use heavenly fire to change, refine, and reshape that person’s character.

These kinds of prayers are common, but they are not according to God’s will. What did Jesus say about these kinds of prayer? He rebuked the disciples and told them to review the manner of their spirit—without even mentioning the inhospitable Samaritans! Jesus’ compassion allowed Him to focus on the needy people in the other villages and to look beyond the fault of the Samaritans. His response shows us the best example of the inner peace and strength that leads to the ability to forgive.

"Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the wicked" (Prov 24:19). When we ask for revenge and judgment from God (like asking for fire from heaven), our hearts are often filled with anxiety and frustration. Of course, we can ask God to show His vindication and righteous judgment, but it is His will that we ask for the ability to forgive and forget. "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses" (Mk 11:25).

It is time to stop pointing fingers at the faults of others. It simply does not help our spirituality. Instead, it is time for us to check the "manner of our spirit." Is it full of hatred, revenge, frustration, and anger? Or is it filled with love, patience, kindness, and forgiveness?

**God’s Will in Our Service to Him**

Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him… She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask… to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father." (Mt 20:20-23)
come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mt 20:26) Humans tend to desire higher status in an organization, because to worldly people that signifies achievement and success. Therefore, the mother of James and John came to ask Jesus for her sons' career advancement in the future, hoping that the right and left position beside Jesus in His kingdom would secure their positions and ensure their superiority over the other disciples. Authority and status, however, are not spiritual pursuits. Jesus corrected her by saying "You do not know what you ask."

Do we know what we ask? When we ask God to give us more gifts is the reason so we can better do His work, or is it because we want to be special and feel superior to others? Do we know that the true meaning of advancing in the heavenly kingdom is to go "downward"; that is, to humble oneself to serve others, and to learn from Jesus' example of humility?

Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mt 20:26)

In the past, we may have asked Jesus for special gifts or opportunities to do His work, when actually it was to gratify our own desire for glory. But it is God’s will that we humble ourselves to do His work. To faithful servants of the Lord, the status, title, and job content of holy work are not important at all. The only thing in their minds is to complete their duty so God’s will can be accomplished.

Jesus said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Mt 9:37-38). This is truly the prayer of a man of God. Who does which task and who receives which reward is not important for the worker of God; the only important thing is that the harvest is reaped. So let’s not ask God to let us do things according to our own will; instead, let’s learn from Paul and say, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10).

**In Conclusion**

"Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom 8:27). The way we pray will affect our spirituality. May we all learn from the mistakes of the disciples and learn to ask according to God’s will. If we submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he will intercede for us according to God’s will. This kind of prayer will give us inner peace so our relationship with God and with other people will be renewed, and the strength of our ministry will be refreshed.

**NOW THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE THAT WE HAVE IN HIM, THAT IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. (1 JOHN 5:14)**