

FAITH IN GOD'S ANSWERS TO OUR PRAYERS

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INTRODUCTION:

- A. Prayer Illustration – Prayer is one of the most valuable & powerful tools available to the Christian... by it we talk to our Father, by it we call upon our Creator, by it we receive help from our Redeemer!
- B. One of the most famous passages on prayer is **Philippians 4:6-7** → This passage is so comforting isn't it? But it also can be so incredibly difficult! Why is this the case? It's often because we do not possess real faith in the power of prayer and a real trust in the way God answers our prayer!

I. THE KEY TO AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE IS FAITH IN GOD'S ANSWERS:

- A. If any group of people should have faith in God's answer it ought to be us!
 - 1. We talk about how God answered prayers in the situation with Dale and Glenda... It's not because we love them more than anyone else, but it's just so evident and amazing what God has done!
 - a. Recount their story – How they came to Trussville & the way God has answered prayers
 - b. The way God has worked in their lives & answered prayers hasn't just resulted in a blessing in their life, but it has also in strengthening the faith of others & God being glorified
 - 2. We have also been able to see how God has granted us our requests in others: Job situations have gotten better, Josh and Laurie's situation is ahead of schedule, health has gotten stronger, elders and deacons have been in place, children have gotten married, etc
 - 3. Yet there have been some prayers we have offered that did not get answered the way we liked:
 - a. We've prayed for families to come here & have had some visit, yet choose to go elsewhere
 - b. Over the past few years we've prayed for the health of some only to see them pass away
 - c. Even in these situations we see good that has come! (Like with Martha Weekly, Bruce Hall)
- B. As we start to consider how God answers our prayers and strengthening our faith and trust in His response, there are some important principles we must keep in mind:
 - 1. Twice Jesus emphasized that God wants to hear our requests and that we ought to be persistent in our prayers to Him! This shows faith, not unbelief! (**Luke 11:5-10; 18:2-8**)
 - 2. God not only desires to hear our prayers but is able to give us what we pray for! (**2 Cor 9:8**)
 - 3. One reason we don't pray with trust in God's answer is we forget about His nature: (**Ex 3:13-14**)
 - a. God is infinitely wise – When God answers our prayers we can rest assured that His answers are according to what is best for us & those around us!
 - b. God is able to look through eternity – We reference everything according to time and we are limited by our circumstances. When God answers prayer it is according to the greatest experience and with a full understanding of eternity in mind
 - c. A warped view of God & His answers will result in weak faith and an inability to trust Him!

II. STRENGTHENING OUR FAITH BY UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD ANSWERS:

- A. Obviously, sometimes God answers with a "YES" to our prayers:
 - 1. God's word is full of promises assuring us that God will say yes to our prayers:
 - a. I'm sure those during the first century lacked faith that God would listen to and answer them when they prayed, so Jesus provides assurance: (**Matt 7:11; Mark 11:20-24**)
 - b. James makes this point as he describes how prayer is powerful & effective (**James 5:16-18**)
 - c. While God may answer "YES" to our prayers through a direct means, we must not limit

- Him to that! It may be that He works through others, through us, or some other way
2. A great example of God answering a prayer with a YES is in the case of Hezekiah: **(2 Kings 20:1-6)**
 - a. **Illustration:** What if you went to the doctor and he said you would die in a short amount of time? Second opinion? Don't believe him? What if it is God telling you? No hope!
 - b. This is Hezekiah's plot! Instead of just giving up he turned & faced the wall, quite literally, and prayed fervently pleading his cause & God decided to give him 15 more years!
 - c. Hezekiah teaches us that God cares about our feelings, He'll listen as we plead our case, striving to please Him impacts how he listens, and our prayers can change His mind!
 3. Sometimes through our faithful persistence or our humbly pleading we can change God's mind from not giving us what we ask to giving us what we ask:
 - a. David understood this so he continued to pray even though God already told him his child with Bathsheba was going to die. He prayed till a "NO" was clear! **(2 Sam 12:19-23)**
 - b. It may be that the reason why God has not requested our prayer is that we needed to learn to lean on Him more, trust Him more, and be humble. As we continue to pray the quality in us that caused God to say no may change and He may say yes!
 - c. Moses is a clear example – God had determined to destroy the nation of Israel but through Moses' pleadings God's mind was changed! Lesson? Keep praying! **(Deut 9:18-20)**

B. Sometimes God answers our prayers with a "NO"

1. We typically think of answered prayers as involving some action we can see; however, sometimes God's answers require no action because He has said no!
 - a. When God says NO it is just as much an answer to our prayers as when He says YES
 - b. When God says no we may question if He cares, if He listens, or if prayer really does matter! This is why we need to remind ourselves of the nature of prayer & of God!
 - c. When God tells us "NO" we must not allow ourselves to feel forgotten, unloved, or that we have lost our identity as His children. He once said no to His only Son! **(Mat 26:44-46)**
2. God may answer "NO" to our prayers because what we ask for is actually detrimental to our physical, emotional, or spiritual well being: **(Luke 5:11-13)**
 - a. We typically think of this passage from the positive perspective – That God will answer our prayers by giving us the good things we ask for, not giving us evil things in their place
 - b. What if what we ask for is really a serpent or scorpion but we don't realize it? We lack the infinite wisdom and the eternal perspective to always know what's best like God!
 - c. Song: "Unanswered Prayers" → When God doesn't seem to answer our prayers we don't need to feel like they've gone unanswered but trust in His wisdom that says no!
 - d. **Poem:** "And God Said No"
3. As with the case of Paul, God may answer with a "NO" because He has greater plans in store or because He is going to work something greater through us: **(2 Cor 12:7-10)**
 - a. If you were asked, "Did God answer Paul's prayers concerning his thorn in the flesh?" God did... even though the answer wasn't what Paul was hoping for! "No" is an answer!
 - b. God knew something Paul did not know! That by keeping this thorn in the flesh Paul's own spirituality would be strengthened & greater glory would be brought to Christ!
 - c. It's a good thing God says no to our prayers at times! By continuing to struggle with life's problems we can sometimes grow more spiritually and increase our impact on others
 - d. Could God have healed Dale & Glenda immediately? I prayed God would heal his kidneys and remove her cancer! But look at the good & glory worked through their situation!

4. We must remember too, that God may be telling us no because there is a problem in ourselves or in what we are seeking from Him. Here we are to blame, not God! (**James 4:3; Is 59:1-2**)

C. Sometimes God answers our prayers with a “NOT RIGHT NOW”

1. Sometimes God grants our requests, but does so on a time table we don't anticipate: (**Ecc 3:1, 11**)
 - a. Notice the words to the song: “In His Time” → God works on His time table not ours!
 - b. God may really be saying “YES” to our requests, but it's just that He knows we need to wait
 - c. Remember, God isn't limited by the clock but is eternal! His answers take not only our immediate circumstances into consideration but our eternal salvation (**2 Pet 3:4, 8-9**)
2. Isaiah prophesied to a people who had often prayed to God for deliverance and began to wonder if God had forgotten them – They are encouraged to wait for the Lord! (**Isaiah 40:27-31**)
3. When God's answer to our prayer seems to be delayed it's hard to be patient; however, we can know that God's waiting is good for us! (**Isaiah 30:18 - NKJV**)
 - a. Maybe it's a couple praying for God to bless them with a child – They pray diligently but months or even years pass – Eventually they have a child & understand God's timing!
 - b. Maybe a person prays for healing from a sickness – They seem to struggle for a long time and wonder if God has forgotten – Eventually they are healed but realize that through their suffering they were able to impact people they never would have!
 - c. A person may pray for a new job or a promotion – He prays and God seems silent while he struggles financially... Maybe he grows impatient then a better opening comes along!
 - d. We are often brought to understand God's timing when we can look back with hindsight, but we aren't guaranteed always to understand His timing – This demands our trust!

D. Sometimes God answers our prayers by saying, “I'M GIVING YOU SOMETHING BETTER”

1. With this answer God is saying “YES” to our prayers, but the way He carries out the answer is different from what we anticipated: (**Isaiah 55:8-9**)
 - a. Not only can it be different – It can be shockingly different! So different that we may wonder if God is really granting our prayer or if He has decided to tell us no!
 - b. When this happens we must remind ourselves that God knows what is best! We must also remember God has often worked His power men's lives in ways totally unexpected!
 - c. Remember “In His Time?” – Consider the third verse: “In His time, in His time; He will answer all your prayers, in His time. Though the answer may not be what you think that it should be, He will answer all your prayers in His time” – Takes trust to accept!
2. It may be that God wants to give us what we request, but in a different way: (**James 1:2-6**)
 - a. Like the statement: “Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime!” → Both men may have asked for a fish to eat and both men got their request granted; but, it was answered two different ways & that made the difference
 - b. Suppose a man asks for wisdom, spiritual strength, or patience – Could God automatically provide that? He did with Solomon! But God may choose to grant it through trials!
3. **Illustration:** Supposedly an unknown confederate soldier was found dead with a poem in his pocket reflecting this situation – This is easy to state, but it's hard to trustingly accept!

CONCLUSION: It is the person of faith and trust who can lay His requests at the feet of the Lord and say, “Not my will, but Your will be done.” When we develop faith that God will answer prayer and trust in His answers we will develop strong prayer lives that greatly impact things now and in eternity!

