

How God Answers Prayer (Dear God #4)

Sermon by Todd Lester

November 22, 2015

Luke 1:5-25

1. Be willing to let God answer in His own _____

Luke 1:18, 13, Mark 11:24

Continue to pray until God:

- a) _____ an answer
- b) _____ you that He will answer
- c) _____ that it is not His will for you

2. Be willing to let God answer in His own _____

Isaiah 55:8, Ephesians 3:20

3. Be willing to let God answer in His own _____

Biblical Examples: Sara and Abraham; Lazarus; Jairus' daughter

4. Be willing to let God answer for His own _____

Romans 1:7, 8, 10, 15, Romans 15:20, 24, Acts 28:16

Summary:

When you pray and the request is not right, God says "_____."

When you pray and you're not ready, God says "_____."

When you pray and the timing is not right, God says "_____."

When you pray and everything is in place, God says "_____."

Four Quaker Questions

This an adaptation of an old Quaker activity from long ago. Take a few minutes to consider the following questions and then go around the circle to share your responses.

1. Where did you live from age 7-12 and who was in your household at that time?
2. What were the winters like then and how was your house heated?
3. What was the centre of warmth in your life when you were a child? (this can be a person, place in the house, time of year, etc.)
4. When did God become a "warm" person to you ... and how did it happen?

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Icebreaker/Introduction

The 'Four Quaker Questions' is a good group building exercise that helps people share a bit about their past. It seems to fit thematically with the colder weather as well. Give a few minutes for reflection and then begin sharing – it might be wise to go first and set a bit of an example for being not too long and drawn out with your answers – otherwise this activity may take a while.

Ask if there was anything from this week's message on prayer that stood out – either a point that was made that really resonated with them, or perhaps a question or difficulty that came up for them.

Consider reading [Luke 1:5-25](#)

ATTITUDES WE NEED IN ORDER TO RECEIVE AN ANSWER FROM GOD:

1. Be willing to let God answer in His own time

Focuses on [Luke 1:18, 13](#), [Mark 11:24](#)

Todd pointed out that Zechariah & Elizabeth probably prayed for many years to have a child, and likely had even stopped praying for this, years ago. Are there prayers that you have prayed for many years? (eg. healing, prodigal child, unbelieving relative) Are there prayers that you have stopped praying? Why did you stop?

Todd suggested that Zechariah & Elizabeth would suffer under the social stigma of childlessness. Is there still a stigma to this? (or does our society have a stigma towards larger families?) What are some other stigmas we see around us? (Todd mentioned some like mental health, physical disabilities, ethnicity)

Todd talked about how faith could be defined as having patience. How are faith and patience the same? How are they different?

What are some of the reasons why God might delay in answering our prayers? (Todd talked of how He often needs to prepare us, for us to learn the right attitude, to mature us – can your group come up with more ideas?)

Continue to pray until God:

- a) releases an answer
- b) reassures you that He will answer
- c) reveals that it is not His will for you

2. Be willing to let God answer in His own way

Focuses on [Isaiah 55:8](#), [Ephesians 3:20](#)

Todd talked about how God answered Zechariah & Elizabeth's prayer in unexpected, surprising (and bigger and better) way. Has God surprised you in how He has answered some of your prayers over the years?

Discuss the statement: "God always gives His best to those who leave the choice to Him."

Can you think of prayers that you have prayed in your life which you are thankful God didn't answer?

2. Be willing to let God answer in His own power

Focuses on Biblical examples of Sara and Abraham; Lazarus; Jairus' daughter

Discuss Todd's statement that we shouldn't try to help God out, or try to work it out on our own. How is prayer also a partnership, where we have a role to play as well? Has prayer ever moved you to take action? (eg. when praying for a person in a difficult situation have you felt led to do something practical to help for them?)

When God moves in power the results can seem dramatic and miraculous. Have you experienced this? How common do you think this is? Does this principle also apply to less dramatic needs/prayers?

Todd recommended that while we are waiting for an answer to our prayers it is helpful to keep our eyes open to seeing how God works in other's lives. How do we keep that from becoming a discouragement (ie. 'God is answering them but not me')

4. Be willing to let God answer for His own purpose

Focuses on [Romans 1:7, 8, 10, 15](#), [Romans 15:20, 24](#), [Acts 28:16](#)

Can you recall the 2 reasons Todd gave for why God answers according to the Bible? (for our growth and for His glory) Do you think there can be other reasons? (eg. because of His love, wanting to give good gifts to His children)

Todd shared the excellent example of how, while Paul's purpose in going to Rome was to preach, God's purpose was to slow him down by having him enter prison, and to have him write so many of the letters that have been foundational to our faith. Looking back on your own life so far, can you see examples of God's purposes being worked out in your life in unexpected ways? (possible example: how you met your spouse)

Summary:

When you pray and the request is not right, God says "no."

When you pray and you're not ready, God says "grow."

When you pray and the timing is not right, God says "slow."

When you pray and everything is in place, God says "go."

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When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly."

Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years."

Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. When he finally did come out, he couldn't speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.

When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."

1. Be willing to let God answer in His own time

Luke 1:18 Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years."

Luke 1:13 But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer..."

Mark 11:24 I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours.

2. Be willing to let God answer in His own way

Isaiah 55:8 "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine."

Ephesians 3:20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

2. Be willing to let God answer in His own power

Biblical Examples: Sara and Abraham; Lazarus; Jairus' daughter

4. Be willing to let God answer for His own purpose

Romans 1:7, 8 I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people ... God knows how often I pray for you.

Romans 1:10 One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you.

Romans 1:15 So I am eager to come to you in Rome, too, to preach the Good News.

Romans 15:20 My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else.

Romans 15:24 I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome. And after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while, you can provide for my journey.

Acts 28:16 When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier.

Summary:

When you pray and the request is not right, God says "no."

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