



THEME: CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

Bible Study 4: Answered Prayer – How the Lord answers prayer.

INTRODUCTION When we come to the area of prayer it is important that we allow the Truth of God's Word to shape our expectation rather than our past experience of prayer. Scripture declares clearly that the Lord's disposition towards the authentic prayers of His people is to ALWAYS answer them in a positive way. As our heavenly Father He is a generous Father who loves to help His children when they are in trouble and equip their lives as we step out in Him. His heart is to empower our daily lives as we seek to bear witness to His Son and the Gospel of salvation He has given to us. Rather than seeing God as a grudging giver, the Word calls to approach Him in faith, humility and yet confidence because we belong to Him.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS – John 15 v 7 – 8, Mark 11 v 22 – 25, Romans 8 v 26 – 27, Psalm 24 v 1 – 10, Matthew 7 v 7 – 8

DISCUSS – What do you think are the different ways that God answers prayers?
What do you think are the heart elements of an authentic prayer that the Lord answers?
How do you think we can grow in faith and trust that God WILL always answer authentic prayer ?

TEACHING SLOT – Intentions at the heart of prayer.

When we look at the subject of prayer we see that people pray for lots of different reasons. There are some who pray out of duty or a habit. They have grown up in an environment where prayer goes on and have picked both the mechanics and habit of prayer. Alongside of this you have people who pray out of a sense of duty or to meet some expectation on them. This can happen because people know that church people should be a people who pray. So we establish our 15 minutes each day where we read the bible and cover our loved ones in prayer. It is perfectly possible to pray not because we feel the need for a specific blessing, or a stirring in our heart to pray but because it is the thing to do. It is about appeasing the conscience rather than because we are being led by the Spirit of God. Hence this sort of prayer is nothing more the form of prayer being manifested without the heart or mind set upon the Lord or an expectation that God will answer the prayer. This then results in prayer that in every sense we do not expect to be answered and so we do not look for God to change or make a difference in that situation. It is a passive and motionless experience that reinforces a passive and unresponsive God. This sort of prayer that prays with words and not with the heart deepens the idea in our hearts that God does not answer prayer and if He does it is to say "NO!" Some prayer is not answered because it is not prayer at all. It has the form of prayer but non of its core elements. God has promised to answer our prayers so if our prayers ARE left unanswered then it is because we are not praying as we should.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS– Matthew 6 v 5 – 8

DISCUSS – Do you think that there are those in the church today who pray out of duty rather than out of relationship?
What do you think the outcome will be of such prayers / praying?

TEACHING SLOT – Answering the Spirit of the prayer alongside the Letter of a prayer

We have seen that the bible establishes that everything that is truly prayer is heard and answered by God. "Everyone who asks receives. Everyone who seeks, finds." What we need to understand is that everything is answered by the Lord but as it is answered it is not always in line with the letter of the prayer rather than the spirit of the prayer. What is meant by this is that the Lord looks at the intentions of the prayer and the needs of that prayer and answers it is the best way possible. Sometimes our words would put a limit on what the Lord could do to best move in a situation. However the Lord looks at the real passionate prayers of His people, that are expression of their love, compassion and needs. And He answers in a way that in the long and fullness of time will bring about the best outcome not only for us but also for His Glory. READ Ephesians 3 v 20 – 21

Example – Paul and His thorn - READ 2 Corinthians 12 v 7 – 10 . Here we see Paul affected by a thorn in the flesh, something that was a snare and a trouble to him. Three times Paul was led to cry out to the Lord for this thorn to be removed.

And yet it wasn't! The thorn was left in and by the letter of his prayer, his prayer was left answered.

HOWEVER when we look at the spirit of his prayer for help and deliverance we see that the Lord did indeed answer him. We see that this problem did not overcome him and his influence for God was not diminished by it. God's grace was poured out into His life and God's strength was made perfect in his weakness. To such a degree he boasts in his weakness BECAUSE it highlights the Lord's grace and strength. His prayer was answered, the Lord secured the results but not in the way Paul expected it.

When we pray we need to be open to the fact that the Lord's ways are wiser than our ways. Because of this He chooses to fully answer our prayers in a way that is greater and more worthy than the outcome we ask for. If prayer is acceptable to Him. He will secure often a greater outcome and more perfect outcome, in kingdom terms, than that which we asked for.

We need to understand that heart felt and worthy prayer is always answered, but not always to the letter. If the letter and the Spirit are the same then God will answer both. The important thing here is that we are prepared to recognise real powerful answers to our prayers. We need to make sure that we are not so bound to the letter of prayer that we are blind to the spirit of our prayer being answered. This challenges us to recognise the inner workings of our minds and the influence of the Spirit within us as we recognise the Spirit's prompting in our prayers. The Lord answers the deep groans of the heart and the pure signs of the Spirit as well as the specific words we use. Prevailing prayer is a child of God coming before Him with a real faith in the Lord promises and asking for things agreed in His will, by the Holy Spirit, in an assurance of being heard according to the true intent of His promises. It is then that we break through to marvellous and glorious answers to prayer that glorify God.