

## *An Answer to Prayer*

While crossing the Atlantic Ocean, Dr. F.B. Meyer was asked to address the first class passengers. At the captain's request he spoke on "Answered Prayer." An agnostic who was present at the service was asked by his friends, "What did you think of Dr. Meyer's sermon?" He answered, "I didn't believe a word of it."

That afternoon Meyer went to speak to the steerage passengers. Many of the listeners at his morning address went along, including the agnostic, who claimed he just wanted to hear "what the babbler had to say." Before starting for the service, the agnostic put two oranges in his pocket. On his way he passed an elderly woman sitting in her deck chair fast asleep. Her hands were open. In the spirit of fun, the agnostic put the two oranges in her outstretched palms. After the meeting, he saw the old lady happily eating one of the pieces of fruit. "You seem to be enjoying that orange," he remarked with a smile.

"Yes, sir," she replied, "My Father is very good to me." "Your father? Surely your father can't be still alive!" "Praise God," she replied, "He is very much alive." "What do you mean?" pressed the agnostic. So she explained, "I'll tell you, sir. I have been seasick for days. I was asking God *somehow* to send me an orange. I suppose I fell asleep while I was praying. When I awoke, I found He had not only sent me one orange but two!" The agnostic was speechless. Later he was converted to Christ. Yes, praying in God's will brings answers!

## *Fellowship*

1. When you asked your parents for something as a child, what usually happened?
2. How confident do you feel that God will answer your prayers?

## *Discipleship*

Welcome back to "Walking with Christ"! Last week we talked about having consistent time alone with Jesus. This week we want to expand on that, and will be talking about prayer. Prayer is *one* aspect of that quiet time with Him...and the more you learn about it, the more excited you'll become to make it part of your day! I love talking about this subject, because I have seen countless answers to prayer! Nothing is quite so encouraging to me as hearing that a prayer I have brought before the Lord has been answered! I always feel so honored that God is allowing *me* to have a part in changing eternity! And what a way to see God's power! You will learn so much of God's love, character, working, and yes... even sense of humor...as you pray and see Him creatively answer!

James Gilmour, a missionary to Mongolia, was once asked to treat some wounded soldiers. Although he was not a doctor, he did have some knowledge of first aid, so he felt he could not refuse the request. He dressed the wounds of two of the men, but a third had a badly broken thigh bone. The missionary had no idea what to do for such an injury. Kneeling beside the man, he asked the Lord for help. He didn't know how God would answer his prayers, but he was confident that his need would be supplied. He couldn't find any books on physiology in the primitive hospital, and no doctor arrived. To complicate matters, a crowd of beggars came to him asking for money. He was deeply concerned about

his patient, yet his heart went out to those ragged paupers.

Hurriedly he gave them a small gift, plus a few kind words of spiritual admonition. A moment later he stared in amazement at one weary beggar who had remained behind. The half-starved fellow was little more than a living skeleton. The missionary suddenly realized that the Lord had brought him a walking lesson in anatomy! He asked the elderly man if he might examine him. After carefully tracing the femur bone with his fingers to learn how to treat the soldier's broken leg, he returned to the patient and was able to set the fracture.

Prayer changes things! Let's learn more about this powerful privilege in our text for today found in Matthew 6:5-15.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

“This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

This passage is so rich in truths to enrich our prayer life! First of all, notice that our prayers are to be private. I'm not saying to never volunteer to pray during your small group! But even if you pray out loud, your attitude should not be others-focused, but rather between you and the Lord. You are not trying to impress anyone with fancy words or appearing saintly. Your heart is humble before God and you imagine yourself in His throne room...coming before the King to talk with Him! I've been a Christian from the time I was a young child, and still at times I get intimidated when I'm in my small group and we take turns praying. Every time I find that happening I take a quick inventory and do a reality check: Who am I trying to impress? Who am I talking to? I remind myself that it's just He and I, and I can be myself.

Then notice in verses 7 and 8: Our prayers are to be to the point. The actual words we pray are not what are going to get us “noticed” before God or determine the answer! It's our heart attitude and our prayers working alongside His will for a situation. Are you more influenced with your children when they take 45 minutes going on and on, trying to impress you with their intelligence and eloquence...*or* when they trust you that you know what's best, you love them, and if it's in your will to grant a request you'll do it? Yes, God tells us to ask...and to keep asking! He tells us to pray without ceasing and to not give up! But the babbling this verse is referring to shows just where this person's faith is placed: the quality of the prayer verses the faithfulness of God. Trust *Him* and not the words themselves... because as verse 8 assures us, God knows what you need even before you ask.

A missionary to Africa told how a mother at their mission station died after giving birth to a premature baby. They tried to improvise an incubator to keep the infant alive, but the only hot water bottle they

had was beyond repair. They asked the children to pray for the baby and for her sister. One of the girls responded, "Dear God, please send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late because by then the baby will be dead. And dear Lord, send a doll for the sister so she won't feel so lonely." That afternoon a large package arrived from England. The children watched eagerly as it was opened. Much to their surprise, under some clothing was a hot water bottle! Immediately the girl who had prayed so earnestly started to dig deeper, exclaiming, "If God sent that, I'm sure He also sent a doll!" And she was right! The heavenly Father knew in advance of that child's sincere requests, and 5 months earlier He had led a ladies' group to include both of those specific articles."

Andrew Murray defines faith as "expecting from God what is beyond all expectation." That's faith-filled praying! James 1:6 says, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."

Do you believe that your God can do anything? That the same God who raised the dead can also raise your marriage? That the God who calmed the sea can solve your problems with your employer? That the Good Shepherd can lead your wayward child home? That Creator God who adorned the fields with daisies can provide you with your daily bread? That the God who knows when a sparrow falls also knows what you will face at the hospital tomorrow? Yes, dear one; He knows even before you ask.

Notice how what's commonly known as "The Lord's Prayer" begins and ends: it's all about God! By reminding ourselves at the outset *who we're praying to; where His throne is*; and *who is powerful enough* to deliver us from evil. It's all about His will, His glory, His provision...and our total dependence on Him.

But one crucial element we must have is a pure heart before Him. We must confess our sins and not harbor resentment and unforgiveness towards others. If we don't, we still haven't understood that it's all about God! Pride is keeping us from seeing our destitution without His mercy and forgiveness to us! Our focus is clouded with grudges and egos that are offended because we haven't been given the treatment we think we deserve. I love to start off every prayer I pray with the words of David, "Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins that they may not rule over me. THEN will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression."

Freedom from pride will also keep us from asking with wrong motives and keep our prayers in line with God's will. James 4:3 warns that some people don't get what they ask for because they ask with wrong motives, so they can spend what they get on pleasures. God does not reject prayers we pray for ourselves and our financial situation, but we need to ask ourselves: who's Kingdom do I want to see built? To build our prayer lives around petitions for a bigger house, a raise at work or a big win in the lottery will make God sick every bit as much as if *our* children never talked to *us* except when they wanted access to our pocketbooks.

The God of the universe longs for pure fellowship with you! For us to talk to Him and enjoy Him! Why else would a God who already knows everything tell us to present our requests to Him and pray about everything? He could just decide to do what was His will without our asking. But He wants us to feel the excitement of having a part in changing eternity!

Just as talking to a friend is a great stress-reliever, God tells us to cast all our anxiety on Him because He cares for us! He promises a peace that passes all understanding! No earthly friend can give that! We may feel a sense of release and gladness that someone knows what we are facing, but only God can do something about it! Prayer carries the comfort that the answer will be the right one, at the right

time, for our good, 100% of the time.

3. Read Philippians 4:4-7. How can we fulfill verse 4 by obeying verse 6?

4. Read James 4:3, 8-10. What are some wrong motives people have when they pray? What does humility in prayer look like?

5. When you don't see an answer to prayer coming, how sure are you that God has heard you? Read the following verses and discuss how they encourage you:

Psalm 55:17

Psalm 145:19

Proverbs 15:29

6. Compare Hebrews 10:19-23 to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. What common threads do you see?

7. Read Matthew 7:8-11. How does verse 11 give you confidence in whatever answer God gives?

8. Perhaps you feel like you've asked God for a fish and he's given you a snake. Share with the group any past experiences that make it hard for you to trust the answers He provides.

## **Ministry**

9. Pause to pray for anyone in the group that shared something difficult in question 8. Ask God to send his Holy Spirit to heal this memory, and give this person insight and a true picture of the Father.

## **Worship**

10. Your homework this week is to spend 10 minutes alone with God each day. You can read the Bible and talk to him about it. You can take a walk and talk to him as you go. Practice thinking about and talking to Him as you would a friend.