

Title: HOW GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

Text: Luke 1:5-23

Intro: A small child wrote to a missionary the following note: *"Dear Mr. Missionary, we are praying for you but we don't know if God will answer."* This prayer reflects the prayers of most Christians who pray a lot but actually doubt answers! When and how does God answer? To get an answer from God, we must know four principles:

I. God answers prayer IN HIS OWN TIME (Eccl. 3:11).

A. What was the couple's prayer request? To have a baby. Yes, but when they were young not when they got old (**v. 7**).

B. It seemed that they already quit praying that prayer long ago. This is why Zacharias was unconvinced (**vv. 18, 20**)

C. The Lord heard that prayer (**v. 13**) but He waited a long time to answer it. Why did God delay in answering their prayer when we know that He is never late? He is never in a hurry too!

D. It was not His time. God needed more time to prepare and change Zacharias and Elizabeth, to receive a baby who was going to be a great man; who will prepare the coming of Christ.

E. They needed to grow and mature, in order to handle this unusual baby. What do you do when God delays?

1. Keep praying until you get direct answers.
2. Keep praying until you get assurance but need to wait.
3. Stop praying when you know it is not God's will.
4. Stop praying when you are no longer at peace praying.

II. God answers prayer IN HIS OWN WAY (Isa. 55:8).

A. If the Lord had answered their prayer when they were young; they could have had a nice little average Jewish baby boy.

B. But God wanted a John the Baptist (see **Luke 7:28**).

C. When you let God answer in His own time and in His own way, He wants to answer them in a grander way! (**Luke 1:14-17**)

III. God answers prayer IN HIS OWN POWER (Eph 3:20).

A. God often waits until the situation is humanly impossible before He answers (**Mark 10:27**).

B. He waited until Zacharias and Elizabeth were old (**v. 7**) when it was impossible for them to have children. Why?

C. Because when God answers an impossible situation, who gets the glory? God of course! (Illustration: Abraham and Sarah tried to "help out" God through Hagar and they got into trouble).

D. Caution: When you pray about a problem, do not be surprised if it gets worse and worse before it gets even better. God will be glorified in a more spectacular way! (**Lev. 10:3**)

E. Illustration: Jesus intentionally delayed His coming 4 days to heal Lazarus (**John 11:17, 21**).

F. Why? What would better glorify God? To heal him or to resurrect him? God always intends the better or the best for us.

G. Sometimes God makes us wait until it seems that answers to our prayers are impossible to make us grow as He gets glory!

H. Other times He lets us see miracles in the life of others before He answers our prayers. Illustration: Jesus on his way to heal Jairus' daughter was touched by a woman who has been sick for 12 years. She was instantly healed (**Luke 8:41-44**).

IV. God answers prayer FOR HIS OWN PURPOSE (Rom. 8:28).

A. The entire Bible summarizes why God answers prayer in two statements: (1) **for our growth**; and (2) **for His glory!!!**

B. God had a purpose for the life of Zacharias and Elizabeth's son. The purpose was to make that little boy, a John the Baptist to proclaim the coming of Christ in His perfect timing!

C. It was Paul's dream to go to Rome and preach the Gospel where no one had preached before. He asked Christians in Rome to pray so he could have a prosperous journey (**Rom 1:9-10**).

D. Was Paul allowed to go to Rome? Yes, in God's time. How did he get there? On a 1st class ship? No, but with a bunch of prisoners! (**Acts 27:1**). Was God's power with him? Yes, of course.

E. In the storm's midst, the Angel of God told him none would perish in the shipwreck (**Acts 27:23-24**). Paul was also bitten by a snake but he lived. God was glorified in all of this! (**Acts 28:3-5**)

F. In Rome he was put into house arrest (**Acts 28:16**). What was God's greater purpose for Paul there? To preach at Coliseum for several days? No! God wanted Paul for something bigger! To write some of the Epistles of the NT in that lonely jailhouse!!

Conclusion: Always remember, God's delays are not God's denials! Sometimes God denies the original request, to give you something better and greater to make you grow for His glory. Remember –

- When you pray and the request is not right, God answers "No"
- When you pray and you are not right, God answers: "Grow"
- When you pray and the timing is not right, God answers: "Wait"
- When you pray and everything is in place, God answers: "Yes"