

THE FOUR CONDITIONS FOR ANSWERED PRAYER

We're in a series of messages called "Try Prayer". Last week we talked about the four purposes of prayer. You've probably had people say to you, "I tried prayer and it didn't work. I'm disappointed and I don't believe in prayer." If we were honest we'd probably all say there are thousands of prayers that go up but there are very few answers that come down. Why is that? What causes that? Is prayer a farce, a superstition, something we just con ourselves into and pretend that it works but it really doesn't? What is prayer?

There's a deeper question than that. Does God promise to answer everyone's prayers? No. It's very clear in Scripture that God completely ignores some people's prayers. In fact, the Bible says that God has laid out some conditions to answered prayer. Four, to be specific.

I want us to look at those conditions because until you meet the conditions for answered prayer, you're wasting your breath.

So, What are the four conditions for answered prayer? This morning I'd like to share with you the four conditions for answered prayer. If you meet these conditions you have every right to expect that what you ask for will be answered in prayer.

1. You must have an honest relationship to God. *"If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, you can ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you."*

(John 15:7) That's a beautiful promise. But in Scripture every promise has a condition or every promise has a premise. The promise here is, "I will give you whatever you ask in prayer if you remain in Me." In other words, "...if you have an honest relationship with Me."

How do you remain in Christ? The next sentence tells it. By Jesus' words remaining in you. Where do you find Jesus' words? In the Bible, of course. In other words, God says if we fill our minds with his Word, the Bible, then we will be in Christ. We will be abiding in Him. You see, God requires that we listen to Him first before He listens to us. If I don't pay attention to what God says to me in His word, why should He pay attention to me when I talk to Him? If I ignore His word, why should He pay attention to what I say to Him?

The starting point is to have an honest relationship to God. How? Through the word of God. That's why Bible study is important. You say, "Are you saying if I don't study my Bible I won't have answered prayer?" No, what I'm saying is your prayer life will never be more effective than how much you understand Scripture. The more you understand the Bible the more you'll know how to pray affectively.

Now, let me give you **three questions on how to evaluate if you have an honest relationship to God.** 1 John gives us questions on how to evaluate ourselves on if we have an honest relationship to God.

1. Do I refuse to admit I sin? The Bible says we all sin. **1 John 1:10 says, "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us."** That sin or sins must be confessed. It may be an activity, an attitude, a thought. When we go our own way, do our own thing, it breaks the connection between us and God. When we try to cover up things that we know are wrong from God then that honest relationship is broken. There's a falseness, a con, a fraud, trying to live two different lives at once -- live for God and live for myself. So the first thing I ask if I'm really being honest with God is have I admitted what I've done wrong.

Psalm 66:18 says that if I cherish or hide sin in my heart the Lord will not hear. Isaiah 59:2 says our sins, our wrongness, separates us from God.

And Proverbs 28:13 says *“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”*

What do you do? 1 John 1:9 says. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* What is confession? Confession is simply being honest with God. It's saying, "God, You're right. I was wrong. That jealousy or that impatience was wrong. Please forgive me." The first way we can tell if we have an honest relationship with God is are we being honest when we commit a sin.

2. Am I obedient to God? In other words, when God tells me to do something, when I know I'm holding on to something that God wants me to let go of and I continue to hold on to it, that breaks the prayer chain, the connection with God. 1 John 3:21-22, *“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.”*

You say, “How can I keep all of God's commands. Nobody's perfect. How am I ever going to get any answers?” God does not demand perfection. He simply demands obedience. And obedience is an attitude: I want to do what's right. God doesn't expect perfection, but He does expect you to obey.

Example: I tell my seven-year-old daughter, "Eza, go clean up your room after playing. And I expect you to do that everytime " If thirty minutes later I go in and the room is half picked up and she's still got things falling all over the side -- it's not immaculate, do I get upset about it? No. She's only a seven year old. But she did the best she could. She's not perfect, she did the best she could. But if the next day I come in and see her messy room again, then do I get upset? You bet. Why? Because as a parent, I don't expect perfection but I do expect obedience.

So we ask, "Am I hiding something from God in my relationship with him? Am I doing what I know He wants me to do at this point?"

3. Do I really want God's will for my life? 1 John 5:14-15 says, "*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*" In short, when we ask according to God's will then we have confidence in prayer and we know He's going to answer.

Most Christians make a big mistake in prayer. They go around constantly saying, "God, is it Your will that I ask for this?" over every little item. The real issue is not "God, what is Your will regarding this specific circumstance?" The real issue is "Am I in the center of God's will as a person?" You see, if my life is in harmony with God, then my desires are going to be in harmony with God's desires.

Augustine said this: "Love God and do what you please." Why did he say that? Because if you really love God with all your heart, you're not going to want to do what displeases God. In other words, if you love God, then what He wants will become what you want—and what you want will invariably be what He wants.

So you don't have to constantly say, "Is it Your will?" You go down to buy a new phone: "God is it Your will that I buy a Samsung Galaxy or an iPhone? ... God, is it Your will that I order the steak or the pork chops?" No, you don't have to ask God's will on every little item like that. You get your life in God's will and say, "To the best of my knowledge, I'm trying to do what's right, Lord. I want to live in Your will." Then you ask according to your desires. You get in God's will.

How do you know the answer to the question, "Do I really want God's will for my life?" How do you know if you really want it? Simple.

How eager are you to read the Bible? Because the only way you can know the will of God is by reading the word of God. And God's word tells you God's will.

Romans 12:2 says, *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* How is your mind renewed? By reading God’s Word. As you immerse yourself in the Bible, your mind is renewed and you get to know God’s will for your life, in all aspects of life.

So the first condition to answered prayer is this: You have an honest relationship to God. Then, Jesus lays out another prerequisite for having your prayers answered.

2. You must have a forgiving attitude. In Mark 11:24-25, he says, *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you've received it and it will be yours. That’s the promise. What’s the condition? And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins.”*

More than any other characteristic in the Bible except maybe faith, the number one thing related to prayer is forgiveness. Over and over again, every time Jesus talks about prayer He talks about forgiveness. Why? Because nothing will kill your prayers faster than resentment. When you hold a grudge, when you nurse an ill feeling, when you allow bitterness to grow in your life, it knocks off your prayers. Maybe you're praying and not getting an answer because you're holding a grudge against somebody.

In Matthew 5, Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount says, when you go to the altar and you're going to offer a gift to the Lord and you remember that you've got something against somebody or they've got something against you, stop,

leave the gift right there at the altar, go out, find that person, get forgiveness or offer forgiveness, make harmony in the relationship, then come back and continue giving your gift to the Lord. Why? Because God says you can't say you love God and hate your brother. One of the primary reasons why people never see answers to prayer is because they allow bitterness to spring up in their lives.

Hebrews 12:15 (Living Bible) "Watch out that no bitterness take root among you for as it springs up among you it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives." Bitterness is like a poison, it will eat you alive. You can't have unforgiveness in your heart and have your prayers answered.

VIDEO – "I Can Only Imagine" Trailer

How do you have answers to prayer? Four conditions: One, Have an honest relationship to God. Two, Have a forgiving attitude toward other people. Three,

3. You must believe that God will answer.

Look at **James 1:6-8, "But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord. He's a double-minded man unstable in all he does."**

The third condition for answered prayer is "Don't doubt." You must expect God to answer. There's only one kind of prayer that God answers: the prayer of faith. Because the Bible says, **"...without faith it is impossible to please God"** (Hebrews 11:6) and in **Mark 9:29 it says, "According to your faith, it will be done unto you."**

What are they trying to say? James, Mark, and the writer of Hebrews are saying that if you ask God for anything, if you pray to God, you must believe that he is able to do what you ask him to do. In short, you must have faith in a God who answers prayers.

You must believe that he is a real God, a personal loving God who cares deeply for you and knows your every concern, your every need, your every sorrow, your every desire. You see, the early disciples lived in a time when paganism was the avowed religion of people everywhere. The Roman and Greek pagans believed in a plurality of gods like Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and all the names of the planets. The Romans and Greeks prayed to them and sacrificed to them but they don't even have an assurance that they're being heard by their gods. They knew that their gods were living in their own world somewhere, interested in their own lives, and so, most of the time they doubted.

James is saying, "Don't be like the pagans. Believe in the real God who answers prayers. Have faith that he can do miracles." Because if you doubt, you're like a pagan, you lack faith, and that doesn't please God.

Now, what is faith? Is faith believing that God can do it? "I believe God can do it!" That's not faith. When you believe God can, that's just a fact. God can do it whether you believe it or not. "I believe God might do it." That's not faith either. That's wish. You wish He might. "I believe God will do it." That's faith. Not believing God can do it, not believing God might do it, but believing God will do it. That's faith.

So, if you have met the conditions of Scripture -- you have an honest relationship to God, you have, as far as you know, no unforgiveness toward anyone, and you're asking God in faith, you can expect God to answer.

It's like you take a seed and plant it in the ground and in a few months it sprouts and you get a tomato plant from it. You're not surprised you get a tomato because you cooperated with the laws of nature and it happened. The same way with prayer. You follow the conditions laid out in Scripture and God answers.

Should you be surprised he answers? No. Because it is simply in line with the spiritual law that God has ordained.

So, again here are the Principles: Have an honest relationship to God. Forgive. Believe that God will answer. And the fourth, a very important principle is this:

4. You must pray in Jesus' name. The Lord Jesus says in **John 14:13**, "*And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*" In **John 16:24** He says the same thing. "*Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*" The fourth condition for answered prayer -- you must pray in Jesus' name.

What is so special about Jesus' name? Some people think "In Jesus' name" is kind of a mystical password that gets you into God. "God, here are all my requests. By the way, the codeword is: In Jesus' name." Or some people would treat it just like a signal to indicate the end of a prayer.

What in the world does it mean to pray "In Jesus' name"? What does it mean?

I heard a story once that illustrates it. A pastor took his young son and about fourteen of his son's friends to the carnival for a birthday party. He bought a roll of tickets and he'd stand at the front of every ride and as the kids came by -- his son and the fourteen friends -- he gave everybody a ticket. He was just handing them out. All of a sudden he looked up and realized there was a little boy who didn't look familiar with his hand out asking for a ticket. He stopped and said, "Son, are you with my son's party?" "No." "Why should I give you a ticket?" The young boy turned around and pointed to the man's son and said, "Your son said you'd give me one." So he gave him one.

Here's the point. I don't have any right to get any answered prayers from God. What makes me think I should get my prayers to be answered? God doesn't owe me anything. I owe him a lot but He doesn't owe me anything. When I come and pray and ask God for requests, I don't ask on my own merit but I come on the merit of Christ. I come and say, "Father, I'm coming to You because Your Son said so. I'm coming because of what Jesus Christ has already done for me on the cross and He's promised and He said I can ask in His name. God, I'm coming in Jesus' name."

Jesus is the bridge between God and man. God came in the form of a man -- Jesus Christ. The Bible says there's one mediator, one bridge, between God and man. Jesus says in John 14:6, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" He's the bridge to God.

Let's say I was going to buy a car. I walk into a car dealer, test drove a car and liked it, and filled out some paper work. They run my credit and they say, "Mr. Estabillo, I'm sorry we cannot give you what you want because your credit score is only 560." I ask, "What do I need to do?" "If you really want the car, you need to get a co-borrower." So, I immediately thought of someone who could help and his name is Elvin. So, Kuya Elvin and I go in the car dealer once again and just looking at him, they say, "That's the guy who can help you. His name is sweet and powerful around here. He's got a good credit line. His credit score is off the charts."

Jesus Christ has an excellent credit reference with the Father. Where I may be spiritually bankrupt, He's got plenty of dough, and plenty of pull. When I come to God and pray, "In Jesus' name" I'm saying, "God, I realize that You don't have any reason to give me this, but I'm coming in Jesus' name because of Him, because of what He's done."

Is it always necessary to say the word, "In Jesus' name" at the end of every prayer? I don't think it's necessary if you've got the attitude, but I think it's a good idea. I don't see anything wrong with doing it every time. Why? Because it reminds you why you have the right to pray. It is a constant reminder. You don't have to say it at the end, you could say it at the start. "Lord, Father, I'm coming to You in Jesus' name" and give your requests. You don't have to tack it on at the end. In the New Testament, the disciples sometimes pray literally in Jesus' name, sometimes not. But I think it's a good reminder of the fact that the way we pray is in Jesus' merit, not our own. We are to pray to the Father, the Heavenly Father, through the Son.

Which of these conditions have you been overlooking that's why you haven't been getting any answers to prayer. Maybe you've been holding a grudge. Maybe you've been nursing a resentment and you have allowed bitterness to build up in your life and it's no wonder you don't have any answers to prayer.

Maybe you've been refusing to admit some wrong in your life. You've known it was there but you didn't want to go to God and say, "You're right, God, that's wrong. I admit it." We think Watergate was a cover up. It's nothing compared to some of the things we try on God. So we say, "God, I admit it. That was wrong. I shouldn't have lost my cool just then."

Maybe you've prayed but you've never really expected God to answer. If you don't expect God to answer, you're just wasting your time. Don't even pray. God says, "Why bother? If you don't believe that I'm going to do it, don't even make the effort." It's a condition.

Have you been abiding in Him? In His word? Reading the Bible, getting involved in a Bible study? Have you been praying in Jesus' name?

You can't pray in Jesus' name unless you know Him as a friend, as your Lord, as your Savior, as the director of your life. The most important question is, “Do you have an honest relationship with God?” I'm not talking about church membership. I'm not talking about being religious. I'm talking about a relationship. God wants you to know Him personally. And the first step is to surrender your life to Jesus. All you need to do is to acknowledge him as the only one who can save you from your sins.