

Pastor's Corner – 3-3-2018
Answers We Don't Expect

This past week I had an interesting conversation with my daughter on the subject of answered prayer. She told me that a guest speaker (I think it was a guest speaker) was talking about living by faith and he shared that each night he would pray that God would wake him up the next morning at the right time. This person said he no longer uses an alarm clock but trusts in God to wake him up.

My daughter has been trying to find time to begin a new workout routine and so she decided to give this suggestion a try and step out in faith. No alarm clock, she decided, just a prayer that God would wake her up at 7am so she could go to the fitness center, do her workout, get cleaned up, and be ready for classes. When she called me she was upset because she woke up 4 minutes before class and had to rush out the door to make it on time.

My first reaction was something along the lines of, "you can't expect God to be your alarm clock" (I'm such a supportive Dad). It seemed kind of trivial in my mind and I wouldn't even consider asking God to do something like that (maybe that's my lack of faith). But for my daughter this was a big deal, because she had stepped out in faith and it appeared that God had not honored that faith. It can be quite discouraging when you feel like God has let you down and that's what she was experiencing.

As we talked a little bit I found out that she woke up at just after 6am, looked at the clock, and then decided to go back to sleep. When she said that, a thought struck me, "what if God had wanted her to wake up at 6 instead of 7? Couldn't it be that God had answered her prayer but it wasn't in the way she expected? Did she almost miss a direct answer to prayer because she was looking for the wrong thing?" I shared the thought with her and she agreed that that could have indeed been God's plan, that maybe God had responded to her faith and she had just missed it.

I wonder how often this kind of thing happens? I wonder how often we step out in faith, ask God for something in prayer, and then when things don't play out the way we imagined they would, we conclude that God failed. But perhaps he didn't fail, perhaps we simply didn't expect (or notice) the answer that he gave.

When it comes to prayer we also have to take into account a few important teachings from the Bible. John 15:7 says, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." The key point here is that if you want Jesus to answer your prayers, you need to be abiding in him. You have to be following him and dedicated to him. He answers the prayers of his friends, not of complete strangers or enemies.

A second condition is found in John 5:14-15 which says: "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." Here the emphasis is on asking according to God's will. In other words we shouldn't expect God to answer prayers that would expressly go against his will and purpose. He also won't answer prayers that go against his nature, so you can forget about praying that God will force someone to change (he's not a God of force or compulsion).

Mark 11:24 adds another component, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." In this passage we see that faith is important. If we ask God to be present or to help us we should accompany that request with a firm belief that God will answer. Faith and trust are an important component to answered prayer. If you don't expect God to do anything in response to your prayers, he probably won't.

I want to conclude with a few observations about prayer. First, we should be open to seeing God answer our prayers in ways we do not expect (and from sources we wouldn't anticipate). Second, our requests should come from an active relationship with God, one in which we ask for things that are

in accordance with his will. Third, that we should have faith that he will answer our prayers and respond in just the right way. And, of course, Fourth, we need to remember that sometimes - God just says no.

Have a Happy Sabbath
Pastor Tyler