

This One Thing:
When God Answers Prayer
2 Chronicles 7:12-22

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Text Introduction: We are in the middle of a prayer challenge. We are calling our challenge “This One Thing.” This is not only guiding our times together on Sunday morning as we examine the Scriptures about prayer, but we are also challenging one another about our discipline and habits of prayer. And what a time it is to pray. I could not have imagined the importance of this effort when God birthed this in my heart early this summer. But, now, all of this makes perfect sense, right?

In recent weeks, we have built a theology of prayer. We have considered Jesus’ example and the Early Church’s example. Sooner or later, we have to come to this question of answered prayer.

Sometimes, we hear people offer this tidy little piece that goes something like this: God always answers prayers. Sometimes, He says, “Yes.” Sometimes, He says, “No.” Sometimes, He says, “Wait.” And I have even heard this one: sometimes, He says, “Are you crazy?” Well, that might make for a nice saying, but I have to be honest with you, a pithy saying like that does me little good when it is my request.

Now, before we read our text today, I want to say that we are going to deal with the opposite of this idea next week. That is, we are going to look Biblically at the idea of unanswered prayer.

But, today, I want to share with you a rather well known passage of Scripture and learn from this passage about answered prayer.

Text: ¹²Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him:

I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a temple of sacrifice. ¹³If I close the sky so there is no rain, or if I command the grasshopper to consume the land, or if I send pestilence on My people, ¹⁴and My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land. ¹⁵My eyes will now be open and My ears attentive to prayer from this place. ¹⁶And I have now chosen and consecrated this temple so that My name may be there forever; My eyes and My heart will be there at all times.

¹⁷As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, doing everything I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and ordinances, ¹⁸I will establish your royal throne, as I promised your father David: You will never fail to have a man ruling in Israel.

¹⁹However, if you turn away and abandon My statutes and My commands that I have set before you and if you go and serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰then I will uproot Israel from the soil that I gave them, and this temple that I have sanctified for My name I will banish from My presence; I will make it an object of scorn and ridicule among all the peoples. ²¹As for this temple, which was exalted, everyone who passes by will be appalled and will say: Why did the LORD do this to this land and this temple? ²²Then they will say: Because they abandoned the LORD God of their ancestors who brought

them out of the land of Egypt. They clung to other gods and worshiped and served them. Because of this, He brought all this ruin on them.

Introduction: Often times, this passage is examined as a prescription for prayer. This is not a prayer prescription. This is God's response to a prayer that Solomon prayed at the occasion of the dedication of the Temple. You read Solomon's prayer beginning in 6:12. Beginning in 7:12, we read God's response to Solomon's prayer.

While we are still learning much about prayer and when God answers prayers, we can draw several conclusions about answered prayer.

Four Keys to Positioning Ourselves for God to Answer:

1. Humility

We can never pray as we ought without humility. Humility is the essence of saying, "I can't do this by myself. God, I need you."

A lady went to work at a sewing factory. On her first day on the job the foreman instructed, "If the thread gets knotted, call me!" Sure enough, the thread got knotted. She tried to correct the problem only to make a larger and more difficult knot. Giving up, she called her foreman and said, "I did the best I could with this knot." "No," the foreman said, "The best you could have done would have been to call me."

With God, we often try to get ourselves out of the knots of life. The best that we can do is to call on Him. The degree of our dependence upon Him is going to be evident in the frequency of our calling out to Him. We cannot say we depend upon Him unless a regular and consistent part of our life is calling out to Him.

Later in this same book called 2 Chronicles is one of my all-time favorite stories about prayer. In chapter 20, we read about the days of the reign of King Jehoshaphat. Word comes to the King that "a vast number" has assembled against Judah. Jehoshaphat calls the people to pray. In his prayer he says this: "For we are powerless before this vast number that comes to fight against us. We do not know what to do, but we look to you." That is, our eyes are upon you.

I sense that is what we are to do. That is how we humble ourselves before the Lord. Prayer begins with authentically telling God in word and action, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You."

But then God answers. "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast number, for the battle is not yours, but God's."

2. Habitual

The second key to positioning ourselves for answered prayer is habitual prayer. God's response to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7 is that the prayer of dedication is not to be the last prayer offered in the Temple.

You see, prayer, above most every other thing is a relationship. God desires relationship. We desire answered prayer. God desires relationship. God is the parent who longs for His children to call Him. When children call their earthly parents, sometimes there is a lot to say and sometimes there is not much to say, but parents still want to hear that voice. God wants to hear His children's voices.

3. Hunger

And we are to seek His face. Isn't that a powerful description of prayer? I am seeing God, but at the same time, I am seeking the will of God. I hear in this phrase that there is a passion, a fervency to our praying. This is much more than asking God about our "list." We hunger to see Him. Remember the beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness." Later in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be provided for you." In the context of praying about our needs, our first obligation is to seek Him.

4. Holiness

Finally, we position ourselves for answered prayer by "turning from our wicked ways." You can search the Scriptures and you will note this: There is a connection between obedience and answered prayer.

You search this passage and you will see this connection. Look at verses 17-22.

James (5:16) said that we should confess our sins one to the other because, "the prayer of the righteous man is very powerful."

During the Great Awakening, when the Spirit of God revived much of our nation's early faith, Jonathan Edwards was presiding over a massive prayer meeting. Eight hundred men prayed with him.

Into that meeting a woman sent a message asking the men to pray for her husband. The note described a man who had become unloving, prideful, and difficult.

Edwards read the message in private and then, thinking that perhaps the man described was present, made a bold request. Edwards read the note to the 800 men. Then he asked if the man who had been described would raise his hand, so that the whole assembly could pray for him. Three hundred men raised their hands. (*Bryan Chapell, Holiness By Grace, (Crossway, 2001), p. 80. Used by permission of Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.*)

Imagine this scene with me. Suppose I could tell you that tonight, I had made arrangements for the President of the United States to be with us. He had agreed to come, and we could address any issue with him that we desired—taxes, health care, war on terror, North Korea, immigration, DACA, gun control, abortion, definition of marriage, or anything else. And, he was going to listen and do whatever we suggested. I dare say that you would move heaven and earth to get here tonight.

As wonderful as that sounds, I have a better offer for you. The Lord, Himself, maker of all the earth, Sovereign, the One who was, and is, and is to come says, “and My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.” And we don’t do that. For some the only time you pray in a given day is before a meal. What’s wrong with us?