

Prepare Yourself to Receive Prayer Answers

May I begin by asking you a question: Are you ready for answered prayer? Many years before the events described in Luke 1:11-20, a young couple—Zechariah and Elizabeth—prayed for a son. Unexpectedly one day, as Zechariah is ministering as a priest in the temple, the angel Gabriel appears and says, “‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard’” (NIV). Zechariah is nearly scared to death.

What would your reaction be? If the Lord sent an angel to say to you, “I have instructions to tell you your prayer has been heard.” Would you say, “Prayer? What prayer?” Or would you say, “Well, I know what that is!”?

The background is this. Perhaps 20 or 30 years earlier, shortly after Zechariah and Elizabeth were married, they wondered why God had given them no children. It turned out that Elizabeth was barren.

We know that in this case, Zechariah and Elizabeth had no choice but to go to God. Abraham did this when Sarah and he were childless, as had Isaac and Rebecca, and so had Hannah. Now Zechariah and Elizabeth pray for a son, but the years go by and there is no sign at all that God is going to answer their prayer. So they let that prayer request fade away—they just know it’s one God isn’t going to answer.

In the meantime, Zechariah has the privilege of being a priest in Israel. We don’t know how many priests there were at the time; we are told 10,000 at least. Because there were so many, the only way to have the honor of burning incense in the temple was to be chosen by lot. And that’s what happens.

Zechariah is chosen by lot to burn incense in the temple—a very high honor. We can be sure it is a day he has looked

forward to, and it's obvious from the context that he has all his friends there. They are holding him up in prayer and waiting to find out the results. This is the moment God chose! Zechariah isn't anticipating anything supernatural taking place. The burning of incense in the temple is just a ritual. But suddenly, God appears.

It's interesting. Sometimes in God's strategy He works coincidentally, and sometimes He works according to what we today would call the "church calendar." Never be surprised if, on a special day, God does something unusual.

It was a special day for Zechariah in the temple, but he wasn't prepared. He didn't know he was a "sovereign vessel," that is, one chosen to do any unusual work for God.

God uses sovereign vessels today. You may think, "Well, He wouldn't use me like that! I'm a nobody." But you see, God has a sense of humor. The kind of person who feels he or she couldn't possibly be chosen is just the kind of person God loves to choose.

So Zechariah is to be a sovereign vessel, the father of one who, in the spirit and power of Elijah, would "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children," and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous (Mal. 4:6).

The angel Gabriel says, "Your prayer has been heard."

Zechariah says, "Prayer? What prayer?"

"Oh," angel the angel says. "You and Elizabeth prayed for a son."

"Oh, that prayer! Well," Zechariah says, "that was 25, 30 years ago."

"Well, your prayer has been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, will conceive."

“It’s not possible,” Zechariah says. “Have you had a look at my wife lately? She’s past the age of bearing a child.”

Zechariah wasn’t ready. Are you? Are you waiting for God to answer prayer? Are there prayers that you have long since taken off your prayer request list because you were sure God wasn’t going to answer them?

It turns out—how sad it is—that Zechariah wasn’t ready. The angel delivered the good news, but because Zechariah didn’t believe it he was struck silent.

Listen! Any prayer prayed in the will of God will be answered, but the shape answered prayer takes is determined by our readiness at the time—Zechariah was not ready. Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed in the will of God, but they didn’t know it. Because God didn’t jump to answer their prayer the first time, they just assumed it wasn’t God’s will.

Are we ready for answered prayer? Zechariah’s story should give us encouragement to go back and start praying again.

Let’s think back on our own prayer requests, maybe for last year, maybe going back before then. Think of one prayer that hasn’t been heard, as far as you know, that you have long since given up praying. What’s the principle to apply? That any prayer prayed in the will of God will be answered.

Adapted from *When God Shows Up* by R. T. Kendall, copyright 2008, published by Charisma House. The author presents life-transforming principles he learned when he encountered God through his own unexpected spiritual experiences. In this book you will learn to see Him when you face your own life’s trials. To order a copy click on this link:



PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 1/7/2013

This week thank God for answering prayer according to His will and what is best in the situations you face. Trust Him to answer in His time so that His purpose will be fulfilled in your life and on the earth. Enter into a season of thanksgiving and praise for His protection, provision and goodness. Pray for President Obama and Congress as they tackle the nation's economic and security challenges. Continue to pray for righteous laws and judges as well as a new spiritual awakening. Pray for our troops around the world and remember Israel. 1 Tim. 2: 1-4; Mal. 4:6