

## **God Answers Prayer!**

A few days ago I received an email from Sarah Hutchenson who almost twenty years ago, as an eleven year old, had been diagnosed with a serious form of cancer and given three to six months to live. Sarah lived in another state and like many families, as a last ditch effort, had been sent to Houston for help, if available. Her parents, familiar with my ministry, called and told me of their daughter's plight. I came down to the Texas Children's Hospital and we had a prayer. I remember the presence of the Lord and the sweet sense of hope in Sarah's face just before we prayed. I have to tell you, I was scared for her too. I did not feel (nor do I now) like some special servant of the Lord that she was giving me credit to be. I just felt like a Christian brother saying a simple prayer with what faith I had. Allow me to give you verbatim the closing lines of Sarah's correspondence:

"This coming February, I will be celebrating 20 years of being cancer free... PTL! I just wanted to thank you so much for praying for me. I remember clearly that afternoon when you came to pray for me. I had loved listening to you preach, and I knew one of God's special servants was there praying in MY hospital room for ME...I felt blessed!

"God has blessed me with a wonderful husband of 7 years now and counting, and as you prayed, I am serving the Lord with my life! My husband and I met at Bob Jones University our freshman year and married the semester before we finished our senior year. He was preparing for the ministry and I for Christian Counseling. I had prayed since Junior High that God would bless me with a man who wanted to be in the ministry...how awesome is God! We are serving God together, along with our precious 5 year old son in a church in Wyoming. God is SO faithful! I praise Him for His healing power and His mercy in my life. What a great God we serve! I just wanted to say a long over-due THANK-YOU ever so much for taking the time to make an 11 year old girl's day back in 1991! May God continue to bless and keep you as you continue to faithfully serve Him! - In Him, Sarah Sackett Hutchenson, Jeremiah 29:11."

Whenever I look into the audience and see Jeovanna Sanchez, who developed a lump in her throat that became golf ball size, baseball size, soft ball size and finally grapefruit size, I am reminded that God answers prayers. She was diagnosed with an inoperable cancer and MD Anderson was prepared to just keep her comfortable until the (considered) end. The prayer of faith and patient waiting on the Lord by her loving parents and others took place. I am still amazed as I write these words; we witnessed the tumor go from grapefruit size to soft ball size, to baseball size, to golf ball size to gone! The doctors declared her beyond remission; they said it is as though she never had cancer. God answers prayers!

There are other stories that would not be appropriate to share with you such as marriages that, humanly speaking, saw no light at the end of a very dark tunnel. There were times as pastor I had no other word to say and the words I had said seemed to fall on deaf ears. All we could do was pray. What a blessing to see couples hang in there, develop a deep abiding love, have children and witness the overwhelming power of God's love at work years later. You would never know (nor do I ever intend to tell you) that there was once a serious problem. God has

never vacated His high and holy throne. We all need the reminder that God answers prayers.

### **1. God sometimes answers prayers immediately.**

A few years ago, I was flying into Atlanta after being diverted from a south Georgia airport due to the fact that our right landing gear would not come down. We were in a precarious situation because the left landing gear was locked down and the right landing gear did not descend. From what I understood, everything was locked up. It was explained later that this was more dangerous than having both wheels locked up because a belly landing was easier to navigate than one wheel down and one wheel up, which, when attempting to land, could begin a spinning top effect, aggravating sparks and combustion that would activate an explosion before we could have a chance to exit the plane. I'll never forget the tense atmosphere of that flight back to Atlanta. People were panicking as preparation was being made for emergency landing. All sharp instruments were removed from our pockets, pillows were passed to every passenger and we were commanded to place our head in our laps upon descent. Just before the one and only wheel touched, I recall a peaceful almost eerie quietness settled over the plane. I am sure I was not the only one who prayed. As I took one final glance at ambulances lining the runway waiting for the worst, I whispered a prayer - nothing boisterous or even dynamic - just a simple down to earth prayer. I had the desire to spend more years with my wife, see our family grow up. Soon the single wheel hit the ground and the jolt (or hand of an angel) knocked the other locked gear down and soon both wheels were down and we were safe. Even people who were not church-going people began to praise the Lord. In this case it was most advantageous that God answered prayer immediately. In John 15:7, Jesus said, *"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."* God answers prayer!

### **2. God sometimes answers prayers later than our desires.**

We live in an age of instant gratification. I have rebuked myself for being impatient while our microwave cooks something in six minutes that would have previously taken forty-five minutes in an oven. That's the way of human nature - we want it and we want it now! Many times God shows us He is in control by answering prayer according to His time line rather than ours. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, *"He hath made every thing beautiful in His time...."* His time is often not in synch with our time. We must often be reminded that His time is always the best time.

I have often thought if my wife had met me too early she would not have responded favorably to my advances. When I first surrendered to the Lord, I was far from clean around the edges. I was what I have considered a half-hippie, Jesus Freak-type variety. The girl that was later to be my wife, on the other hand, was a totally separated fundamentalist young lady who would not have been impressed with my bell bottom pants, loud shirts, hair turning up at my collar and songs of Christ with a blues run that I would make in the middle of my song of praise. We were both seeking God. In a couple of years I had morphed into a fundamentalist as well. I got a haircut without being reminded, toned my music

down and preached hard against anything that even looked like the appearance of evil. I didn't start out this way. But as we separately prayed while she was attending college in Tennessee and I was attending college in Louisiana, God in His providence brought us to the same college in Indiana. As we prayed for the will of God be done in our lives and her parents and my parents prayed for the will of God be done in our lives, God answered prayer and brought us together at the right time. God moves - seldom early, never late. The Bible says, "*For ye have need of patience...*" (Hebrews 10:36). Jesus said, "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*" (Matthew 7:7-11). We may rest assured that when we are right with God, He, as our loving Heavenly Father who wants nothing less than the very best for us, will answer our heartfelt prayers right on time. God answers prayers!

### **3. God answers prayers contrary to our request, but in accordance to His overall plan**

The Bible says in Jeremiah 33:3, "*Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*" The word translated "mighty" may also be translated "hidden." When our specific prayer request has been denied, it may be because God had something better for us and something would bring Him greater glory. This is when we must trust Him. He may have a hidden plan that has not yet been revealed to us. God sometimes answers prayer by saying "no" to our request for a greater "yes" to His will. And then as we accept God's plan, we praise Him for His denial and pray according to His revealed plan. And guess what happens? God answers prayer!

-Pastor Pope-