



# The Certainty of God's Answers

## Chapter 8

### Lesson 8

This chapter attempts to make a connection between prayer, the Holy Spirit, and confidence in God's answering by emphasizing the prayer life of Jesus and the early church in Acts.

1. At Lazarus's resurrection, in John 11:41-42, Jesus mentions His confidence that the Father hears Him. Read this passage and record your initial thoughts concerning it. How is God challenging you in your prayer life? Do you have the confidence that Jesus displayed? Why or why not?

The word that comes to mind when you read about the Holy Spirit and prayer in relation to the people of God in the book of Acts is dependence. They realized that the mission they were on could not be accomplished by their own power and ability. It all depended on God. It all depended on God showing up and using them in ways only God can do.

When you read through Acts you can't miss their dependence on the Holy Spirit for many things. We find Him empowering the apostles with words to say (Acts 4:8), ensuring believers to speak boldly against the powers of the world in the name of Christ (Acts 4:31), encouraging the Christians (Acts 9:31), speaking to them specific instructions of what they were to do (Acts 13:2), and warning of trouble ahead (Acts 20:23). They depended on the Holy Spirit for the mission to be a success.

You also can't miss their dependence on prayer. They prayed when making major decisions (Acts 1:14, 24), when they faced persecution (Acts 4:18-31 & 7:59), when faced with prison (12:5, 16:25). What is more, the inclusion of Gentiles into God's kingdom had prayer on both sides. Peter was on the rooftop praying (Acts 10:9) and Cornelius was praying at the same time (Acts 10:30-31). There is no doubt about the fact that the early church was a praying church.

The result of this dependence was boldness. That word is used more in Acts than any other book of the Bible. They could be bold because they had the Holy Spirit and were in fervent prayer for them to be in God's will and for God to guide and lead them through what they were doing. One of the most interesting verses where the Holy Spirit, prayer and boldness come together is found in Acts 4:23-31. Peter and John had been chastised by the chief priests and elders. They had been told not to "speak or teach at

all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). How did they respond? They prayed. They prayed for boldness to speak anyway..."Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." (4:29-31).

I believe it is essential for our participation in God's mission to depend totally on God for our guidance. We have to realize that the Spirit dwells within us and plays an active role in our relationship with God (Acts 2:38, 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19, Rom 8:26ff). I wonder how many times we try to figure out why our activity is not successful when all the while we were just depending on ourselves and not on God. Maybe it is time we look at the early church again for an example of how to depend more fully on God for the directions we take and the decisions we make.

2. Given the significance of prayer in Jesus' life and the early church, what's up with us? With you? With me? Do we pray with the confidence that God will answer? Why do you think it is so difficult to get the church in America together today to consistently pray?

Read chapter eight in *Experiencing Prayer with Jesus*, and then consider the following question.

3. Have you cultivated a prayer life in which you can say along with Christ, 'Father, I know that You always hear me?'

4. What can you learn about dependence on God and apply to your life from the prayer life of Jesus and the early church?

5. When you make your request and God doesn't grant it, what is your response? Recall Jesus' attitudes and actions in the Garden of Gethsemane. What can you learn from Him?

**Beyond the Book:**

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Paul is living proof that holy living and courageous faith do not ensure instant positive answers to prayer. When you are seeking after God, how have you seen Him provide His strengthening provision for you in your times of particular weakness?