

When God's Will is Hard

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we are going to look to God's word and after the sermon I hope to leave! some space for questions and answers. So if you might have a question that arises during! we have some pastoral care cards at the back of the seats. You can just take one, you can write the question there, or if you prefer to just share it verbally, you can do that as well. If you do write it, no need to put your name on it. We'll have them collected at the end. Please turn your Bibles to Luke 22. Our attention this morning will be directed to verses 39 through 46. Luke 22, verses 39 through 46. This sermon is the first in a three-part series on prayer. And I think it's fair to say that the primary activity of the church is to make disciples. And prayer is one of the primary identifying marks of disciples.

And so the goal of this three-part sermon series on prayer is to help us to grow in being people of prayer. This first sermon is titled, When God's Will Is Hard, the second one, When Defeat and the third one, when we are anxious. I'm reading from the English Standard Version.

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives. And his disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, Pray that you may not enter into temptation. And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw and knelt down and prayed, saying, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.

And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly. And his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. When he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow.

[2 : 52] And he said to them, Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

Let's pray together. Father, we are grateful this morning that we have your word. We're grateful for the privilege privilege we now have to sit under the preaching of your word and we pause acknowledging our need for your help. Lord, I need your help to be faithful to proclaim your word. We all need your help to be obedient to hear and do your word. So, Father, would you grant us grace to be able to do this now? In Jesus' name. Amen.

One of the realities of the Christian life or following Jesus is that we soon find out that it's not always easy. You don't follow Jesus for any long period of time before you realize it's not always easy.

Sometimes it can be hard. On the journey of following Christ, we sometimes come to the place where we struggle to do God's will. Two weeks ago, the sermon was on true discipleship and we considered these sobering words from Jesus. In Matthew 16, 24, If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

In that sermon, we heard that to take up our cross daily is to, it is a call to die to self, to surrender our lives to Christ. It is a call to surrender the claim to be masters of our lives and even to willingly embrace suffering and even death following the example of Jesus.

I mentioned that sermon that to follow Christ is to suffer a thousand times and to die a thousand times. And sometimes it's hard.

[5 : 18] It's not hard when we don't know God's will in a particular matter and we're trying to determine what that will is. It is hard when we know God's will but it's difficult to do his will. We struggle to do the will that we know.

And so the question to us this morning is this. What do we do when God's will is hard? What do we do when we know what God calls us to do but it's hard?

Well, to help us answer that question in our remaining time, we'll be considering this account in the life of Jesus we're hours away from being the atoning sacrifice for sinners.

He wrestled with the Father's will. The will that he knew he wrestled with it. And this morning I have two simple points for a complex matter a very difficult matter in which we find the will of God to be

hard.

The setting for Luke 22 39 through 46 is the night on which Jesus was betrayed by Judas and his own by Peter.

[6 : 55] Jesus would have just had the Passover meal with his disciples and he would have instituted the Lord's Supper. other gospel accounts tell us that on this same night Jesus would have once again told his disciples about his imminent death that he was going to face.

So he knew better than anyone else what awaited him just hours away. Death. And not only did he know that death immediately awaited him, he knew the exact manner of death that he was going to die.

he knew that he was going to die by crucifixion. And not only did Jesus know that death was in front of him and death by crucifixion was in front of him, Jesus knew it was all the Father's will.

He knew that it was the Father's will that he would come into this world and be the atoning sacrifice for sin and for sinners. Jesus knew that he came into this world to give his life as a ransom for many and that his death was necessary to reconcile sinners to a holy God.

We read in Isaiah 53, 4 through 11. You don't need to turn there. I just want you to listen to these words this morning. If you want to make a note, it's Isaiah 53, 4 through 11.

[8 : 22] I want us to, I want to read this because Jesus would have been very aware of this prophecy because he was familiar with the scriptures and he knew the prophecies concerning himself.

We are told at the end of his life, after he had resurrected from the dead, when he was on that road to Emmaus, that he opened the scriptures and he showed those two men the things pertaining to himself.

He also did that at the very end with his disciples. He showed them all the prophecies to show that the Christ had to suffer. So Jesus would have been familiar with Isaiah 53, 4 through 11.

Listen to what it says. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed.

[9 : 37] All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and he was afflicted. Yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep that before his shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

And they made his grave with the wicked and with the rich man in his death, although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief when his soul makes an offering for guilt.

[10 : 49] He shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied.

By his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant make many to be accounted righteous and he shall bear their iniquities.

Jesus knew these words. He knew that it was all God's will. Yet when the moment of fulfillment approached it was hard.

God's will and so in this passage before us Luke tells us that Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives and he prayed.

He prayed to God. And that act of prayer to God Jesus models for us what we should do when God's will is hard.

[11 : 52] It is simply this we need to pray to God. when God's will is hard pray. That is what our Lord and Savior did at his darkest hour when his life was closing in on him.

He prayed to the Father. And we're told in verse 41 what he prayed. Well in verse 41 we're told first that he withdrew from the disciples about a stone's throw away.

And he knelt down and he prayed. And then verse 42 we see what he prayed. He prayed Father if you are willing remove this cup from me nevertheless not my will but yours be done.

The Father's will was expressed in terms of the cup that Jesus asked to be removed from him. It was the cup of the wrath of God. It was the cup of the wrath of God to be poured out for sin and sinners.

And it was the Father's will that the Son would drink this cup in their place as their substitute. And Jesus knew this. He was perfect and without sin but it was the Father's will that he would become sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[13:18] And in his humanity Jesus prayed Father if you're willing remove this cup from me. You see Jesus was both divine and human.

He was God incarnate. He was God divine in flesh human. And here in this prayer his humanity is on full display and he asks for God's will for him if possible to be removed from him.

In that moment it was so hard he prays Lord it is anyway let this cup pass from me. Perhaps the humanity of Jesus is on fullest display in verse 44 where Luke tells us that as he agonized as he prayed his sweat became as great drops of blood falling to the ground God's will for him was hard brothers and sisters for us God's will will never be near as hard as it was for Jesus that night when he was about to be betrayed and crucified but still God's will for us as we follow Christ as we live the Christian life can sometimes be hard and we too must engage in fervent prayer to God concerning! His will and many times God's will may may not be earth shaking it may not be life altering it may not be all of that sometimes it's in the normal routine of serving Christ in a sinful world for example we know that it is God's will that we turn the other cheek and we go the extra mile but sometimes when we are called to do that it's hard to do that and we need to pray to God to be able to do that we know it's God's will that we have to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us but sometimes it's hard to do we know it's God's will to forgive and to ask for forgiveness and to seek reconciliation but often times our flesh cries out against that and it's hard maybe it's something in your life even now you know

God's will concerning it but you struggle to do it you find it hard to do it prayer for you will not be God show me your will you know God's will but you need the will to do God's will and while the same simple that we are being called to pray when God's will is hard the reality is we don't always pray sometimes we run sometimes we run from God's will we go our way and we do our own thing we do what Jonah!

[16:39] we try to run from God only to find out that we can never run from God when God sets his love upon you when God sets his love upon me he never lets us go he will pursue us relentlessly and so rather than run from God we need to run to God and pray to God and pour out our hearts to him sometimes what we also do is rather than pray when God's will is hard we engage in diversions we engage in distractions and today we have many options entertainment being one of the favorite ones because it's all around us where we can divert away from focusing on doing the will of God trust in God's providence this morning

I have no doubt that there are some present who are finding some aspect of God's will in your life hard hard to fulfill you know it's not ignorance but you find it hard to obey it how are you responding are you praying to God as Jesus did or are you running as Jonah did going your own way doing your own thing or are you being distracted while that elephant as it was right there in front of you you being distracted in so many other ways brothers and sisters when God's will is hard we need to pray but in this account of how

Jesus responded to his impending death we not only see that he prayed to God we see that Jesus also yielded to God and this is the second thing that we must do when God's will is hard after praying to God concerning his will we must yield to God's will and that's my second and final point yield to the will of God we must yield to God's will notice in verse 42 Jesus says two things to the father first he says father if you're willing remove this cup from me and the second thing he says is nevertheless not my will but yours be done and in this last statement Jesus yields to the father's will even though it was hard we're told in the other gospel accounts of

Matthew and Mark that Jesus prayed this prayer three times he prayed this prayer three times underscoring how difficult it must have been but in the end he yielded to the father's will we read in verse 43 that an angel appeared to him and strengthened him that was a difficulty of what was in front of Jesus and when we think about this for a moment Jesus was actually facing the reality that he was going to know something that up to this point was totally foreign to him he was perfect and sinless he knew no sin committed no sin but he was going to become sin for us and the magnitude of that and the wrath of God associated with that bore upon him and he received divine

strengthening and I believe that we can trust

God for the same God never calls us to do what he will not strengthen us to do what he will not enable us to do but brothers and sisters I think we know well that we don't find that strength we don't find that will just in passing and having a passing thought or prayer or wish oh Lord just help me to do this without truly coming before the Lord and laying our lives before him and honestly acknowledging the difficulty and the hardness of what it is that we are called to do and at the same time yielding to God's will in that matter God will never leave us alone he will never call us to do his will and then fold his arms but he will always grant us the grace to do whatever he calls us to do in the gospel accounts of

[22 : 04] Matthew and Mark they identify this place that Luke calls the Mount of Olives they identify it as Gethsemane the word Gethsemane means oil press the Mount of Olives and Olives were there and the Olives would be pressed!

to extract the oil so that's the picture that we get from Gethsemane this picture of pressing the oil crushing the oil as it were to get the olives as it were to get the oil out of it and I think it's a vivid picture of what it is like when God's will is hard but we yield to the will of God we yield to God that he would have his way with us as opposed to seeking to preserve our lives and run away and be that whole all of us that we submit to God's will a number of years ago a very good friend of mine stood in this pulpit and I remember him saying something that came back to me as I was preparing this sermon he said

Jesus went to Gethsemane once his people will go there often and his point was that as we live the Christian life as we follow Jesus we will come to these places where God's will is not a cake walk where God's will is hard where we need God's strength and God's grace to do God's will and indeed this seems to be the pattern that is laid out for us in verse 39 look at verse 39 of Luke 22 it says and he came out and went as was his custom to the Mount of Olives and the disciples followed him his disciples will always follow him even to

Gethsemane that is part of what it means to follow Jesus not all of it but it is certainly part of what it means we will go there we will go to this place our own Gethsemane where we cry out to God for grace and strength to do what we know he has called us to do so brothers and sisters when God's will is hard we need to pray to God and yield to God and as we do let us remember our savior who has gone before us and who faced the most difficult instance of God's will being hard no one else has and no one else will ever face the bitter cup of the hard will of

God as Jesus faced on that night that he was betrayed and yet he yielded to God by ascending Calvary's hill and dying the death that we deserve to die and so when we find God's will to be hard let's remember him and let us thank God that because he knew the extremity of the hardness of God's will we will never know that he has known that for us and let us pray that by his own example we too may yield to God's will because God's will is best amen let's pray father we thank you this morning for your word and we thank you lord that in the lord Jesus Christ we have an example of what we should do and how we should respond when your will is hard and I pray lord that you would grant us grace to respond in prayer and then in yielding to your will we pray in Jesus name amen amen I wonder if any questions from anything that you have heard this morning anyone wrote if you wrote a question just raise your hand we'll have it collected or if you want to ask a question verbally we'll do that I know some of you probably thought you had more time because this is probably the shortest sermon in a long time so you know if you just need to take a few minutes to write that that is fine to do that but I would just say this as I see some pens going so hopefully you're writing questions one of the things I would say this is what we would call practical theology of what it is to follow Jesus and and recognizing that when the rubber meets the road it becomes a just becomes a different experience and we should never pretend you should never pretend that the Christian life is other than what it really is because sometimes what we do is we put on a smile and we put on a front that is very different from what's behind the smile and behind the front and the truth is if you've served Christ for any length of time you would have wrestled with God's will that you knew that you found hard to do and I and I pray that our savior's example would encourage us that we we don't need to hide that we can confess that to brothers and sisters to say you know I know God is calling me to do this and finding it hard to do what you pray with me when we see the savior's example he took his disciples with him and though he prayed by himself they were nearby and we see them as some form of support for him even as he prayed any

[29 : 39] questions because i'll shut it down and just let you have an early day if there are no questions can everyone hear linden thanks i'll ask a question that i think might be helpful to all of us i know the examples when you talked about god's will you use the number of examples and all of those examples related to things that are clearly laid out in scripture that we should do right we know that we are called to forgive for example but what about those instances where it's not a matter of right and wrong but it's a perhaps a difficult decision that the lord that we feel that the lord has called us into to do would you maybe it's not taking a particular job or not choosing a particular spouse those kinds of things that's a good question and i i did seek to distinguish that at the very beginning by saying it's not an area where you don't know for sure what god's will is you're it's not that you're trying to discern god's will you know god's will and really i believe that that is where we tend to struggle most because we know it we know god is calling me to do this to obey him in this particular area or this is clearly his will for us so there's no we don't need to consult on it we don't need counsel on it that's what it says yet we struggle to do that that's hard very hard but what linden is talking about is situations that are not expressed in god's word god's word will not say to us take this job marry this person we won't see that in god's word but we may have an impression we may have a sense that this is how god is leading me this is how god is directing me and how god may be how we may sense god leading us or directing us may be contrary to what we desire what i would say is one i would i would certainly seek counsel i would definitely reach out and and seek counsel get input into into that situation and then when it's said and done you gotta make a decision consistent with what you really believe the lord is calling you to do it needs to be a matter of prayer but here's one of the things that guides me in prayer i don't believe that god makes his will elusive i don't believe that god plays hide and seek with us about his will if he did we can't i mean why would he do that why would he say you know i want you to do my will and it's behind his back and he's pointing here god is not going to mislead us in that way even when we pray the prayer that obviously jesus intended us to pray daily the lord's prayer the disciples prayer we pray and lead us not into temptation so i don't believe that god is going to tempt us with his will and then even when it comes right down to it we trust the sovereignty of god that as it says in i think proverbs 3 5 and 6 um is it uh is it trust in the lord what is it prophecy 5 and 6 i'm forgetting that's right

and lay not lay not to your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path so i believe that we can trust the sovereignty of god working in our lives as we seek to hear him and obey him in those areas that are not expressly um stated in scripture so i would say in those situations you want to reach out for counsel um but in the end you want to do what you really believe that the lord is calling you to do trusting that in the end he is going to direct your steps anyway and i think we have experienced that where sometimes we felt the lord leading us in one way and we sincerely tried to fulfill that and god in his mercy directed us in the path that we should actually go that's a good question than anybody else i have a question but i have a question but it's not i guess deep as what you're saying but my question is that okay i have a problem with listening with a lot of secular music and i feel god keep telling me you need to stop or the dreams and all sorts of stuff stop what to do when you know god's will and it's hard and no matter how much i pray about it i don't know if i can't do it but it's hard not to do it and even when i pray not much progress happens but i know it is where it's just hard to comply with first of all let me say that i commend you that you are making progress to even recognize that god is speaking to you in that way that it's something you're being convicted about i think the simplest thing i could say to you is you may want to think about some practical things you're doing in terms of what you're doing with media radio other kinds of things that you are exposing yourself to in terms of what you're feeding you may also want to be very intentional in terms of the kind of music that you listen to like there may be a radio station that would play good solid christian music there's certainly a lot of it online that you can listen to for free or even exchange cds with friends so i think it probably would be those kinds of practical things because what it sounds like i mean you have the right impulse that god is convicting you that you want to make the change it just seems like you just need to do some practical things now to feed your soul in the right direction and to starve it in the wrong direction i trust that's helpful amanda it's not for a lack of awareness or experience in knowing how god works through prayer but in listening to you i have the same question i'm going to word it in two different ways i think i'll just write it as i wrote it down not as an attempt to be sacrilegious but if god's will is to and will be done then what is the purpose of prayer first part second if god's will is to be exercised through us whether it be as he did with pharaoh when he hardened his heart or as it be through joseph where

he put him or allowed him to pass through turmoil for a greater purpose then how does how and why does prayer change help influence anything in this regard yeah the the first response i would give why pray first of all god tells us to it is a clear instruction in scripture and one of the things i believe that we as believers need to do and the same thing we did as children is we were often times told as children to do things even though we didn't have a full understanding of it i don't claim to know to the nth degree why a sovereign god who is sovereign over all things who works all things out in accordance with the counsel of his own will calls us to pray but what i can deny is he does call us to pray and so we are we are called to pray in that way what i would say is i think that part of the reason i would i would offer that god who is sovereign who doesn't need us who brings to pass what is his sovereign will part of the reason he calls us to pray is that he has sovereignly chosen to engage us to involve us in the outworking of his sovereign plans and purposes so i think that one it would be out of obedience that we pray and two that a sovereign god has so ordained it that he would fulfill his plans and purposes in our lives and and through our lives through prayer that's my best response to a very difficult question that will be around i believe until the lord returns i trust that's helpful we have time for one more were you going to ask question is that another part i'm sorry it's the same question in just two different ways to present it but i think you covered it yeah let me let me just add a little bit more on that one of the important things that we must do as relates to scripture is we have to hold truth intention and what we find in scripture is we find when we think about the sovereignty of god that is the truth that we see in scripture but we also see human responsibility responsibility we see both of those in scripture now to us oftentimes we don't know where one starts and the other ends and we can be confused about that but to god there's absolutely no confusion about that i think what we are called to do is we're called to be faithful when we open god's word and we see human responsibility being called for we say amen and we receive that and when we see divine sovereignty being proclaimed we submit to that and we recognize that as well so i think we have to grow in holding truth intention because many times there are we find truths with two different poles to it and we don't want to take one and ignore the other we have to be able to hold both and say amen to both scripture says both and do our best to live in accordance with that john i've been trying to formulate this because it's not real clear in my mind so but when you mention the human responsibility i think that helped with god's will can often be hard when you know he's called you to something but then you've experienced what you believe to be hearing very clearly from him that something's going to change how do you like work through that with god's will being hard of knowing the difference between continuing to hear clarity from him on it or to do the human part of responsibility i don't know if that's really real clear i think i follow your question what i would say is one obviously it's a timing issue because i didn't get the impression that you were talking about something where he says it's going to happen tomorrow or next week or next month just so i'm going to do this your prayers answered and so we just have to wait and really trust him in that but what i would also say to us in these areas where we don't have scripture that we can go to and we have impressions and we believe that god is leading us in a way we have to hold it loosely because i think we've all missed god in those ways before some things they're kind of open ended and so we can't really say definitively we've missed god but there are some things that are time sensitive and we know okay yeah that didn't happen i miss god on that i think we've all had those experiences where we concluded we miss god with a time sensitive matter but other things that don't have a timeline on them we just have to trust and wait and recognize that we could have missed god we could have heard god but we have to hold it loosely and just trust him in the process knowing that he's going to take care of us no matter what you would say then that persevering in faith that he would make things clear if what you originally sent from him was what he's doing absolutely absolutely yeah and and i would certainly open it to council as well to trusted brothers and sisters all right will i trust sorry i'm sorry hi pastor church um what i wanted to know is what should one do in terms of hearing from god where it's not clearly stated in his word what you should do for example if you are praying for an answer from god and um it's i guess kind of time sensitive even though we can't rush these things um but praying for an answer from him and it comes and you don't clear you don't get a clear answer from god of course because i can't just turn to the word of god um should i just go on how i feel and um you know or that inner i guess burning on the inside of hey maybe i should do this is that hearing from god well i think i think in the end in those kinds of situations the only thing that we can do is go on what we sense to be the will of god that's not stated in black and white in scripture but i would say only get to that place after you have embraced

counsel the scripture is full of exhortations and commands to seek counsel that things are established in the multitude of counsel that we shouldn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly but we should walk in the counsel of the godly so i do think that um in these areas that are not expressed in scripture we would be wise to invite godly counsel in our lives it brings safety to us and not just safety in the decision ethically it brings support to us because if if you seek my counsel and i share counsel with you and i say this is what i think and and let's say that it goes south it doesn't work out well i would be unethical if i say well sorry i only give counsel i would just come and try to support you as well so i think when we reach out for counsel not only do we get the safety of that decision we get the support in the aftermath of that decision as well so i would say seek counsel before you make that final decision thank you that helps good all right i'm sorry one second would you recommend to someone who has i guess been praying through a difficult situation would you recommend a person praying to god to show a sign tell me something that kind of thing i would pray lord confirm what you were what i'm asking you whether i should do it or not confirm it through someone you know that kind of thing would you recommend i wouldn't recommend that kind of specificity i would i would say lord would you speak would you would you show me and kind of leave it open to however god chooses to do that because i think we all know signs could oftentimes be misleading some people do take gideon's example with the fleece and say well gideon did it so i'll do it but i'm not sure that that is why that is in our bibles you know it's interesting when jonah was running from god when you read the text that just happened he just happened to come upon a boat going to japa and he could have thought you know hey that's a sign that god wants me to get in that boat so i don't preach those ninevites um so no i wouldn't pray that specifically but certainly god is um able if he wants to use someone to um speak to you in that way or even sometimes you may be reading his word and it it may be in some way that he uh leads you in that particular way so i would ask for god to speak but i wouldn't specify how i'd want him to speak i guess this is another question um regarding prophetic words um yes people um i guess i want to ask how well do you how do you recommend that as well well scripture is very clear scripture tells us that we are to cast prophecy we are to um prove all things we are to hold fast to that which is good so clearly um we are not to just take prophecy unfiltered and and wholesale the the clear implication is that there are some prophecies to be um rejected and there i would say again that's something that you would want to receive counsel about i wouldn't recommend someone giving you a prophecy and then you just holding on to that and say this is from the lord and just go and act upon that um you would want to prove it you'd want to test it and i think in the context that we see this in scripture in first thessalonians chapter five the testing i believe is in community that the testing is in the context of brothers and sisters certainly that's the case in first corinthians 14 that those kinds of things are to be judged um and not just taken unfiltered all right okay well thanks for those uh oh shambi has a question or comment observation [49 : 44] okay that's that's shambi that's shambi yeah i think if i can make a one observation or one or two observations the um hearing the questions and hearing the responses that when we are in a difficult situation and as you said we do know what god's will is very clear for our life and we are praying i think we need to keep in mind that in prayer the ultimate aim of prayer is not necessarily an answer to our prayer in our favor and let me and what i mean by that is that the ultimate aim in prayer is the glory of god and the glory of god sometimes goes cross with our own desires and purposes and plans um but in that process i think we also have to keep in mind that what god is doing is that he's working in our lives to shape us into the conformity of christ which is in romans 8 28 and 29 that in that text where many hold on to the promise of god is working all things together for good to those that love god to those who are called according to his purpose but then in verse 29 it tells us what god is ultimately doing which is to bring us into conformity to christ and so that when we find ourselves in that situation and we submit to the will of the lord and we say lord ultimately we desire your glory what that does is when we can submit especially when it goes against what we may desire inwardly we are being brought into christlikeness which is the ultimate aim for the christian i think that's helpful to remember that prayer is not a lever or a mechanism to twist god to our will but it's really for us to submit to his will amen very good very very good um observation and i do think that over time you know we can change our appetites over time we can we can actually um adjust our palate and our love for certain foods we can also adjust how we view prayer we can begin to grow and lord what i want more than anything else is your will and your glory that's what i want and i believe over time we can let that be to the fore of our minds that we want to glorify god amen all right i hope that we got to everyone who had a question i trust that this was

helpful let's pray you