

## Does Prayer Really Change Things?

Selected Passages

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Last week, we talked about and answered the first of what we're calling "must-answer" questions of 2025, "Is the Bible trustworthy?" It's an important question to answer because as we stated last week, we are encouraging you to build your life...to stake your life on the Bible, and if we are going to do that, we need to be confident that it really is the full and final, authoritative word of God.

I encourage you if you missed to go back and give it a listen. This week, is the second "must answer" question we're addressing and it's the title of the message today: **Does Prayer Really Change Things?**

Now, fair warning...this is a message that is going to be full of information. I realize that I'm about to give you A LOT here, but I think in order to answer this question in the right way and give it the justice it deserves, it's just something we have to do.

Truthfully, this could be a 6-8-week series and I'm about to do this in 35 minutes!

Now, I've got to believe that ALL of us in here at one time or another have asked ourselves and wondered - maybe NOT out loud, but certainly internally, we've probably ALL wrestled with this question. Perhaps you've thought something like this:

- Why do I need to pray, God is going to do whatever he wants to do anyway? My prayers are not going to change and/effect the Almighty from working his plan, so why pray?
- God knows what I need before I ask him, so why should I even ask him in the first place?
- You know what? This need in my life or what I want to happen over here, God has WAY bigger things to be concerned about than this, so I'm not even going to bother him with it.

Or maybe you are discouraged when it comes to prayer, and if you were honest, God hasn't seemed to come through for you in the past, and when you even hear this question asked, "Does Prayer Really Change Things?", your immediate thought was "it sure didn't in my case!"

Perhaps you are here today, and you prayed at some point for God to answer a prayer:

- Your child needed help in some area...
- You had a family member sick and asked God to heal them...
- You had a financial need in your life and asked God to meet that need...

But he didn't answer your prayer in the way that you were thinking or hoping or expecting that he would. He seemed silent! In your eyes even uncaring and you got nothing out of the prayer and so you've just kind of given up on it.

And then there are others, you don't know whether it changes things or not because you've never practiced it before! Your answer to this question, "Does Prayer Really Change Things?" is, "I have no idea because you've never really tried it.

Prayer for you seems odd...it feels weird...almost mystic and mysterious and truth be told, you've never felt comfortable doing it.

You'd like to...you like the idea of it...you'd LOVE to be able to answer this question, but the reality is, every time you go to pray, you run out of things to say in the first two minutes...or your mind wonders!

"Does Prayer Really Change Things?" – you'd like to find out, but you've just never seemed to be able to crack the code on HOW to make it work PLUS the schedule you keep...there's no time to even figure this out!

- You've got a family to raise and take care of...
- You've got extra-curricular activities you're involved in...
- You've got places to go, people to see and take care of, thousands of things on your "to do"
- ...

Quiet...alone time - what is that?! The busyness of life doesn't allow time to seek the Lord to even SEE if prayer changes things.

Is there ANYONE out there that can identify with what I'm talking about? Has ANYTHING I've said in this opening introduction hit home? Is there anyone in here quietly in your spirit saying, "that's me!"

I'm thinking it's a lot of us. Prayer is one of those subjects that when brought up...it's kind of like sharing your faith.

We KNOW we need to do it. We KNOW we need to do MORE of it, but in terms of our spiritual lives, we just kind of settle and barely breach the surface of all that is out there for us.

Here's what I'm hoping though: I really believe that if we knew the answer to this question, "Does Prayer Really Change Things?" ...I think if we KNEW the answer to this question was an unequivocal "YES" – PRAYER CHANGES THINGS (which spoiler alert: it does! You can't leave!), I believe knowing this with certainty would revolutionize our prayer life and put to rest ALL of these excuses, reasons, and questions that we have as it relates to prayer.

At least, that's my hypothesis. So, let's talk about it and I want to start by leading us to first, consider: **WHO we pray to**

Let's discuss for a moment, WHO we address our prayers to. When we pray, we are talking to, communicating and communing this eternal triune being we call, God. This is the one who is referred to as "Elohim" in the Hebrew scriptures. He is the all-powerful, creator God of the universe.

Now, God has MANY attributes, and if you are looking for a great study to start off the year, I would encourage you to study the attributes of God. There are a TON of great resources out there that can help you in this.

I want to look at FIVE attributes of God VERY briefly. We're going to fly through these and to me, these are the most important as it relates:

- to having a proper perspective of prayer...
- understanding prayer...
- and these specific attributes will help us the most as we think through thus question we are looking at today, "does prayer really change things?"

There are a few things we need to know about this God that we are praying to.

**1. God is omniscient** – This simply means that God is all-knowing.

There is nothing taking place in the world today, that has ever taken place or that will take place that comes as a surprise to God! He knows EVERYTHING.

**Psalm 139:1-4** – “O Lord, you have searched me and known me! <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. <sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.”  
**Isaiah 46:9b-10** – “...for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, <sup>10</sup> declaring the end from the beginning (God exists outside of time – he knows it all, sees it all) and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’” (this leads to a second attribute)

**2. God is sovereign** – He WILL accomplish his purposes, and nothing can stand in his way.

That God is sovereign means he rules over the universe. You've heard me say it like this before, “While man plays checkers, God is playing chess.”

**Psalm 115:3** – “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”

**Job 42:2** – “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

What God wants done, gets carried out – and there is NO ONE and NOTHING that can stop or get in his way. This leads to a third attribute:

**3. God is omnipotent** - This means that God is all-powerful

We used to sing a song in church that expressed this truth. We'd sing: *Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing our God cannot do.*

God can move mountains. God can part rivers. God can send famine and storms and cause them to stop in a moment. He created everything that exists out of nothing – he is ALL-POWERFUL.

**Psalm 147:5 – “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.”**

**Luke 1:37 – “For nothing will be impossible with God.”**

- 4. God is immutable** – This simply means that God is unchanging – in his character...in his nature. God does not...will not ever change.

In his book, *Systematic Theology* Wayne Grudem defines the immutability of God like this...VERY important as it relates to our discussion prayer today.

**Wayne Grudem – “God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations.”**

**Psalm 102:25-27 – “Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. <sup>26</sup>They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, <sup>27</sup>but you are the same, and your years have no end.”**

**Malachi 3:6a – “For I the Lord do not change...”**

**James 1:17 – “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”**

Now, a little asterisk here. Sometimes, you can read scripture and it can appear as if God has changed his mind. For example, God sends a message to the people of Ninevah in the Old Testament through the prophet, Jonah.

**Jonah 3:4 – “Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”**

God was bringing judgment. However, the people of Ninevah, heard Jonah’s message, the King issues a fast and calls for repentance. God sees their repentance, and listen to:

**Jonah 3:10 – “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.”**

God relents?! Did he change his mind? Well, scripture as noted just a moment ago says God doesn’t change AND it explicitly states God DOESN’T change his mind.

**Numbers 23:19a – “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind...”**

**1 Sam 15:29 – “And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret (translated other places as the word “lie”), for he is not a man, that he should have regret (lie).”**

**Psalm 110:4a – “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind...”**

So, God doesn't change... clearly, he doesn't change his mind.

So, what's happening in the book of Jonah? What happening in places like Exodus with God "relenting" from bringing his wrath to the people of Israel after they fashioned an idol and was worshipping it.

These verses are NOT proof that God changes...in fact, him "relenting" is proof of his unchanging character. Verses like Jer. 18:7-10 show us this!

**Jer. 18:7-10 – "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it,<sup>8</sup> and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.<sup>9</sup> And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it,<sup>10</sup> and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it."**

God operates within his sovereignty and omniscience and what may appear in the moment as him changing his mind is actually him staying true to his character and nature as expressed in his word.

Fifth and final attribute we'll look at:

## 5. God is love

**1 John 4:8b, 4:16b – "...God is love..."**

This is a highlight and common theme of scripture. It is that God is love and he is full of steadfast love. Outside of his holiness, THIS the chief attribute of God – LOVE.

So, put it all together. Knowing THIS about God is going to really help us as we answer this question, "Does prayer really change things?"

When we pray, we are praying to a God who is:

- Omniscient/all-knowing – he sees the end from the beginning and KNOWS everything. NOTHING is getting by him.
- Sovereign – he is totally in control and governing the affairs and outcomes of the world.
- Omnipotent/all-powerful – he can do ANYTHING! NOTHING is too hard or difficult for him.
- He is unchanging. He's NOT going to act outside of his character and nature.
- He is love. We NEVER have to question his motives OR his actions on our behalf – what he does, he does out of and from love – it's WHO he is. Our God unlike the other gods of the world CARES for us.

We've considered WHO we are praying to. Now, let's consider: **WHAT prayer is**

This is important. Outside of prayer being communication with God (prayer in its simplest form...it's relationship), have you ever really thought about WHAT prayer is? Three statements that may help

First of all: **Prayer is the means to growing in intimacy with God**

Fundamentally, this is what prayer is all about. It is THE way we commune with God. The goal of the Christian life is intimacy with the Almighty – prayer is the way this happens – PERIOD.

You can be a Christian and have a minimal prayer life – you just won't be a growing and productive Christian...and you certainly won't be an intimate of the Lord's. Prayer paves the way to intimacy and intimacy with God is THE entire point and purpose of prayer.

**Illus. Brennan Manning** – Empty Chair story – “see you're waiting on me” - chair - “hope he died peacefully” – “strange crawled out of bed and died with his head in that empty chair” – that's a picture of intimacy.

Secondly: **Prayer is the means to accomplishing the work of God**

**1 Cor. 3:9a** – “**For we are God's fellow workers...**” (2 Cor. 6:1- we are “working together with him”)

Author, T.W. Hunt, has written much on prayer. He calls prayer a “regal responsibility”. I love that! He explains that for Christians, we are “joint heirs” with Christ (Rom. 8:17), and scripture teaches that we will one day reign and rule with him.

Hunt suggests that prayer is the “training ground” that is preparing us to rule and reign in eternity. Listen to what he writes:

**T.W. Hunt** – “**Most important of all the work is spiritual work. Spiritual work can only be accomplished with spiritual methods, and the only mover in any spiritual project must be God himself. How do we cooperate with God in this work** (this work of stewardship in leadership in bringing God's kingdom to earth!)? **The answer is obviously prayer...God could move without our cooperation, but our cooperation is the method He uses to demonstrate His sovereignty. All power derives from God; He is the most powerful Agent in the universe. Prayer provides a way for us to cooperate with our all-powerful God.**”

As you read the scripture, you will see:

- the invitation to pray (Jer. 33:3 – call to me”) ...
- the command to pray (Eph 6:18 – pray at all times” ...
- examples of prayer (too many to list!)

Prayer IS the primary way the work of God is accomplished and thus the Kingdom advanced.

As **Charles Spurgeon** said: “**Prayer moves the hand that moves the world.**”

He also said: “**Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence.**”

When we pray, we are activating the resources of heaven and advancing the Kingdom of God in this world. I like this quote by John Piper in his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (every missionary will tell you great movements has always been preceded by prayer)

**John Piper - “Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of God advances in this world.”**

Prayer is the means by which God’s work is accomplished and his will is carried out on earth.

There is a third purpose to prayer and that is: **Prayer is the means by which we express faith, trust, and dependence upon God.**

**Illus. Prayer Opps** - I tell our staff this all the time!) prayer meeting/this Wednesday night)

The ONLY way I know to show God, we trust him and are dependent upon him is to prayer! This is one of the main purposes of prayer – it is a recognition and awareness of WHO God is, and humbling of ourselves before him and crying out to him!

So, check this out. In ALL of this...as we consider the purposes of prayer:

- It’s the means to growing in intimacy with the Lord...
- It’s the means to accomplishing the work of God...
- It’s the means of expressing faith, trust and dependence upon God...

Notice in all of this – what the purpose of prayer is NOT! It’s NOT for our wish list in life to be fulfilled. The purpose of prayer is NOT to have access to some cosmic Santa Claus that makes all our dreams come true. God’s not some genie in a bottle and prayer the lamp we rub to get his attention.

I believe we are short circuiting in prayer...maybe even becoming frustrated with prayer because we are missing the true purpose behind it.

The proposition I’m making today is when you consider WHO you are praying to and WHAT the true purposes of prayer is, your perspective on what needs changing changes!

So, “Does prayer really change things?” The answer is YES. But MOST of all it changes the one praying!

Now, let’s drill in on this. Prayer does “change things”. There’s no question about it.

**James 5:16b-18 – “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.**

**<sup>18</sup> Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”**

Prayer works. It’s powerful and effective. As **E.M Bounds** writes: **“God shapes the world by prayer”**

Prayer changes things. However, for prayer to change things, there are several requirements that must be met:

Requirement #1: **We must make an “ask”**

**Matt. 7:7-8** – “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (these are “present imperatives” - keep on asking, seeking and knocking).

Listen: All answered prayer begins with an “ask”. I heard this statement years ago and when I first heard it, I couldn’t get my mind off of it. It relates to what we’re talking about in prayer.

There are some things that God will do regardless of if we ever ask or not. And there are some things God will not do unless we ask...unless we pray. (REPEAT)

Now, I don’t know...you don’t know...we don’t know what those things are that God will do and what those things are not. Our responsibility is to make the ask! What did James say?

**James 4:2b-3** – “...You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”

Secondly...and this comes right off of this verse, if we want prayer to change things:

Requirement #2: **We must pray in accordance with God’s will**

James said here, you’re not getting what you asked for because you are asking with wrong motives...you want this or are asking this for wrong reasons.

Again, this kind of prayer is prayer that is attempting to get the sovereign, all-powerful God of the universe to bend TO our will, desires and wants, INSTEAD of asking him to bend our will to his will, desires and wants...to trusting that he is all-knowing and loving and knows what’s best.

**John 14:13-14** – “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

To ask something in Jesus’s name is to ask something where he is most glorified, NOT your specific request being answered.

Sometimes the answer to your specific request will be what glorifies him the most and sometimes it won’t – we have to trust him with this and sometimes...many times we won’t understand his purposes and even if he explained and showed us, it wouldn’t make us feel any better in the. Moment (ah-ha!)

THIS is why the first part of this message is so important on knowing WHO you are praying to. Yes, God could change the circumstances you are in and the situation you are facing, but MOST important is knowing God. And as we grow to know him via prayer, we’ll grow in our trust of his sovereignty and love.



- This is why Jesus could pray in the Garden and make the ask – let the cup pass, but not my will, yours be done.
- This is why Paul could pray on three different occasions for the thorn to be removed, but what did God say? My grace is sufficient.

Sometimes the way which God weighs things are very different from us! That’s why he’s God! (Is. 55:8-9) – “his ways are not our ways, his thoughts not our thoughts!”

Remember, he is omniscient...sees the beginning from the end...he knows better than we do, and so we pray for his will to be done and when we don’t know what his will is, we trust and entrust.

**R.A. Torrey – “Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God.”**

Thirdly, for prayer to change things:

**Requirement #3: We must “be right” in our relationships**

By right, I mean all must be good both vertically and horizontally. You praying for God to change your spouse?

**1 Peter 3:7 – “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”**

**Psalm 66:18 – “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”**

If we are living in sin...or living with bitterness or anger toward someone – it’s hard to pray. Jesus said, if you have something against a brother and sister or they have something against you, leave your gift at the altar and of make the relationship right first, THEN come offer the gift.

Instead of concealing sin, confess it and that dam will break. When we are living in sin and actively rebelling against the Lord, (Prov. 28:9) says even our prayers are an abomination.

Don’t think your prayers will change a thing if you are holding onto or coddling sin.

**John 15:7 – “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish (if you’re abiding the assumption is you’re asking what would be in line with God’s will/his word – you are rightly related to him), and it will be done for you.”**

Fourthly, in order for prayer to change things:

**Requirement #4: We must pray in faith**

**Mark 11:22-24 – “And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God.<sup>23</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart,**

**but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. <sup>24</sup> Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”**

**James 1:6-8 – “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”**

Listen, when it comes to prayer – just the act of prayer – remember – that’s exercising faith! And when it comes to praying in faith, it’s NOT the size of your faith that matters – it’s the size of the object of your faith that matters.

Jesus said, “mustard seed faith” can move mountains. The object of your faith is the omnipotent God! Be like the dad of that young boy who was convulsing and asked Jesus to heal him.

**Mark 9:21-24 – “And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood.**

**<sup>22</sup> And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” <sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to him, ““If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.” <sup>24</sup> Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”**

If we want our prayer to change things, we must pray in faith, and sometimes the best we can muster is “Help my unbelief.”

Finally, in order for prayer to change things:

Requirement #5 – **We must persist in prayer**

In Luke 11 and in Luke 18 Jesus gives a parable about persistent prayer. And the scripture says in:

**Luke 18:1 – “And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”**

Don’t give up...you could be one prayer away – Again, God is changing you AS you in your prayer are asking him to change things!

**Illus. Halcie Wethington**

Listen to me: “Does prayer change things?” Absolutely. Most of all, it changes me.

Let’s pray.

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Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.