

Gunston Bible Church
 Pastor Dave
 26 Jan 2020

Can Prayer Change God's Mind?

Good morning GBC, the last two weeks we talked about the Power of Prayer and being steadfast in prayer and how we should always be in a playful mindset, this morning we are going to look at the issue or question does prayer change Gods mind?

I will start by saying prayer isn't about changing God's mind; it's about changing my mind so my will lines up with His will.

If our questions aren't addressed properly, it's easy to become confused.

Listen to how some children answered a few Bible questions:

- ✓ The first three books of the Bible are Genesis, Exodus and Laxatives.
- ✓ Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day, but a ball of fire by night.
- ✓ David fought with the Frankenstein's, a race of people, who lived in biblical times.
- ✓ Solomon, one of David's sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
- ✓ The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.

One websites related to answering questions about Christianity is gotquestions.org.

One of their posts deals with the number of questions in the Bible: "It is difficult to give a precise number because ancient Hebrew and Greek did not use punctuation...but Bible scholars estimate that there are approximately 3,300 questions in the Bible."

I see three purposes behind questions in the Bible.

Questions can create doubts. The first question asked by the Serpent to Eve was designed to create doubt in **Genesis 3:1**: "***Did God really say...?*** It all goes downhill from there, and it all started with a little question.

Questions can lead to discovery. The first question asked by God is found in **Genesis 3:9**. After Adam and Eve sin they shrink away in shame, trying to hide their guilt when they hear God ask, ***“Where are you?”***

This question was for their benefit and shows how God seeks to restore their relationship with Him. Questions can help us discover truth as evidenced when God asked Job 70 of them in the final chapters of the book bearing his name.

Questions can equip disciples. Also, the Bible records men and women asking faith questions. After the disciples asked,

Mark 4:38, *“Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”*

They experienced a tremendous miracle and an unforgettable display of compassion.

When Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the sea, **PEACE Be Still**, and the wind ceased and there was a great calm...

Our question today is Does prayer change God’s mind?”

According to **Revelation 22:13**, God knows all things past, present and future because He has always been and He will always be:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

2 Samuel 22:31 says it is impossible for God to improve upon any plan He has made: ***“This God—His way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true.”***

So, does prayer change God’s mind?

Here’s my answer in a sentence:

Prayer isn’t about changing God’s mind; it’s about changing my mind so my will lines up with His will.

Let’s go back to an event recorded in Exodus.

While Moses was up on the mountain, the people made an idol, a golden calf, and went wild as they fulfilled their pleasures and immoral appetites. In **Exodus 32:10**, God warned Moses, *“Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”*

In response, Moses took on the role of a mediator and pleaded for God to show mercy in **verses 11-12**: *“But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, ‘O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.”*

Is it possible the prayer of Moses changed the mind of God?

Listen to **verse 14**: *“And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.”*

To make it a bit more complicated, Moses later wrote these words in **Numbers 23:19**, *“God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind.”*

1. God’s purposes are **unchanging**.

No change is possible in God, because God is **absolute perfection**.

One theologian said it this way: “God cannot change for the better, for He is perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse.”

According to **Malachi 3:6**, we can count on God’s constancy: *“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”*

And **Isaiah 46:9-10**, God declares: ***“For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”***

Another theologian remarked: “Moses did not change God’s foreknown sovereign will.

A human cannot change God’s will lest he be more knowledgeable and powerful than the Lord.”

Prayer isn’t about changing God’s mind; it’s about changing my mind so my will lines up with His will.

God’s purposes are unchanging but we must hold this truth in tension with a second truth.

2. God’s plans are **unfolding.**

The text of Exodus says God changed His course of action based on Moses’ prayer.

Here’s the irony: God is the one who tells Moses to go down and see the situation in **Exodus 32: 7**: ***“Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.”***

Moses didn’t know about the people’s perversion so God had to show him.

Furthermore, the very thing Moses pleads in prayer is God’s own promise to the patriarchs in **Exodus 32:13**: ***“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’”***

Do you see what’s happening?

God put Moses into a situation so he would see the problem God already knew about, remember God's promises, and petition God to change His course of action. Moses' prayer itself is a result of God's plan.

God wants Moses to ask this, so He sovereignly puts him in a situation where he will ask for it.

Prayer isn't about changing God's mind; it's about changing my mind so my will lines up with His will.

If God does not change and yet He tells us to pray, then somehow prayer matters.

3. God's promises are **unleashed** when we pray.

This much is clear: The intercession of Moses was instrumental in the ultimate answer God gave.

To say it another way: **Without this prayer, the Israelites would have been incinerated.**

Exodus 8:13 is a staggering verse: *"And the LORD did according to the word of Moses."*

I'm reminded of **James 4:2**: *"You do not have, because you do not ask."*

James 5:16 says, *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."*

God has sovereignly placed us in certain situations for the express purpose of praying His promises...

Like Moses, God has 'sent you down' into a family, a group of friends, a neighborhood...

You are placed where He wants you to be so you can obey and pray for the things He wants to do, to perceive the problem and believe the promise and release His power into the situation."

Let's go back to **Exodus 32:14**: *“And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.”*

The Hebrew word **nacham**, sometimes translated as “repent” or “change one’s mind,” can also mean, “**Sorrow**” or “relief from an undesirable course of action.”

As an example, **Genesis 6:6** says, *“And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”*

The wickedness of people brought grief to God, especially in light of how far He would need to go to restore them.

Another example is found in **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.”*

It's not that God changed His mind because He already knew they would repent.

This is fleshed out in **Jeremiah 18:8**: *“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.”*

When we repent, God relents.

David Platt puts it this way: *“We pray because we have a privilege we cannot forsake, we pray because we have a family we can't forget, and we pray because we have a God we cannot fathom.”*

Does prayer change things? **Yes.**

Does God use prayer as a means to bring His purposes to pass? **Yes.**

Does God invite us to pray? **Yes.**

Does prayer change us? **Yes.**

Does God change His mind when we pray? **No.**

God is sovereign, knowing the end from the beginning, and He tells us to pray.

Prayer is a powerful way for us to participate in God's plans and purposes because He works through the prayers of His people.

We're called to pray and not give up according to **Luke 18:1**: "*...they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*"

1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to "*pray without ceasing.*"

1 John 5:14-15 says when we pray according to His will, He hears us: "*And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him.*"

Wanting What He Wills

Prayer isn't about changing God's mind; it's about changing my mind so my will lines up with His will.

A prime example of this is found in **Mark 14** where we see Jesus wrestling with the Father about whose will ultimately win.

We see the Savior's struggle in **Mark 14:35**, "*And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.*"

When Jesus sees and senses the sum total of all the sin in the world and the resulting penalty and punishment that awaits Him, He wants to take a pass.

In the midst of all Jesus is going through, I love how He addresses the Almighty in **Mark 14:36**, "*And he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you...'*"

He's literally saying, "Daddy, Father." Abba speaks of relationship and Father is a term of respect. **Romans 8:15** says we receive the Holy Spirit who makes us children of God, "*and by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'*"

In the middle part of [Mark 14:36](#), Jesus gets specific in his request:
“Remove this cup from me.”

The cup contained joy and judgment, redemption and wrath.

Jesus is saying, “If there’s another way, let me do it that way.”

As Jesus anticipates the cup of sin, suffering, sacrifice, separation and salvation, He verbalizes His submission to the Father’s plan in the last part of [Mark 14:36](#): ***“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”***

Jesus is resolutely and voluntarily lining up His will under the Father’s will.

Isn’t this the ultimate goal of prayer?

We come to God with our desires, our longings, our preferences and then we must say, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

His prayer is slightly different the second time according to [Matthew 26:42](#): ***“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”***

The first time He prayed, *“If it be possible,”* and now He prays, *“If this cannot pass.”*

In his first request He longs for the cup to be taken from Him; now He mentions drinking it.

In the first plea, He says, ***“Yet not as I will”*** and in the second He declares, ***“May your will be done.”***

Henry Blackaby says instead of asking God to bless our plans, we need to commit ourselves to His plans.

We’re to figure out where God is moving and join Him in that. We could say it like this: “God show me your plans and bless me as I make them my plans.”

There are two instructional elements to Jesus’ prayer.

HE STATED HIS OWN DESIRE - “This is what I want!”

HE SUBMITTED HIS DESIRES TO THE FATHER - “Not My will, but your will be done.”

Let us pray...