

Do Our Prayers Change God's Mind?

Exodus 32:14: (NASB) *So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.*



One of the very basic tenets of Christianity is the belief that God does not change. We see Him as omnipotent, above the fray, and the embodiment of clear vision and intention. As such, we believe when God's plan has been put in motion it is a universally unstoppable force. Enter the concept of prayer. Not only are we instructed to pray for and about things, we are shown several scriptural examples where prayer seems to have changed God's mind. How can these things be? Why would we pray if God has already decided, and how is it even possible to

change the mind of He who is unchangeable? There are answers to these questions, but as is usually the case, they are not found on the surface. The answers are rooted in the depth of scriptural meaning and provide profound biblical insight into the extraordinary character of God.



Our first story is about Abraham praying for the city of Sodom. Abram and his wife, Sarai, lived with Abram's nephew, Lot, in Haran. God made a covenant with Abram and told him to go to Canaan. Both Abram and Lot's herds grew so large they needed to split up. Lot moved next door to the city of Sodom. God changed Abram's name to Abraham and established the Covenant of Circumcision. Three messengers (angels) were sent to Abraham to first tell him good news - he would have a son. But then, bad news - God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham pleads with God not to destroy Sodom:

Genesis 18:22-26: (NASB) *²²Then the men (the angels) turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. ²³Abraham came near and said, Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly? ²⁶So the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.*

Abraham's argument centered itself on the greatness of God's justice; and therefore, the greatness of His mercy.

Abraham, having established God's power, now bargains with God because he wants to protect life:

Genesis 18:29-32: (NASB) ²⁹He spoke to Him yet again and said, suppose forty are found there? And He said, I will not do it on account of the forty. ³⁰Then he said, oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there? And He said, I will not do it if I find thirty there.

Abraham knows his place and feels his insignificance before God:

³¹And he said, Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there? And He said, I will not destroy it on account of the twenty. ³²Then he said, Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there? And He said, I will not destroy it on account of the ten.

Forty - thirty - twenty - ten? He said, I will not destroy it on account of the ten. Abraham returned home content with his understanding of God's mercy.

What a great example of prayer in action and how God reacts to requests with mercy and patience.

God's care for those who could be righteous would next be revealed:

Genesis 19:12-14: (NASB) ¹²Then the two men said to Lot, Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; ¹³for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it. ¹⁴Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, up, get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy the city. But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

The angels asked, *Whom else have you here... bring them out of the place?* Lot warns his sons-in-law to leave Sodom, but they did not believe him.

Not only did God say, *I will not destroy it on account of ten*, but God was being merciful by saying He would save every individual in the city who was righteous.

PROPER PRAYER PERSPECTIVE:



What God does with humanity depends upon what humanity does with God. This gives us opportunity for choice.

God did not have to change His mind, but He allowed Abraham to come before Him and express his request. The Scriptures tell us those who were destroyed in Sodom will be resurrected in the Day of Judgment.

Whether we see Abraham's actions toward God about Sodom as successful or not, they certainly were bold.

For more on the story of Sodom and Lot, please search our archives for episode 1064: "Is He Who Hesitates Really Lost?"

Sodom is easy - God did not change His mind. Does Moses convince God to change His mind in Exodus?

This next example IS much more difficult! It will show us God proclaiming to do one thing and *Moses seemingly talks Him into doing another*. Our focus here needs to be clearly based by making sure we are asking the right questions. As we will see, there is more to God's character than meets the eye.

 **What we do matters, Why Should We Pray if God Already Knows What I Need, oneminuteapologist**

- *The ultimate issue here is that prayer is not speaking to a God who has fatalistically determined everything that's going to happen in the future. No, what we do really matters, and prayer therefore really makes a difference. When we get up in the morning, we wash our hands, it makes a difference. When we pray, it makes a difference. Again, God has ordained both the ends and the means; and therefore, the prayers that we pray really do make a difference.*

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Moses led Israel out of bondage from Egypt. God provided many miracles to help Israel - He destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, He provided them with water, manna and quails and helped Israel defeat Amalek and his army. Moses talked to God on Mount Sinai and received all of God's commandments. The people agreed to being obedient to these commandments by saying, *All that the LORD has spoken we will do* - Exodus 19:8 (KJV).

Exodus 32 - Moses pleads to God on behalf of Israel. Instead of asking why God is so rash and needing to be calmed down, we should be asking why God is giving Moses an opportunity to speak up.

The event: The people of Israel made a golden calf to lead them, because Moses had not come down from the mountain.



God first reports to Moses what the people had done:

Exodus 32:7-10: (NASB) ⁷Then the LORD spoke to Moses, Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. ⁸They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!

This is BLATANT IDOLATRY! God concludes they deserve destruction:

⁹The LORD said to Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. ¹⁰Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.

GOD IS ANGRY

- ☛ God told Moses that Moses' own people corrupted themselves and abandoned God
- ☛ God told Moses to let Him be so His anger can burn – essentially saying you are the only thing that can save them
- ☛ God told Moses He would develop a "new" nation from Moses himself
- ☛ God gave Moses a great opportunity to stand faithfully as deliverer and servant of God Himself!



Moses stands and honors God at the beginning of his prayer by voicing God's mighty power:

Exodus 32:11-14: (NASB) ¹¹Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

Moses stands and honors God by voicing God's mighty reputation:

¹²Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, with evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth?

Moses questioned God about why He would allow the Egyptians to mock Him.

Moses stands and honors God by voicing godly mercy:

Turn from Your burning anger and **change Your mind <5162>** about doing harm to Your people.

Repent (KJV): Strong's #5162 *nachum*; to sigh, breathe strongly

Moses tells God to *take a moment to think and meditate about doing harm to Your people*. Why would Moses say this to God?

Moses stands and honors God by voicing God's previous promises as entirely valid:

¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever. ¹⁴So the LORD **changed His mind <5162>** about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

God did not change His mind; He changed *the action* because Moses mediated between God and the people. This is a perfect picture of Jesus mediating between God and mankind in His kingdom.



A mediator is someone who intervenes between two sides at odds and brings them together.

PROPER PRAYER PERSPECTIVE:



Sometimes God sees fit to set intense tests before us to try and proclaim our faith. Our prayers and actions can and do alter events. This is not literally changing the mind of God at all; it is contributing to the actions He will take or allow. Prayer can change things.

Prayer is not changing the mind of God; it is changing the actions that support the mind of God.

Abraham and Moses seemed to confront God. What about someone who prayed while running from Him?

When Jonah prayed to God from the fish's belly, it seemed to change God's mind. As we look at this example of prayer, we first need to notice the dramatic similarities in our stories thus far. While each one is about the destruction of unrighteous people, Jonah is not exactly being helpful.

The following audio clip is from an atheist who mocks Christianity and biblical reasoning.

Prayer for a job, Does Prayer Work? Does God Really Answer Prayers, AnswersInInsanity

- How do you tell the difference between something happening because you prayed for it or because it was probably going to happen anyway? How do you know when prayer doesn't work? So, for example, you pray that you would get this new dream job. You don't get the job. Did you not get the job because God heard your prayer but decided to deny your request? Or did God not hear the prayer at all, meaning that you didn't get the job simply because they just didn't want to hire you.*



When something you want to happen and you pray for it, and it doesn't happen, you'll say, "well that's just God's plan." But how about free will in this job scenario? Wouldn't God be interfering in someone's free will if He made it so that you got the job you wanted? If they weren't going to hire you and God decided to answer your prayer by getting you the job, that means He influenced the hiring person to change their mind.

God did *not* get in the way of the person's free will.

How should we pray for something specific like a job? *Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.* We do not know if something we ask for could harm or stifle our spiritual growth. The Lord knows, and that is why we count on Him to answer our prayers by allowing or directing what is best for us and our spirituality.



Jonah chose to pass on God's command and went on a ship in the opposite direction. That was not wise. God sent a great storm on the sea, and the ship was about to fall apart. It seemed all would soon die. All the men were praying to their gods to save them, and the captain found Jonah sleeping. The captain told him to pray so they would not perish. Jonah told the captain the storm was his fault because he was running away from God. He told the sailors to throw him overboard and the sea would become calm. This is how he got swallowed by a giant fish!

Jonah, a prophet of God, decides to run away from God's command:

Jonah 1:1-3: (NASB) *¹The word of the LORD came to Jonah... saying, ²Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me. ³But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So, he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*

We can run, but we cannot hide from God. A life-threatening storm arises, and Jonah confesses he is running from God:

Jonah 1:10: (NASB) *Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, How could you do this? For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.*



Let's take a look at parts of Jonah's prayer. Jonah was not trying to change God's mind; he was changing himself to be mindful of God's character and power.



Jonah is thrown overboard and swallowed up by a great fish the Lord prepared for Jonah's experience.

Jonah then prays:

Jonah 2:4: (NASB) *So I said, I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless, I will look again toward Your holy temple.*

His life is slipping away:

Jonah 2:7-9: (NASB) *⁷While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. ⁸Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, ⁹but I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.*

Jonah is repentant in the moments inside of the fish, and God delivers him.

PROPER PRAYER PERSPECTIVE:



Deep and sincere repentance opens the door for opportunity to do God's will. God's mind did not change, He simply responded to a repentant sinner with grace.

God did not change His mind, but He allowed something else to happen that was within His will. He gives us the ability of free moral agency.

Jonah is rescued by God and now delivers the prophecy:

Jonah 3:1-2,4-5: (NASB) *¹Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you... ⁴Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown. ⁵Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.*



They were not trying to change God's mind; they were getting their minds in tune with God's mind and power.

The people of Nineveh mightily repented in sackcloth and ashes:

Jonah 3:9-10: (NASB) *⁹Who knows, God may turn and **relent <5162>** and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish. ¹⁰When God saw their deeds, that they turned from*

their wicked way, then God **relented** <5162> concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

God relented - is this a change of mind? No. God sent Jonah to warn the people. Because they listened, what was prophesied did not have to happen. Whenever Israel was in trouble, God sent a prophet to warn them.



Many years ago, I asked my kids to clean their room, but they had all kinds of excuses. One day I said, "Okay, we have been talking about cleaning your rooms and you are not doing it. If this room is not clean, all your toys are going to be mine. So, I'm going to go downstairs and if I come back and your rooms are not clean, whatever is not put away is going to be mine." When you are a father and you tell them sternly, they panic and run to put away their toys.

That is what God did. It was as if He said, "Unless something changes, this is the result." God changes things that happen as a result of His mind being focused.

PROPER PRAYER PERSPECTIVE:



*To acknowledge God and repent
in the midst of sin is to appeal
to the very core of
the mercy and justice of
His character.
This can change what God does.*

Prayer is not about trying to change the mind of God; it is much more about tapping into the mind of God.

What are the best ways we can set ourselves up to take advantage of the huge benefits of prayer?

Prayer is based on two simple (though not easy) things. The first is faith. Our faith must have the strength to see God as above us, and to see Him as caring for us. Jesus' role in this is crucial. His ransom provided us with the necessary bridge to gain access to God.



christianquestions.com

Please see our CQ Kids video: **Why Do We Pray if God Already Knows Our Thoughts?**

God's role versus our role must be clear if we are going to pray for access to influencing His actions:

Jeremiah 18:1-6: (NASB) ¹The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, ²Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will announce My words to you. ³Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. ⁴But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so, he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. ⁵Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, ⁶Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.

God says, "Tell Israel, you are like the clay in this potter's hand with me. I can shape and fashion as I wish."

Are we not considered "spiritual" Israel? As Christians, we should be like clay in the potter's hand. We need to be willing to be shaped and formed however He decides for us.



Principle: God can and will do what He wants to with humanity. What does He want to do?



Daniel prays over 70-year prophecy, Does prayer actually change God's mind, Southern Seminary,

- *Or you think of in Daniel 9 where he's reading the prophet Jeremiah, he knows that 70 years will be the exile. He doesn't then say, "Well, that's part of God's sovereign plan. It's going to happen in 70 years; I just might as well sit around and wait." Instead, knowing that very plan, he then takes that knowledge and he turns it to prayer, in confession, and petitioning that God would keep His promise that it would only last 70 years. Of course, it's only going to last 70 years, but he prays and petitions God in light of the very plan, the sovereign plan, the eternal plan of God that he knows from the prophet Jeremiah.*



Daniel was fulfilling his role in the hands of the potter.

God wants to bless us! The following are several pieces we will look at one at a time:

James 5:13-16: (NASB) ¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.



Those who quench the spirit of holiness or *grieve the Holy Spirit* are spiritually sick. It could get to the point of being cut off from fellowship with God. But James says they have one last resort - they should ask for help from their spiritual leaders. They should ask those leaders to pray for them with the

prayer of faith to forgive their sins and sicknesses and to once again have a renewed standing with God.

James 5:13: (NASB) *Is anyone among you **suffering <2553>**? Then he must pray...*

Faith makes us look up.

Suffering: Strongs #2553 *kakopatheo*; to undergo hardship

2 Timothy 4:5: (KJV) *But watch thou in all things, endure **afflictions <2553>**, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.*

The very use of the word *suffering* has to do with trials of faith, not illness. It is about being tested. Faith requires hardship and prayer to be two interlocking pieces of a true Christian's life experience.

James 5:13: (NASB) *...Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.*

Faith-based praise is a form of prayer. A hymn in our heart is a great example of faith-based praise.

Colossians 3:15-17: (NASB) ¹⁵*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Choose what will rule in your heart the turmoil of life or the peace of God!)* ¹⁶*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, (Choose whose words guide you the words of the world flesh and devil or the words of Christ) with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.* ¹⁷*Whatever you do in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.*

PROPER PRAYER PERSPECTIVE:



Faithful prayer for ourselves is important when under the pressure of trial and in times of praise.

We need to have Jesus' "nevertheless" attitude as our own overriding attitude.

Luke 22:42: (NKJV) *Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.*

"God, let me be acquiescent to your will."

Here is one of the few times in Scripture we will see an appropriate focus on "me." I need to pray for me.

How do we practically and properly access God's will and affect His actions on behalf of others?

While faith is the real foundation of prayer, perspective is the house we live in. We must learn to see that our role in praying for ourselves or anyone else is ALWAYS subject to the mind of God, but that does NOT limit the power of our prayers to influence what God will do or permit.

We cannot change the mind of God, but we do have access to how He carries out His will. Prayer is a tool which helps us grow up toward God.



Praying for others:

James 5:14: (NASB) *Is anyone among you sick <770>? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

Sick: Strongs #770 *astheneo*; to be feeble (in any sense)

2 Corinthians 12:10: (KJV) *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak <770>, then am I strong.*

The word *weak* is used to depict physical illness as well as spiritual weakness. In the epistles it is most often used as spiritual weakness.

We should ask for strength, not miracles!

If we always pray for the Lord's will to be done, whether for us or others, then we would never expect to change God's mind. His way and His timing are always best.

Humility on the part of one who is spiritually sick is a sure sign their hope is still alive:

James 5:15: (NASB) *and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick <2577>, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.*

Sick: Strongs #2577 *kamno*; to toil, i.e. (by implication) to tire

Only other use:

Hebrews 12:3: (KJV) *For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be **wearied** <2577> and faint in your minds.*

This James text really has nothing to do with physical illness at all; rather, it has everything to do with spiritual illness.

Praying for others CAN alter circumstances. The feebleness here is not in the category of just having a bad day; rather, it is a deep symptom of a spiritual life turned fleshly that requires much more than a prayer request. This feeble and tired condition requires intervention.

PROPER PRAYER PERSPECTIVE:



Knowing God's will is unquestioned is paramount. Also, knowing that we, in our faithful prayers, can influence HOW His will is accomplished is priceless.

Example: We believe it is God's will for us to do this podcast. We have been shown God's overruling providence over and over again. It is God's will for us to pick biblical topics. Now, is it God's will for us to bring this point up at this exact moment on the podcast? No, we have free will. God gives us liberty to use our spirituality in the best way we can.

James 5:16: (KJV) *The effectual **fervent** <1754> prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Fervent: Strongs #1754 *energeo*; to be active, efficient, to be operative, be at work, put forth power; to work for one, aid one

Prayer is more than words on behalf of someone else; it includes action on behalf of someone else.

No matter what the circumstance - if we are strong, cheerful, spiritually ill or learning day by day, *prayer can be the most powerful resource in our fighting the good fight of faith.*

James 5:16: (Rotherham) *Much availeth, the supplication of a righteous man, when it is energised.*

Now, perspective on this next text is SO much simpler:

John 14:13-15: (NASB) ¹³*Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. ¹⁵If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*

PROPER PRAYER PERSPECTIVE:



*We **SHOULD** ask in prayer knowing the Father will give us answers that are appropriate for our eternal welfare. Our asking needs faith and perspective.*

Hebrews 4:16: (NASB) *Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Accessing the grace of God is working within the will of God. The grace of God opens the door for the opportunity to contribute to the ways of God. That is how prayer should work.

*Do our prayers change God's mind?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*



Join us next week for our podcast on October 7, 2019:
Ep. #1094: How Do You Handle Being Uprooted in Your Life?

Bonus Material!

Patience, persistence and perspiration make an unbeatable combination for success.

— Napoleon Hill

Here are the verses that follow the potter illustration from segment three:

Jeremiah 18:7-10: (NASB) ⁷At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; ⁸if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. ⁹Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; ¹⁰if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.

Here are more references to a potter and clay:

Isaiah 29:15-16: (NASB) ¹⁵Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, and whose deeds are done in a dark place, and they say, Who sees us? or Who knows us? ¹⁶You turn things around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, that what is made would say to its maker, he did not make me; or what is formed say to him who formed it, he has no understanding?

Romans 9:20-21: (NASB) ²⁰On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, Why did you make me like this, will it? ²¹Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

The potter and clay seems like an appropriate analogy since mankind was created from the dust of the ground.

Here Moses recalls the event of the golden calf as they are about to enter Canaan. More detail is revealed. Note how Moses continually prayed on behalf of the people:

Deuteronomy 9:6-21: (NASB) ⁶Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people. ⁷Remember, do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD. ⁸Even at Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, and the LORD was so angry with you that He would have destroyed you. ⁹When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. ¹⁰The LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God; and on them were all the words which the LORD had spoken with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. ¹¹It came about at the end of forty days and nights that the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. ¹²Then the LORD said to me, Arise, go down from here quickly, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made a molten image for themselves. ¹³The LORD spoke further to me, saying, I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a stubborn people. ¹⁴Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they. ¹⁵So I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. ¹⁶And I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God. You had made for yourselves a molten calf; you had turned aside quickly from the way which the LORD had commanded you. ¹⁷I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from my hands and smashed them before your eyes. ¹⁸I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you had committed in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke Him to anger. ¹⁹For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you, but the LORD listened to me that time also. ²⁰The LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him; so I also prayed for Aaron at the same time. ²¹I took your sinful thing, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very small until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that came down from the mountain.

(Source: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/10-most-important-verses-on-prayer-in-the-bible.html> - Lori Hatcher)

1. **Luke 18:13-14:** (NIV) ¹³But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. ¹⁴I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

These verses, from the well-known story of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple, reveal the prayer that allows us to enter into a



relationship with God: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The tax collector was honest with God about his sin. He humbled himself, repented and acknowledged his need of God’s mercy. God answered his prayer and saved him.

Bottom line—the first step in developing a prayer life is calling upon God for salvation.

2. Psalm 66:18: (NIV) *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

This verse from David’s psalm shows us a major hindrance to God’s willingness to hear our prayers—unconfessed sin. Some might ask, “If sin prevents God from hearing our prayers, then none of us have a chance, because we all sin, even after we’re saved.”

A careful reading of Psalm 66:18, however, draws our attention to the word “cherished.” “If I had cherished sin...” To cherish sin means to embrace it. To love it, hold on to it, and refuse to give it up. This is vastly different from committing a sin that we regret, confess, and forsake as soon as the Holy Spirit brings it to our attention. God doesn’t expect us to be sinless, but He does call us to deal with our sin as soon as possible (1 John 1:9).

Bottom line—we can’t live a consistently sinful lifestyle and expect God to hear our prayers.

3. Psalm 34:15: (NIV) *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry.*

If we have a correct relationship with God and are earnestly seeking to follow and honor Him with our lives, we never have to wonder if He’s listening to our prayers. On the contrary, this verse assures us that He is carefully attuned to our lives and eager to hear every prayer that comes from our lips.

Bottom line—God hears the prayers of those who put their trust in Him.

4. Daniel 9:18: (NIV) *We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.*

This beautiful excerpt from Daniel’s prayer on behalf of the Jews exiled in Babylon shows us a profound truth about prayer—that God answers our prayers because of His mercy, not our good works. Many believers think their good works obligate or persuade God to act on their behalf. And while God does call us to live holy lives, it is not our obedience that moves God to answer our prayers, it is His great mercy toward us.

Bottom line—God’s mercy, not our goodness, is the basis for answered prayers.

5. Psalm 5:3: (NIV) *In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.*

The psalmist who penned Psalm 5:3 models the attitude we should have when we pray—that of eager expectation. We should believe God will answer our prayers and diligently watch for His hand at work. The psalmist also shows us



that when we pray early in the day, we have the rest of the day to anticipate God’s answer.

Bottom line—when we pray, we can wait in eager anticipation for God to work on our behalf.

6. 1 John 5:14: (NIV) *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*

God delights in answering prayers that align with His will. But how do we know what God’s will is? The most reliable way to know is by reading His Word. As we seek God through Bible reading and prayer, we get to know His heart and gain wisdom and spiritual insight. This gives us a greater understanding of how to pray according to His will, and a greater chance of having our prayers answered.

Bottom line—God answers every prayer that aligns with His will.

7. James 4:3: (NIV) *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

This verse from the book of James tells us why God says no to many of our prayers—they are selfish, self-centered, and sometimes downright bad for us. Because God is wise and loving, like any good parent, He will not give things that will harm us or others.

Bottom line—God will say no to our prayers if we ask for something for the wrong reason or for the wrong purpose.

8. Matthew 26:42: (NIV) *He (Jesus) went away a second time and prayed, my Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.*

Jesus set the supreme example of surrender and submission to the Father’s will when he prayed for God to spare him from dying on the cross. Because he was fully human, he was fearful and reluctant to experience the agony of the crucifixion. He could have refused to die, but instead, in humble trust and submission, he prayed, “May your will be done.”

On the surface, death by crucifixion seemed to end Christ’s ministry. In reality, his death on the cross paved the way for countless believers to receive eternal life by believing in his death and resurrection.

Bottom line—we can surrender our will to God’s in complete confidence that He knows what’s best.

9. Mark 9:24: (NIV) *I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*

This honest confession comes from a man whose son was demon-possessed. He was not fully convinced Jesus had the power to deliver his son, but he asked anyway.



This passage debunks two of the greatest misconceptions about prayer - that if we have enough faith, God will answer our prayers, and if we don't, He won't. Scripture does not support the idea that great faith produces great miracles and small faith prevents them. Instead, God tells us to ask in faith, believing that He can and will answer our prayers in the way He knows is best. Even frightened, tiny, mustard-seed faith like this father had can and does move the hand of God.

Bottom line—it's not how much faith we have that matters, but who we have faith in.

10. James 5:16: (NIV) *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

What a beautiful affirmation James, the half-brother of Jesus, gives in this short verse. When we wonder if prayer accomplishes anything, he encourages us. Not only is prayer powerful, but it is effective. "You're not wasting your time," he seems to call to us. "Keep praying! God is using your prayers to accomplish His will."

Bottom line—the prayers of godly Christians work.

I don't know why God uses the prayers of His people to accomplish His work in the world, but I'm glad He does. I'm humbled to think we can talk to Him at any time of the day or night. I'm grateful that He's never too busy to hear our prayers and act on our behalf. My prayer for us all is that we will never take for granted the privilege and the power of prayer.

