



Praying with Purpose

God's Providence, Our Prayers (Part 1)

Schedule/Topics

Apr 15 – God's Providence, Our Prayers (Part 1)

Apr 22 – God's Providence, Our Prayers (Part 2)

Apr 29 – Prayer for Maturity, Ephesians 1:15-20

May 6 – Prayer for Strength, Ephesians 3:14-21

Setting the Stage: Observations on Prayer

- At its most basic level prayer is an expression of our dependence upon God.
- Our purpose in prayer is to glorify God by seeing him actively accomplish his will here on earth. God, not us, must be the focus of our prayers and it is his will and not just our own that we must long to see occur in our lives.
- Submission is an essential ingredient in Jesus' prayer life and should be in ours. This means, at least, accepting the answers God gives and that no answer is itself an answer.
- In our prayers we should discern how God is working in and through circumstances rather than merely expect God to change them.
- Thankfulness for God's movement in others gives us opportunity to avoid self-absorption.
- God is just as interested in us as in what we want and he occasionally denies our requests so that his glory and our good are optimal.

God's Providence, Our Prayers

Exactly how do our prayers intersect with God's meticulous sovereignty? In what sense does God respond to prayer when his purposes are changeless? Why pray if God is all-wise and all-knowing? Similarly, if God has already determined the end from the beginning and the outcome of every event, do our prayers really influence God to act in ways that he otherwise would not? Consider:

Divine providence is like a blueprint or master plan involving a stream of dynamically related events through which God brings about precisely what he intends and by which he governs the world (see Psalm 33:10-11; 115:3; Proverbs 5:21; 16:1-4, 9, 33; Daniel 4:34-35; Isaiah 14:24-27; 46:9-11; Acts 4:27-28).

1. **Prayer**, as one element in God's blueprint, is an expression of our trust and reliance upon God's providence and, therefore, **is a means God uses to affect change** for accomplishing his will.
2. **Prayer is a condition for not the cause of God acting** in the world. God does respond to the prayers of his people, but not because he is compelled to do so but because he has chosen to do so (see Genesis 18:22-33; 21:17; 30:17; Exodus 32:14; 1 Chronicles 14:14; Daniel 10:12; Matthew 7:7-11; Acts 4:29-31; 12:5-11). Consider:

As Chief Architect and Ruler over all, God's providential control is seen in governing the affairs of nations (Job 12:23; Ezra 1:1; 6:22; Psalms 22:28; 33:14-15; Proverbs 21:1; Acts 17:26). Even in the midst of evil, God redirects the results of sinful human choices toward his ultimate purposes, whether his purposes are for blessing, discipline, or judgment (Genesis 37:28; 45:5; 50:20; 2 Kings 19:25; Isaiah 10:5, 12; 13:17; Jeremiah 25:9, 12; Ezra 14:9; Habakkuk 1:5-12; Romans 8:28-29; Ephesians 1:11). As sovereign King he has an overall "blueprint," known only to him, in which he has already engineered every effect from every cause and every consequence from every condition. In his perfect wisdom and almighty power, God's firm and sure resolve is to bring about the precise goal he intends for his creation. Ultimately, everything that comes to pass is what he has purposed and everything he has purposed comes to pass. And prayer, serving as a link in the chain of God's meticulous provision, is an exciting opportunity for us to be actively involved in changing the world!



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3. Nevertheless, **God has set some parameters around answered prayer**, which include **praying in Jesus' name** (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24). To pray in the name of Jesus is to enter the presence of God by the authority and reputation of Jesus rather than any individual authority (e.g., Acts 3:6; 4:7-10; 16:18; 1 Corinthians 5:4). It implies a surrendering of all personal authority and privilege and a complete submission to the Lord Jesus' authority over all. Therefore, humility and dependence are necessary prerequisites to effective prayer (2 Chronicles 7:14; James 5:16; 1 Peter 5:6-7).
4. Another parameter is **praying according to God's will** (Matthew 6:10; 26:39; 1 John 5:14-15). The fact that God knows in advance what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:8) suggests God's provision is not only in the answers he provides, but also in the prayers we pray. Prayer is not only about us, it is for us and is God's gift to us.

Like a conductor and composer, God has orchestrated each note and rhythm in the universe to perform his perfect composition of history. The motif repeated in every refrain includes the prayers of the saints that are instrumental in bringing the grand finale to a climax when the chorus will one day sing:

*"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"
— Revelation 5:13*

Next Week *God's Providence, Our Prayers (Part 2)*