



Praying with Purpose

God's Providence, Our Prayers (Part 2)

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

Thinking about God's providence and our prayers

Often, we think certain things will happen *because* we pray and, reciprocally, will not happen if we do not pray. We suppose there is a kind of cause-effect relationship between our prayers and God's answers. After all, it does appear that our prayers trigger or cause God's answers. But do they? Are these assumptions correct? Consider:

If I claim "God answered my prayers **because I (or others) prayed,**" this is true only in the sense that my prayers were instrumental; not because they are causal. For example, we are saved *by* our faith, not *because of* our faith. Prayer may be a condition for God's answers, but it is not the cause of them.

In no way, therefore, does prayer coerce or manipulate God into doing something he has not already determined to do. Therefore, in the strictest sense, our prayers do not cause God to do anything. The will of God is accomplished by our prayers, not because of them.

Exactly how do our prayers intersect with God's sovereignty?

- If God is meticulously sovereign over every detail in the universe, then he ordains certain ends and specific means to accomplish those ends. After all, God can only guarantee those outcomes where he can also ensure the means to achieve them. In some cases, prayer is God's means for bringing about those circumstances that otherwise would not have occurred.
- Prayer is not a way of helping God decide between different courses of action, but the instrument by which God's already settled decree affects our world. Some things God has purposed to accomplish despite human involvement while other things he has chosen to accomplish through human involvement, such as prayer. Just as God has provided labor as a means of supplying our material needs, so too God has provided prayer as a means of supplying our spiritual needs (John Calvin).
- Consequently, God's providence does not relieve us of the responsibility to pray. In fact, if prayer is a link in the sequence of events that God has ordained to bring about his will on earth, then we're not merely responsible to pray but highly privileged!
- Prayer, therefore, is God actively involving his followers in the process of advancing his kingdom in the hearts of men and women around the globe. Prayer is God's invitation to us to join him in changing the world! Prayer is the divine channel through which God's free, predetermined favor should descend. Prayer does change things in the world, but it does not change God's purposes for the world.

"Prayers are useful in obtaining those favours which He foresaw He would bestow on those who should pray for them"— Augustine, *City of God*.



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God's Providence, Our Prayers (Part 2)

- The will of God is never frustrated by our prayerlessness, yet our prayerlessness can be an instrument of discipline in God's hand (see Joshua 9:14).
- When we pray according to God's revealed will we can be sure God will answer positively.

"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." (1 John 5:14-15)

Here the condition is asking according to God's will. We must want what God wants when we pray. Implicitly John is telling us that we don't always know what God wants, so praying according to His will demonstrates our total dependency upon Him. Other conditions for answered prayer include obedience (1 John 3:22), abiding in Jesus' words (John 15:7), praying in Jesus' name (John 14:14), and purity from sin (Is. 59:2; Ps. 66:18-19; Jn. 9:31).

When biblical conditions are met, we can be assured of not only being heard but receiving answers. Therefore, believers should pray with expectancy (Mk. 11:24; Heb. 4:16).

- That God already knows what we need before we ask him is no hindrance to our prayers. God's foreknowledge makes it possible for him to answer our prayers even before we pray (Isaiah 65:24). The certainty of the future, though determined by God, comes about through the free agency of human choices, including our prayers. Some of what God has determined to do he has chosen to do in response to our prayers.

The Privilege of Prayer

Since God has ordained the means as well as the ends to accomplish all and only what he intends for the universe, we have every incentive to be on our knees and gladly join him in changing the world for his glory by our prayers. Such privilege we have!

Next Week Prayer for Maturity, Ephesians 1:15-20

Recommended resources on prayer:

Providence & Prayer: How Does God Work in the World by Terrance Tiessen

A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers by D. A. Carson

Prayer in the New Testament by Oscar Cullman

The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions by Arthur Bennett

Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God by Dallas Willard

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard Foster

Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer by Gary Millar

The Soul of Prayer by P. T. Forsyth