

PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

When I pray, coincidence happen,
and when I don't they don't.

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Prayer changes things

Genesis 24 Abraham is living in a foreign land. And he is very old, on his death bed. God has blessed him in every way. But like most parents, he wants to see his son get married. He's forty already! And to fulfil the promises that God has given him, he needs to see him married and have children. He doesn't want him to marry someone from Canaanites. So, he gets his manager and tells him to travel back to his homeland of Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac.

So, manager sets off. As he is getting close to Nahor he stops by a well and prays. He asks that God would lead him to the right young lady, by a sign. As he was still praying Rebekah comes out to the well. He asks for a drink. She gives him one then offers to water his camels as well. This was the sign that he asked for. He asks who she was and finds that she is a relative of Abrahams. He falls to his knees and worship God. **Prayer changes circumstances.**

Exodus 17:8-16. The people of Israel are facing their first major military test. The Amalekites are not happy at the Israelites. So, Moses appoint Joshua as his military commander to lead the Israelites. Moses Aaron and Hur go up a nearby hill overlooking the battlefield. He held out the staff with his hands - representing the presence of God. Most commentators say language used is that of prayer. When he held out the staff, the Israelites were winning the battle. But when he got tired of holding out the staff the battle started going against the Israelites. So, Aaron and Hur got a big rock, sat Moses down and held out his arms in supplication to God. At sunset, after whole day of prayer, Israelites had won the battle. The key difference in the battle was prayer.

Prayer changes the battle.

2 Kings 6:8-23 Elisha h was prophet who heard from God. The king of Aram was at war with the Israelites and would launch surprise attacks on the Israelites. But whenever he did so, he found himself ambushed. The king accused his officers of betrayal. But one his officers said the problem is Elijah. He tells the king of Israel what you say in your bedroom. So, the king sent a battalion to capture him. Elijah's servant gets up early and sees they are totally surrounding. Elijah tells him not to be afraid. "There are more on our side than on theirs." He prayed this prayer. "O Lord, open his eyes and let him see". The servant's eyes were opened, and he saw the hills around the town completely covered in horses and chariots of fire. **Prayer changes our perspective.**

Nehemiah Ch 1-2. Nehemiah is a key official working for Artaxerxes, King of the Persian Empire. He is one of the Jews who have been taken captive when Jerusalem was invaded years before by the Babylonians. He is in a trusted position within the government. But hears back that things are not good in his home of Jerusalem which is still in rack and ruin. When he hears this report, it says he mourned and faster and prayed for 6 months. Then one day the king asks him why he is so sad. Nehemiah's prayer had been. "Put it in his heart to be kind to me.". When Nehemiah explains about his homeland the king replies What can I do to help? Wow. The king says this to his servant. God had softened his heart. He gave him leave. He paid for all the repairs to the city. **Prayer changes hearts, even of those who are not believers.**

Acts 10. Peter the disciple of Jesus is upstairs praying while he is waiting for lunch. While he is praying it says he fell into a trance. His vision is of all these animals. A voice tells him to kill the animals and eat them. Three times the same thing happens and he says no. Peter was a good Jew and he hadn't got his head around how Christ had changed things. So, he wakes up, and wonders what the dream means? He is still puzzling when there is a knock on the door. And God says to him. Go with the guys at the

door. The guys at the door are Gentiles with a story to tell. Their boss is Roman army officer by the name of Cornelius. God had sent an angel to him to tell him to go find Peter. So, Peter puts the messengers up for the night and the next day goes to see Cornelius. Somewhere along the way Peter puts all this together. He realizes the dream and these guys are connected. He comes to this profound realization. that the gospel message was for all peoples, not just the Jews. It is hard for us to realize what a profound world view change this was for Peter. You see prayer changes us. In prayer God met him with the dream. In prayer God spoke to him about going with these strangers at the door. **Prayer Changes Us**

Luke 23:39-43 When Jesus was crucified, it says two others were crucified with him. When the crowds and Jewish leaders scoffed at Jesus, one of them joined in. But the other man saw something in Jesus. Maybe he had heard Jesus preach or seen Jesus heal someone. Maybe one of his family members had been healed. Maybe hanging on that cross in agony, he reflected on his own life and saw something different in Jesus. But he says to his fellow mate. We deserve to be here for what we have done. This man does not. "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." A nine-word prayer. And yet this prayer changes this man's destiny. Jesus said. "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." A 9-word prayer changes his eternal destiny.

Prayer changes people's eternal destiny

James 5:16-18. James says the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. What he is saying is prayer changes things. And we can read this and think. Well, I am not a super righteous person. James though goes on to illustrate this statement by using Elijah. It says he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for 3 and half years. Then he prayed for rain and down and it poured. Now Elijah was an incredible man of God. (1 Kings Ch 18-19) He is the guy that challenged the prophets of Baal to a prayer contest. You guys pray to your god to burn up the altar and I will pray to my God and we will see who wins. Prophets of Baal set up the altar, spent the day praying, dancing even cutting themselves. Baal

did not answer. Elijah started to give them a hard time. At the end of the day, Elijah built his altar and drenched it in water, just so there was no accusation of cheating. Then he prayed and God sent fire from heaven and burnt the whole thing up. So, it is fair to say, he was pretty up there when it comes to prayer. But James points something out. Elijah was as human as we are. That means he struggled with doubt. That means he had times when God seemed miles away. That means he got depressed. In fact, he got severely depressed when Queen Jezebel said she was going to get him. Despite all he had seen God do, he runs away scared, depressed and full of self-pity. He is suicidal and wants to die. He is human like us, and yet his prayers have great power and produce wonderful results.

Prayer changes things.

Exodus 32:14 There is a passage in the story of Exodus that has caused a huge debate. In fact, it seems to contradict what we are told about God. The Israelites had come out of Egypt. They had seen God amazingly free them from 400 years of slavery. They had seen God provide food and water in the desert. They had seen the glory of God fall like fire on the mountain. But when Moses went up the mountain to receive the ten commandments, the people got restless. Moses was up there for 40 days and 40 nights. The people decided he had disappeared and wanted Aaron to make them a god like the other nations. So Aaron and Hur caved in and made a golden calf. God is incredibly angry with them and says to Moses that he is going to wipe these people out and start again with him. It says in Exodus 32 that Moses pleads with God and that God changed his mind. This is an outrageous statement. Can our prayers change God's mind? That puts the scholars into a right spin. There are many Scriptures that assert that God is not like humans and does not change his mind.

Later on, Moses intercedes again for the people and it says that he offered himself as a sacrifice for the people. God says that he was not the one who sinned. (Scholars say there is a pointer here to Jesus Christ. Moses was not able to be a sacrifice for the sin of the people because he was human and sinful himself. Jesus did not sin, and was perfect, and his life was offered for us. Now

it says he is in heaven praying for us.) Did Moses prayers really change God's mind? The answer seems to be no, at least not in the way a human change their mind. But it seems that in some mysterious way, God's will be worked out through out prayers. I can't explain it fully. You can tie yourself in knots trying to figure this out.

But it seems that God responds to our prayers. When we pray, the power of God is released into the realm of earth. Prayer is the connection between the physical realm and the spiritual realm. Prayer links us to the power of God. And Paul says this. You cannot imagine what God can do through the power of God at work in you. Ephesians 3:20

It is more than can dare hope for or ask for. The power of God in us at work in us can more that you can dare hope for or ask for. That is an incredible, mind blowing statement. What it is saying is quite simply **Prayer changes things.**

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SMALL GROUP REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

Get people to write it down on a piece of paper what they hope to get from the 36-day prayer adventure. Fold them over with names on the front and put the answers in a sealed envelope and keep for the last week. (the answers are confidential)

1. Ask those who want, to share what they have written.
2. What struck you from the first week of devotions? (depending when your group is, this might not be so relevant the first week) Talk about how you can make the devotions a priority.
3. Do the Biblical stories of prayer changing things seem at times somewhat unbelievable?
4. Share a story from your own life of when prayer has changed things.
5. Can you recall any times when prayer changed you, rather than the circumstances?
6. Discuss the James 5:13-18 passage, focusing on vs 17-18. What is the key point of this passage, and what is it saying to us?
7. Why do you think God works through our prayers, rather than just doing what He wants anyway?

Set up a fun challenge as a group for the two memory verses in week 1 of God's Plan for Prayer. (See Day 2 and 5)

Choose one of the prayer cards that come with your journal to help you pray for an area.