

DOES PRAYER CHANGE GOD'S MIND? (MATT 6:7-15)

Tonight, we have two great questions about prayer, and this passage will answer both...

- 1) *"If God has already made up His mind about what He's going to do, why do we pray? Does it change His mind?"*
- 2) *"When I pray, do I pray to 'God,' or to the 'Father,' or to 'Jesus?'" Or does it matter?"*

These are great questions! And Jesus answered them both when He taught His disciples (and us) how to pray...

Matthew 6:7–15 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. ¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Notice: Before Jesus tells us WHAT to pray and WHY to pray, He first tells us how NOT to pray. In **verse 7** He says, *"When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words."*

Let me be clear: Just because a prayer is long or has repeated phrases, that doesn't make it a bad prayer. Jesus is warning us against **"empty phrases"** – the mindless things we say without sincerely talking to God.

In fact, *this* prayer – The Lord’s Prayer – is often said by sports teams in a mindless, insincere way! They’re just repeating it by memory like it’s a good luck charm. It’s just empty phrases.

“All of us have one routine prayer in our system; and once we get rid of it, then we can really start to pray!” – Robert Cook ¹

You see, Jesus didn’t give this prayer to be memorized and recited like empty phrases. In fact, He gave this prayer *to keep us* from using vain repetitions. He didn’t say, “Pray these words.” He said in verse 9, “Pray *like* this.” In other words, “Use this prayer as a pattern.”²

But **verse 8** highlights our first question: *“Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*

So, if God already knows what we need, and He already knows what He’s going to do, why do we pray? In this passage, we see at least 8 reasons why we pray. You see, we’re not trying to change God’s mind but, as we pray, there ARE some really important things happening...

1. We pray because Jesus expects us to.

This doesn’t answer our questions yet, but it’s an important point that Jesus wants to make. In **verse 7** He says, *“When you pray”* (Not *if* you pray!) If you are a Christian, Jesus expects prayer to be woven into the normal rhythm of your day.

First of all, your day should begin with an intentional time of prayer (Jesus is praying from the perspective of the morning: “Give us this day... Lead us not into temptation,” etc).

Illustration: The earliest African Christians were very consistent in getting alone with God in prayer. Each one had separate spots in the thicket where they went to pray so they

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 25–26). Victor Books.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 26). Victor Books.

developed well-worn paths from their huts to their private spots in the thicket. So, when one of them stopped meeting with God, it was soon obvious to the others. They would then gently remind the person by saying, "The grass on your path is beginning to grow."³

Begin your day with an intentional time of prayer, but prayer is also an ongoing conversation with God throughout the day.

2. We pray because it reminds us daily that God is our Father.

In **verse 9**, Jesus tells us to pray to "*our Father who is in heaven*." You see, when we come to God – whether for salvation or for prayer – we're coming *to* the Father *through* Jesus.

This answers **question #2** – "*When I pray, do I pray to the Father or to Jesus? Or does it matter?*" Honestly, it doesn't matter because both the Father and Jesus are God. But technically, according to Jesus, you're praying *to* the Father *through* the Son. Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6) So, we pray to the Father, in Jesus's name.

But, when you pray to the Father, it's a daily reminder that He is more than a distant deity – He is your Father in heaven...

Romans 8:15 "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

3. We pray because it cultivates a deep respect for God.

In **verse 9b** Jesus says we should pray, "*Father, hallowed be*

³ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Your name. “The word **“hallowed”** means *to treat as holy and separate*.⁴ That’s why He is “our Father in heaven.” He is totally separate and different from us...

Isaiah 55:8–9 [God says] “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

When we pray, we’re not praying that God would *become* holy, we’re reminding ourselves that He *is* holy! His thoughts and ways are SO much higher and holier than ours, and our daily prayers should remind us of that.

4. We pray because it reminds us to keep our priorities straight.

Verse 10 says, “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” You see, prayer reminds us to...

- Glorify *God’s* name, not ours.
- Ask for *His* will to be accomplished, not ours.
- Pray for *His* Kingdom to come, not ours.

“Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting our will done in heaven, but for getting God’s will done on earth.” – Robert Law

So, when we pray, we shouldn’t try to change God’s mind. We’re praying that God’s will be done in our life as it is in heaven. That’s for His glory and for our benefit!

5. We pray because we have daily needs.

In **verse 11**, Jesus says we should ask the Father to “*give us this*

⁴ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge Commentary: An exposition of the scriptures* (Lk 11:2–4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

day our daily bread." Notice that it's our *daily* bread – not enough bread for the next day, or next week, or next month.



Why just enough for *this* day?

- Because you don't know that you'll be here tomorrow.
- Because you need to learn to trust God day-by-day. If He Supplied all your needs a month in advance, you wouldn't talk to Him for a whole month!

Proverbs 30:8 "Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me."

Jesus is telling us to pray for our *needs*, not our *greeds!*⁵

Illustration: Mana would spoil if they collected more than needed. Why? Because God is not a vending machine – He wants a sincere relationship between Him and His child!

BTW: Jesus tells us that we should treat our worries the same as our needs. Look down at verse 34...

Matthew 6:34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Pray about the needs and worries of THIS day. And leave the cares of tomorrow in God's hands!

6. We pray because we need to confess our sins regularly.

Verse 12a says, "*Forgive us our debts (sins).*" In other words, don't wait for Sunday or Wednesday to confess your sins at church. Confess them daily as you talk to God in prayer!

⁵ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 171). Zondervan Publishing House.

1 John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

7. We pray because we need to let go of past hurts.

In **verse 12b** it says, *"As we also have forgiven our debtors."* Then Jesus elaborates further in verses 14-15...

Matthew 6:14–15 *"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

Jesus isn't saying that we have to *earn* God's forgiveness by forgiving others. He's simply making this point...

- If your eyes have been opened to the ENORMOUS offense of your sin against God, then you can forgive someone else's sin against you.
- But if you have an exaggerated view of someone else's sin against you, then you'll minimize your sin against God.

In other words, we should say, "Father please forgive my sins against You even though I don't deserve it. And I'll forgive others who have sinned against me even when they don't deserve it."

BTW: That's why the prayer says "us" so often...

- Give *us* our daily bread.
- Forgive *us* our debts.
- Lead *us* not into temptation.

We're all in this together, but sometimes we offend each other. So, we have to forgive as we've been forgiven.

8. We pray because we need help with temptations.

Verse 13 says, *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”* Jesus is not implying that God actually leads people into temptation...

James 1:13–14 *“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”*

So, when we say, “lead us *not* into temptation,” we’re saying, “Father, please lead me *away* from the temptations that my sinful heart craves. But when I *am* faced with these temptations, please show me the “exit sign” so I can flee from it”...

1 Corinthians 10:13 *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*

So yes, God already knows what we need even before we tell Him. And yes, His will is already firmly established. However, as we pray daily...

- 1) God is being glorified as our Father and Provider.
- 2) We’re being changed, cleansed, and strengthened as we rely on Him daily.
- 3) Our relationship with Him is growing stronger each day.
- 4) And we’re playing a role in His perfect will being accomplished on the earth as it is in heaven!

Small Groups