

**“Prayer Changes Things”
(Ephesians 6:18-20)
Pastor Peter Yi
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Introduction:

Ephesians 6:18-20 TNIV

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

In the Bible, there is really not like an explicit theology on prayer. It's mostly implicit. There are brief teachings on prayer here and there, but there's no section that outlines prayer or teaches us how prayer works or the like. The closest thing would be the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. What you see are just people who pray. The Bible is like that with most of the stuff it teaches. The reason is because much of the bible is written in either a historical way, like the history of the people of Israel or the life of Jesus you find in the gospels, or it's written in the context of relationships, either a relationship between one of God's followers with another person, like in the New Testament letters or between one of God's followers and God himself. And in a relationship you don't just list the rules and guidelines of your relationship. There's some of that, but if was only that, it would make for a pretty lifeless and detached relationship. What you see in most relationships, including our relationship with God, are certain moments of stating the ground rules and revisiting, now and again, those same ground rules. But the majority of the relationship is lived out with the understanding of many assumptions. And one of those assumptions is prayer as our means of talking to God. What you see developing in the Bible is that God communicates and initiates a personal and intimate relationship with his people and he opens up a channel of response and that response is prayer.

Prayer is very mysterious and there are a lot of questions when it comes to prayer. Here are just a few that I've thought of.

How does prayer fit in to the predestination / free will tension? There are a whole ton of questions related to this issue. If God knows already what we're going to pray, do we need to even pray it? If God already knows what's going to happen in a particular situation, why do I need to pray? Also related to the above question...Does prayer really change God's mind? Can God's mind even be changed? Perhaps a better question is does prayer change the way God responds or acts in a certain situation?

Why are some prayers answered while others are not?

What makes one prayer more effective than another prayer?

How exactly am I supposed to pray?

This sermon cannot cover most of those topics, but we will begin on the basis of this biblical assumption. That prayer is the means by which we communicate to God.

Also, what you find in the scriptures is an assumption that prayer really works. It's implicit throughout scripture that prayer is the means by which we communicate to God and one of the

means by which things on earth are changed. The assumption that prayer works is based on the very nature of God. It's based on so many truths about God.

- That God is powerful, that he is able to do what we ask.
- That God is loving and good, and willing to do what we ask.
- That God has a plan for individuals, families, communities, cities, nations, and the world and for all of creation.
- That God includes us and invites us into the things that he is doing and is about to do.

Prayer also assumes certain things about ourselves.

- We are powerless. We need outside help.
- We are lacking in understanding and wisdom. We need the wisdom of God. Another thing prayer assumes is that God knows better. Or God knows best. If you knew best, then you don't need to pray. But we understand that God's way are perfect and without injustice. We believe that his will is a perfect will.
- And then prayer assumes an intimate relationship between us and God. Within this relationship we can be ourselves to express ourselves freely and honestly, with a wide range of topics and emotions. And because of this intimate loving relationship we understand that God always desires the best for us.
- God has made it that our prayers can make a difference.

And so when we pray, it's our way of responding to and living out these truths and assumptions about God and ourselves. Prayer also expresses our trust in God and our trust can increase through prayer. The very act of prayer implies trust and faith and belief. It understands our own inability and our impotence. So the more we pray to God, the more we will trust in Him. And the opposite is true as well. The more we don't pray the less we will trust in him. Because in our lack of prayer, we are trusting in ourselves.

In praying, we are believing that God's ways are perfect. And within those prayers we can expect four responses. This past Thursday I was giving the children's version of this message at Awana down at TCM, and I said there were three answers to prayer. Yes, No, Later or wait. But there is a fourth answer to prayer. Many of us know the first three answers. We know that when we pray and ask God for something, he can say, 'yeah, sure, no problemo'. And there are times when he says, 'no way, jose.' And there are times when God says, 'yes, but not right now.' But there are times when we ask and ask and ask, and God doesn't answer the question we asked. So I believe the bible teaches a fourth answer to prayer and that is the answer of silence. Often times this prayer is cried out in suffering, like with in the psalms or like the prayers of Job. And God for some reason, doesn't answer the question. But he does give a deeper understanding and revelation of himself and the scriptures seem to indicate that that's enough and I agree. So prayer increases our faith and in deepens our relationship with God.

And there's one more reason why we pray. And I want to spend the rest of our time talking about this final reason. By praying, we become directly involved in God's work in the world. The moment you begin praying, you've turned from a civilian into a soldier. In the workbook Experiencing God written by Henry Blackaby, two of the principles that this book teaches is that God is always at work in the world. He is never idle. He is always moving and shaking and doing something somewhere. And another principle this book teaches is that God invites us to join him where he is at work. God can do the work alone, but he chooses to invite us to participate and

join him in the work that he's engaged in. That's an incredible privilege that God would invite us. And one of the primary ways we respond to this invitation is through prayer. Prayer helps get God's work done. Or prayer plays a significant part in the work of God. Or God waits upon our prayers to work and act in this world. Whichever way we look at it, prayer is a central part of our involvement in God's work.

So what am I trying to say? What I'm trying to say is that Prayer really changes things. Forget about the predestination/freewill dilemma. That issue will never be solved to our satisfaction here on earth. What the bible teaches is just this. That in some mysterious yet powerful way, our prayers can and do change the outcome of things. The characters of the bible assume that this is true and repeatedly act upon this assumption.

Let's start with Jesus. Jesus says to us, to ask, seek, and knock, that is pray, and you will have your answer. When you ask you will receive. When you seek you will find. When you knock the door will be opened. This teaching implies something else too, doesn't it? What is that? That if you don't ask, seek, or knock, you don't get what you would have gotten had you prayed. Jesus would not have told us to do something if the outcome was the same whether you did that thing or not. Everything that Jesus asks or commands us to, not just prayer, is based on this. If you do this...there is a certain outcome. And if you don't do this there is a different outcome. And this is definitely true in prayer.

James piggy backs on this and says in 4:2, "You do not have because you do not ask God." Again, what is James assuming?---that if you had asked, you would have received.

Sometimes I wonder what could have been, what should have been, if I had prayed more. Friends, God doesn't want us to live in the regretful life of could have beens and should have beens. He wants us to live of it is yours, and the situation can change, when we pray. During this weekend's prayer retreat with Emerge we looked at Ephesians chapter one. And in this incredible chapter that details our identity in Christ, Paul says that as Christians, as God's adopted sons and daughters, we are entitled, privileged to not just a few, or to most, but to every spiritual blessing in Christ. But why is it that we don't experience them all? Because we don't reach out and take them and claim them. Prayer makes all the difference in the world, if we pray.

Let's also look at Exodus 32: 9-14, a story about Moses. In this story God has had it with the Israelite's rebellion and stubborn hearts and he enters into a dialogue with Moses.

⁹ *"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make **you** into a great nation."*

¹¹ *But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?"*

¹² *Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' "* ¹⁴ *Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.*

The final verse of this dialogue is incredible. It says the Lord relented. In some older translations it uses the word, the Lord repented. Not that God sinned and needed to confess and repent, but more the literal meaning of the word repent in 'changing your mind or changing your direction. After Moses prayed and interceded, God acted differently.

Again, there is a level of incomprehension and mystery in this. You know things like, does God have plan A's and plan B's? Does he have multiple endings like in the DVD release of some movies? I'm not exactly sure. But if we take the scriptures at face value, knowing what we know about God's providence and sovereignty and knowing what we know about human responsibility, it seems to indicate that prayer changes things, because prayer changes the way God acts on our behalf and in the world. I think it's just amazing that God has chosen to act this way.

One more scripture. 1 John 1:9 also implies that God acts differently when we pray. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

That "if" at the beginning of that prayer carries huge meaning. It states a condition. And throughout the scriptures, God deals and interacts with his people based on the response of his people. If you obey. If you repent. If you listen. Then I will bless you. Then I will forgive you. Then I will respond.

So in this popular verse the teaching is that if we confess, God will forgive and if we don't confess then God doesn't forgive. Who wouldn't take God up on such an incredible offer?

Intercessory Prayer

In the verses that we read from Ephesians, the Apostle Paul seems to base this teaching and request on a very comprehensive understanding of the biblical teaching on prayer. Listen to it once more.

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In writing to the Ephesian Christians, right after going through in detail the Christian's armour, Paul tells them to pray with all kinds of prayers and requests, meaning that we should pray for everything. There isn't anything that we shouldn't be praying about. Pray for everything.

He says to pray 'in the Spirit'

He says to remain alert. Like a soldier who has to keep watch while others are sleeping.

He says to pray continually for Christians.

He says pray for himself, for Paul, particular for the effective and fearless communication of the gospel.

What he's asking of the Ephesian Christians is to be his intercessors. He's saying, be my prayer warriors. He's saying, join me in God's battle. Help me in expanding God's rule on the earth. Friends, God is calling every single one of us to join in prayer. He wants us to be His movers and shakers. He wants us to pray for people who are not yet Christian. He wants us to pray for our global partners. He wants us to pray for our government leaders. He wants us to pray for the city we live in. He wants us to pray for all churches. He wants us to pray for each other, because prayer really does change things. Situations and outcomes will be different when we pray.

Conclusion:

My belief is that every Christian became one via prayers of others. Every one of us. If that is true, shouldn't we be in intercessory prayer for others in our family, church, city and world?

This sermon is for the purpose of inviting all of you to Saturday mornings. ... join us for a dedicated time of intercessory prayer.

