

“WHAT’S THE POINT?!”**Date:** January 30, 2022**Speaker:** Joe Borelis

We’re a few weeks into our series, “Homeward” which is a series on orienting our lives through the term we call “Prayer.”

- We’ve discussed the idea that the Bible offers and even commands prayer in *all* circumstances.
- Then we heard from Lindsey on *How* we pray and the model that is offered by Jesus
- Then we discussed the posture God has of *Mercy & Grace* for us when we pray.

Now there are a vast variety of people in this room who represent a spectrum of belief and skepticism on prayer listening today.

- Let me just stop and say no matter what your perspective on prayer is, you matter to us, you matter to God, and I am so glad you are here.
- But to the skeptics in this room, I believe a question that arises out of what we discussed in this series is the what or even how does my prayer change anything?
- The logic goes something like this: God is all-knowing. God is all-powerful. God is sovereign (meaning God is in absolute control and rule of the universe): All this means that God orders and is aware of absolutely everything that has happened or will happen.

So, if God is going to do whatever He desires and chooses no matter what, then what is the point of prayer? If all of this is true, then does my prayer really change anything?

- This is a really messy, complex, and frustrating question, and one that I am by no means claiming to be an expert on. This message today will be messy as we dive into the tension, but my hope is not that this infinite question will be comfortably answered but rather that we’re comforted by God Himself.
- This question first began to stir in me my freshman year of college... Have any of you ever had a Costco sheet cake?
- Now what I began to wonder was, had I not prayed... would 5 days of cake still have been there? Or was it that I prayed that made it change?

What I do know is that Bible asks us to ask in prayer for things and see how it affects at situation.

- Such as the story of Exodus 32... Moses begs God not to destroy the Israelites and he cries out...

(Vs) Exodus 32:14: 14 (ESV) – And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

- Or the story of Jonah. The people of Nineveh pray that God would spare them from potential destruction... And in...

(Vs) Jonah 3:10 (ESV) – When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

- Or King Hezekiah in Judah... We read after his prayer...

(Vs) 2nd Kings 20:5 – “Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, and I will add fifteen years to your life.

All of these passages (and dozens of others) seem to indicate that our prayers change the things that God does. But... what about the passages that heighten God’s sovereignty?

(Vs) Numbers 23:19 (ESV) – “19 God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”

(Vs) Isaiah 14:24 (ESV) – “24 The LORD of hosts has sworn: ‘As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.’”

(Vs) Isaiah 46:9-10 – “9 remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”

- So what is it? Setting aside the fact that each of these verses have their own authorial voices with their own intent and context for now, all these verses seem to highlight both realities and hold them in tension.
- Now you’re maybe beginning to understand the complexity of this. But what happens if we begin with the premise that prayer changes something, but it may not be God?
- That’s where we get a passage that God Himself PRAYS, knowing HIS request won’t change the outcome, but HE ASKS anyway. To show you what I mean, if you have your Bible, turn to Matthew 26 beginning in verse 36.

(Vs) Matthew 26:36 (ESV) – Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.”

- Gethsemane is a garden. The name means Oil Press, and it is a little over a half a mile from the temple mount. What Jesus is doing seems to be modeling something for His disciples. We continue...

(Vs) Matthew 26:37 (ESV) – 37 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”

- Luke will tell us that Jesus even sweats blood, which is a physiological condition that happens to humans under intense stress and trauma. But what is interesting is Jesus is asking His disciples to “WATCH with HIM.” We continue...

(Vs) Matthew 26:39 (ESV) – And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

- Now what cup is Jesus talking about? In the Passover meal or Seder meal according to our Jewish friends, there’s traditionally...The cup also seems to represent God’s wrath according to the prophets (Isaiah 51). But has the absurdity of this set in for you? Jesus His whole life has talked about His time that is coming (that time being Him suffering...) He has known from the beginning what is going to happen. He knows what God’s will is because HE IS GOD.

SO THERE SEEMS TO BE SOMETHING ABOUT PRAYER AND ASKING FOR THINGS FROM GOD EVEN IF IT DOESN’T CHANGE A THING!

(Vs) Matthew 26:40-42 (ESV) – 40 And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 42 Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”

- Why would Jesus PRAY twice KNOWING it will not change a thing? The Father is going to do the same thing regardless of this prayer. So, there’s a greater purpose to this prayer so much so that Jesus even prays twice... BUT, notice how the prayer changes. His heart is beginning to align with the Father’s!

(Vs) Matthew 26:43-44 (ESV) – 43 And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So, leaving them again, He went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.

- Jesus prays three times, all the while knowing what is going to happen, but this time, He even lets them sleep. There’s something happening in this prayer that is giving Jesus resolution!

(Vs) Matthew 26:45 (ESV) – 45 Then He came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”

- Jesus now is resolutely ready to endure the suffering to PARTICIPATE in what the Father is doing. Jesus has actually modeled for us what our prayer changes.

- That is exactly what happens when we pray and ask. Jesus doesn't change the will of the Father with this request. JESUS is God and He still asks knowing what the plan is all along. But by simply asking, Jesus is participating in what the Father is doing, and through the prayer itself, His heart is being changed, and the Father's heart is being moved.

These are the tensions we must hold when we discuss prayer:

- Prayer Moves God's Heart & Prayer Changes Us
- Prayer is an invitation to PARTICIPATE in what God is ALREADY doing.
- CS Lewis says on trying to unpack and understand this question,

"For up till now we have been tackling the whole question in the wrong way and on the wrong level. The very question "Does prayer work?" puts us in the wrong frame of mind from the outset... Petitionary prayer is, nonetheless, both allowed and commanded to us: "Give us our daily bread." And no doubt it raises a theoretical problem. Can we believe that God ever really modifies His action in response to the suggestions of men? For infinite wisdom does not need telling what is best, and infinite goodness needs no urging to do it. But neither does God need any of those things that are done by finite agents, whether living or inanimate. He could, if He chose, repair our bodies miraculously without food; or give us food without the aid of farmers, bakers, and butchers; or knowledge without the aid of learned men; or convert the heathen without missionaries. Instead, He allows soils and weather and animals and the muscles, minds, and wills of men to co-operate in the execution of His will. "God," said Pascal, "instituted prayer in order to lend to His creatures the dignity of causality." But not only prayer; whenever we act at all He lends us that dignity. It is not really stranger, nor less strange, that my prayers should affect the course of events than that my other actions should do so. They have not advised or changed God's mind—that is, His over--all purpose. But that purpose will be realized in different ways according to the actions, including the prayers, of His creatures. For He seems to do nothing of Himself which He can possibly delegate to His creatures. He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what He could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye. He allows us to neglect what He would have us do, or to fail. Perhaps we do not fully realize the problem, so to call it, of enabling finite free wills to co--exist with Omnipotence. It seems to involve at every moment almost a sort of divine abdication..."

"We are not mere recipients or spectators. We are either privileged to share in the game or compelled to collaborate in the work."

- "...Is this amazing process simply Creation going on before our eyes? This is how (no light matter) God makes something—indeed, makes gods—out of nothing." – C.S. Lewis
- The point is less that our prayers change God's mind, but rather that through asking, our prayers change us! And in this, the God of the whole universe invites us into what He is doing. He even uses US! In our prayers, God puts things on our hearts to begin the process of shaping us, inviting us, and granting us the opportunity to PARTICIPATE in what He is doing.
- When we pray it changes things, because in it we connect and are brought into what God is doing.

- To show you what I mean, I want to show you a video... This video illustrates what happens when this conversation leads to this very relationship of participation.
- Many of you may know this song, it's titled, "How He Loves," which was originally written by John Mark McMillan. It may seem like a nice song about love, but it was born out of a conversation with God that didn't change God's plans, but changed John's heart.
- So we're going to sing this song together, I hope this becomes the anthem for you that God is inviting you into. I hope it invites you to orient your life into this conversation that moves the very heart of God toward you, and changes and incites you to ask ask ask, and begin to participate.

How He Loves

John Mark McMillan

He is jealous for me
 Loves like a hurricane, I am a tree
 Bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy
 When all of a sudden I am unaware of these afflictions eclipsed by glory
 And I realize just how beautiful You are
 And how great Your affections are for me
 And oh, how He loves us, oh
 Oh, how He loves us
 How He loves us so
 He is jealous for me
 Loves like a hurricane, I am a tree
 Bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy
 When all of a sudden I am unaware of these afflictions eclipsed by glory
 And I realize just how beautiful You are
 And how great Your affections are for me
 Yeah, He loves us
 Oh, how He loves us
 Oh, how He loves us
 Oh, how He loves
 And we are His portion and He is our prize
 Drawn to redemption by the grace in His eyes
 If grace is an ocean, we're all sinking
 So Heaven meets earth like an unforeseen kiss
 And my heart turns violently inside of my chest
 I don't have time to maintain these regrets
 When I think about the way
 He loves us
 Oh, how He loves us
 Oh, how He loves us
 Oh, how He loves