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Prayer Changes Things

—*What, how much, and in what manner?*

You will understand prayer much better, if you will consider three questions that arise from the well known saying, "Prayer changes things."

The three questions are valid because prayer does change things. If prayer changes nothing, why pray "in everything"? (Philippians 4:6). God promises that people who pray are far better off than people who don't; things do change for the better through prayer (James 4:2-3 and Matthew 7:7-11). Now for the three questions...

1 *What Things Does Prayer Change?*

Prayer changes "all things". If we are to "pray in everything" (Philippians 4:6) then everything must be capable of being changed by prayer. Prayer helps make "all things" work together for good (Romans 8:26-28).

But "all things" does not mean absolutely everything in the universe but rather "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2Peter 1:3-4,11). The "life" referred to is eternal life. Prayer does not change things which have no connection with the salvation of souls.

However this doesn't mean that prayer changes only spiritual things. Prayer will certainly change material things when that change has a spiritual benefit. On the other hand, God is not Santa Claus.

Prayer is not for satisfying material lusts and whims, although it is certainly important that we pray for our material needs. In one breath Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses..." The main purpose of prayer, however, is to help make things "turn out for salvation" (Philippians 1:19).

2 *How Much Does Prayer Change Things?*

Prayer avails "much" (James 5:16)

But how much is "much"? If you think, "Not very much", you are mistaken. "Much" is "more than we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). Prayer changes things more than we imagine or comprehend. Prayer changes things for spiritual and eternal purposes which are wonderfully high.

We cannot measure or perceive the changes which prayer makes, so in one sense we cannot answer the question "How much?"

But we do know this: Prayer changes things as much as is necessary to ensure the salvation of our souls. Thus prayer changes things very much indeed!

3 | *In What Manner Does Prayer Change Things?*

Sometimes in a miraculous manner —for example when Peter raised Tabitha from death (Acts 9:40).

Sometimes in an extraordinary manner —for example the case of Elijah and the drought (James 5:17-18).

But mostly in an ordinary manner —for example when Paul was met by his friends (Acts 28:15-16).

We usually experience the changes prayer makes at an ordinary level. If miracles and extraordinary events were commonplace, they would not be extraordinary, would they? God is able to influence the ordinary course of events so that our real needs are satisfied. This does not diminish the power of prayer or the providence of God. In a way, it makes it all the more wonderful and abundant.

Questions for Discussion and Review

1. Does God do more for those who ask of him than he does for those who don't?
2. What things should we pray about? What about material/physical things?
3. To what extent, and to what end, does prayer change things today?
4. Why is it foolish to think of every answer to prayer as extraordinary or miraculous?
5. God answering prayer is by definition “supernatural”. Isn't it therefore “miraculous”?
6. Why is the operation of providence easily mistaken for co-incidence or mere good fortune?
7. When prayer changes things in the ordinary course of events, it does not change things very much. True or false?
8. Can we usually and confidently point to something and say "God changed that!" —and is it necessary or fruitful for us to do so?
9. The story of Esther (in the Old Testament) certainly demonstrates providence. How many miracles does that story record?

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