



## Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

“Prayer” Series Lesson 2 – February 7, 2016

Does Prayer Change God’s Actions?

### I. Lesson Starter Questions:

How exactly does prayer work? Can prayer change God’s mind or the way He acts? If our prayers change God’s mind or previously planned actions, how does that relate to God’s Sovereignty and ordained plan?

You will remember we are breaking down our series on Prayer as follows:

1. Why Does God want us to Pray?
2. The Effectiveness of Prayer
  - a. **Does Prayer Change the Way God Acts?**
  - b. Effective Prayer made possible through Jesus
  - c. Who are we supposed to pray too?
  - d. Role of Holy Spirit
3. Important Considerations for Effective Prayer
  - a. Pray “According to God’s Will”
  - b. Praying with Faith and Obedience
  - c. Forgiveness and Humility
  - d. Praying Continually and Earnestly
  - e. Waiting on the Lord, What about Unanswered Prayer?
4. Praise and Thanksgiving

### II. Does Prayer Change the Way God Acts?:

#### James 4:2-3

**2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

- Our prayers are unfortunately a long list of our personal desires and wants, not driven by “God’s Will” or prayed in “Jesus Name”
- We should approach our prayers first from a perspective of finding God’s Will for our decisions, directions in life and actions; aligning our life with Him
- Be careful of turning our prayer life into an action trying to convince God of what our desires are and not how we fit into His overall plan

#### Luke 11:9-10

**9 “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.**

- Implication is that our failure to ask deprives us of what otherwise God would provide
- When our prayers are not answered, it is solely due to wrong motives?
- Jesus makes a clear connection between seeking things from God and receiving them
- When we ask with the right motive, God responds

#### Exodus 32:9-12

**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.*

- God initially declares that He will destroy the people due to their sin
- Moses’ prayers directly changes God plan and saves the people from destruction
- If and when God’s people pray with humility and repentance, then God will hear from heaven
- KJV says in verse 14 “And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people”; Correlate this t a couple of key points:
  - “Evil” here would be the same definition we studied in our previous series about “Origin of Sin”, again not a moral event, but a calamity or something bad against a sinful people
  - Using the word repented, it is an obvious reference to a change and turning away; scripture seems to affirm that God changed course, changed His mind and direction from the prayer
  - NIV uses the translation “relented”, but again that would directly imply a changing from a previous decision to follow the course that Moses had prayed about

#### Acts 12:5-11

*5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. 6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists. 8 Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. 9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. 11 Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”*

- Most likely this was not a situation whereby you could say that prayer changed God’s mind, but is a direct example of prayer working through God’s plan to affect direct actions and impacts on peoples life.
- Did the church’s prayers change God’s mind about the forward plans for Peter? Or where the Church’s prayers influenced by the Holy Spirit to align with God’s plan all along? Prayers by the church allowed them to sew what God’s plan was for Peter all along?
- Payers affect actual events and peoples lives

#### Gen 18:22-33

*22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. 23 Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all*

*the earth do right?" 26 The Lord said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." 27 Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, 28 what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it." 29 Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it." 30 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it." 32 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." 33 When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.*

- God allows Abraham to inquire about His ways and plans
  - We learn that a small number of innocent men is more important in God's sight than a majority of sinners and is sufficient to stem the judgement at that time
- Is Abraham negotiating with God and trying to change His mind?
- Or was this a beautiful situation whereby God was allowing Abraham to slowly inquire and pray to understand the true heart of God?
- While some scripture does seem to show that God changed from prayer, there are also more examples like this whereby God seems to interact and use prayer with His people to influence, grow and broaden our understanding of His ways and plan

#### Amos 7:1-6

*1 This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king's share had been harvested and just as the late crops were coming up. 2 When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, "Sovereign Lord, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" 3 So the Lord relented. "This will not happen," the Lord said. 4 This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: The Sovereign Lord was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land. 5 Then I cried out, "Sovereign Lord, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" 6 So the Lord relented.*

- God spared Israel at that time due to the prayer of one man; ultimate judgement was sealed though from their sins and transgressions
- Amos was an intercessor on behalf of his people
- Same as in Exodus 32, this says that God "relented" in the NIV translation and "repented" in the KJV; See explanation above on meaning

### III. **Group Questions:**

1. Are we to assume that all unanswered prayer is because of "our" wrong motive or will? Do unanswered prayers imply that they are not "things of God" as per Luke 11:9-11?
2. Do you think that God changed His mind in Exodus 32:9-11? Or did he use the process to guide Moses to the place He intended all along as seems to be the case in Genesis 18? Provide evidence.
3. Does Exodus 32:9-11 imply an interactive process of future events that could be in God's Will and changed with prayer? How can God have a plan from the beginning of time, yet change it through prayer?
4. How can we understand our prayers made at a particular point in time "changing Gods plan" that was made before the beginning of time in His Sovereignty?
5. Do you think that Amos 7 is more like Exodus 32 or Genesis 18 in "changing God's mind? What proof do we have from the scriptures?
6. If we pray little, could it be a result of us not really believing that prayer accomplishes much at all?