

“Does Prayer Change the Mind of God?”

// Exodus 32:11–14 // Ask 3

January Sanctity of Life Prayer Time

Welcome to all Summit campuses.

Before we get going this weekend, we’re stopping a couple times this month to pray for the **oppressed and underprivileged** in our society, to **mourn the loss of the sanctity of life** in our eyes, to **confess our sin—both of ourselves and our community** in this regard, and to ask God to extend protection to marginalized groups.

Today is National Sanctity of Life Sunday, and we want to spend just a few minutes mourning and praying for healing from the tragedy of elective abortion in our society.

Psalm 139:13, For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

- Psalm 139 tells us in no uncertain terms that the baby is a human being made in the image of God, a soul that God knows and has a plan for.

Works Consulted:

“Prayer, Unanswered Prayers,” John Mark Comer

“Does God Change His Mind?” David Platt

Bible Doctrine, Wayne Grudem

Evangelical Theology, A. A. Hodge

- One of the easiest ways for a society to justify the worst sins is to downplay the humanity of its victims.
- Both science and the Bible agree that the unborn baby is a human, a person, a child.
- I know that **bothers some of you** to talk about this—but like I said, this is not a **political issue it is a biblical one**.
- **3,000** babies, made in the image of God with human souls are aborted every single day in our country; almost 28 per day here in the Triangle. And for each of these there is often a grieving mother and sometimes a father on the other side crying out for healing.
- **We’re not here to cast stones** or judge
- **Jesus came to seek and save the lost**, not to condemn the world but to save it
- **That’s what we want to be, too, so we want to pray**

Requests

- ...that God would give us his heart for the abused, oppressed, the poor, and the underprivileged, and that help us develop ministries that preserve the sanctity of life from the womb to the tomb
 - I mean things like fostering, orphan care, working with the homeless, the immigrant and the prisoner
- ...that God help those in our midst whose stories include abortion understand and embrace God’s offer of redemption
 - You may have lost a child due to abortion. Your pain is real, and we recognize the challenges of this healing process. We want you to know that we (The Summit Church) want to be a place of acceptance, hope, and healing for you. God forgives you. **He loves you, and we love you**. You do not have to carry guilt and shame any longer, or face the journey of healing alone.

- We have **many stories at our church** of those who have experienced redemption in this area: **on my blog**
- Me: For God to forgive us as a society and change our hearts on this matter.
- Resources up on blog

One more thing before we get going: On your way in, you received a spiffy little piece called our 'Annual Report.' This is one of the ways we try to communicate to you all of the ways God is at work through the Summit.

- **I want you to take some time to read through this—as always, preferably not during the message, but later—and it will be worth your time to sit down and look over it, too.**
- **I'm not going to point out every number in there, but just a teaser:** I read in here that in the past year, our women's prison campus has seen **227 professions of faith since it began. 227!** Are you kidding me? Is that not incredible?
- **Ladies, we love you, your faith inspires us**

Everything you'll read about in this [Annual Report](#) is the result of two things: (1) the power of the Holy Spirit and (2) your generosity through Multiply.

- **In fact, they told me this week that over the course of Multiply, we ended up receiving over \$54.1M in 2 years.**
- **I am **blown away** by the way you continue to go 'all-in' for God's mission.**
- **Can we thank God for the way he continues to move? One of the reasons we want to be a house of prayer is that we are amazed at the great things we have seen God do, and we know that past grace is evidence of his willingness to give us future grace and we don't want to leave any of it on the table! Amen?**

Introduction

So, to that end, Exodus 32, if you have your Bible.

It might be just me, but it seems to me that you're a little more enthusiastic in worship than usual, and I'm pretty sure it has something to do with being excited to be out of the house after being couped up for four days. I suspect for some of you parents what I'm picking up is 10% excitement to worship, and 90% excitement just to not be watching Peppa Pig or listening to the soundtrack from the Greatest Showman for the 1,000th time. Amen? Or least that's what I'm excited about.

Either way, glad you are here.

We're in our 3rd week of a series on prayer called, ASK—the title comes from...

Today I want us to consider a mystery in prayer, one that troubles some of you and keeps you from praying. Sometimes, when I am bored, I like to ponder life's greatest mysteries, things that will blow your mind if you think about them too much. Like,

- If you spell out the word "bed," it looks like a bed. Was that intentional? Mind blown. **EMOJI**
- Or, when I learned that **Yoda and Miss Piggy** were voiced by the same guy. Again, mind blown. That messed my whole world up when I found that out.
- Or the thought I had the other day that **when I am in a restaurant** waiting on my waiter to bring me the food, I am the real waiter. **EMOJI**
- Or in middle school when someone pointed out that if a ghost was trying to kill me, he's was really just trying to make me his best friend.
- **Or how about this one:** Reading is essentially staring at dead trees and hallucinating. Mm-hmm. Everything is coming unraveled for you now, isn't it?
 - **Let me tell you something I do now:** Whenever I watch TV now I turn on the subtitles. So when people ask me what I did last night, I say, "Oh, I read for a couple of hours..."

- Or, last one: There are no children left on earth who were born in the 20th century. Everyone born in the 20th century is now officially an adult. Isn't that depressing?

Well, today's subject is one of those things that can blow your mind if you think about it too much. It's the question of what role our prayers have in changing God's plans—in other words, do our prayers convince God to do something he wasn't otherwise planning to do.

Because, as I'll show you in a minute, **there are Scriptures that indicate that God's purposes are eternal** and he knows the end from the beginning, nothing ever surprises him and his plans are unchangeable and unstoppable.

Does that therefore mean that prayer is really more for us, a way of changing us?

- **You've seen the plaque...** Illus. from *Shadowlands*
- *Is that it, or do our prayers actually change the future?*

So, what I want to do in our 3rd week of our series on prayer is explore a story that answers that question, or at least shows you how to think about it. **It's an amazing story**, though I warn you that it will hurt your mind a little when you try to understand all that is going on.

(EXODUS 32 if you have your Bible).

After we walk through this story, I then want to use the truth we find there to take a slight right turn and answer another question we deal with: **What about unanswered prayer?**

Now, you may say, "We talked about that on the 1st week and you told us that *Jesus answer to that was to pray persistently and trustingly.*" Yes, **but even with that answer, many of us still struggle** with why some prayers never seem to get answered—they made so much sense and you couldn't understand why a loving God wouldn't do that.

For example,

- Maybe you prayed for someone to be healed and they died. And you think it doesn't make much sense to keep praying persistently for that.
- Or, maybe you prayed for someone to come to faith and as far as you know they never accepted Christ before they died.
- Or, maybe you are 60 and you prayed to get married, persistently, but even if you do get married now it's not like you can go back and live the last 40 years of your life again.
- Or, **how about this one:** Maybe you have some inward struggle or addiction and you've asked God to deliver you from it—but he hasn't, and you can't figure out why!
 - **For example, a friend of mine says that whenever you see a teen in church with a same-sex attraction** the first thing you are dealing with is an unanswered prayer, because most teens who have this struggle have prayed for God to take it away. And just as troubling for them as the attraction is why God hasn't taken it away.
 - **In some of Bart Ehrman's works (a famous skeptic at UNC)** he talks about when he believed in God in college he prayed that God would take away his doubts and he couldn't figure out if God was real **why God didn't** and that **made him conclude** that God was not there after all.

For many, **this issue of seemingly unanswered prayer** is why you walked away from church altogether; for others of you, it's at least dampened your confidence and enthusiasm for prayer.

What we are going to get into today is going to give you, I believe, a framework for approaching that. (I promised you on week 1 I was going to come back to this, so I am.)

But 1st, let's get to the story.

Ex 32:11–14—Does God Change His Mind?

Context: In Exodus 32 Moses is up Mt. Sinai with God. He's gone up there alone to receive the 10 commandments. (God had actually invited all of Israel up into the mountain to meet with him, but the people were scared of God and didn't trust him, so they told Moses to go up alone—Ex. 3:12)

Well, Moses was gone a little longer than expected, and so everybody freaked out, thinking God and Moses had abandoned them.

Now, mind you, this was a totally insane freak-out. Why would they think God had brought them all the way to this mountain just to forget about them?

I mean, he had just delivered them miraculously from the most powerful empire in the world through 10 supernatural plagues; and as a little finishing touch he moved all these rich upper-class Egyptians to take off their jewelry and give it to the Israelites as a going-away present. So Israel left with bling. Then God led Israel a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night; then he split the Red Sea in half so they could walk through it on dry ground and then destroyed Egypt's army in one fell swoop when they tried to follow Israel. Then God miraculously supplied Israel in the desert with food and meat every day. And just for an extra touch of awesomeness, **he kept their shoes** from showing any signs of wear during their several-mile journey to Sinai.

And now they think God has abandoned them. Can't you see God shaking his head saying, "You think that after all that, this is when I leave you?"

We do the same thing, of course. So, Israel, blind, ungrateful and unbelieving, takes off all the jewelry that God had moved the

Egyptians to give them, melts it down and makes a gold statue to worship out of it; get drunk, and had an **all-night orgy around it**.

It's **Franklin St. or Hillsborough St.**, right here in Exodus 32.

[7] And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for *your people*, (Watch this—whose people? Since when did they become Moses's people? This is like one parent saying to the other, "Do you know what "your" son did?" when they are in trouble. But there's more) whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt (Who brought them up? Moses brought them up from the land of Egypt? Sure seemed like God to me), have corrupted themselves... [10] Let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, and I will make of you a great nation."

[11] But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your (Moses says, "God, they are *YOUR* people") people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? (is he rebuking God? This is twice he has corrected God in one sentence!) [12] Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains...? Turn from your burning anger and relent (many translations say 'repent,' it just means, "changed his mind") from this disaster against your people. [13] Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, (Remember—is he implying God forgot what he said?) to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" ('You said all this God!')

And then, the most amazing verse: [14] And the LORD relented (again: repented, changed his mind) from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. (Exodus 32:11-14)

What is going on here? Moses's prayer convinces God to change his mind by reminding God of something he had said that he forgot about? Was God just having an off day? Had he forgotten to do his quiet time that morning? Did Moses really change his mind?

That's what it says? And here's what's even more confusing. **Moses, the same author who recorded this story**, says clearly in **Numbers 23:19**: "God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind."

Exodus 32, written by Moses, says, "God changed his mind." Numbers 23, also written by Moses, says, "God is not a man that he should change his mind."

What do you do with this?

Here are three truths to hold in tension:

Engineers and accountants will struggle with this, but God is too big to contain in neat, tidy formulas. *We should approach these things not as contradictions to be resolved, but truths to be held in tension...*

1. God's purposes are unchanging¹

Verses like **Numbers 23:19** are clear. God is not a man; he never learns anything new, he doesn't wise up with experience or change his mind.

Isaiah concurs: ***"For I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'**" Isaiah 46:9–10

And Paul: **"In him we have... been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."** Eph 1:11

Moses, Isaiah and Paul are your 3 most significant Bible writers (in terms of content) and they all say the same thing. So, it seems clear that God's purposes are unchanging, but...

2. God's plans are unfolding

The story says that God changed his course of action based on Moses's prayer. And here's the irony of the story:

- **God was the one who tells Moses** to go down and see the situation: [7] **And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people... have corrupted themselves..."**
- **Moses didn't know about it. God showed this to him.**
- Furthermore, **the very thing that Moses uses** to "change God's mind" is God's own promise. God, of course, hadn't forgotten it.

When you put all this together, what you see is that God had put **Moses** into a situation so that he would see the problem, remember God's promises, and petition God to change his course of action.

- **God wants Moses to ask this**, so he sovereignly puts him in a situation where he will.

3. Our prayers are instrumental

The text is clear: **Without this prayer, God would have destroyed Israel.** The prayer was instrumental in getting God to change his course of action.

¹ I owe the wording of these 1st two points to David Platt, "Does God Change his Mind?," sermon on Exodus 32, March 2, 2008: <http://www.radical.net/sermons/sermons/does-god-change-his-mind>

Now, I know for many of you are asking, “Well, what if Moses had refused to pray? Would that mean that they would not have been saved, and would that mean that it was not God’s will to save them after all?”

- And what does that mean if I fail to pray for something God wants me to pray for?
- Does that mean that the thing that I didn’t pray about wasn’t God’s will after all?
- Or would God have just gotten someone else to pray it?”

And your mind feels like it is going to explode, even more than when I showed you the word 'bed' up here earlier.

I’ve told you before that **these are the wrong questions** to ask about these situations. **Scripture never teaches us to think** about the will of God that way.

One of the best illustrations of that is the statement I have frequently given to you (for those of you who have seen this before I apologize, but it’s just a helpful way of thinking about this)

19th century Princeton theologian A.A. Hodge said it this way:

“Does God know the day you’ll die? Yes. Has he appointed that day? Yes. Can you do anything to change that day? No. Then why do you eat? To live. What happens if you don’t eat? You die. Then if you don’t eat, and die, then would that be the day that God had appointed for you to die?”

(New slide) ...Quit asking stupid questions and just eat. Eating is the pre-ordained way God has appointed for living.”² Quit asking stupid questions and just PRAY.

*Moses doesn’t dwell on the **unchangeable purposes of God** as much he does the **unchanging promises of God** and how they apply to the situation.

What you are supposed to take away from this is that God has sovereignly placed you in certain situations precisely for the express purpose of praying his promises and “changing his plans,” so to speak, to employ divine power to create a different destiny than the one everyone is heading to.

(Let that sink in: God sovereignly puts his people in situations so that we can claim his promises and change his mind, so to speak.)

- **Your situation—the problems** you are observing and the divinely appointed opportunities in them—are divinely appointed invitations to call God’s promises into effect.
- Like Moses, **he has “sent you down”** into a family; a group of friends; a neighborhood. Some of you have looked around at your family and thought, “Why did God make me part of this family?” He put you there for you to *pray*.
- *The system is rigged.* You are placed where he wants you to be so you can obey and pray for the things he wants to do; **to perceive the problem** and **believe the promise** and **release his power** into the situation.

Sometimes people talk about the sovereignty of God as if it keeps them from action: “Well, if God is sovereign, then it doesn’t matter what I do!” Scripture actually points you to exactly the opposite place: Realizing God sovereignly puts you in places as the instrument of his power is what gives you the motivation to pray:

- Once, I sat next to a lady on a plane and was settling in for an 8 hr plane ride to Taipei to go visit a couple of our missionaries. I noticed this lady was reading a book by David Jeremiah, a popular radio preacher. **I asked her why she was going to Taipei.** She said,

² Adapted from Charles Ryrie, who stole it from A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology* (1890), 92–93.

“I’m retired, and I’m on a search to find myself... to find God, really.” I said, ‘Does he live in Taipei?’ She laughed and said, “No. I don’t think so. But I’m really attracted to the way of life over there. **But, to be honest, I’ve been there for about a half a year and now I’m more confused than ever.** I returned home because my sister is really sick and I’m thinking about her death and mine and I just don’t know where to turn.”

I said, “**Well, what’s with the David Jeremiah book?**” She said, “I don’t know. I haven’t started reading it yet. I heard him on the radio a couple of weeks ago and he sounded like he knew God. So, I’ve been praying that whatever God is out there will reveal himself to me.” I said, “Ma’am, I don’t mean to be presumptuous but I think God is answering your prayer.” I talked to her for the next 2 hours about Jesus, and at one point I said, “How many people do you think are on this plane?” She said, “about 200.” And of all those people, you sat next to me.” And somewhere over the Pacific she bowed her head and accepted Christ.

- **You say, “Well,** that stuff never happens to me. It only happens to you because you’re a pastor. No, being a pastor is a liability is conversations like those. It happens because **I’ve learned to live with the awareness** that God has sovereignly placed me in situations where he wants to use me and I open my mouth in faith **expecting to discover somewhere God is already working.**
 - Do you know what kind of **confidence** that gives me?
- **The reason it doesn’t happen to you** is you don’t live with that awareness and don’t **open your mouth in expectation.**
- *I’ve learned to live with the awareness that God is always at work around me and he never accidentally puts me anywhere.*
- (It doesn’t happen every time I do it—but it does a lot of times!)

God sovereignly puts us in situations to pray for people and see his kingdom come and his will be done! My friend David Platt, reflecting on this passage, says it this way: *“When we pray we take our God-given place and use our God-ordained privilege to participate with him in the accomplishment of his purposes on the planet.”*

Let me take this a step farther and share with you an amazing, life-changing truth that God has used to revolutionize my prayer life recently: One of the primary reasons God saved you was to pray for people:

- As I was preparing myself for this YOP, I went back through one of my favorite devotional books: *Gospel Primer*. I read something in it that totally re-invigorated my prayer life: **When God chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world, he did not merely choose me to be "holy and blameless"; he chose me also to be "before him in love..."** (a reference to Ephesians 1, which I had memorized but missed this.) **As a chosen one of God, I was saved to pray; and whenever I come into God's presence to behold him, worship him, or make request of him, I am arriving at the pinnacle of God's saving purposes for me.**

How can I not feel the infinite sincerity of these invitations, especially when considering the painful lengths that God endured so that I might enter his presence in prayer?³

Believer, you are chosen to pray. And part of that means that you have been sovereignly placed to certain situations where you can perceive what God wants and say to God, “Let your kingdom come in this situation, let your will be done in this moment.”

In light of that, I told you two things last week that you need to be absolutely full of if you are going to be an effective pray-er: A) *the*

³ Eph 1:4; *Gospel Primer*, 35–36

Word and B) the Spirit. Because those are the two means God has given to you to perceive the kingdom of God and the will of God.

- **The word:** This is not just a textbook to be learned, but a book of promises to be claimed! To be put into effect. Like Moses, we are supposed to say, **“God, remember you said...”** There are some 3000 verses in this book to be prayed back to God in various situations. I don’t want to miss a single one of them! Read through this book on your knees. **Don’t just read your way through Scripture, pray your way through it.**
 - H - ighlight
 - E - xplain
 - A - pply
 - R - espond
- **The second thing** you ought to be full of is **the Spirit of God:** trust in him to guide you as you pray, to show you where and how to extend God’s kingdom. Last week I called it “listening prayer.” Prayer is **not just talking;** it is listening.
- Be full of the word and the Spirit, and you’ll be closer to what Moses experiences here. Because, remember: **The prayers heard by heaven are the ones that start in heaven.**

On that mountain Moses perceived what heaven wanted to do and he prayed it into effect.

So now, **let’s use that understanding of prayer** to shape our answer to this question:

What if I am praying persistently and still not getting an answer?⁴

Here are a few things:

⁴ For more on this, see John Mark Comer, “Prayer: Unanswered Prayer,” from *Practicing the Way* series, preached at Bridgetown Church on May 28, 2017. Comer references *God on Mute* by Pete Greig frequently in this message. See also <http://gospelrelevance.com/2018/01/15/why-god-isnt-answering-your-prayers/>

Maybe...

1. You are not right with God

- **I hate to start negative, but the promises that God extends about prayer apply only to those walking in fellowship with him.**
- *You have to be ‘in the mountain’ with him, so to speak*
- **Nowhere in Scripture does God promise to hear the prayers of unbelievers.**⁵ He says in Psalms that if we regard iniquity in our hearts, he won’t hear us.
- Of course, **God sometimes does hear unbelievers and answers** their prayers, because he is compassionate and gracious, but he hasn’t *promised* to the way he promises to hear believers.
- You say, “That feels exclusive.” Listen—God WANTS you to be his child. He gave his life to make you his child, and invites you to become that whenever you are to receive it by surrendering control of your life to him and trusting him as your Savior! You want your prayers answered? Receive his invitation to become his son or daughter today.

2. Something in you needs to change

- Scripture says that sometimes God doesn’t grant us our request because we ask with the wrong motives.
- **James 4:3, “You ask, and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your (sinful) passions.”**
- **Maybe God uses the delay in answer to work in you.** Remember the example I gave you of parents praying for the return of a prodigal...
 - **Unanswered prayer** can be how he purifies us.
- **Even in this story of Moses we see God working on Moses’s heart.** The reason God keeps saying, “Moses, *your* people that you brought up out of Egypt” is not because God has forgotten

⁵ Theologian Wayne Grudem writes: “God has nowhere promised to respond to the prayers of unbelievers. The only prayers that he has promised to ‘hear’ in the sense of listening with a sympathetic ear and undertaking to answer when they are made according to his will, are the prayers of Christians offered through the one mediator, Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:6).”

that they are actually God's that he brought up, but because he wants Moses to feel about Israel like God does. He wants Moses to say, "God, they are my people, and I care for them like you do, and I would give my life for them like you would."

- **Christlikeness for Moses, not just deliverance for Israel, was the goal.**
- **That's his *first* goal in your prayer, too,** and unanswered prayer is often how he purifies us.

3. Your prayers do not align with God's will

The prayers that start in heaven are the ones that are heard by heaven.

John says it him: ***"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us... and we know that if he hears us, we have the requests that we have asked of him."** (1 John 5:14-15)

Sometimes God doesn't answer our prayer because our prayers don't line up with this will. That doesn't mean there is something wrong with us, just that sometimes we get it wrong. And we should trust God enough to say, "Not my will, but yours be done."

Here's a practical variation on this...

4. Your prayer circumvents God's processes

- **Sometimes we pray for God to overturn processes he has established in running the world.**
 - God set up our universe to run according to natural laws, and that means miracles are, by definition, rare. God doesn't routinely rewrite the laws of nature through prayer.
 - **Many things, including sicknesses, typhoons—which are in our world because of the curse of sin—operate now**

according to natural laws. God doesn't routinely interrupt those laws. Occasionally yes, commonly no.

- **This is why God typically doesn't answer all the sports prayers that get prayed.**
 - The game is usually not determined by who has a better prayer ministry.
 - Coaches probably shouldn't depend on a prayer strategy to guard against 3-pointers. They should work on their defense.
 - It is rare that you see a 3-pointer swatted out the sky because sister Margaret was praying that her little nephew Johnny would win the game.
 - **UNC vs. ND:** "Didn't do his QT." But even that is not the reason. God typically rules the world through natural processes. **Besides, we know that prayers against UNC are fruitless anyway.** God is a Tar Heel fan. Otherwise, he wouldn't have made the sky Carolina blue.
- **Or, here's another more spiritual example. We might pray,** "God save everyone in Afghanistan tonight, and have them believe on Jesus." That's a prayer that seems to align with what God wants, but it goes against two processes that God has set up in seeing people come to salvation.
 - **One, that God uses his church to preach the gospel.**
 - **Two, that the cooperates with our free will in seeing the gospel going forward.**
 - Praying that God will magically, apart from those things, make everyone in Afghanistan a Christian tonight is not a prayer God has invited us to pray.
- **Which brings up another observation: God's prayers in the Bible often seem to have a regard for someone's free will.**
 - **Matthew 23:37, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."**
 - **There is a balance in the Bible between freedom and sovereignty.** I'm not sure how it all works together.

- **It is clear in Scripture that God is the one that draws and saves**—no one can come to the Son unless the Father draws him and all those that the Father draws will come (John 6:44, 37)—but there are also clear places in the Bible like Matt 23 where God says, “I wanted to draw you; I extended the invitation; YOU didn’t receive it.”
- **Or here’s another example. We might be asking God to deliver us from something that he intends of his means of accomplishing something in us.** Acts 14:22 says that Saul was in Antioch “...strengthening the souls of the disciples... saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).
 - **That means that we should not expect God to deliver us from all difficulty** since he expressly said that he has appointed us to difficulty in his world as part of his plan to prepare us for his kingdom.
 - **We are free to ask for deliverance—Paul did**—but we should be prepared for God to say to us what he said to Paul: “**My grace is sufficient for you for my strength is made perfect in weakness.**” It’s not made perfect in healing, but through weakness.
 - **This whole concept difficult for Americans**, because we assume that God wants only our comfort and prosperity, but this another place where we need not to read our Bibles through American glasses.
- **One more on this one:** Maybe, like I referenced at the beginning, you have prayed for deliverance from some inner struggle or temptation and God hasn’t delivered you because his plan is to use the struggle to accomplish something even greater in you!
 - John Newton: why hasn’t God delivered me from my temptations? Taught me humility. “I realize now that pride is the most important thing to be delivered from.”
 - **Teenager with same-sex attraction:** He may want you to use you as a demonstration to everyone that you will hold onto

God’s word even when everything in you is going the opposite way.

- **He uses your doubts** to take you deeper into him.

5. He delays his answer until his return*

- **One of my favorite scenes in the book of Revelation** where God talks about bowls full the prayers of the saints that God uses to bring in the final days (Rev 5:8). Many of these prayers that we prayed for relief and healing will be answered, but in eternity.
- **“For all the promises of God are yes in Christ Jesus.” 2 Cor 1:20**
- **On the final day is when** “God will wipe away every tear” (Rev 21:4–5). We will be delivered from broken bodies, broken desires, and broken relationships. Prayers for marriage, healing and reconciliation will all be answered then.

CONCLUSION

So, those are 5 reasons why God may not be answering your prayer in the way you think he should.

But let’s return to this story one more time, because this story shows us the one thing we should never assume when our prayer is not being answered.

The children of Israel assumed when God delayed that he had abandoned them. And that, after all they’d seen!

But haven’t we seen even more?

You see, this story sets up a parallel between what Moses did for the children of Israel and what Jesus would one day do for us.

- Like Moses, Jesus stood in the gap between the anger of righteous God and the sin of his people.

- Like Moses, Jesus offered for God to take his life rather than destroy us (Exod 32:32). But whereas Moses only offered it, Jesus actually did it.
 - God said to Moses, I'll destroy the children of Israel and take you.
 - Jesus replied, Destroy me and take them.
- Jesus was the mediator who would die rather than let us perish.

And that shows me that when I feel alone, or abandoned in prayer, it's not because he has actually abandoned me. He gave his life so that I would never be abandoned.

And because of that,

- I **know** that God hears me when I pray.
- And I can leave my **request at his feet**.
- I can trust that **whatever he is doing**, he is pursuing his good plan in me.
- Guys, I have a **hard time doing this consistently**. Sometimes when I pray I get up just as burdened.
- But what **freedom there is** in just learning to **trust in Jesus!**

Where have you been appointed to pray? Will you boldly take your place?

