

Does Prayer make a difference with a Sovereign God?

If God is all powerful (omnipotent) and he has absolute rule over the world (sovereignty), do my prayers even affect him or any of life's outcomes?

More simply asked "does prayer change things?"

Theological truth #1: God is sovereign where he rules over all. Proverbs 16:4, 9, 33; Psalm 115:2-3; 135:6; Isaiah 45:6-7; Proverbs 21:1; Ephesians 1:11

Theological truth #2: God is all powerful therefore he is able to do anything that is within his character. 2 Timothy 2:13; James 1:13; Jeremiah 32:17, 27; Lk 1:37; Matt 19:26

Dangerous responses to the sovereignty of God.

1. Fatalism- Because God is fully in control, it's all going to happen as God has chosen, whether or not I pray. So, I don't bother to pray.
 - Most fatalistic- The universe is simply God's big toy that we cannot mess with. Prayer then simply is reduced to a "psychological crutch." D.A. Carson
 - Positive spin fatalism- Prayer is only good for changing me internally but does not affect anything beyond.
2. Dualism- God is not sovereign, how can he be with all of the evil in the world. God and evil have always existed side by side and this would suggest the outcome on earth is undetermined. Grudem God is not the Lord over all the creation and thus there is not a purpose in our existence to bring about his great will and glory to him.

Sovereignty clarified. D.A. Carson "Praying with Paul"

1. God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in Scripture in a manner that reduces human responsibility.
2. Human beings are responsible creatures who make decisions/choices, obey/disobey, can morally respond. However, human responsibility never functions in Scripture to diminish God's sovereignty or to make God absolutely contingent. Isaiah 30:18; 65:2; Lam 3:31-36; Ez 18:30-32; 33:11; Josh 24:14-15; Romans 10:9-11; Ex 33:19; Romans 9:18

3. God is transcendent and personal. Romans 11:34; Eph 1:4-5; Psalm 139

Example: God is sovereign, and man is responsible. Gen 50:19-21 (pg. 38)

- The brothers of Joseph did what was evil by selling their brother as a slave and lying to their father about his disappearance.
- God's plan was to provide protection for Israel to grow as a nation without fear of many adversaries.
- The brothers did what they wanted to do, but it did not hinder or change God's plan to fulfill his covenant to Abraham in his family becoming a mighty nation. Their sinful actions played directly into God's greater plan.
- The mystery is in his transcendent ability to have always known this and how his will is brought to full fruition with man making choices that defy him.

Limitations to our will:

- We do not have absolute power to defy God's sovereignty. God is not held up by our failures.
- We do what we want to do, but we are not permitted to hinder the sovereign purposes of God.
- Our willful sin has its boundaries. Our willful sin can only go as far as what God's power and will have decided before hand should happen, yet it did not excuse us from guilt or responsibility. For we do what we want to do. **Romans 1:18-32**

Praying to a sovereign God.

1. He is a personal God who has invited us to pray and pray always. **Philippians 4:4-9**
2. By praying to God there is a change that happens within with joyful dependence, heartfelt engagement, learning to trust God's ways are superior, and developing intimacy with God. This happens because you begin to know and believe in his character.
3. The more you pray, the more you know his heart. The more you know his heart the more aligned with his will your prayers will be.
4. We are willful agents who are praying to a God whose will is sovereign. "My will" vs. "Thy will"

“My Will” example. **2 Kings 20:1-6** (pg. 269)

Result: Babylon is provided the template for invasion, and the vilest of all Israeli Kings is born to Hezekiah. Hezekiah’s heart goes cold.

“Thy Will” example. **Matthew 26:36-46** (pg. 696)

Result: Jesus undoes the curse of the Garden and provides the way of redemption for all of mankind. Jesus is given the seat at the right hand of God.

Application:

- Continue to pray in that one unique 5-minute period of time chosen this past week.
- In your time with God acknowledge before him what is your will and begin to ask for his will to be done. Consider utilizing the Lord’s prayer.

Benediction: The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.