



What is the purpose of praying for something or to change a situation when God is going to do what he's going to do anyway?

This is an excellent question, because it's one that each of us has either asked or will ask at some point in time. When God gives us what we ask, was he going to give that to us anyway?

Check out the story of King Hezekiah in Isaiah 38:1_9. Then check out the fate of Ninevah in Jonah chapter 3. These are just a couple of cases where we are told that God did "change his stated course of action" in response to earnest prayers. Would God have "relented" had the prayers not been offered? No. God *does* do things in answer to prayer that he would not have done had the prayers not been offered. You can probably add countless other examples of things happening in your own life that would not have happened without prayer.

One purpose of praying is that *it is by nature a humbling experience*. When you go to God in prayer and ask him for something, you are humbly admitting that you are powerless to bring about what you want by yourself. God can do amazing things in our lives only after we have humbly admitted that we need Him.

Another purpose of praying is that it is *a faith-strengthening experience*. You wouldn't be asking God for something unless you believed that He has the power to do something about it. And when He gives what you ask for, your conviction that God really does have the power to do anything is made that much stronger.

Yet another reason God wants us to ask for things in prayer is that *He loves us and doesn't want to force us to take what He wants to give*. As a father, I can relate to this. There are lots of things I like and hope my kids learn to like them too, but I don't want to force them to do the things I like to do. I heard a story about a father who loved baseball and bought his son a glove but kept it in the closet and didn't give it to the boy until he asked his dad for a glove. The father was overjoyed and ran to the closet to get the glove that had been waiting there since the day the boy was born. The father did not want to force his boy to want the same things he himself wanted. He waited for the boy to ask, because that showed the boy, not just the father, wanted the glove.

God does have plans for us, but very often he waits to hear from us before giving us the things he's wanted us to have all along - just because he won't force his will on us. Someone put it this way: "Heaven is filled with great gifts that have your name on them, but they go undelivered until you ask."

Perhaps the greatest example of God not acting except in response to prayer is forgiveness. God's forgiveness is there for everyone, Jesus purchased it for all people. But it is only given in response to requests for it. God wants what is best for us, but he will not force it on us. He wants us to want it too.

Pray with confidence knowing that God does hear and does act on your prayers. And if you don't get what you ask for, remember, God - who sees the "big, eternal picture" knew that wasn't what you really needed. Or he had something better in mind.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net