

# EXTRA ESSAY

## *Two philosophical questions on answered prayer...*

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When we speak of God 'answering' our prayers, or 'changing his mind' as a result of them, that raises all kinds of philosophical questions. Most people watching the films won't be too concerned by them – but for those who are, this is a brief introduction to how we might think about them.

*If God knows everything, and his plans are perfect, how can he change his mind because of my prayers?*

I don't think we can ever claim to know the full answer to this question – but I do think part of the answer can be to suggest that the question assumes too small a view of God and too small a view of the place of prayer. In particular, it forgets that God knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46v10) and has always known what I would pray in a particular moment. Therefore, his plans and purposes have always included knowledge of my prayer, and any ways in which he freely and graciously chooses to allow his actions to be influenced by my prayer. Perhaps 'change' is therefore the wrong word to use – but there aren't many alternatives that make sense to us, and there is good Biblical precedent for doing so (e.g. Exodus 32v14).

I would also suggest that part of the 'problem' in such a situation lies with the limitations of our knowledge and understanding! God uses human language to describe himself, so that we can understand and be in relationship with him. We should never forget though that he is infinite in his greatness and goodness. That means that he is far far far beyond our ability to understand – so we should not be surprised when something about God, or his actions, is beyond our capacity to explain or understand.

*If something is good, why doesn't God do it anyway, without me praying?  
And if not, why would he do it just because I prayed?*

Again, I don't think we can ever claim to know the full answer to this question. In this case though, a simple response is to suggest that God 'changes his mind' because our prayers do actually change whether a particular outcome is good or not.

An analogy would be the relationship between a parent and a child. In most situations giving a child a sweet or chocolate may not be the best thing to do – certainly, always doing so would not be in the child's best interests! However, often parents will 'change their mind' in response to a request from their child – in this case, the reason is that the child asked, and that is a perfectly good and valid reason for the parent to change their mind.

*A final thought..*

Both questions above also point to some reasons why God may sometimes choose *not* to answer our prayers – something we will explore more in the next chapter. If God *did* always do everything we ask for in prayer, the result would likely be disaster! We would move away from the good and loving providence of God to a world which is governed by the caprices of whatever any one of us wanted to pray for – which is not an appealing (or logically possible) prospect.