

Text: various  
Target audience: Christians  
Topic: Prayer  
Theme: Dismantling our unbelief concerning prayer  
My purpose for this message: To prove to Christians that God not only hears our prayers but responds, acts AS A RESULT.  
Delivered: Feb.27, 2005 @ KEFC

## **Determined Prayer**

My desk is normally cluttered. I like to think of my desk as *evolutionary*, since it tends towards “natural selection.” It naturally selects any piece of paper or book I haven’t either put away or thrown away, and adds it to one of several piles. (I take some comfort in the fact that my father’s desk makes mine look tidy.)

A number of years ago I came across the results of a study that put my shortcomings in a different light. It turns out that in a survey of Fortune 1000 firms, 58% of their executives have orderly desks while 42% are a mess like mine. However, among the companies with neat executives, their average one year change in stock was down 1 point, while average 1 year change for companies whose execs had messy desks, was up 3.5 points.

Of course the question is, was there a cause and effect relationship between the condition of the desk and the condition of company stock?

Here’s a similar question only it’s about prayer: is there a cause and effect relationship between your praying, and what happens? Every Christian here *believes* God *hears* us when we pray; but do you believe He changes anything as a result?

- Your Theology: God’s sovereign, rules universe and every event that takes place in it? Determined all things, even before world began.
- Your Experience: Your belief that God’s sovereign doesn’t go that far, but you still doubt there’s much connection between what you ask for and what happens. You see little evidence in your own prayers.
- Your raw doubt: The few answered prayers you’ve seen could easily be coincidences.

My theme this morning is “Determined prayer:” passionate, persistent prayer. But I wasn’t into this sermon long before realizing that before we pray and pray about something—before we cry out to God with great passion, something else must come first: belief that there is a link between what I ask God for, and what He does. So this morning we’re going to look at Scripture to try and confirm this: God not only listens when you pray, He acts as a result, He responds. PRAY.

This morning we’re going to look at a number of situations when God said “yes” to his children when they asked Him for something.

### **1. God says “Yes” when asked to restrain Judgment.**

READ Gen.18:16-33. In human form 2 angels and God visited Abraham. Their initial mission was to confirm what God had already told Abraham: you’re going to have a baby next year. But from there, God was headed for Sodom on a factfinding mission: is this place as awful as He’d heard (by the way, this is anthropomorphism.) Amos 3:7 says God doesn’t move without letting his prophets know what He’s up to, so before He moved on to Sodom, he told Abraham his plans. Abraham’s heart sank.

“NO, what about my nephew Lot? He’s a leader in that city; what about him?” I imagine he felt ill and began to pray. (Remember, all conversation with God is prayer whether you’re face to face with Him or not.) Abraham began to intercede for Lot, not just with the One who was Sodom’s Judge, but the One who was His heavenly Father.

He took a deep breath and asked, “Will you still destroy Sodom even if it has some righteous residents, say 50? (Not righteous as in no sin whatsoever, but righteous as in being God-worshippers.) It’s not like you to indiscriminately kill the good along with bad.” (Which—by the way—would be a great line to launch us into a discussion on God’s action in natural disasters.)

*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? (25-26)*

Abraham’s brazen. He’s basically saying, “If you do that, you’re not acting like I think you should act.” He’s not insolent or disrespectful, but Abraham’s sticking his nose out there pretty far.

God calmly responds, “No, if there are 50 righteous people, I won’t condemn it.” Abraham pushes some more.

“Look, I’m like garbage before you but since I’ve already taken the chance to speak, how about if the total were only 45, or 40? Would you still destroy Sodom if there were 5 or 10 less righteous people?”

“No, I wouldn’t.”

“How ‘bout 30, or 20 or 10?” And each of the last 3 times Abraham’s getting nervous that he might be running out of grace: “Don’t be angry, don’t be angry, don’t be angry.” But he’s determined. He *will* have his say. He *will* seek what he thinks is right. Each time God simply says, “I will spare it for the sake of that many righteous people.” At 10, Abraham was satisfied. His prayers for consideration, were answered.

The next day flaming sulfur fell from heaven and *did* destroy Sodom but not before angels rescued Lot’s family of 4. Not 10, just 4. So the town wasn’t spared, but the righteous were.

## **2. God says “Yes” when asked for longer life    2 Kings 18:1-6, 20:1-6**

After God carved Israel into 2 kingdoms, the best king Judah ever had was Hezekiah: *Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses.* (2 Kings 18:5-6).

In 2 Kings 20 Hezekiah became deathly ill. READ 1b. “Get your estate in order, your life is nearly over.’ The king could roll over, accept things, or...

READ vv.2-5a. The king had followed God many years, and he pointed that out to God. He was determined to be heard and in tears he begged God for more time. I imagine we only have a summary of his prayer. Yet God decided to reverse himself so fast that before Isaiah could leave the palace, he was sent him back to the king with a “yes.”

It looks very much like God changed His mind doesn’t it? Yet God *doesn’t* change His mind. READ Numb.23:19. So what’s going on? God is bigger than we could ever imagine and while it’s true that He is sovereign over every affair on earth, it is just as true

that in some awesome, mysterious way, God shares his sovereignty with us. And *wants* to. That despite having a precise plan of how the events in His universe will unfold, He goes or comes based on one of His children's pleas.

READ Amos 7:1-8. This prophet who understands that God is sovereign (says it 6 times in 6 verses) also witnesses the God has already decided matters, changing the course of history because a prophet asked him to.

### **3. God would have said “Yes,” if someone had just asked.**

The last example is one in which God did not say “yes.” He *wanted* to, but there was no one to ask him to. READ Ez.22:23-31. Judah was a mess. The prophets (likely “princes”) were corrupt, the priests were corrupt, the politicians were corrupt, and the people followed willy-nilly in their own sin. Only judgment could follow. Which is what God dictated.

*Except* if there had been one person; just one. REREAD v.30. This is not just prayer, it is spiritual leadership in the land. But it *includes* prayer. If there were just someone, *anyone* who would have gone to bat for the land and its people, God would have backed away from his plan. What a sad picture of James 4:2: *You do not have because you do not ask...*

#### **Concl:**

Alvin J. Vander Griend is the director of Houses of Prayer Everywhere (HOPE) and in the days when he was trying to become a better intercessor, he was doing all the right things: spend more time, cover more needs, praying with greater intensity. Yet, more times than he cared to admit, he found himself skipping these extended prayer times if it wasn't convenient.

So he spent some time asking the Lord: “what's my problem?” And God began to show him that beneath his supposed desire to be a great intercessor, he honestly didn't believe his prayer changed anything since those he prayed for seemed to get along just fine with or without his prayers. So deep down his intercession seemed unnecessary.

This message started out about “Determined Praying.” How to pray with zeal and persistence. But I realized that there is only persistence, only zeal and passion, if there's conviction that God might very well act in direct response to our petitions.