

*the*  
**PROVERBS 31**  
**MINISTRIES**  
*podcast*

**Biblical truth for any girl in any season.**

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**Kaley:** Well, hello, friends. And welcome back to the Proverbs 31 Ministries Podcast, where we share biblical Truth for any girl in any season. I'm your host, Kaley Olson, and I'm in the room with some of my very favorite people, our Proverbs 31 Ministries president, Lysa TerKeurst, and our in-house resident theologian, Joel Muddamalle. Welcome back, my friends!

**Lysa:** Thank you. This is a very important topic today.

**Kaley:** I agree. And the reason that we're here today is because we're talking about the topic: "Does prayer change God's mind?" which I think is something that every believer asks, but if you're like me, you ask the question, but you're like, how do I find the answer? I don't know. Are there things that God has already made up His mind about? Or where is there room for me to ask for something to change? And so I'm excited to hear from you guys on this topic and to kick us off, I would love to know: Why did you start studying this, and why tackle this topic right now?

**Lysa:** Well, I think that there are a lot of questions around this topic, and I understand it. People are praying and asking God to do something in their life, and it feels very urgent. It feels like the need is very immediate, and it can feel almost like if God answers our prayer, then it's validation that He heard us and that He cares about us. And I think we all know, God does hear us. God does care about us, but when we pray about something and we see God move in a way that we know it had to be God, it validates something deep within us — around "does God hear me and does God love me." But I want us to kind of switch this up just a little bit in our thinking, because when we pray and in the process of praying, we establish an outcome that we very much are expecting God to do, we can become very attached to outcomes of our own making.

And I'm speaking about this from a personal experience. This is so deeply personal to me, Kaley, because I've been very open and honest about the story of hardship that Art and I walked through with our marriage. And when I was praying, God bring Art home, fix my family, help us in the midst of this, I very much had a certain outcome in mind. And so I would pray using that outcome as evidence of whether or not God was caring about me. And that's an honest admission. And it's something that I just challenge everyone listening, just think about, could that possibly be what's happening right now? Prayer really should be the very thing that releases us from carrying the weight of

outcomes. No human should have to carry the weight of being their own god, figuring all of this out, saying if things turn out this way, then this is evidence of God's goodness.

But so many of us work our fingers to the bones and our emotions into a tangled fray trying. We don't pray to control God, but in essence, when we're praying and expecting Him to do what only our finite human minds can see as good, we negate the fact that God's definition of good and His timing of good is so much bigger than ours. So I just wonder if we might shift just a little bit in today's conversation and say, let's pray, not expecting a certain outcome from God, but let's pray to release control to God who can handle it. So maybe the wrong question is will God change His mind? And maybe the right question is, have I prayed to receive peace in this no matter what God's answer is?

Philippians 4:6-7 says, *"do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding."* In other words, God's ways are higher than our ways, His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ability to see the full picture all at one time, that's what, when we release control, or we release our suggestions of outcomes to God, the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our heart and our minds in Christ Jesus. So we're talking about carrying the weight of determination of what is actually good and not good as an outcome in our situation. And I guess having walked through this season that I've walked through, I now can see so many of the outcomes that I was very much begging God for.

They were not the outcome that I would have been able to ever dream up. In other words, I have a limited way of looking at things. Let me give you one other suggestion, a passage to turn to, and then Joel, I'm turning it over to you. Because I love when you do the heavy lifting of theology on big topics like this. Right?

Joel: Yeah.

Lysa: And I do want to get to the question, when we pray, does it change God's mind? Because I do think that's a legitimate question, but I feel like it's first to say, okay, let's just, it's not that it's the wrong question, will God change His mind. But I think the right question at first is have I prayed to release the weight of this and to receive peace in this no matter what God's answer is? So when you look at the Lord's Prayer, Matthew Chapter 6, I love turning to the Lord's Prayer.

And Jesus was asked the question, how do we pray? And so then Jesus is going to teach us how to pray, He starts off the prayer in a way that I would expect: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. It's an amazing establishment that God has a will and that His will is in the heavens, and it is on Earth, and we want God's will to be done. But do you see right off from the very beginning here, this is a prayer of release. It is a prayer of establishing right from the very beginning, I release carrying the weight of knowing what is best in every situation. And I'm going to trust God with the outcome because God, Your will, I want Your will be done more than the suggestions that I'm bringing to You.

Then it says, “*give us today our daily bread.*” So this is where I'm just feeling so profoundly challenged right now, is when I pray, I want my prayers to be like Amazon Prime deliveries. I'm getting better. I just want you guys to all know I'm getting better.

Kaley: I appreciate your honesty.

Lysa: Yes. But it's like, I kind of have this unspoken thing. Like, okay, I'm going to pray. And then God's going to answer. And the answer is going to be so obvious. It's going to look exactly like what I thought it would. In other words, it's almost like when I pray, give me today my daily bread, I want that loaf of bread to show up on my doorstep looking exactly like the loaf that I expected. When in reality, when I read through the Bible, how many times have the children of God been provided for in ways that don't at all look like a loaf of bread.

In the case of the children of Israel, they're wandering the desert for 40 years, God rained down manna, sweet potato flakes, kind of like coriander seed flakes raining down. It looked nothing at all like a loaf of bread or a piece of pita or Lofa as they probably would have had in that time. But this manna was perfect sustenance for their body doing desert living. And so that's a big clue. When we say, “give us today, our daily bread,” it may not always look like a loaf of bread. It may look like manna, or in the New Testament, we find out Jesus himself calling out saying food can only reach your stomach. My provision reaches down into your soul, which is where your real soul hungers are coming from. And Jesus says, “*I am the bread of life.*”

So how many times have I been crying, thinking God isn't answering my prayer, because I keep looking for a loaf of bread while I'm walking through fields of manna holding Jesus, the bread of life, holding His hand. And I think God isn't doing anything because my outcome that I expected being a loaf of bread may be the very thing that's setting me up for disappointment and not what God is do doing or is not doing.

Joel: So good.

Lysa: Joel, take it away.

Joel: Well, I mean, I think one of the things that you're saying right there, Lysa, that is personally convicting to me is just how do we approach God? What is our view of God? And one of the things that I often talk about is being careful not to approach God as if He's the genie in the bottle. And I kind of call this the genie in a bottle theology, and sometimes we view prayer as being those silver bullets. Is that the right thing? Gold bullets. It's not gold bullets. It's silver bullets.

Kaley: Go with it, Joel, you're asking two women here.

Joel: It's like these silver bullets that we think that if we just pray the right prayer, or if we construct the prayer and use the right words and use the right language, then maybe we could make our outcome happen. And I want to be careful about that because really, that is a formula that we're trying to do, and that's really not biblical, because God is

King and He's a good Father. And as a father, He's got a will like you just talked about. And so prayer, for us theologically, when we look at this biblically, prayer is this incredibly special gift that we have been given graciously by a good dad that wants to invite us into conversation with Him. And so then we have this tension of, "okay, if God wants to invite us into prayer, then is it possible for my prayers to actually change anything, to change His mind, because then there's tension of if God is sovereign and if His will and all these other things," and it gets us a little bit confused and I just want to turn to first Samuel 15:11.

Lysa: Well, as we're turning there, I think it's important to state that we understand when you are leaning in asking this question, because we want to bring the humanity to the text, that it's often you're asking this question because there is this deep longing that you have inside of your heart for something. And you may have cried a thousand, 10,000, a million tears over, and you see God doing this very thing for someone else. And so you're wondering "Why isn't God doing this for me?" And I guess as we get into the text, I want to say, can we all just start by looking through the lens that God does absolutely love us? God does absolutely care for us. God loves us and cares for us so much that He sees a bigger picture of what we're asking for and it may be that the very thing we're longing for, even if it's a good thing, God sees something that He is going to do that is different than our definition of that good thing. But that doesn't mean just because God does it different or in a different way or different timing, that doesn't mean that God doesn't deeply care about the heartbreak we're experiencing right now.

Joel: That's so good, Lysa. And in fact, that is the exact perspective that I'd love for us to consider, because I think often we think about our perspective, but have we thought about the perspective of God, which is a challenge. How can we think the thoughts of God? There was a great theologian who said really theology is about thinking God's thoughts after Him. And really, that's kind of what we're going to attempt to do. But I want to look at first Samuel 15:11. I think we'll find something very instructive that will teach us actually about how does God feel. I don't know if you've ever thought about that. Have you ever thought about like, how does God feel? It's a little dangerous to think about that, because His feelings are perfect. They're not like human feelings, but you and I have our feelings because God made us in His likeness and in His image.

And so, because we have the image of God innately in us, there's something about us that's reflective of God. And so this is so interesting, in 1 Samuel 15:11, this is God speaking through the prophet. And essentially, this is what it says here, that I regret that I have made Saul King, because Saul has turned back from following me and has not carried out my instructions. And there are a series of scriptures. In Genesis, there's a scripture that talks about God, regretting that he made a humanity. And we want to know what does that mean? Can God regret something? That seems odd. And I dug into this, into the Hebrew, and the word regret here is *naham*. That's N-A-H-A-M. And this is a word that describes a relief from sorrow or distress, a relief from sorrowed distress.

Sometimes it can be to change one's mind or to reconsider, to be grieved or to relent. And I want to take this, so now we've got God in the Old Testament, who's looking at the situation with Saul and He's grieved in His heart. He's grieved because He's got His people and He wants His people to be led by a King that would be reflective of who He

is. And yet, this King is not owning up to or living up to the standard by which God intended for Him. And so there is grief. And so, in response to that present situation, God responds and says, “I regret, I regret that I've made Saul King,” but this actually speaks to not necessarily God's sovereign will when we think about what He's doing throughout the course of human history; this is actually speaking about His attitude, His emotion, His response in the present moment.

So I want us to think about this. I know this is sometimes hard, but there is God sovereignly outside of human history that knows all things. And yet, our God is not a God who is absent from human history. He doesn't just look at it coldly from outside, He's present, He's inside of human history. He is responding and reacting to the plight of humanity. And you're going to say, Joel, how do we know this? Well, actually one of my favorite scriptures is John Chapter 11. And we know this because Jesus, in the New Testament, is God the father, the invisible God the father may visible in humanity and still maintained a hundred percent divinity. Jesus has best friends. This is kind of right. Like we know Peter, James and John are His inner three. And he also has a very good friend by the name of Lazarus.

And then Jesus hears about the death of Lazarus. And I just want us, if you've got some time, I want you to read Chapter 11, I'm going to summarize it for the sake of time. But this is so interesting.

Lysa: Tell us which book it is again?

Joel: This is the book of John. John Chapter 11, the death of Lazarus. And it's kind of verses one through 16. Jesus hears that His friend has died, and the text tells us that Jesus waits essentially four days. Well, why does Jesus wait four days? Well, because in rabbinic culture, in Jewish understanding, there was this thought that the spirit of the individual would hover over the body for a period of three days. And so there was this thought idea, well, maybe a resuscitation would take place in three days and you would know that that took place because the spirit had kind of been hovering over.

Kaley: But after four days, they're not just dead, they're *dead*, dead.

Joel: They gone gone, it's done. So the intentionality of Jesus to wait for this to happen because Jesus knows before He even gets to Lazarus that He is going to raise Lazarus from the dead. Now imagine being Jesus who's in the present situation, yet Jesus is the embodiment of God the Father. And so He even knows the outcome of what's going to take place. So we see a perfect picture of an example in Jesus. He gets to the tomb, and when He gets to the tomb and He sees Jesus, we know this as the shortest verse in the New Testament — what do we know that Jesus, what?

Kaley: Wept.

Joel: Y'all, Jesus wept. He responded to the death of Lazarus in that moment, in that situation, with grief and with sorrow. And yet He knows He's going to raise Lazarus from the dead. Why is it so important for us to see the Jesus himself wept in that moment?

Because it tells us that Jesus is present in that moment and the present plight of humanity, the impact of sin and destruction on the people that God himself has made, it affects the heart of God. And so now, as we take a little step back, how do we consider this thought of “does prayer change God's mind?” Because that's really what we're getting at. Well, we know by the example of Jesus, by the example in 1 Samuel, that God responds to humanity in the present situation with an emotion, which is grief. But I want us to look at Jonah Chapter 3, verse 4, and I'll just summarize this, we already know the story of Jonah.

Jonah calls the people of Nineveh's repentance and yet, the expectation that Jonah has is that God is going to enact judgment. And what happens to Jonah when God relents?

Lysa: He is very attached to the original outcome He was expecting.

Joel: That's probably one of the best ways I've heard that. He's very attached to the original outcome that he had. Well notice this, that there was a present situation and that present situation was the sin and the absolute depravity of this nation called Nineveh. And God was going to bring judgment to Nineveh. This is the present situation, but the present situation changes. What is the change? Well, the change is in the form of Jonah who preaches, or some people may say that he prays, he's pleading with them, and saying, “you must repent.” The present situation changes.

Lysa: And he tells them there will be consequences.

Joel: And there's going to be consequences.

Lysa: So Jonah is very attached to the outcome that he felt like he received straight from the Lord.

Joel: The outcome would have taken place if the situation remained the same, but notice the situation doesn't remain the same. The people repent; they actually plead for forgiveness. And the catalyst of this is they hear the words of the Lord through God's people, God's agent, Jonah. And so when the present changes, God's response to that present situation changes. And so does prayer change God's mind? In a sense, it can, absolutely. Because we have in this unique, mysterious way, the opportunity to change the situation when you and I participate in prayer. Now this isn't just with Jonah; think about King Hezekiah. King Hezekiah has a situation, we know this, Lysa, from *Trustworthy*, he's got this disease, he's going to die. And yet he pleads to God and he intercedes.

Lysa: And God gives him more time.

Joel: Because the present situation changed because of the presence of prayer. Think about Moses. Moses, and the Israelites should have been wiped out probably three or four times easy. I mean, if we're just going to be honest, right? And in each one of those instances, Moses, thank goodness for the people of Israel for Moses, because Moses intervenes on their behalf. The present situation changes when Moses comes down off

of Mount Sinai and he sees the people acting out idolatry, it is Moses who prays on behalf of the people, and the present situation changes because of the presence of prayer. And so I just want to encourage us right now that when we think about prayer, we should not be thinking about it in a defeated type of way, or even in the sense of “man, is this going to make a difference?” One of the things that we see over and over in Scripture, that just the very presence of prayer, it changes our present situation.

And now you have to step back and say, “Okay, God, in Your sovereignty, in Your Lordship, in Your kingship, we accept, we trust that this outcome is going to ultimately be an outcome that honors You.” And I want to go back to the Philippians passage because that was so important, Lysa, what you had said, and notice the outcome of the prayer of Philippians 4:6-7. There's this weight of anxiety, but then verse 7 says, and the peace of God, that Greek word peace, it brings back an Old Testament word of *Shalom* and *Shalom* is a peace; it's a sense of serenity; it's when all the wrongs have been made right. There's a lack of anxiety between God and man. And because of that *Shalom* between God and man, man and man can experience *Shalom*.

And this is what it says, which transcends all understanding and that will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ. And so I would suggest that prayer absolutely changes something. And sometimes, because of the presence of prayer in our present situation, our circumstances change, our present circumstances change, but then sometimes the circumstance might not change, but even if the circumstance does not change, our hearts are actually being changed. And so prayer is about a changing of our hearts. It's about a formation of our hearts. And when we come and we think about prayer, I would just think of us to pray with these three things in mind, these three truths about who God is. One that we pray and we recognize that prayer includes the love of God, prayer includes the wisdom of God, and prayer includes the power of God.

And when we come to the Lord in prayer, and we remember these three truths about who God is, that God is a God of love, that God has got a wisdom, and that God is a God of power, it does exactly what you had mentioned, Lysa. It releases the weight and the burden of responsibility from our feeble hands, and it places them in the hands of our faithful God. And that is something that we can put all of our hope in.

Lysa: Here's what I want to make sure we don't hear — that our God is inconsistent in His character or His nature. So He's not going to change His character, His nature. When a situation changes, He may be responding in His character and His nature to the shift of the atmosphere of prayer, to the shift of people repenting or lamenting or softening or to people not repenting or relenting or softening. So I think that that's important so that we don't view it as “I have the ability to control God with my prayers,” because God is unchangeable in His character and His nature, but in His character and His nature, His wisdom, His power, His compassion, His love, He has the ability absolutely to respond.

Joel: That's so good. I'm studying the book of Amos right now, and in Amos Chapter 1, there's this formula, this three plus one for three sins, or for one. And it's like, “why is Amos saying this?” It's actually a formula that if you add three plus four, because that's what it's saying. Three plus one is four, so three plus four equals seven. It's saying sin had come to a completion. So that number together talks about the sins that were taking

place. But one of the things that we have to remember is that seven is a pretty big number. So the three plus one is actually evidence of a great mercy of God. God's character is always weighted towards mercy, towards relenting, towards a calling of His people towards repentance. If we had to put a character attribution trait there, it's like, yeah, that is who God is. And yet God, because He is just, is going to also execute in terms of judgment and righteousness. But I think what you just said is so important, that God is always consistent with His character and with His nature. And God's character and nature teaches us and tells us throughout the course of human history that His desire is to show mercy to His people so that they may turn in repentance towards Him.

Lysa: So good. Thank you, Joel.

Kaley: Something that I kept thinking about, and Joel, I talked with you a couple of months ago, whenever I was working on an older podcast teaching about God and His holiness from Isaiah, I think, I can't remember exactly what chapter it was, but it talked about how no one can fathom God's understanding. You can't understand what God is doing all the time, but we have to trust Him because He is Holy. And because He is Holy, nothing He does is wrong. It's all based on His character and that He is always consistent with who He is. And so that helped me a lot, especially as I've kind of been walking through what I've been walking through personally with trusting the Lord with a lot of just, like I asked you for this, and I opened my hands to you, and then you took it away; I'm confused.

But I think when God answers our prayer as humans, like you said, at the beginning Lysa, it's validating. It's like, "Ooh, God heard me. Okay, well now I'm going to pray this, will He hear me this time?" But then what happens when He doesn't hear us? And so I feel like whenever we can lean into the "no" that He says for our protection or for whatever we don't see, it switches in our hearts and minds, or at least it has in mine to approach prayer as a conversation and a surrender, rather than God, I want this or God, I want that. And it's so helpful for me.

Well, I wish that we had more time to talk about this, but what I want to do now for whoever is listening, just to, I want to give this opportunity back to you. So we've got a resource that our teams created, and I love this resource. It's called "Now What?" And it's perfect for something like this, where it's heavy and there's a lot to take in. We read off how many scriptures? I don't even know, a lot of scriptures, and wherever you are right now in your prayer life, this is a great resource for you to process and apply exactly what you heard today. And so this resource is available in the show notes for this episode on our website, [proverbs31.org/listen](http://proverbs31.org/listen). You can download it and then just use it to jot down everything that you're learning, and then ask God, what is the next thing that you want me to do with what I learned today?

Alright, friends. Thank you so much, Lysa and Joel, for joining us today. I'm so thankful for the truth that you shared with us. And for those of you who listen, we pray that today's teaching helps you know the Truth of God's Word, and it helps you live out that truth, because we know when you do, it changes everything.