



Does Prayer Really Work???

Prayer is a universal part of all major world religions. In this country we have a “National Day of Prayer”, yet some feel it is unconstitutional to pray openly in our public schools. During and after tragedy, many turn to prayer as a source of comfort and guidance. Some of the obvious questions are – Does God answer prayer? Are all prayers answered? If people pray to different Gods, can they all be getting answers? What should we pray for? Are there right and wrong ways to pray? We will examine this topic and see what the Bible says about prayer.

What does it mean to Pray?

In the Bible, there are many different words translated with the same basic meaning of “pray”. We can think of the following as synonyms for prayer: reflection, devotion, a contemplation, to intercede, to seek or ask, a hymn, entreaty, to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior, and petition.

How should we Pray?

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, and Jesus’ response was what we call our Lord’s prayer. The prayer is given to us in both gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Matt 6:9 ¶ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Luke 11:2 And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. 3 Give us day by day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

Although there is a slight variation in these accounts, the lessons of what Jesus is teaching can be drawn from both:

1. Glorify God our father
2. Pray for the plan of God to unfold
3. Petition for basic needs
4. Seek forgiveness and be forgiving
5. Seek God’s overruling and protection

Does God answer all prayers? Some prayers? Any Prayers?

Asking God to hear your prayer certainly implies that He may not (see Psa 86:1). The scriptures tell us of situations where God refused to hear prayers, sometimes due to arrogance (Luke 18:9-14), or lust (James 4:1-3), or praying to other gods (1Kings 18:1-40). But there are also many scriptures that show how God has heard prayer. Gideon is one example (Judges 6:22-40). Gideon prayed to God to see if Israel would be delivered by his hand, and he asked God to indicate His will by putting out the fleece.

Cornelius is another example (Acts 10:1-31). Cornelius was a Roman centurion who believed in Jesus and the God of Israel. He was the first gentile converted to Christ, because up until this time the disciples were told explicitly not to go the way of the gentiles (Matt 10:5). He had been praying for several years to God, and God eventually did hear his prayers by sending Peter (when the time was right) to baptize him and his family.

Are your prayers being answered?

The scriptures are clear about the prayers God will and will not hear. If our prayers are not being answered, it could be for a number of reasons. What type of things are we praying for? Perhaps our prayers are not heard because we are asking amiss (James 4:3). Or perhaps we have not turned toward righteous living (1 Pet 3:12). Or perhaps our prayers are being answered according to the Lord's will, which may be different from our will (Luke 22:42). One thing is certain: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much". (James 5:16)

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