

Prayer

**Prayer:**

*How to Talk to God*

**By**

**Don Stewart**

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## Prayer

### **Prayer**

#### *How to Talk to God*

Prayers are found everywhere in the Bible. Indeed, at very beginning of life upon the earth we are told that, “People began to call on the name of the LORD” (Genesis 4:26).

We also find prayers at the very end of Scripture. In fact, John concluded the Book of Revelation by praying, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

Searching the Scripture, we discover that the Bible contains nearly fifty lengthy prayers as well as several hundred shorter prayers, or references to praying. Thus, the subject of prayer and praying is found throughout the pages of Scripture.

What do we mean by prayer? Who can pray? Does God hear the prayers of everyone? Why are certain prayers not answered?

We will cover these, as well as many other issues, as we look at this important subject.

## Question 1

### What Is Prayer?

The Bible says that God is the Father of all who believe in Jesus Christ. Scripture also teaches that He is a loving Father. Since God is a good and loving Father, it makes sense that He would allow His children to communicate with Him.

This fact makes the possibility of talking to God something that we should expect. This is how we define prayer—it is talking to God. It is our way of personally communicating our deepest thoughts, needs, and desires, to Him. Indeed, prayer is one of the most important things that Christians can do!

### Prayer To God Is Possible Because Of What Jesus Accomplished

Today, prayer is possible because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Because we are sinful, we have no direct access to God the Father on our own.

In fact, the Bible speaks of God as being unapproachable. Paul wrote:

He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No one has ever seen him, nor ever will. To him be honor and power forever. Amen (1 Timothy 6:16 NLT).

Sinful humans cannot enter into His presence. However, Jesus Christ is the intermediary—the one who allows the prayers of believers to be answered. He is our “go-between.” Paul wrote to Timothy about this. He declared:

For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human (1 Timothy 2:5 NET).

The writer to the Hebrews emphasized that Jesus Christ is our Advocate with God the Father—He represents us:

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence (Hebrews 9:24 NIV).

Since Christ now appears in the presence of God on our behalf, the writer to the Hebrews encourages believers to enter that presence through prayer:

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22 NKJV).

Therefore, the ability of human beings, to talk to the living God, is granted only through the Person of Jesus Christ. Because of what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf, believers can boldly enter into the presence of God.

## **There Are A Number of Important Truths About Prayer**

Since we, as human beings, are able to communicate with the living God, then there are a number of important things that we need to know about the privilege which we have. We should note well the following truths about prayer:

### **1. God Wants Us To Pray**

To begin with, God has said that He wants believers to pray. In fact, He delights in the prayers of His people. In Proverbs, we read:

The LORD hates the sacrifice of the wicked, but he delights in the prayers of the upright (Proverbs 15:8 NLT).

Since He delights in our prayers, we should get into the habit of praying.

Paul wrote to the Romans about the necessity of always being prayerful. He said:

Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful (Romans 12:12 NLT).

It is important to make prayer a habit.

### **2. Prayer Is Something That We Do – It Is An Act**

Prayer is an act, not merely an attitude. It is something that we do. This can be seen by the way the Scripture speaks of people praying.

We read about Jesus' disciples coming to Him with a specific question. The Bible says:

And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples (Luke 11:1 KJV).

Notice it says that Jesus was praying, and then He finished praying. This means that prayer is an act. You begin it, and you finish it. It is more than just an attitude of the heart.

### **3. We Are To Be Asking God For Things**

The main idea behind prayer is petition—asking God for things. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the following to His disciples:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened (Matthew 7:7,8 NIV).

Prayer is not informing God of what we need—He already knows that. Jesus made this very clear He said:

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:8 ESV).

When we ask in faith, we trust the fact that God will meet our needs. This is what a prayer of faith is all about.

#### **4. Prayer Centers Upon God**

Genuine prayer is a personal encounter between the believer, and the living God. It is where heaven and earth meet. When believers pray, they put God at the center. They put their thoughts and feelings upon Him—rather than upon themselves.

Things should now be seen from God's point of view, not ours. Therefore, while we are asking for things that we want, there also should be the desire of gaining His perspective on the things for which we are asking. Consequently, we need to ask the Lord for a mind that understands things as He understands them. The psalmist asked:

May my cry come before you, Lord; give me understanding according to your word (Psalm 119:169 NIV).

Consequently, we should not look at prayer as trying to talk God into doing something that He does not want to do.

#### **5. We Should Expect Our Prayers To Be Answered**

Prayer is something believers need to do. It is important that we tell the Lord our desires so that He can answer them. The God of the Bible has not only told us to pray, He has also promised to answer our prayers. The psalmist wrote:

I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God (Psalm 38:15 NIV).

We also read in the Book of Psalms:

I am counting on the Lord; yes, I am counting on him. I have put my hope in his word (Psalm 130:5 NLT).

We pray, and then we count on Him for the answer.

James emphasized that prayer truly does work. Indeed, he reminded us of the biblical example of the prophet Elijah. He said:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it

did not rain on the land. Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit (James 5:16-18 CSB)

God has promised to answer our prayers. As always, He keeps His promises.

## **6. We Should Have Confidence In Prayer**

Consequently, believers should have the utmost confidence in prayer. We realize that everything is in God's control and, through Jesus Christ all things are possible for believers. Paul wrote to the Philippians about this confidence. He said:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done (Philippians 4:6 NLT).

His advice was simple—worry about nothing, pray about everything. This is something all of us should put into practice.

In a similar manner, the Apostle John wrote about the confidence that believers should have when they pray. He said:

We are certain that God will hear our prayers when we ask for what pleases him. And if we know that God listens when we pray, we are sure that our prayers have already been answered (1 John 5:14,15 CEV).

God is listening to our prayers, and has promised to give us what we ask for—if it is in line with His will.

Therefore, as the writer to the Hebrews said, we can enter boldly into the presence of the Lord. He declared:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19 NLT).

There should be confidence that the Lord will answer our prayers. Since He has promised to answer them, we should take Him at His Word.

## **7. Prayer Takes Time**

Prayer is something that takes time and effort. Therefore, a time should be set aside to talk to the Lord. If we do not take the time to pray, then we really do not believe it is that important.

In fact, the amount of time that we spend in prayer testifies to the importance that we place on it. We are told that, on occasion, Jesus spent the entire night in prayer:

About that time Jesus went off to a mountain to pray, and he spent the whole night there (Luke 6:12 CEV).

This gives us an idea of the importance that Jesus attached to prayer. Unfortunately, too many of us do not give prayer the importance it deserves.

## **8. Prayer Should Be Done With Reverence**

When we pray, God should always be addressed with reverence, never flippantly. He is our Lord and should be treated as such. It is a great privilege to pray to a holy God. We should constantly be aware of whom we are talking to.

In the model prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples, He started it with acknowledging God:

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored (Matthew 6:9 NLT).

We always should pray with the proper respect for the Lord.

## **9. We Should Get To The Point In Our Prayers**

Although praying takes time, the actual requests should be brief. Genuine prayer comes straight from the heart, and straight to the point. We read in Ecclesiastes:

Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2 NIV).

This is good advice. An example of getting to the point can be found when Simon Peter attempted to walk on water. The Bible says the following occurred:

But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted (Matthew 14:30 NLT).

Although this was not a prayer in the strictest sense, it was a cry for help to the Lord. Peter got right to the point—so should we.

## **10. A Person Should Pray With All Their Heart**

Prayer should be done with our total being. It should not be a half-hearted effort. Believers should not just mindlessly repeat the same prayer all of the time. Genuine prayer comes from deep in the heart. It is a serious matter and should be taken seriously.

King David, in his prayer of confession, is an example of a heartfelt prayer. He said:

Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice. Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the

stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me (Psalm 51:7-10 NLT).

David's prayer was from the depths of his heart. Our prayers should also come from the depth of our innermost feelings.

### **11. There Is No Special Prayer Language**

We must also remember that there is no special language that we are to use in prayer. Prayer consists of talking to God in a reverent conversation. There are no special terms that we must use, neither is there any holy language that we should speak.

We should talk to the Lord in a respectful way but it is not necessary to use language that we do not ordinarily use.

For example, those who speak English do not have to pray in 17<sup>th</sup> century Elizabethan English for God to understand and answer. Indeed, God understands what is on our heart, so we should verbalize it in the best way that we know how.

### **12. We Should Expect To Be Spoken To**

Prayer time is often a time when God speaks to His children. We not only talk to God—we should also listen to Him. Therefore, we should give time in our prayers to listen to Him.

The psalmist wrote about the need for waiting on the Lord. We read the following:

I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God (Psalm 38:15 NIV).

Elsewhere, the psalmist speaks of waiting patiently for the Lord. He put it this way:

Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD (Psalm 27:14 NIV).

We wait for Him to speak to us.

We also read in the Psalms about the importance of meditating, or thinking, about the things of God. It says:

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do (Psalm 1:1-3 NLT).

When we enter into the presence of the Lord in prayer, it is not just a one-way conversation. We talk to God, and then we allow Him to speak of us.

### **13. We Need To Act Upon The Answers We Receive**

When we pray for a certain thing, and our prayer is answered, we have the responsibility to act upon what we have prayed. We need to follow through with the answer that God gives us.

Prayer also changes us. When we seek God's mind on a certain issue, we must be open to His leading. In fact, this will often cause a change in our own life. Hence, we must always be prepared for the Lord to change us. Consequently, prayer involves responsibility to act upon any answer that God gives us.

### **14. Sometimes We Must First Make Things Right With Others**

Before we pray, there are times that we have to seek someone out and set things right between us and them. Jesus spoke of doing this while people were offering their sacrifice to the Lord. Matthew records Him saying the following:

So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God (Matthew 5:23,24 NLT).

The Bible emphasizes that we must make things right with others.

### **15. We Should Pray Privately**

There is something special about talking to God privately. It emphasizes the unique relationship that each one of us has with Him. Jesus said that our prayers should be done in private.

In the Sermon on the Mount, we read the following:

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly (Matthew 6:6 NKJV).

There is no doubt that there is a time for public prayer. However, as individuals, we should talk to God in private.

### **16. We Should Pray Honestly**

God knows us. Therefore, we should not attempt any dishonesty with Him. We need to clearly admit our failures rather than trying to ignore or justify them. David emphasized the need to pray honestly. He prayed as follows:

Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place (Psalm 51:6 NIV).

Jesus gave the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector that went to the temple to pray. He said the following:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 18:10-14 NIV).

Our attitude should be that of the tax collector. Instead of boasting of our spiritual accomplishments, we should humbly come before Him and honestly admit our failures. He already knows them anyway.

### **17. We Should Always Give Thanks To The Lord**

It is important that prayer time should always be accompanied with thanksgiving. The psalmist emphasized how we are to enter the presence of the Lord with a thankful heart:

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *and* into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name (Psalm 100:4 NKJV)

When we begin to appreciate all the things that the Lord has done for us, we cannot help but give thanks. In fact, an unthankful heart is actually a sign of unbelief. Paul wrote about those who rejected God’s truth:

Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused (Romans 1:21 NLT).

The prayers we offer should be given with a thankful heart. Indeed, we do not want to appear like unbelievers who do not display thankfulness to the Lord.

### **18. We Should Pray Joyfully**

There is something else which is important. We should have a joyful attitude when we pray. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Every time I think of you, I thank my God. And whenever I mention you in my prayers, it makes me happy. This is because you have taken part with me in spreading the good news from the first day you heard about it. God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won’t stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns (Philippians 1:3-6 CEV).

When he thought of the people at the church at Philippi, joy came to the heart of Paul. In the same manner, we should have joy in our hearts when we pray.

### **19. We Should Ask Others To Pray For Us**

Prayer is not only something that we should do—it is something that we should ask others to do for us. The Bible contains a number of places where people have asked others to pray for them. Paul wrote to the Colossians:

Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should (Colossians 4:4 NLT).

Paul had no problem asking others to pray for him. He sets a good example for us. To the Thessalonians, he made the same request:

Dear brothers and sisters, pray for us (1 Thessalonians 5:25 NLT).

Therefore, we should not be afraid to ask others to pray for us. In fact, we are robbing them of a blessing—if we do not solicit their prayers. Thus, we should not let our pride get in the way. Indeed, we all need prayer!

### **20. We Should Expect God To Give Us Good Things**

We must remember that the Lord is our loving heavenly Father. In other words, He wants to give good things to His children.

Jesus emphasized this when He spoke about prayer. The Lord Jesus gave the following illustration about this biblical truth:

Then Jesus went on to say: Suppose one of you goes to a friend in the middle of the night and says, "Let me borrow three loaves of bread. A friend of mine has dropped in, and I don't have a thing for him to eat." And suppose your friend answers, "Don't bother me! The door is bolted, and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up to give you something."

He may not get up and give you the bread, just because you are his friend. But he will get up and give you as much as you need, simply because you are not ashamed to keep on asking.

So I tell you to ask and you will receive, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you. Everyone who asks will receive, everyone who searches will find, and the door will be opened for everyone who knocks. Which one of you fathers would give your hungry child a snake if the child asked for a fish? Which one of you would give your child a scorpion if the child asked for an egg? As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks (Luke 11:5-13 CEV).

God wants to see His children trust Him. Therefore, we must keep on asking, and keep on seeking Him in prayer. By doing so, we are trusting

that He exists, and that He will answer us. This is the proper way to approach Him.

## **21. Above All, We Should See Prayer As A Spiritual Battle**

Finally, we need to look at prayer for exactly what it is—a spiritual battle. When we pray, we are asking the Lord to help us overcome our three enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Paul wrote the following to the Ephesians about the struggle which we, as believers, constantly face. He said:

We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world (Ephesians 6:12 CEV).

Prayer is indeed a battle. The good news is that Jesus has already won the war! Therefore, we should allow the Spirit of God, rather than our own selfish desires, to guide our prayer requests. He will show us how and where to fight the battle.

This sums up some of the key things we learn about the important subject of prayer.

### **Summary To Question 1:**

#### **What Is Prayer?**

Because of Jesus Christ, and His work upon the cross of Calvary on our behalf, believers today have the privilege of talking directly to God the Father, through God the Son. Prayer is simply talking to God.

God wants His children to pray. Indeed, He commands us to prayer. Therefore, in obedience to our Lord, we should be people of prayer.

We must also note that prayer is a specific act that we do, not merely an attitude. We begin to pray and then we finish praying.

The main idea behind prayer is petition—asking God for things. It is certainly not wrong to ask for things. The key for Bible believers is to ask for the sort of things which will glorify God. We are not merely make requests with selfish motives.

From the Scripture, we discover that prayer is an act that we are to perform between God and ourselves. This being the case, prayer should be done in private without calling attention to the fact that we are praying.

Prayer should also be done honestly—we should always tell God the truth. It is a time when we bear our soul to the Lord. We let Him know how we genuinely feel about things. It is not a time for being dishonest.

## Prayer

Giving thanks should also be part of each prayer. Indeed, one of the marks of a believer is a thankful heart. Our hearts should be overflowing with thanksgiving because of what the Lord had done for each of us.

Prayer should center on God—not ourselves. We not only talk to Him, we praise and worship Him in our prayers.

When we pray, we should expect our prayers to be answered. This is what praying in faith is all about. He has promised to answer our prayers, and we should believe His promises.

Genuine prayer takes time. Thus, we should make it a priority. Jesus often spent the entire night in prayer. This is what prayer meant to Him.

We should also pray with a reverent heart. Prayer is not a time to be flippant, or overly familiar with the Lord. Indeed, we should approach the Lord with a heart which is respectful.

Also, our prayers should get to the point. As Jesus emphasized, we should not expect our prayers to be answered merely because we keep on speaking or repeating the same thing. Prayers should come from the heart.

When we pray, we should expect to be spoken to. When God answers our prayers, we need to act upon the answer. If we ask for something, and then receive what we have asked for, we must responsibly act upon God's answer.

The believer should be confident when he or she prays—we realize that God is in control. Indeed, we are praying to Almighty God, the King of the universe.

We should also ask others to pray for us. This was the practice of those living in biblical times—they asked others for prayer.

When we pray, we realize that God wants to bless us, and give us good things. However, we must always appreciate that prayer is a spiritual battle. Therefore, to pray properly, it must be led by the Holy Spirit of God.

This is a brief summary of some of the important aspects of talking to God, prayer.

## Question 2

### What Different Types Of Prayers Can Believers Pray?

Those who have trusted Christ as Savior have the privilege, and the right, of approaching God through prayer. From Scripture, there are a number of types of prayers that can be prayed by believers in Jesus Christ. They include the following.

#### 1. The Prayer Of Confession

While Jesus Christ has forgiven Christians of all of their sins, no believer ever lives a perfect life. We all still commit sin. There are no exceptions to this. These sins need to be acknowledged before God. Consequently, prayer should often involve confession of our sin.

Indeed, Jesus told us to pray a prayer of confession. In the Sermon on the Mount, He told us to pray in this manner:

Pray then like this . . . forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (Matthew 6:9,12 ESV).

The psalmist likewise emphasized the need for confession of sin. He wrote:

Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You took away the guilt of my sin (Psalm 32:5 CSB).

King David confessed his great sin to the Lord:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge (Psalm 51:1-4 NIV).

The prophet Daniel confessed his sins as well as those of his nation. We read of this in the following manner:

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God (Daniel 9:20 ESV).

Daniel recognized the importance of confession.

We discover in Proverbs that confession, and the forsaking of sin, will cause the Lord will show His mercy. It says:

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy (Proverbs 28:13 NIV)

Ezra the scribe confessed for the sins of his people. In doing so, he humbled himself before the Lord. The Bible records it as follows:

At the time of the evening sacrifice, I was still sitting there in sorrow with my clothes all torn. So I got down on my knees, then lifted my arms, and prayed: I am much too ashamed to face you, Lord God. Our sins and our guilt have swept over us like a flood that reaches up to the heavens (Ezra 9:5,6 CEV).

We not only should pray for the sins we remember, we also ought to pray for those sins that we do not remember.

The psalmist asked the Lord to cleanse him from his hidden faults—those faults that were perhaps unknown to him. He said:

How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults (Psalm 19:12 NLT).

This is certainly something which is important for us to remember. There are likely many sins, which each of have, that we may be unaware of. We should ask the Lord to show us these hidden faults.

The Lord has promised to forgive our sins when we confess them to Him. John wrote the following to the believers:

If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10 NET).

Confession of sin helps us with our daily relationship with the Lord. All of us should want to walk worthy of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Confession of sin gets us back on to the straight and narrow way that the Lord has for each of us. Therefore, confession of sin, in our prayers, is essential.

## **2. The Prayer Of Asking Something For Others (Intercession)**

Sometimes our prayers are not for ourselves, but rather they are for the needs of other people. This is also known as intercessory prayer. We find a number of examples in Scripture of those who prayed, or interceded, for the needs of others. Paul wrote the following to the church at Thessalonica:

God chose you, and we keep praying that God will make you worthy of being his people. We pray for God's power to help you do all the good things that you hope to do and that your faith makes you want to do (2 Thessalonians 1:11 CEV).

Paul indicated that he constantly prayed for the Thessalonians. He said that he would continually ask the Lord to meet their needs.

This prayer of intercession may be for an entire city or an entire nation. The psalmist declared that we should pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May all who love this city prosper (Psalm 122:6 NLT).

Intercessory prayer is not necessarily something which is only to be done on behalf of our friends, and loved ones. Indeed, we are also told to pray for our enemies. Jesus said:

Pray for the happiness of those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you (Luke 6:28 NLT).

This is difficult for us to do. Indeed, we need direction from the Spirit of God to be able to pray for those with whom we are enemies.

### **The Example Of Epaphras**

In the letter to the Colossians, Paul writes that a man named Epaphras prayed for the church at Colosse—so they could know the will of God:

Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God (Colossians 4:12 NKJV).

This is consistent with the life and ministry of Jesus. It can be summed up in one word—others. Matthew wrote:

For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28 NLT).

Paul also emphasized this in his letter to the Philippians. He wrote:

Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing. Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had (Philippians 2:4,5 NLT).

We should ask the Lord for a number of things when we pray to Him. This includes the needs of others:

### **3. The Prayer Of Asking For Something For Ourselves (Petition)**

Much of pray is asking for things for ourselves. This is nothing wrong with this. In fact, James says we do not have sometimes because we do not ask:

You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it (James 4:2 NLT).

Yet sometimes we do not receive what we have asked for, because we have the wrong motive. James also wrote:

And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure (James 4:3 NLT).

The key is to ask for the things that God wants for us. The psalmist wrote about this. He put it this way:

Do what the Lord wants, and he will give you your heart's desire. Let the Lord lead you and trust him to help (Psalm 37:4,5 CEV).

We should want the same things that God wants. These godly desires should be expressed in our prayers.

#### **4. There Is A Prayer of Worship, Praise And Thanksgiving**

There are times when our prayers consist of worship, praise and thanksgiving. Jesus began His model prayer for His disciples with praise for God:

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored (Matthew 6:9 NLT).

Consequently, we can begin our prayers with words of praise and worship to the Lord. Indeed, it is only fitting.

The psalmist wrote about the need to bow down and kneel before our God. He said:

Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care. If only you would listen to his voice today! (Psalm 95:6,7 NLT).

We should always pray with a thankful and humble attitude before the Lord. This is especially true when we remember all that He has done for us.

#### **Israel Was Told To Remember**

For example, the children of Israel were told to always remember what the Lord has done for them. In the Book of Exodus, it says:

Then Moses said to the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand" (Exodus 13:3 NIV).

The Apostle Paul says that we should give thanks in all things. He emphasized this when he wrote to the Thessalonians:

Keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:17,18 NLT).

He also told the church at Thessalonica that he constantly gave thanks to God as he continually prayed for them:

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers (1 Thessalonians 1:2 NKJV).

Thankfulness and praise should always be part of our prayer life.

### **5. The Prayer Of Benediction (Blessing)**

There is also what is known as the prayer of benediction. This means a prayer of blessing for others. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

I pray that your love will keep on growing because of your knowledge and insight. That way you will be able to determine what is best and be pure and blameless until the day of Christ. Jesus Christ will fill your lives with everything that God's approval produces. Your lives will then bring glory and praise to God (Philippians 1:9-11 God's Word).

This is the type of prayer that we should often pray. We should desire for God's blessings to be bestowed upon others.

### **Our Prayers Can Contain All Of The Above Elements**

Much of the time when we address the Lord in prayer, it is likely that our prayer will contain each of these elements.

For example, when we pray, it is probable that we will confess our sin, pray for others, pray for ourselves, give thanks to God, and pray a specific prayer of blessing for others. While this is not the case with every prayer we pray, these elements will certainly be in most of our prayers.

The psalmist wrote:

Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he did for me. For I cried out to him for help, praising him as I spoke. If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But God did listen! He paid attention to my prayer. Praise God, who did not ignore my prayer or withdraw his unfailing love from me (Psalm 66:16-20 NLT).

The prayers that we make should contain these elements of confession, intercession, thanksgiving, blessing and praise.

Truly, this is the biblical way in which we should pray.

**Summary To Question 2:  
What Types Of Prayers Should Believers Pray?**

The Bible tells us to pray. As we examine the Scripture, we find a number of different types of prayers which we can pray. This includes the following:

First, there is the prayer of confession. In this prayer, we acknowledge our sins before the living God, and ask for His forgiveness. Confession of sin is crucial—if we are to talk to God with honest and open hearts. Consequently, the prayer of confession is essential.

There is also the prayer of intercession. This prayer is for the needs of others. This is another important type of prayer. Intercessory prayer emphasizes that we are not merely to address the Lord for our needs. We need to think about others. Jesus, our example, did this, and so should we.

Then there is the prayer of petition. This consists of asking for things for ourselves. It is not wrong to ask for our own needs. In fact, Scripture commands us to do so. However, we want to ask for genuine needs—we should not be greedy.

Next, there is the prayer of worship, praise, and thanksgiving. The Lord is deserving of our worship and praise.

Consequently, we should use part of our prayer time to thank Him for who He is, as well as what He has done for us. He is truly worthy of our praises.

Finally, there is the prayer of benediction, or blessing, for others. We need to ask for God's blessings upon others.

In any given prayer, all of these elements may be present. The important thing is this: we need to pray!

### Question 3

#### **What Is The Lord's Prayer? (Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4)**

In two places in the New Testament, we have what is known as the "Lord's Prayer." We read the following words of Jesus in Matthew:

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. Give us our food for today, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (Matthew 6:9-13 NLT).

This prayer of Jesus, with minor differences, is recorded in Luke's gospel. It is stated in the following manner:

Jesus said, "This is how you should pray: "Father, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. Give us each day the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation" (Luke 11:2-4 NLT).

This is how Luke records this prayer. There are a number of things which we should note about this particular prayer.

#### **This Is A Model Prayer For Those Who Believe In Jesus**

While this is called the Lord's Prayer, it is really a prayer that the disciples of the Lord are to pray. It is the Lord's Prayer in the sense that this is the sort of thing the Lord commands us to pray. However, it is not a prayer that He prayed for Himself.

#### **Jesus Could Not Pray This Prayer: He Never Sinned**

Indeed, we should note that this prayer is not something that Jesus Himself could pray. For one thing, it asks God to forgive our sins:

And forgive us our sins—just as we forgive those who have sinned against us. And don't let us yield to temptation (Luke 11:4 NLT).

The testimony of Scripture is that Jesus was without sin. Indeed, He asked the following question of His own disciples:

Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me? (John 8:46 NLT).

None of them could find any sin in Him—because there was none.

Peter emphasized the same truth about the sinlessness of Jesus—the Lamb of God. He wrote the following to the believers:

This is true because Christ suffered for our sins once. He was an innocent person, but he suffered for guilty people so that he could bring you to God. His body was put to death, but he was brought to life through his spirit (1 Peter 3:18 God's Word).

Paul wrote something similar:

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT).

It is clear that the Bible teaches that Jesus was sinless. Therefore, He Himself could not pray what is traditionally known as "The Lord's Prayer."

### **John 17 Is The Real Lord's Prayer**

The real "Lord's Prayer" can be found in John 17. This is the prayer of Jesus while on His way to being betrayed by one of His own in the Garden of Gethsemane. He began the prayer in the following manner:

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he looked upward to heaven and said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that your Son may glorify you" (John 17:1 NET).

This was Jesus' prayer for those who would take His message of forgiveness of sin to the unbelieving world. He also said:

I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them safe in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one (John 17:11 NET).

Thus, "The Lord's Prayer" should probably be more correctly titled, "The Disciples' Prayer." This is the type of prayer that those who believe in Jesus Christ should pray.

### **We Should Not Merely Mechanically Repeat It**

While this is a model prayer for those who believe in Jesus, we must be careful not to mechanically repeat it. It is a model about *how* we should pray—not *what* we should pray.

The disciples of Jesus asked Him to show them how to pray—in the same way that John the Baptist taught his disciples. We read:

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, *that* one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1 NKJV).

Therefore, Jesus did not give this prayer so that we would repeat these exact words every time we talk to God. In fact, He warned about mindless repetition in prayer. Indeed, Jesus introduced this model prayer with the following words:

“When you pray, don’t ramble like heathens who think they’ll be heard if they talk a lot. Don’t be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:7-8 God’s Word).

We are not to repeat this prayer merely mechanically. Indeed, this is not why the Lord gave it to His disciples.

### **What Do We Learn About Talking To God From This Model Prayer?**

From this model prayer that Jesus gave, there are a number of things we learn about what God expects from us—when we talk to Him. They include the following:

#### **1. We Recognize God For Who He Is: The Lord Of The Universe**

To begin with, we must recognize to whom we are praying—our Father, which is in heaven. There is no one like Him. The Lord Himself has said:

And do not forget the things I have done throughout history. For I am God—I alone! I am God, and there is no one else like me (Isaiah 46:9 NLT).

Instead of focusing on ourselves first, it is fitting to begin our prayers with the recognition that we are talking to the Lord of the universe. Consequently, we should have a continual attitude of reverence and respect when we talk to the Lord in prayer.

#### **2. We Magnify His Holy Character**

The next thing that is mentioned is the magnifying of the name of the Lord. We hallow, or worship, His name. Name, in this context, means His character: Therefore, after acknowledging who God is, we worship His Holy character. The psalmist wrote:

Lift your hands toward the sanctuary and praise the LORD! (Psalm 134:2 NET).

This worshipful attitude should be a part of our prayer.

#### **3. We Ask For His Kingdom To Come**

We are to pray that the promised Kingdom of the Lord will come to the earth. In fact, this is the last prayer that we find recorded in Scripture. In the final chapter of the Book of Revelation, we read the following:

The one who is testifying to these things says, “Yes, I’m coming soon!” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20 God’s Word).

We want to see His rule on the earth—a rule which will be characterized by righteousness. We read about this coming righteous rule in Hebrews. It says:

But to his Son he says, “Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. Your royal power is expressed in righteousness” (Hebrews 1:8 NLT).

One day He will rule in righteousness.

#### **4. We Pray That The Will Of The Lord Will Be Done**

This part of the prayer is to get our minds in line with God’s purpose. We know that His will is going to be accomplished, both in heaven and on the earth. There is not the slightest chance that it cannot be accomplished. Yet, this part of the prayer is for our benefit.

We need to have our priorities and goals to be the same as His. When we pray for His will to be done, then we are saying that we will live in accordance with His will. Paul said we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to the Lord:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is (Romans 12:1,2 NLT).

This means that His desires are to be our desires. We are to line up our hopes and dreams with the will of the Lord.

#### **5. We Ask God To Supply Our Daily Needs**

We then ask God to meet our needs. God has promised to supply these daily needs. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he said the following:

I pray that God will take care of all your needs with the wonderful blessings that come from Christ Jesus! (Philippians 4:19 CEV).

He knows the things we need before we ask Him. Furthermore, He has promised to fulfill whatever needs we may have.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the following about God the Father:

Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the

Kingdom of God your primary concern. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today (Matthew 6:32-34 NLT).

He knows what things are necessary for us, and He said that He will meet those needs. This is God's promise!

## **6. We Ask Him To Forgive Our Sins**

Confession of sin is an important part of prayer. This confession is not so that we will become believers—this prayer is for those who have already believed. It is the confession of our daily sins. We do not want anything to interfere with our ongoing relationship with Him.

Therefore, when we confess, we should be specific about the sins that we have committed. We should ask the Lord to search our hearts and reveal any sin in it. The psalmist wrote:

Examine me, O God, and know my mind. Test me, and know my thoughts. See whether I am on an evil path. Then lead me on the everlasting path (Psalm 139:23,24 God's Word).

We read in Proverbs about the need for confession:

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy (Proverbs 28:13 ESV).

We also ask the Lord to forgive us of those sins that we are unaware of. The psalmist wrote:

How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults (Psalm 19:12 NLT).

We need to admit our sins and then confess them.

## **7. We Forgive Others Who Have Sinned Against Us**

Not only do we confess our sins, we are to forgive those who have sinned against us. We cannot come to the Lord with a pure heart if we have not forgiven the people who have injured us.

The Bible says that we are not to be bitter toward others. Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior (Ephesians 4:31 NLT).

Therefore, we must forgive those who have wronged us. We read in Psalms:

If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, my Lord would not have listened (Psalm 66:18 NLT).

Forgiving others is an important part of prayer.

### **8. We Ask That We Will Be Led Away From Temptation**

We should pray that our life will be free from temptation—as much as it is possible. While it is certainly not possible to be totally free from temptation in this fallen world, we can reduce the amount of temptation that we are faced with.

#### **He Will Never Give Us More Than We Can Stand**

God has promised that He will give us strength to resist any temptation. Paul wrote this to the Corinthians:

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure (1 Corinthians 10:13 NLT).

The Lord will help us resist temptation. Indeed, He will always show us a way out of the various temptations we receive. In other words, He will never give us more than we can handle.

### **9. We Ask For His Protection Against The Evil One**

Finally, we are to ask God from His protection from the evil one—Satan. The Bible says that Satan, our enemy evil, is constantly attempting to get Christians to sin. Peter emphasized this as he wrote the following words to the believers:

Keep your mind clear, and be alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion as he looks for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8 God's Word).

We need protection. The good news is that the Lord promises to protect those who are His. Indeed, He is constantly watching out for us.

These truths give us a better idea of the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Prayer. May each of us learn to put these truths into practice in our daily lives.

#### **Summary To Question 3**

#### **What Is The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4)**

In two places in the New Testament, we have what is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." However, this is really the prayer that the Lord gave for His disciples to pray.

He gave the model prayer based upon the desire of His disciples to learn how to pray. We discover that Jesus Himself could not pray this prayer because confession of sin is a part of it. The real "Lord's Prayer" is the found in John 17.

## Prayer

From a look at this model prayer, we learn a number of things about how we should pray. They are as follows:

First, we recognized God for who He is. We then adore and praise Him for being Lord of all. This is something which He richly deserves. Believers are also to pray for the kingdom of God to come to earth, and for His will to be done on the earth. Of course, there is no force in heaven or earth which could stop this from happening. The idea then, to pray for His kingdom to come, is to get our goals and priorities aligned with His.

We also ask Him to supply our daily needs. He is the Great Provider. Indeed, all good things come from Him, and Him alone. We certainly need to acknowledge this.

The model prayer also includes confession of sin. It is important that we own up to the sins we have committed. Another important part of this model prayer is the forgiveness of those who have sinned against us. We must forgive others as He has forgiven us.

Finally, we ask for His protection to lead us away from temptation, as well as away from the evil one. We are likened to sheep—animals which do not have any natural defenses. Therefore, we need to be protected from all forms of evil.

This model prayer gives believers a good idea of what God wants from His children when they pray to Him.

## Question 4

### Why Should We Pray?

Are there reasons as to why people should pray? The answer is, “Yes.” The Bible has the following things to say about why we should talk to the living God.

#### God Commands Believers To Pray

Above all, is the fact that God commands us to pray. Every believer, therefore, should pray in obedience to His commands. In fact, Paul said to pray about everything and worry about nothing. He wrote the following:

Never worry about anything. But in every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests while giving thanks. Then God’s peace, which goes beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6,7 God’s Word).

Paul wrote to Timothy about the need to pray:

So wherever you assemble, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy (1 Timothy 2:8 NLT).

We become obedient to God when we pray.

#### The Example Of Godly People Who Prayed

Another reason why we should pray is to follow the example of godly people throughout Scripture. They thought it was important to take the time to pray. From Scripture, we read of the following people praying:

##### Moses

On one occasion, the leader Moses spent forty days before the Lord in prayer. He said to the people:

I lay flat on the ground before the Lord for forty days and nights, for he had said he would destroy you. I prayed to him: O, Lord God, do not destroy your people, your valued property that you have powerfully redeemed, whom you brought out of Egypt by your strength (Deuteronomy 9:25-26 NLT).

Moses was a man of prayer. He gives us a great example of the importance of prayer.

##### Joshua

We find that the prayer of Joshua caused a great miracle to occur. We read of this in the Book of Joshua. It says:

## Prayer

On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: “O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.” So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel (Joshua 10:12-14 NIV).

Joshua felt the need to pray—so should we.

### **Hanna**

Hannah, the mother of Samuel prayed to the Lord for a son. Scripture records the following episode:

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD’s temple. In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, “O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head” (1 Samuel 1:9-11 NIV).

God answered her prayer. In fact, her son grew up to be the prophet Samuel.

### **David**

David was a man of prayer. On one occasion, when the Lord answered David’s prayers, he was delivered from being captured by Saul. We read of the following event:

And David prayed, “O LORD, God of Israel, I have heard that Saul is planning to come and destroy Keilah because I am here. Will the men of Keilah surrender me to him? And will Saul actually come as I have heard? O LORD, God of Israel, please tell me.” And the LORD said, “He will come.” Again David asked, “Will these men of Keilah really betray me and my men to Saul?” And the LORD replied, “Yes, they will betray you.” So David and his men—about six hundred of them now—left Keilah and began roaming the countryside. Word soon reached Saul that David had escaped, so he didn’t go to Keilah after all (1 Samuel 23:10-13 NLT).

David was delivered from King Saul because he asked the Lord what he should do. David is another example of a prayer warrior.

### **Anna**

There was a woman named Anna who was constantly in prayer. She was given the unique privilege of seeing the baby Jesus. The Bible says:

There was also a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old, having been married to her husband for seven years until his death. She had lived as a widow since then for eighty-four years. She never left the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment, she came up to them and began to give thanks to God and to speak about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38 NET).

The constant prayers of Anna were noticed by the Lord.

### **John The Baptist**

We find that John the Baptist was a man of prayer. In fact, the reason Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, was so they could be taught like John's disciples. We read the following in the gospel of Luke:

Once Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he stopped praying, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1 God's Word).

Jesus' disciples were impressed with the prayer life of John's disciples. They wanted to be men of prayer also.

### **Peter**

Peter was a man of prayer. On one occasion, we are told that he prayed for a dead woman named Tabitha, or Dorcas, to return to life. God answered his prayer and brought this woman back from the dead. The Book of Acts records the account as follows:

Peter made everyone leave the room. He knelt and prayed. Then he turned toward the body and said, "Tabitha, get up!" Tabitha opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. Peter took her hand and helped her stand up. After he called the believers, especially the widows, he presented Tabitha to them. She was alive (Acts 9:40,41 God's Word).

Peter's prayer was answered, and this valuable woman was again among the living.

### **Paul**

We know that the Apostle Paul was a man who often prayed. After he appointed elders in the various churches in which he visited, he prayed and fasted over them. The Bible says the following about Paul's practice:

When they had appointed elders for them in the various churches, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the protection of the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:23 NET).

We find many references to prayer in the writings of Paul.

### **The Eleven Disciples**

The eleven disciples prayed to the Lord to find a replacement for the traitor Judas. We read in the Book of Acts:

Then they prayed, “Lord, you know the hearts of all. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to assume the task of this service and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” Then they cast lots for them, and the one chosen was Matthias; so he was counted with the eleven apostles (Acts 1:24-26 NET).

They prayed intensely to find a replacement for Judas.

### **The Early Church**

We are told that the leaders of the early church were devoted to prayer. In fact, they chose certain men to take care of the daily running of the church—so they could spend more time in prayer. We read them saying the following:

So, brothers and sisters, choose seven men whom the people know are spiritually wise. We will put them in charge of this problem. However, we will devote ourselves to praying and to serving in ways that are related to the word (Acts 6:3,4 God’s Word).

The early church realized the need to pray. It was an important part of their lifestyle as believers in Christ.

### **Jesus Was A Man Of Prayer**

Finally, we find that prayer was an important part of the experience of the Lord Jesus. We are told that He spent the entire night in prayer. The Bible says:

At that time Jesus went to a mountain to pray. He spent the whole night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12 God’s Word).

Jesus thought it necessary to pray all night before He made His decision.

The transfiguration of Jesus occurred while He was praying. This is recorded for us in Luke’s gospel. It says:

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white (Luke 9:28-29 ESV).

The writer to the Hebrews spoke of the prayers of the Lord. He emphasized the importance of prayer in His life and ministry:

During his earthly life Christ offered both requests and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his devotion (Hebrews 5:7 NET).

If Christ felt the need to pray, then so should we. He is our example.

Therefore, we find the main characters in Scripture, along with many others, were those who practiced prayer.

**Summary To Question 4**  
**Why Should We Pray?**

We should indeed pray to the Lord. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so.

First, prayer is something that the Bible commands believers to do. To be obedient to the commands of God, believers should spend time talking to Him.

In addition, as we search the pages of Scripture, we find godly men and women engaged in prayer. These include Moses, Joshua, Hannah, David, Anna, Peter, Paul, the Eleven disciples, and the early church. Scripture records all of them were engaged in prayer.

Finally, we note that the Lord Jesus was also a man of prayer. He thought it was important to take the time out to pray. We should do likewise.

## Question 5

### Where Can A Person Pray?

In many religions, there is a particular place where a person must go to pray. However, this is not true with the Christian faith. Indeed, Scripture is clear that there is not any special spot where one must be, in order to pray to God.

A person can pray at any place, to the Lord, and at any time. We do not have to be in a church, or a house of worship, to pray to Him. We can make the following observations about praying to the Lord:

#### 1. God Always Hears Our Prayer

To begin with, God always hears the prayers of the righteous. The psalmist wrote about this wonderful truth. He said:

The Lord's eyes are on righteous people. His ears hear their cry for help (Psalm 34:15 God's Word).

He listens to believers all of the time.

In another place, the psalmist acknowledged that God of the Bible never sleeps or grows tired. He stated:

Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep (Psalm 121:4 ESV).

He is always ready to answer our prayers.

#### 2. We Should Pray In Private

While God hears our prayers wherever we may be, the Scripture emphasizes that we should pray in private. Indeed, Jesus often went alone to pray. Luke tells us of this practice of our Lord. He wrote the following:

But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer (Luke 5:16 NLT).

We are told that the prophet Daniel prayed in private. The Bible records the practice of Daniel of praying on a regular basis:

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before (Daniel 6:10 NIV).

Jesus also emphasized that we should pray in secret. Matthew records Him saying the following in the Sermon on the Mount:

When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you (Matthew 6:5,6 NLT).

The idea, of praying in private, is that we can fully express our feelings before the Lord. This is more difficult to do—if we are praying in a group setting. It is best to get away from people, and pray secretly to the Lord. He is the only One that needs to know what we are saying to Him.

### **3. We Can Pray Publicly With Others**

There are, however, times when we should pray in public with other believers. We discover that the early church met together to offer their prayers to the Lord. The Bible says:

When they heard this, they raised their voices to God with one mind and said, “Master of all, you who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything that is in them” (Acts 4:24 NET)

When Simon Peter was in jail, the early church got together and prayed for his deliverance.

Scripture records the constant prayers of these believers:

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church (Acts 12:5 NKJV).

They bonded together, as a church body, to continually pray for the release of one of their own. This reminds us that, at times, it is good to pray with other believers.

Thus, we learn from these examples, that a believer can pray at any place, and at any time.

### **Summary To Question 5 Where Can A Person Pray?**

The Bible says that there is no specific place where believers must go to pray. Indeed, the Bible says that a person can pray anywhere. There are many illustrations of this.

We have the example of Jesus who withdrew to the wilderness to pray. He went away from the crowds, and His disciples, to pray by Himself to God the Father. While in Babylon, Daniel the prophet prayed three times a day with his doors open toward Jerusalem.

In addition, praying in secret is important—because we can open our hearts to the Lord without worrying about what others may think.

## Prayer

Public prayer is also something that can be practiced. Indeed, the Book of Acts records the members of the early church coming together in prayer.

Thus, we find examples of both public and private prayer in Scripture. As mentioned, prayer can take place at anywhere, and at any time.

## Question 6

### How Often Should We Pray?

The Bible says that believers can pray to God at any place that they happen to be. We also find that the Scripture teaches that Christians can pray at any time that they wish. A number of things need to be observed from the words of Scripture:

#### Pray Whenever Possible

If possible, there should be set times each day that we pray to the Lord. However, as the need arises, prayer should also take place in between these times. The Bible commands us to pray continually:

Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17 ESV).

This does not mean that we are to pray from the moment we get up, until the moment we go to sleep. The idea is to pray as often as possible. Paul wrote to the Romans about the need to always be prayerful. He said:

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (Romans 12:12 ESV).

Paul also told the Ephesians that they should be praying at all times. He emphasized that their constant prayers should be in the power of the Holy Spirit:

Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere (Ephesians 6:18 NLT).

Scripture tells us that prayer should be a constant part of the lives of believers.

#### We Should Pray Earnestly, or Sincerely

Not only should we pray often, we should always pray with sincerity. We read about the prayer of Daniel:

O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay!  
For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name! (Daniel 9:19 NIV).

This prayer was obviously made with sincerity. He was praying that God would intervene in the affairs of the nation that was in captivity.

We also find Amos, the prophet, prayed with great sincerity and feeling. The Bible records the following words of this man of God:

When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" (Amos 7:2 NIV).

This is another example for us to pray with sincere feelings.

Therefore, as believers in Christ, we should pray often, at set times when possible, and always with deep feelings.

**Summary To Question 6**  
**How Often Should We Pray?**

We should pray often. Indeed, prayer should be done as often as possible. This does not mean that we never stop praying. It means that we are to be constantly praying—using whatever chance we can to pray.

However, if possible, there should also be times that are set aside for prayer. While our prayers should be anything but routine, it can be helpful to have a set time to pray.

In addition, we should make certain that our prayers are always earnest, or sincere. Prayer time should be a time for a blunt conversation with God. We should never treat this time lightly.

## Question 7

### **How Many Times Should We Ask God About a Particular Matter?**

Should believers pray about a matter only once, and then leave it alone? Is asking about something more than once a lack of faith? Or should a person continue praying about one particular matter? What does the Bible have to say about this question?

#### **We Should Continue in Prayer**

The Bible is clear on this matter—we are to continue in prayer, to keep on praying for the same thing, over and over again. We do not just pray for something once, and then stop. We find this in the example of Jesus. The Bible says:

Then they went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” . . . He went away again and prayed the same thing (Mark 14:32,39 NET).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, we discover that Jesus prayed three times for the same thing.

Hence, it is not a lack of faith to continue to pray for something. If Jesus thought it correct to pray three times for the same thing, then so should we.

We are also told that Jesus prayed for the entire night:

At that time Jesus went to a mountain to pray. He spent the whole night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12 God’s Word).

The fact that He prayed all night is consistent with the idea of praying a number of times for the same thing. We should not necessarily assume that His all-night prayer was for entirely different things. Instead, we can probably assume that He repeated the same requests a number of times.

Furthermore, we are commanded to keep on praying for things. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said the following:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened (Matthew 7:7,8 ESV).

We are to continue in prayer. Jesus said so.

### **The Parable Of The Friend At Midnight**

Jesus gave His disciples a parable of a friend who arrived at midnight. In it, He emphasized that we should continue to ask, continue to seek, and continue to knock, when we pray:

Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’ And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’ But I tell you this—though he won’t do it for friendship’s sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence. “And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened (Luke 11:5-10 NLT).

Again, He emphasizes that believers continue in prayer. We are not to just pray about something once, and then forget all about it. It is not a lack of faith to keep on praying for something—this is what Jesus commanded us to do.

In fact, He used the words “shameless persistence.”

### **Paul Asked The Lord Three Times For The Same Thing**

We find that the Apostle Paul asked the Lord, on three different occasions, to take away his “thorn in the flesh.” He wrote the following:

Even because of the extraordinary character of the revelations. Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me—so that I would not become arrogant. I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. But he said to me, “My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me (2 Corinthians 12:7-9 NET).

We note that each time Paul prayed, God answered him. The Lord gave an answer of “No” to this prayer of Paul. Instead of saying, “Yes,” He told Paul that His grace would be enough for Paul to endure this problem. This was not the answer Paul wanted. Nevertheless, it was God’s answer to him.

Therefore, from the words of Scripture, we find that we should continue to pray for a particular issue until the prayer is answered.

**Summary To Question 7**  
**How Many Times Should We Ask God About A Particular Matter?**

There are a number of people who believe that we should pray only once about a particular matter, and then never pray about it again. They assume it is a lack of faith to ask the Lord, over and over again, about the same thing.

However, this is not what the Scripture teaches. Indeed, it is not a lack of faith to continue praying about a particular issue.

For example, we find that Jesus prayed three times for the same thing in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had no problem praying more than once for the same thing.

We also find Jesus spending the entire night in prayer. It is fair to assume that He repeated His requests—during this all-night prayer time.

In the parable of the friend that arrived at midnight, we also find Jesus emphasizing to continue in prayer. This includes praying, again and again, for the same thing.

The Apostle Paul asked the Lord on three different occasions to remove his thorn in the flesh. However, the Lord did not grant his request.

Therefore, it is the testimony of Scripture that we continue to pray, in faith, about matters. It is not showing a lack of faith by praying for the same thing, again and again.

## Question 8

### Does God Answer Prayer?

God not only commands us to pray, His Word also records the fact that prayer truly works. For example, the Book of Chronicles records that the Lord made the following promise to the nation Israel:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14 NIV).

Here we have a promise from the Lord to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. If these people would humble themselves before Him, pray, and then change their evil ways, He will then change their circumstances. This is a promise that their prayers, as well as their behavior, would actually change things.

### The Bible Gives Examples Of Answered Prayer

The Bible gives us numerous examples that prayer truly does work. We will only mention a few of the many instances that God answered the prayers of His people.

#### 1. Elijah Prayed For The Rain To Stop

James reminded his readers, that the prophet Elijah prayed for the rain to stop in Israel. God answered his prayers and the rain ceased. He wrote:

Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and there was no rain on the land for three years and six months! Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land sprouted with a harvest (James 5:17,18 NET).

Rain was stopped, and then the rain started again, because of the prayers of this one man, Elijah. James commented on this matter:

The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness (James 5:16 NET).

Elijah, a single person, prayed to the Lord for the cessation of the rain, then he prayed for its resumption. His prayers were answered. Prayer makes a difference.

#### 2. Jehoahaz Prayed To Be Delivered From His Enemies

Jehoahaz, the King of Israel, prayed that his people would be delivered from their enemies. The Bible says the Lord heard his prayer and delivered the people:

Then Jehoahaz sought the LORD's favor, and the LORD listened to him, for he saw how severely the king of Aram was oppressing Israel. The LORD provided a deliverer for Israel, and they escaped from the power of Aram. So the Israelites lived in their own homes as they had before (2 Kings 13:4,5 NIV).

The prayers were answered, and the Lord delivered Israel. Again, we find that the Lord answers the prayers of His people.

### **3. Moses Asked God Not To Destroy The Entire Nation Of Israel**

On one occasion, we read of Moses praying to God to spare the entire nation from destruction. We read about this in the Book of Exodus:

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened (Exodus 32:11-14 NIV).

This episode happened again. Moses asked the Lord, a second time, to spare the nation. We read the following account in the Book of Numbers:

So now, let the power of my Lord be great, just as you have said, 'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in loyal love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children until the third and fourth generations.' Please forgive the iniquity of this people according to your great loyal love, just as you have forgiven this people from Egypt even until now." Then the LORD said, "I have forgiven them as you asked. (Numbers 14:17-20 NET).

On each of these occasions, the prayers of Moses were answered, and the people of Israel were spared the judgment of God. Prayer works.

### **4. Twice The Prophet Amos Asked The Lord Not To Judge Israel**

The prophet Amos was given two visions concerning how God was about to punish the nation of Israel. The first judgment was of a plague of locusts that would eat all of the crops. Amos records it in this manner:

This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king's share had been harvested and just as the second crop was coming up (Amos 7:1 NIV).

## Prayer

Amos prayed to the Lord on behalf of the nation. His prayer is recorded for us:

When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!” So the LORD relented. “This will not happen,” the LORD said (Amos 7:2,3 NIV).

God answered His prayer. The judgment did not occur as threatened.

Amos was given a second vision. In it we find that the entire land of Israel was burned with fire. He wrote:

This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: The Sovereign LORD was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land (Amos 7:4 NIV).

Again, Amos prayed, and once again, God did not punish the people:

Then I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!” So the LORD relented. “This will not happen either,” the Sovereign LORD said (Amos 7:5,6 NIV).

God answered the prayers of Amos.

### **5. Cornelius Prayed To Know The Living God**

Cornelius was a Gentile who wanted to know the true and living God. The Bible says that he prayed to God on a regular basis. We read about this in the Book of Acts:

A man named Cornelius lived in the city of Caesarea. He was a Roman army officer in the Italian Regiment. He and everyone in his home were devout and respected God. Cornelius gave many gifts to poor Jewish people and always prayed to God (Acts 10:1-2 God’s Word).

God heard his prayer, and sent Simon Peter to preach the message of Jesus Christ to him. Cornelius believed the message that Peter brought, and thus became the first Gentile, non-Jew, to be part of the New Testament church.

### **Prayer Works!**

From the first page of Scripture until the last, it is clear that prayer is not just a religious exercise in which believers are to go through—prayer works!

Therefore, we should spend as much time as possible talking to God, and asking Him to do the things that are pleasing with His will. We need to pray!

**Summary To Question 8**  
**Does God Answer Prayer?**

Prayer works. This is testified throughout Scripture. When people turn to God in prayer, He answers them. The Bible is filled with examples of this sort of thing.

For example, we see this in the life of Elijah, Jehoahaz, the people of Nineveh, Moses, and Cornelius. They all prayed and God miraculously answered their prayers. The God of the Bible hears the prayers of His people and answers them.

Therefore, we can be assured that the same God who answered the prayers of these people, will also answer our prayers. This is another reason as to why it is important for us to pray.

## Question 9

### **To Whom Do We Pray: The Father, The Son, Or The Holy Spirit?**

There is some confusion among believers as to whom we are supposed to address our prayers. Are we to pray to God the Father, or to Jesus Christ? What about the Holy Spirit? Should we address Him in prayer? What does the Bible say?

Simply stated, the Bible says we are to pray to God the Father, through God the Son, by means of God the Holy Spirit.

#### **We Are To Pray To God The Father**

Jesus taught that we are to pray to God the Father. In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew records Jesus saying the following:

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored (Matthew 6:9 NLT).

He also said this to His disciples on the night of His betrayal:

When that day comes, you won't ask me any more questions. I can guarantee this truth: If you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it to you (John 16:23 God's Word).

Paul the Apostle also wrote about the necessity of praying to God the Father. He wrote the following to the Ephesians:

And you will always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:20 NLT).

Therefore, God the Father is the ultimate One to whom we are praying. This is something which the Scripture makes clear.

#### **Jesus Christ Is The Intermediary**

While we are to address our prayers to God the Father, it is through the mediation of Jesus Christ that our prayers are heard. In other words, He is our go-between. The Apostle Paul wrote:

For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human (1 Timothy 2:5 NET).

The writer to the Hebrew said that Jesus is our Great High Priest. He is the One who brings the prayers to God the Father on our behalf:

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17 NET).

In the Old Testament, it was the High Priest who represented the people to God. Jesus, our Great High Priest, offers our prayers to the Father.

Scripture is also clear that Jesus understands the problems we face. The writer to the Hebrews emphasized that He is able to sympathize with us:

We have a chief priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are, but he didn't sin (Hebrews 4:15 God's Word).

Therefore, Christ can be sympathetic to our needs—because He has had similar experiences.

### **We Do Not Pray Directly To The Holy Spirit**

While the Holy Spirit participates in our prayers, we do not pray directly to Him. Our access to God the Father is through Jesus Christ alone. The Holy Spirit is the One who guides what we should pray—He is not the object of our prayers.

While the Bible does not say that we cannot pray directly to the Holy Spirit, the evidence of Scripture seems to be that we should not pray to Him.

### **Summary To Question 9**

#### **To Whom Do We Pray: The Father, The Son, Or The Holy Spirit?**

When believers pray, it is to the living God. We address our prayers to God the Father, through God the Son, by means of God the Holy Spirit. Consequently, when we pray, all three members of the Trinity are involved.

Jesus Christ is the intermediary between God and humanity. It is because of His work on the cross at Calvary, that believers have access to the living God. He has made it possible that we can pray to Him.

In addition, as our great High Priest, Jesus understands our needs. He is able to sympathize with our sufferings.

While we pray to the Father through the Son, we do not directly pray to the Holy Spirit. He is the One who lives inside each believer and guides our prayers. Consequently, we do not direct our prayers to Him.

## Question 10

### What Does It Mean To Pray In Jesus' Name?

Is it important to always pray “in Jesus name?” Must this be said for God to hear and answer our prayers? What does the Bible mean when it says we should pray in the “name” of Jesus?

From the Scripture, we can make the following observations.

#### **Jesus Told Believers To Pray in His “Name”**

We find that Jesus commanded believers to pray in His name. John records Him saying the following:

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it (John 14:13,14 ESV).

Later, He repeated the same commandment. We read:

In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you (John 16:23 ESV).

It is important that we pray in His name.

#### **This Means Praying With Jesus' Authority**

The word “name” has the idea of authority. Praying in Jesus' name, means to pray with, or by means of, His authority.

We read where Peter healed a man in the name, or in the authority, of Jesus. The Book of Acts records the following:

Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” (Acts 3:6 ESV).

We find the same use of “name” later in the Book of Acts. The religious leaders wanted to know by what name, or what authority, Peter and John used to heal the lame man.

Peter gave a clear answer to what power, or name, was ultimately responsible for this:

And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” (Acts 4:7 NKJV).

Later, we find Paul pronouncing judgment in “the name of Jesus.” He wrote the following to the Corinthians about judging someone in Jesus’ name:

I am with you only in my thoughts. But in the name of our Lord Jesus I have already judged this man, as though I were with you in person. So when you meet together and the power of the Lord Jesus is with you, I will be there too (1 Corinthians 5:3,4 CEV).

Again, we have the word “name” speaking of authority.

### **Name Can Also Mean The Character Of Someone**

The term name can also refer to the character of someone. We read about in the Book of Proverbs. It says:

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold (Proverbs 22:1 NIV).

We read the same thing in the Book of Ecclesiastes. It says the following:

A good name *is* better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1 NKJV).

Consequently, the name of someone can refer to the character of that person.

### **Jesus’ Name, Or Character, Is Above Every Name**

Jesus has a name that is above every other name. In other words, His authority is above the authority of everyone else. Paul wrote the following to the Philippians:

For this reason God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11 CSB).

There will come a day when everyone, believer and unbeliever both, will bow before the authority of Jesus Christ.

### **Praying In Jesus’ Name Is Praying According Is His Authority And Character**

Therefore, praying in the “name” of Jesus indicates that we pray in His authority, and consistent with His reputation and character. This is how New Testament believers are commanded to pray. Jesus said:

If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:14,15 ESV).

Consequently, we not only to pray in Jesus' authority and reputation, we should also pray in a manner that is consistent with the commandments that He has given us. Our prayers should reflect His thoughts.

### **There Are No Specific Examples Of People Using The Phrase "In Jesus Name"**

While Jesus told believers to pray in His "name," we do not find any specific examples in the New Testament of using the words "in Jesus name" when they prayed. While these exact words are not used, the idea is certainly present in the prayers that we find:

On one occasion, when the early believers met together to pray, they did ask the Lord to show great wonders through the name of Jesus:  
And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage, while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously (Acts 4:29-31 NET).

Therefore, we do not find the exact words, "in Jesus name" ever used when people prayed to the Lord.

### **There Were Prayers Addressed to Jesus**

There are prayers in Scripture that are addressed directly to Jesus. In the Book of Acts, we find the martyr Stephen addressing his final prayer to Jesus:

While council members were executing Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, welcome my spirit" (Acts 7:59 God's Word).

Obviously, this is praying in the authority of Jesus without using the particular phrase, "in Jesus' name."

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth about the believers who call upon the name, or the authority and character, of Jesus. He put it this way:

I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours (1 Corinthians 1:2 NLT).

Paul also wrote that whoever called on the "name of the Lord" would be saved. Again, this speaks of His authority:

Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They all have the same Lord, who generously gives his riches to all who ask for them. For

“Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:12,13 NLT).

However, we again emphasize that nowhere do we find people praying, “in Jesus’ name.” This means that we do not have to conclude our prayers “in Jesus name” to be heard.

If we are praying to God the Father, in the authority of Jesus Christ, He has promised to hear us—whether or not we add the words “in Jesus name.”

**Summary To Question 10**  
**What Does It Mean To Pray In Jesus’ Name?**

Jesus’ name speaks of His authority and character. The Bible says that His name, or character, is above that of every other thing in the universe. Consequently, when we pray in Jesus’ name, we should be praying consistent with His power and character.

Although Jesus told His disciples to pray for things in His name, nowhere in the New Testament do we find people specifically praying “in Jesus’ name.”

However, we do find people directly addressing Jesus in their prayers. For example, the martyr Stephen addressed his dying prayer to Jesus—but did not specifically pray in Jesus’ name.

Therefore, it is not necessary to attach the phrase, “in Jesus name” when praying. The important thing is to address one’s prayer to the living God. He is the One who knows what we have need of—before we even ask it.

## Question 11

### **How Does the Holy Spirit Help Us Pray?**

We find that all three members of the Trinity are involved in the prayers of the believer. We pray to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit.

This brings up the question: What exactly does the Holy Spirit do with our prayers? The Bible answer this question for us.

#### **The Holy Spirit Is The Means Through Which We Speak To God**

All believers, Jew and Gentile alike, can pray to the living God, through the Person of Jesus Christ, by means of the same Holy Spirit. Paul wrote:

Now all of us, both Jews and Gentiles, may come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us (Ephesians 2:18 NLT).

The Spirit of God is the means by which we reach the Father, through the Son.

#### **The Holy Spirit Should Direct Our Prayers**

The Bible tells us to pray “with,” or “in” the Holy Spirit. This has the idea of the Holy Spirit directing us to pray. We read in Jude:

But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20 CSB).

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit (Jude 20 NLT).

He should be the One directing how we pray. In other words, what we ask for, should be led, or directed by Him. The Spirit of God will teach us to pray for the right things.

#### **The Holy Spirit Directs The Lives Of Believers**

This idea of the Holy Spirit “directing” us, is consistent with what we know about the ministry of the Spirit from other parts of Scripture. Paul wrote about the Holy Spirit directing the lives of believers. To the Galatians, He said it in this manner:

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25 KJV).

We know the Holy Spirit directs believers in real situations. Indeed, we find that the Apostle Paul felt that the Holy Spirit was compelling him to go to Rome. The Book of Acts records the following event:

After these events, Paul resolved by the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem. “After I’ve been there,” he said, “It is necessary for me to see Rome as well” (Acts 19:21 CSB).

The Spirit was giving guidance to the Apostle Paul concerning his upcoming journey. He was directing Paul—as to where he should go next.

As He directs believers where they should go, and what they should do, He also directs believers concerning what they should pray. Paul again wrote:

Pray in the Spirit in every situation. Use every kind of prayer and request there is. For the same reason be alert. Use every kind of effort and make every kind of request for all of God’s people. (Ephesians 6:18 God’s Word).

The direction of the Holy Spirit, in all areas of our life, is of the utmost importance. In fact, Paul also said that we should pray that the Holy Spirit gives us “the right words to say” when we preach the message of Jesus:

Also pray that God will give me the right words to say. Then I will speak boldly when I reveal the mystery of the Good News (Ephesians 6:19 God’s Word).

Therefore, in every area, we should ask for the guidance of the Spirit.

### **The Holy Spirit Participates In Our Prayers**

The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity also participates in our prayers. He is the One who prompts us to pray and teaches us what to pray for. Paul wrote to the Romans about this important ministry of the Spirit. He said:

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don’t even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will (Romans 8:26,27 NLT).

This verse tells us that we all have a weakness when it comes to prayer. Often, we do not know how to pray, or what to pray for. One of the many ministries of the Holy Spirit is to help us with our prayers. He prompts us to pray for the right things.

The key to praying in a biblical manner is praying “in the Holy Spirit.” This means we should let the Holy Spirit tell us what we should pray for. He knows what we should ask—we do not know what to ask for.

If we are going to pray according to the will of God, then we need the mind of God to tell us what to pray. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

**Summary To Question 11**  
**How Does The Holy Spirit Help Us Pray?**

Each member of the Holy Trinity is involved in our prayers. The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, is the “means” by which our prayers reach God the Father through God the Son, Jesus Christ.

Indeed, we are told to pray “in the Holy Spirit,” or to pray “while being directed” by the Holy Spirit. We know that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to direct the lives of believers. We find that there are many examples of this in Scripture.

The Holy Spirit also participates in our prayers by prompting us what to pray for. Many times, we do not know how to pray as we should. It is the one of the many ministries of the Spirit of God to help us pray as we should.

Unless we pray in the Spirit, we cannot expect to have our prayers answered. It is that simple.

Therefore, we see that the ministry of the Holy Spirit, in our prayer life, is of the utmost importance.

## Question 12

### **Should We Pray Directly To the Holy Spirit?**

Is it proper for believers to pray directly to the Holy Spirit without mentioning God the Father, or Jesus Christ? The answer is, “No.” Believers are not to speak directly, or pray, to the Holy Spirit.

There are a number of reasons as to why this is so. They can be summed up as follows:

#### **The Holy Spirit Does Not Speak of Himself**

For one thing, it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to speak of Jesus Christ. He does not speak about Himself. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was given to remind His disciples of the things which He said and did:

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you (John 14:26 CSB).

The Holy Spirit, who was sent by the authority of God the Father, was given to testify to Jesus Christ, not Himself.

In addition, we are told that He will not speak on His own initiative. Jesus said:

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you (John 16:13,14 CSB).

Jesus made it clear that the Holy Spirit is His representative. He does not present His own ideas or speak on His initiative. Instead, He carries out the plan of God the Father, and God the Son. This is His role among the members of the Trinity.

While the Holy Spirit is fully God, His role is one of representing the wishes of the Father, and the Son. Thus, while the Holy Spirit is not subordinate, in nature or character, to God the Father, or God the Son, He is subordinate in His position.

#### **The Holy Spirit Helps Us Pray The Right Things**

Consequently, the Holy Spirit is not the member of the Trinity to whom we address our prayers. We should pray to God the Father, through the Person of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the One who guides our prayers and helps us to pray the right things. Paul wrote about this to the Romans. He put it this way:

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words (Romans 8:26 NLT).

The Holy Spirit helps us pray to the Father, through the Son—He does not help us pray to Himself! This is the plain teaching of Scripture.

### **We Are Commanded To Pray in Jesus' Name or Authority**

In fact, we are commanded to pray in Jesus' name, or authority. Jesus made this clear to His disciples on the night that He was betrayed. He said:

In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf" (John 16:23-26 NIV).

It is in the authority of Jesus, by which we pray. We are to ask for things using Him as our access to God the Father.

### **There Are Direct Prayers To Jesus**

We also find that people directly prayed to Jesus. Stephen, the martyr, was filled with the Holy Spirit as he was dying. At that time, he directed his prayer to Jesus. The Bible records what took place in this manner:

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59-60 ESV).

Direct prayers can be made to Jesus. Indeed, we have a biblical example of this.

### **There Are No Direct Prayers To The Holy Spirit**

As we search the Scriptures, we find no prayers addressed directly to the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is the indwelling presence of God in every believer, it is not necessary to pray to Him. Indeed, He lives within us.

In fact, there is only one possible place in Scripture where the Holy Spirit was directly addressed. This is found in the writings of Ezekiel. We read:

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live'" (Ezekiel 37:9 NIV).

The word translated “breath” in this verse is the same word for “Spirit.” Therefore, it is seemingly possible to argue that Ezekiel is directly addressing the Spirit of God. However, this is unlikely. Indeed, Bible translations uniformly render this word as “breath” or “wind” in this context.

Accordingly, while this highly symbolic passage may refer to the Spirit of God, it is not at all certain. Consequently, we find no clear passage in Scripture where the Spirit of God is directly addressed.

### **We Should Pray To God**

It is probably best to address our prayers to God without worrying about distinguishing between the various members of the Trinity. God understands what we mean. He is more concerned with the attitude of our heart, than the exact terms we use in addressing Him.

However, if we realize that the Holy Spirit is the one helping us pray to the Father through Jesus, we should not direct any specific prayer to Him.

### **Summary To Question 12: Should We Pray Directly To The Holy Spirit?**

The Bible commands believers to pray to God. He is the One who answers our prayers. However, Scripture does not command Christians to pray directly to the Holy Spirit. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so.

First, the Holy Spirit is the representative of Jesus Christ—now that Jesus is no longer here upon the earth. It is, therefore, His job to further the plan of Jesus—not Himself. While the Holy Spirit is fully God His role among the Trinity is subordinate to that of the Father, and the Son. He was not sent to glorify Himself, but rather to glorify Jesus.

The Bible does say that the Spirit of God directs our prayers. He reveals to us what we are to pray. Thus, His job is to cause us to pray for the right things.

Furthermore, the Scripture explicitly states that we are to ask God the Father for things in the name of Jesus. In fact, it is Jesus who taught us that. The Holy Spirit is not directly addressed.

We discover that this was the practice of the New Testament believers. While we find prayers directed to God the Father, and to Jesus, there are no instances in Scripture where prayers are directed to the Holy Spirit. This is to be expected. He is the One who helps us to pray.

Also, the Holy Spirit is how God’s presence dwells in each believer. Since He lives within us, it is not necessary to pray to Him.

Thus, our prayers should be directed to God the Father, by the authority of God the Son, through God the Holy Spirit.

### Question 13

#### **How Did People Get Their Prayers Answered Before Jesus Came To Earth?**

The New Testament says that Jesus is the High Priest for those who believe in Him. God the Father accepts our prayers because they go through the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the One who causes our prayers to be answered.

#### **How Did It Work Before Jesus Came?**

This brings up the issue of how the prayers of people were answered before Jesus came. How were people able to approach God the Father apart from the work of God the Son?

Since Jesus was not there to intercede on behalf of those who believed the promises of God, how, then were their prayer requests granted? Who answered their prayers and why?

#### **God Answered Prayers Before Jesus Came Into The World**

There is one thing that we know for certain. Those who lived, before Jesus entered our world, were able to pray to God. We know this because there are a number of examples in the Old Testament of people praying to God. We also find that He answered their prayers.

#### **Moses**

For example, Moses told the Pharaoh of Egypt:

Moses replied, "When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the LORD. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so you may know that the earth is the LORD's" (Exodus 9:29 NIV).

Moses assumed that he had the right to pray, and that his prayer would be answered. Moses was correct in his assumption. His prayer was answered. The Bible says:

Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. He spread out his hands toward the LORD; the thunder and hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land (Exodus 9:33 NIV).

The Lord heard Moses' prayer, and He answered it. Obviously, God was answering the prayers of His people.

#### **Prayer Was To God Alone**

While the people of Israel were told to pray, they could only pray to the God of Israel. Moses wrote to the children of Israel:

Take heed to do everything I have told you to do, and do not make mention of the names of other gods—do not let them be heard on your lips (Exodus 23:13 NET).

It is to the God of the Bible, and to Him alone, that we pray.

### **The Entire Nation Prayed To God**

When Solomon dedicated the Temple, he acknowledged that the entire nation of Israel prayed to the Lord. We read the following in the Book of Kings:

Hear the petition of your servant and your people Israel, which they pray toward this place. May you hear in your dwelling place in heaven. May you hear and forgive (1 Kings 8:30 CSB).

Therefore, we find that the people of Israel were told to pray to God. In addition, we find that God answered their prayers—before the time of Jesus.

### **The Sacrificial System Foreshadowed The Work Of Jesus**

The basis, upon which God answered prayers, during the time of the Old Testament, was the response of the people to His commandments. God established a detailed sacrificial system—that included the sacrifice of bulls and goats. These sacrifices, however, could not save the people from their sins. The writer to the Hebrews emphasized this:

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4 CSB).

This entire sacrificial system that is found in the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. These sacrifices spoke of His Person and work. The people were saved by placing faith in God, and the future work that He would do. Without realizing it, they were saved by looking forward to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

### **A Blood Sacrifice Was Necessary**

There is something else. Paul made it clear that no one can live up to God's perfect standard. Therefore, a blood sacrifice was absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of sin. He wrote the following to the Romans:

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair

and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus (Romans 3:23-26 NLT).

The writer to the Hebrews made the same point. He put it this way:

And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission (Hebrews 9:22 NKJV).

God required blood sacrifices. Without it, there is no forgiveness.

### **The Prayers Were Answered On The Same Basis**

Therefore, God answered the prayers of the people during the Old Testament era, because they placed their faith in Him. This was based upon the amount of knowledge that He revealed to them. This explains how God could answer their prayers before the coming of Christ into the world.

### **Summary To Question 13: How Did People Get Their Prayers Answered Before Jesus Came to Earth?**

Today, our prayers are answered because of the ministry of Jesus Christ. He is our Great High Priest. However, He has only been in this position since His Ascension into heaven.

This brings up the issue as to how prayers were answered before Jesus assumed the position of our High Priest. How were people granted answers to their prayers?

Those living in the Old Testament period did have access to God. We know that God answered their prayers—because there are numerous examples in the Old Testament of the Lord granting the requests of the people.

This was possible because of a number of things which the Lord established.

For one thing, the Old Testament sacrificial system foreshadowed the work of Jesus Christ. It spoke of who He would be, and what He would do. However, the sacrifices and ceremonies could not save them—all of these pointed to Jesus. They were looking forward to His coming.

The people were able to have their prayers answered, because they acted in faith, according to the promises that God made to them.

Although they did not understand everything that God had promised, they believed Him to the degree that He revealed Himself to them. This is the basis upon which their prayers were answered.

## Question 14

### **What Does It Mean To Pray With Faith?**

The Bible emphasizes that believers should pray “in faith” to the Lord. Jesus said the following to His disciples:

For this reason I tell you, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (Mark 11:24 NET).

It is important to Jesus that we ask in faith. We are to believe that the Lord will answer the requests which we bring to Him.

### **Jesus Again Emphasizes Faith**

Matthew records Him saying something similar. He records the following words of our Lord:

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith (Matthew 21:22 ESV).

Again, the importance of faith is stressed.

James wrote that we should not doubt when we pray. In fact, he compared those who doubt to the surf being tossed around. He said:

But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind (James 1:6 NLT).

We are not to be doubters in our prayers.

What is faith? It is defined in the following way in the Book of Hebrews:

What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see (Hebrews 11:1 NLT).

Biblical faith is the confident assurance that the Lord will keep His Word. This is what faith should be all about.

### **Prayer Is An Act Of Faith**

Faith is trusting in God for something that we cannot see—something that has not yet happened. Therefore, when we pray, we are acknowledging that we are trusting in the God of the Bible, whom we cannot see, to answer our requests concerning things that have not yet happened.

By doing this, we are telling God that we believe that He exists, and that He truly answers prayer.

Peter wrote the following about Jesus:

Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8 CSB).

We have not seen Him, yet we love Him “in faith.”

The same is true with our prayers. We pray in faith. John wrote:

Dear friends, if we don’t feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him (1 John 3:21,22 NLT).

When we pray, we are acting in faith. We are trusting the Lord will respond to our requests—even though we cannot see Him, or audibly hear His voice.

### **Does This Mean He Will Give Us Anything We Ask For?**

Some people have understood these promises as God saying He will give us anything that we ask for—as long as we have enough faith. This includes asking for such things as riches and health.

However, this is not what these passages are teaching. In faith, we can ask for the Lord for anything that is consistent with His revealed will. John wrote:

And this is the confidence that we have before him: that whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, then we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him (1 John 5:14,15 NET).

We can receive anything that is in God’s will—not anything we want to ask for. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

And my God will supply all that you need according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19 NET).

God has promised to supply all of our needs—not all of our “greeds.” Our prayer of faith must always be in accord with God’s revealed will. Otherwise His answer will be, “No.”

This sums up what it means to pray “in faith.”

### **Summary To Question 14: What Does It Mean To Pray With Faith?**

Scripture emphasizes the importance of faith. Indeed, the Bible says that we should pray to God “in faith” or “with faith.” In fact, the act of prayer is an act of faith. We are exercising faith that there is a God who exists and who answers our prayers.

## Prayer

Indeed, we have never seen this God nor do we hear His voice in an audible way. Yet we believe and we pray in faith to the Lord. While we may have a confident assurance that the Lord exists and that He does answer our prayers, it is not something which we can physically experience. It must be done in faith.

While we are told to exercise faith in prayer, we are not promised that God will give us everything that we ask. He has only promised to give us those things that are consistent with His will.

Therefore, the “prayer of faith” has its limitations. Answers are only given if our prayers conform to God’s will. In other words, we need to ask for godly things if we expect our requests to be granted.

## Question 15

### Is There A Proper Prayer Position?

No. The Bible does not command people to assume any particular physical position in talking with God. On the contrary, there are various positions people assume when talking to God.

In Scripture, we find individuals praying in the following ways.

#### 1. Some Prayed When Kneeling

The martyr Stephen knelt as he prayed to the Lord. The Book of Acts explains what occurred in this manner:

As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” He fell to his knees, shouting, “Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!” And with that, he died” (Acts 7:59,60 NLT).

When Simon Peter brought a woman back from the dead, he too knelt in prayer. We also read about this in the Book of Acts:

Peter sent them all out of the room. He knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up (Acts 9:40 CSB).

In the Old Testament, we find the prophet Daniel kneeling in prayer. In fact, he would kneel in prayer three times, every day, as he talked to the Lord. We read:

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before (Daniel 6:10 NIV).

In the Book of Acts, we read about an entire church kneeling and praying to the Lord. The Bible says:

When we returned to the ship at the end of the week, the entire congregation, including women and children, left the city and came down to the shore with us. There we knelt, prayed (Acts 21:5 NLT).

Kneeling before the Lord shows proper reverence. When we kneel before Him, we recognize His majesty, as well as our humble state.

#### 2. Some People Stood And Prayed

The Scriptures give examples of people praying while standing. In a parable that Jesus gave, we read the following:

The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector (Luke 18:11 CSB).

This is also a proper prayer position. Although this particular prayer was certainly *not* pleasing to the Lord!

Nehemiah prayed as he stood before the king. The Bible explains what happened this way:

Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven (Nehemiah 2:4 ESV).

It is allowable to stand and pray.

### **3. Some Lifted Up Their Hands**

Some prayed with lifted hands. The psalmist wrote:

I will honor you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer (Psalm 63:4 NLT).

We read of the same idea in the New Testament. Paul said:

First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all people. . . . So I want the men to pray in every place, lifting up holy hands without anger or dispute (1 Timothy 2:1,8 NET).

At times, the lifting up of hands accompanied prayer.

### **4. Jesus Prayed With His Eyes Open**

Contrary to what some people may think, we can pray with our eyes open. On His way to the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed with His eyes open:

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you” (John 17:1 NLT).

Jesus looked up to heaven when He prayed.

We find another example of Jesus praying with His eyes open. This was at the tomb of Lazarus. Scripture says He set His eyes upward when praying:

So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. (John 11:41 SB).

Therefore, one does not have to shut their eyes when they pray.

## 5. Jesus Prayed When He Fell On His Face

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus fell upon His face when He prayed. Matthew records this in the following manner:

He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*” (Matthew 26:39 NKJV).

Hence, we see prayer to God is not so much the position of the body, rather it is the right attitude of the heart. The Bible makes it clear that the intention of the heart is what God cares about. We read of the Lord saying the following to Samuel:

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7 CSB).

God looks upon our heart. This is the key.

To conclude, from an examination of the Scripture, we discover that there is no such thing as a biblical prayer position. In fact, the important this is that we do pray.

It is not so much how our body is positioned, as it is how our heart is positioned. Indeed, our hearts need to be in the right position when we talk to the Lord.

### **Summary To Question 15: Is There A Proper Prayer Position?**

Often, we think there is a proper physical position that we must assume when we pray to the Lord. However, this is not the case. The Bible does not say that there is a correct prayer position in which a believer must pray.

In fact, as we look at the totality of Scripture, we discover just the opposite. In the Bible, we find some people praying when they are standing—such as the prophet Nehemiah.

On the other hand, Jesus walked when He prayed. The Lord Jesus also prayed with his eyes open.

There are further examples of people kneeling when addressing God—such as the martyr Stephen. Daniel the prophet prayed on his knees.

In addition, the Bible gives examples of people falling on their face when praying. Yet not everyone prayed in this manner.

We are told that some people lifted up their hands as they prayed, while others did not.

## Prayer

These examples should make it clear, that the Lord does not expect us to assume some “holy” position when we talk to Him.

Consequently, the position of the body is not as important as the attitude of the heart. It is our heart that must be in the correct position, not our body.

## Question 16

### **Do We Always Have To Pray Out Loud?**

When we pray to God, do we always have to pray out loud, or can we pray silently? Must we always verbalize our prayers? What does the Bible say?

#### **There Are Examples Of People Praying Silently**

There is nothing in Scripture that says we always have to pray out loud. To the contrary, we find examples of people in Scripture who prayed silently. We can cite a number of examples.

#### **1. Hanna Prayed Silently In The Temple**

We discover that God can hear prayers that are not spoken out loud. We have the example of Hanna, the mother of Samuel. She prayed silently in the temple.

The Bible records this episode as follows:

While she continued praying in the Lord's presence, Eli watched her mouth. Hannah was praying silently, and though her lips were moving, her voice could not be heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to be drunk? Get rid of your wine!" "No, my lord," Hannah replied. "I am a woman with a broken heart. I haven't had any wine or beer; I've been pouring out my heart before the Lord. Don't think of me as a wicked woman; I've been praying from the depth of my anguish and resentment." Eli responded, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the request you've made of him." (1 Samuel 1:12-17 CSB).

The God of Israel did answer her prayer. Soon she gave birth to a child who grew up to be the prophet, Samuel.

#### **2. Nehemiah Prayed Silently Before The King**

The Bible says that Nehemiah offered a silent prayer to God when the king asked him a question. It records the event in the following manner:

The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it" (Nehemiah 2:4,5 NIV).

Nehemiah had to provide an immediate answer to the king. He had no time to pray privately, or even pray out loud. He made a quick silent prayer, and then answered the question of the king.

### **3. The Servant Of Abraham Prayed Silently**

The servant of Abraham prayed silently as he was looking for a bride for Isaac. We read about it in the Book of Genesis:

Before I had finished praying in my heart, I saw Rebekah coming out with her water jug on her shoulder (Genesis 24:45 NLT).

Silent pray is certainly allowable.

#### **The Lord Knows What Is In Our Heart**

The Lord has made it clear that He understands what is in our heart. Jeremiah the prophet acknowledged that God knows what is in the heart of each of us:

O Lord of Heaven's Armies, you test those who are righteous, and you examine the deepest thoughts and secrets. Let me see your vengeance against them, for I have committed my cause to you. (Jeremiah 20:12 NLT).

The Lord also tests the things that are in our heart. Jeremiah again wrote:

Yet you know me, O LORD; you see me and test my thoughts about you (Jeremiah 12:3 NIV).

This is a wonderful truth of Scripture! He knows us, He knows our hearts. Therefore, He knows what we are going to ask Him before we verbalize it.

#### **God Hears The Prayers Of Mute People**

Something else needs to be considered. There are many people in this world who are not able to speak—they are mute. God certainly hears their prayers—even though they do not have the ability to put their thoughts into words!

Consequently, we should not assume that we must speak our prayers out loud for them to be heard by God. He can hear our prayers—even though they are not verbalized.

#### **Summary To Question 16 Do We Always Have To Pray Out Loud?**

While most of the prayers that are recorded in the Bible were spoken out loud, there are also a number of examples of people praying silently to the Lord.

In the Old Testament, Hanna prayed silently in the temple. Her prayer was answered. God gave her a son, who grew up to become the prophet Samuel.

## Prayer

When asked a question by the king, Nehemiah made a quick silent prayer. Indeed, he had no choice. The king had asked him a question which needed an immediate answer. Nehemiah quickly prayed to the Lord, and the Lord gave him the right words to say to the king.

We find the servant of Abraham praying silently when looking for a bride for Isaac. Again, his silent prayer was answered.

There is one other thing in which we must remember—there are mute people in this world. God is quite capable of answering their prayers—though they do not have the capacity to verbalize them.

This is consistent with the rest of Scripture. The Bible says that God knows what is in our heart. Therefore, when we pray silently, He hears us as well as if we verbalized our prayers.

## Question 17

### Does God Answer All Of Our Prayers?

This is an often-asked question. Many times, Christians complain that God did not answer their prayer. They prayed for a particular thing, but did not receive what they had asked for.

Does this mean that God does not always answer our prayers? What should we conclude when our prayers are not answered as we believe they should be? Did God hear these prayers?

#### **All The Prayers Of Christians Are Answered**

While there are complaints that God does not answer certain of our prayers, such is not the case. The Bible promises that God hears the prayers of those who believe in Him, and He answers *all* of them.

However, the answer may be one of three things: “Yes,” “No,” or “Wait.” We need to understand the following things about what the Bible says concerning answered prayer.

#### **1. Sometimes the Answer Is “Yes”**

There are times when we pray for specific things, and God grants our request. He gives us what we ask for. There are many examples in Scripture of God giving an immediate “Yes” to prayer:

The Judge Samson asked the Lord to restore his lost strength, for one last time. We read of this in the Book of Judges. It says:

Samson called to the LORD, “O Master, LORD, remember me! Strengthen me just one more time, O God, so I can get swift revenge against the Philistines for my two eyes!” Samson took hold of the two middle pillars that supported the temple and he leaned against them, with his right hand on one and his left hand on the other. Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” He pushed hard and the temple collapsed on the rulers and all the people in it. He killed many more people in his death than he had killed during his life (Judges 16:28-30 NET).

His prayer was immediately answered.

#### **2. The Answer May Be “No”**

However, there are times when God answers our requests by saying, “No.” God has promised to give us the grace to accept any answer that He gives us. Not everything we pray for is granted. “No” is an answer to prayer.

### **Saying No Is For Our Benefit**

Christians have to remember that God only has the best interest of the believer in mind. When He says no to our prayers, He does it for our own good. The Apostle Paul asked the Lord three times to remove a particular problem that he had.

Each time God answered the same way, “No.” Paul records his experience in his second letter to the Corinthians:

Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:8,9 CSB).

In this case, the prayer of the Apostle Paul was indeed answered. However, the answer was “No.” With the answer of no, God promised Paul that His grace would be sufficient to help him cope with his problem.

### **David’s Prayer For His Son**

King David prayed that his young child would not die. Scripture says the following took place:

Then David prayed to God for the child and fasted. He would even go and spend the night lying on the ground (2 Samuel 12:16 NET).

However, when the child died, David accepted God’s answer to his prayers. His behavior shocked his servants. The Bible says:

His servants said to him, “What is this that you have done? While the child was still alive, you fasted and wept. Once the child was dead you got up and ate food!” He replied, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept because I thought, ‘Perhaps the LORD will show pity and the child will live. But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Am I able to bring him back? I will go to him, but he cannot return to me!’” (2 Samuel 12:21-23 NET).

David realized that he would see his son in the next life. Therefore, he was able to trust that God knew best in allowing the child to die. This is indeed a comforting truth for each and every one of us—our Lord always knows what is best.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked God the Father if it was possible to remove the cup of suffering that He was about to experience. Christ prayed in the following manner:

Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me — nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done (Luke 22:42 CSB).

Jesus’ attitude is the proper one. We want the Lords’ will—not our own. Indeed, His will is always the best for us.

One of the reasons why God says, “No” is listed by Peter. He told his readers that the Lord wants to test, or prove, our character. This will help us grow spiritually. He wrote:

Such trials show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold—gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away—and will bring praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:7 NET).

The Lord wants our faith to remain strong in the midst of difficulties. This is one of the reasons as to why we do not get everything that we ask for.

### **3. God Also Tells Us To “Wait”**

Oftentimes, God does not give us a “Yes” or “No” answer, but rather says for us to “Wait.” A delayed answer is not necessarily a “No” answer. There are a number of examples of this found in the Scripture.

#### **Hanna Wanted A Child**

In the Old Testament, we have the example of Hanna, the mother of Samuel. For many years, she prayed to the Lord for a child. Finally, she prayed in anguish for the Lord to give her a son. The Bible says:

On one occasion in Shiloh, after they had finished eating and drinking, Hannah got up. (Now at the time Eli the priest was sitting in his chair by the doorpost of the LORD’s temple.) She was very upset as she prayed to the LORD, and she was weeping uncontrollably. She made a vow saying, “O LORD of hosts, if you will look with compassion on the suffering of your female servant, remembering me and not forgetting your servant, and give a male child to your servant, then I will dedicate him to the LORD all the days of his life. His hair will never be cut” (1 Samuel 1:9-11 NET).

Her prayer was immediately answered—she soon conceived a son. The Bible says:

They got up early the next morning and after worshiping the LORD, they returned to their home at Ramah. Elkanah had marital relations with his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. After some time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, thinking, “I asked the LORD for him” (1 Samuel 1:19,20 NET).

The Lord answered her prayer in a mighty way. However, He did not grant her request the first time she asked. Indeed, it was a number of years before her son was born.

#### **Zechariah And Elizabeth Waited For A Son**

Another case that can be found in Scripture is Zachariah—the father of John the Baptist. The story is as follows:

For many years, he and his wife Elizabeth had prayed for a child. Yet no child was given to them. Finally, their prayer was answered.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah, and told him the good news. Luke records the exchange between them as follows:

But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John” (Luke 1:13 NKJV).

God delayed the answer their prayer. The reason is that God had something in mind that was better than they had ever dreamed. Their child was to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Yet they had to wait until they were very old before they saw the birth of this child. They merely wanted a son. Instead they got much more—the forerunner of the Messiah, the Christ. All of this occurred in the perfect timing of God.

### **Simeon Waited A Lifetime To See The Messiah**

Another example of God telling someone to wait, can be found with a righteous man named Simeon. His constant prayer was for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. However, it was not until he was very old, that his prayer was answered. Yet, his prayer was indeed answered.

Luke records what occurred:

There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel’s consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord’s Messiah (Luke 2:25,26 CSB).

God had promised Simeon that he would send the promised Messiah before Simeon died. He had to wait many years before this promise was fulfilled. The answer came in God’s timing, not Simeon’s.

### **The Martyrs In Heaven Were Told To Wait**

In the Book of Revelation, we read of the martyrs in heaven. Those who had been martyred called out to Lord to avenge their death. The Lord told them to be patient and wait for this to occur. The Book of Revelation says:

They cried out with a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Master, holy and true, before you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?” Each of them was given a long white robe and they were told to rest for a little longer, until the full number was reached of both their fellow servants and their brothers who were going to be killed just as they had been (Revelation 6:10,11 NET).

Their prayers were answered according to God's perfect timing. The same principle applies to us. God will answer our prayers in His timing, not ours.

### **The Prayers May Not Be Answered In Our Lifetime**

It is possible that some of our prayers will not be answered in our lifetime. It is only after the believer dies, that their prayer is answered. Often this prayer concerns the salvation of a loved one. The right attitude is to keep praying in faith—whether or not we see the results.

The writer to the Hebrews wrote about those who died in faith without seeing the promises. He put it this way:

These all died in faith without receiving the things promised, but they saw them in the distance and welcomed them and acknowledged that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth (Hebrews 11:13 NET).

The promises to them were eventually fulfilled—yet they never lived to see them. However, God's answer did indeed come.

### **People Prayed From The Beginning For The Coming Messiah**

From the time Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, humanity has waited for the promised Deliverer that God would send. Generations of people prayed, and died, without seeing the answer to their prayer. Eventually, He came as promised. The Bible says that it was in the “fullness of time.” Paul wrote to the Galatians:

But when the appropriate time had come, God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4 NET).

The Messiah arrived on God's schedule, not the peoples.

Consequently, we must pray in faith realizing that we may not live to see the answer to our prayer. Yet this should not stop us from praying. Some of our prayers may be answered after we have left this world.

### **Summary To Question 17 Does God Answer All Of Our Prayers?**

It is often wrongly contended that God does not answer some of the prayers of Christians. This is incorrect. God answers every prayer of the believer. His answer consists of one of three things. He either says, “Yes,” “No,” or “Wait.”

Many times, the Lord will give us what we ask for. The answer will be, “Yes.” We find an example of this in the case of Samson. The Lord restored his strength, one last time, and allowed him to die with the Philistines. His prayer was immediately answered.

However, there are other times when He will not grant our request. The answer will be “No.” Three times, the Apostle Paul prayed for the Lord to take away a problem that he had. On each occasion, God told him no.

Yet, the Lord also told him that He would provide strength for Paul to endure the problem. Paul’s prayer was answered—but not in the way he desired. The same holds true for some of our prayers. God answers them, but he does not give us what we ask. His answer is “No.”

There is also the possibility that our prayers will not be given an immediate yes or no answer, but rather we will be told to “Wait.” We have a number of examples of this in Scripture.

There was an old man named Simeon, who waited his entire life to see the Messiah. Yet, at the end of his life, his request was granted. He saw the Christ. It was well worth the wait.

Hanna, the mother, of Samuel waited for many years to have a child. When her request was finally granted, she bore a son who became a mighty prophet of God. While the years of waiting were difficult, the final result, the child Samuel, was worth the wait.

The same is true for Zechariah and Elizabeth—the parents of John the Baptist. They were beyond the child-bearing years when she gave birth to a son. He was to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Finally, there is the possibility that our prayer will be answered, but not in our lifetime. We do not always see the end result of our ministry, or our prayers.

Scripture provides examples of such a thing. Many biblical characters prayed in faith but they died without seeing the result. The answer eventually came—although they were not around to see it.

Consequently, we must, in faith, leave the results to God. This is one part of our Christian experience where we will never have all the answers.

The answers to our prayers is up to God, and to Him alone. The same holds true to the timing of His answers. We must leave this entirely up to Him.

## Question 18

### **Why Do So Many Prayers Seem To Go Unanswered?**

While God promises to answer all of the prayers of believers, He often answers with “No.” There are a number of reasons as to why this is so.

Indeed, the Bible tells us what keeps our prayers from being answered with a “Yes.”

#### **Sin Can Hinder Our Prayers Being Answered**

The Bible indicates that sin can hinder our prayers from being answered in the affirmative. The psalmist wrote:

If I had harbored sin in my heart, the sovereign Master would not have listened (Psalm 66:18 NET).

Sin can hinder the answer to our prayers. We read something similar in the writings of Isaiah:

The Lord is not too weak to save or his ear too deaf to hear. But your wrongs have separated you from your God, and your sins have made him hide his face so that he doesn't hear you (Isaiah 59:1,2 God's Word).

This truth is illustrated in the New Testament. A certain blind man, that Jesus healed, made the following observation to the religious leaders:

We know that God doesn't listen to sinners. Instead, he listens to people who are devout and who do what he wants. Since the beginning of time, no one has ever heard of anyone giving sight to a person born blind (John 9:31,32 God's Word).

His statement is very instructive. God hears those who worship Him, and do His will. However, He will not listen to those who are in sin.

#### **This Does Not Mean We Must Be Completely Free From Sin To Pray**

While we are told that sin can hinder our prayers from being answered, this does not mean that we have to be completely without sin, or have reached some sort of super spiritual level. If this were what was demanded of us, then none of us would have our prayers answered!

We approach God through the Person of Jesus Christ, not our own merit. The Apostle Paul wrote the following to the Romans:

For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood (Romans 3:25 NLT).

Therefore, we do not have to wait until we have arrived at some advanced spiritual level, before our prayers can be answered.

### **Marital Problems Can Hinder Answers To Prayer**

Marital problems can hinder the granting of prayer requests. Peter emphasized this fact when he wrote his first letter:

Husbands, in a similar way, live with your wives with understanding since they are weaker than you are. Honor your wives as those who share God's life-giving kindness so that nothing will interfere with your prayers (1 Peter 3:7 God's Word).

This is why it is so important to have a godly home life. If not, our prayers can be hindered to some degree.

### **Lack Of Faith Can Keep Our Prayers From Being Answered**

Sometimes a lack of faith can keep our prayers from being answered. James wrote about the importance of exercising faith. He put it this way:

But he must ask in faith without doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord, since he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:6-8 NET).

Prayer needs to be done in faith. We need to believe that the Lord will answer our requests. He has promised to do so, and the Lord always keeps His promises.

### **Disobeying His Commandments Can Hinder Our Prayers**

Our prayers will be answered—if we remain in an obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus said to His disciples:

But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! (John 15:7 NLT).

To remain in Christ, to stay joined to Him, means that we keep His commandments. John wrote of this necessity:

Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him (1 John 3:21,22 NLT).

This means that disobeying His commandments can keep our prayers from being answered. This is another reason as to why our obedience to Him is crucial.

### **Prayers Not According To His Will Go Unanswered**

Often times, our prayers are answered with a “No,” because it is not according to His will. John emphasized the necessity of praying according to God’s will, or desire, rather than our own. He wrote:

And this is the confidence that we have before him: that whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us (1 John 5:14 NET).

We need to pray according to God’s will. However often we do not. We read in the Book of James about some of the reasons as to why prayers are unanswered. It says:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:1-4 ESV).

James listed a number of reasons why our prayers may go unanswered.

For example, he said that friendship of the world is hostility with God. We cannot be a friend of God, and a friend of the world, at the same time. Indeed, we are not citizens of this world but rather citizens of heaven. Paul wrote:

But our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:21 CSB).

Our prayers must reflect our heavenly citizenship.

### **The Request Of The Mother Of James And John**

An example of asking for the wrong thing can be found in the request of the mother of James and John. She approached Jesus with the following request:

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling down she asked him for a favor. He said to her, “What do you want?” She replied, “Permit these two sons of mine to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” Jesus answered, “You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink the cup I am about to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” He told them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right and at my left is not mine to give. Rather, it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” Now when the other ten heard this, they were angry with the two brothers (Matthew 20:20-24 NET).

Although this was a sincere request from the mother of the two boys, it was not according to God's will. This teaches us a valuable lesson. We can ask Jesus something with all sincerity, but still have our request denied.

### **Lack Of Forgiveness For Others Can Hinder Our Prayer Life**

Jesus stressed the need to forgive others when we pray. Mark records Him saying the following concerning prayer:

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing (Mark 11:25 CSB).

Our daily relationship with God can be affected, if we have not forgiven people for what they have done to us. This does not affect our standing with God—we are still believers. However, it does affect our day-to-day relationship with Him. The Bible tells us to forgive others completely. Paul wrote:

But instead, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you (Ephesians 4:32 NET).

As much as we are able, we need to forgive those who have wronged us.

### **The Spiritual Battle May Delay The Answer**

Sometimes, it is because of a spiritual reason that our prayers are not answered immediately. We read the following account in the Book of Daniel:

Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come (Daniel 10:12-14 NIV).

This account gives us incredible insight into the unseen realm. It took twenty-one days, from the time the angel began to answer Daniel's prayer, until the answer came. This teaches us a valuable lesson—we must continue in prayer.

This is also another indication of the ongoing spiritual battle we face. Paul wrote about this battle to the Ephesians:

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12 NLT).

We should, therefore, not be discouraged, if there is a delay in the answering of our prayers. Often people will become discouraged if their prayers are not immediately answered. Consequently, they quit praying.

This is tragic. If we quit praying, then we cut ourselves off from God and His blessings.

Prayers need to be offered before they can be answered. Indeed, Jesus commanded us to continually pray:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7 NKJV).

Therefore, let us keep on praying.

This sums up as to why some of our prayers seem to go unanswered.

### **Summary To Question 18** **Why Do So Many Prayers Seem To Go Unanswered?**

While the Bible commands us to prayer, it seems that some of our prayers are not answered. There are a number of reasons as to why this is the case.

Sometimes it is sin in our life that is hindering our prayers from being answered. Scripture says that the Lord hides His face from those who are in sin. Therefore, our sinful behavior in certain areas, can hinder the answer to our prayers.

However, this does not mean that we must have attained some state of spiritual maturity before our prayers will be answered. If this were the case, then none of us would have our requests granted. Each of us has certain sinful areas which we must deal with. We will never reach sinless perfection in this life.

The Bible also says that marital problems can hinder our prayers. Consequently, it is important to have a home life which properly honors the Lord.

There is also lack of faith on our part. The Bible emphasizes that believers must exercise faith in our prayers. If we lack faith, it can hinder our prayer life.

If we are in a state of disobeying the commandments of the Lord, then we should not expect positive answers to our prayers. Obedience to the Lord is the key.

Furthermore, when we pray, it is necessary to pray according to His will, His desires. We should not insist that our own desires must always be met.

In fact, sometimes our desires are wrongly motivated. We need our desires to match up with His desires.

## Prayer

Add to this, the problem of our lack of forgiveness to others. Jesus said this would hinder our prayers. We are commanded to forgive others completely.

Finally, there may be a spiritual reason as to why an answer is delayed. We find an illustration of this in the Book of Daniel—where Daniel's answered was delayed for twenty-one days because of a spiritual battle. Thus, the delay may be because of warfare in the heavenly realm. Therefore, it is essential that we continue in prayer.

These are some of the reasons as to why some of our prayers seemingly go unanswered.

## Question 19

### Can Some Of Our Prayer Requests Bring About Bad Results?

Unknown to us, there are occasions when the granting of our requests can have a bad result. It is possible that the thing we are asking for will not ultimately be in our best interest. The Lord knows this. Consequently, He says, “No,” to our specific request. There are biblical illustrations of this truth.

#### The Example Of Hezekiah

We have the example of King Hezekiah. The prophet Isaiah informed Hezekiah that he was about to die. The Bible records what took place as follows:

About that time Hezekiah became deathly ill, and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to visit him. He gave the king this message: “This is what the LORD says: Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die. You will not recover from this illness” (Isaiah 38:1 NLT).

When he heard this news, Hezekiah prayed to God to prolong his life. We read:

When Hezekiah heard this, he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD (Isaiah 38:2 NLT).

God granted his request and gave him fifteen extra years to live. The Lord said the following to Isaiah the prophet:

Then this message came to Isaiah from the LORD: “Go back to Hezekiah and tell him, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your ancestor David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will add fifteen years to your life’” (Isaiah 38:4-5 NLT).

Hezekiah lived an additional fifteen years. However, during that time, two things occurred that had terrible consequences for the future of his people.

#### He Showed The Babylonians The Temple Treasures

First, Hezekiah showed the Babylonians the great treasures of the Temple. The prophet Isaiah then told the king the eventual outcome of him doing such a foolish thing:

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Listen to this message from the Lord of Heaven’s Armies: ‘The time is coming when everything in your palace—all the treasures stored up by your ancestors until now—will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left,’ says the Lord. ‘Some of your very own sons will be taken away into exile. They will become eunuchs who will serve in the palace of Babylon’s king’” (Isaiah 39:5-7 NLT).

As Isaiah predicted, one hundred years later, these same Babylonians plundered the Temple, and its treasures. We read in Second Chronicles:

He brought to Babylon each of the utensils from God's temple, the treasures from the Lord's temple, and the treasures of the king and his officials. They burned God's temple, tore down Jerusalem's walls, burned down all its palaces, and destroyed everything of value (2 Chronicles 36:18,19 God's Word).

Hezekiah made a huge mistake in showing the Babylonians the treasures of the Temple. He made this mistake in the extra fifteen years the Lord had given to him.

### **Hezekiah Conceived An Evil Son During This Time**

Hezekiah also conceived a son in those last fifteen years. He became one of the worst kings in the nation's history—Manasseh. Manasseh led the people into all types of idolatry—causing the nation to stray away from the service of the Lord.

Therefore, as far as the nation was concerned, it would have been better for Hezekiah to have died when he was deathly ill. This is a case where a “No” answer to his original prayer, would have been better for everyone. His prolonged life caused unforeseen suffering to the people.

### **The Blessings Of Unanswered Prayer**

This brings up an important truth. Many times, God does not answer our prayers with a “Yes,” because it could have had similar disastrous results. As we look back on our lives, most of us can be very thankful for prayers that God has answered with a “No.” At the time, we could not understand why He would do such a thing.

As time passes, we see the wisdom of that answer. In fact, in so many instances, we now deeply thank Him for saying “No” to something that we thought that we should have had. Obviously, He knows best in all things.

### **God Wants The Best For His Children**

This confirms another Bible principle—God wants only the best for His children. We read in Romans about this. Paul wrote:

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? (Romans 8:31,32 NLT).

Therefore, whatever the answer God gives to our prayers, we should thank Him for it. He only desires the best for us.

**Summary To Question 18:  
Can Some Of Our Prayer Requests Bring About Bad Results?**

While we may not think so, there is the possibility that our prayer requests, if granted, may bring about a bad result. Scripture illustrates this important truth.

We find this in the example of King Hezekiah. It would have been better if he had accepted the original decree of God—when the Lord told him that he was about to die. However, he asked to live longer, and God gave him fifteen additional years.

Yet, during those years, two events happened that affected the nation in a terrible way. This included Hezekiah showing the Temple treasures to the Babylonians, as well as the child he conceived during those extra fifteen years.

The Babylonians came back one hundred years later and plundered the treasures of the temple. In addition, the son he conceived, Manasseh, turned out to be one of the worst kings in the history of the nation.

Therefore, it would have been better for everyone if his prayer had been answered with a “No.”

In the same way, many of our prayers are answered with a “No,” since God knows that it will bring about bad results for us, as well as for others.

Therefore, we ought to thank Him for the blessing for the answer of “No” to some of our prayers.

Indeed, He only wants what is best for His children. This is a constant biblical theme.

## Question 20

### What Are The Conditions For Answered Prayer?

The God of the Bible answers prayer. Indeed, He is a God who hears our requests. The Bible says there are certain conditions as to why God answers prayer. They include the following things:

#### **We Must Pray According To His Will**

First, our prayers should be according to His will. John wrote about this important element:

We are confident that God listens to us if we ask for anything that has his approval. We know that he listens to our requests. So we know that we already have what we ask him for (1 John 5:14,15 God's Word).

Our will, our desires, needs to line up with His will, in prayer.

This truth is stated elsewhere. In the model prayer of Jesus, we find Him telling His disciples to pray for God's will to be done:

This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, let your name be kept holy. Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven (Matthew 6:9,10 God's Word)

It is important to desire God's will in our requests.

We discover Jesus asking for the Father's will when He prayed. On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus prayed the following in the Garden of Gethsemane:

He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Matthew 26:39 NLT).

Like Jesus, we should want the will of God to be accomplished in our lives.

#### **How Are We To Know God's Will?**

If we are to pray according to His will, then how do we know what is the will of God? Many times, we have no idea what God wants us to do. How should we then pray?

There are a number of important things for us to consider when we are trying to understand the will of God.

### **1. Is There A Passage Of Scripture That Speaks To The Issue?**

If there is a passage of Scripture that says something is God's will, or it contains a command from God, then we know that this is His will. It is His will that we obey His commandments. In fact, we find that people in the Bible often quoted Scripture when they prayed.

An example of this is found in the Book of Acts. The early church, when confronted with a difficult issue, prayed as follows to the Lord:

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed" (Acts 4:24-26 ESV).

In their prayer, they cited Scripture. They reminded the Lord of His Word. By citing Scripture, and obeying the Scripture, we can be assured we are in God's will.

### **2. We Must Ask For Wisdom**

If the issue we are praying about is not directly, or indirectly, dealt with in Scripture, we then must ask the Lord for wisdom. James writes:

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do (James 1:6-8 NLT).

The Lord promises to grant wisdom to us, if we ask Him. We need to claim this promise and ask for His wisdom on matters in which we seemingly have no answer.

However, when we do ask for wisdom, as James tells us, we should have faith, we should not doubt. Indeed, God promises to answer our prayer!

### **3. We Must Be Joined To Christ**

Christ said that we must abide in Him, to be "joined to Him," in order to have our prayers answered. The Lord put it this way:

But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! (John 15:7 NLT).

Being “joined to Christ,” or “abiding in Christ,” has the idea of living our lives in accordance with His commandments. When we do this, we will then have a better idea of what to pray for.

#### **4. We Must Pray With Unselfish Motives**

Prayers should be offered with the best of motives. James made it clear that we must check our motives when we pray:

You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, so you can spend it on your passions (James 4:3 NET).

Instead of asking with our own selfish thoughts in mind, we should ask with unselfish motives. This is how our prayers will be answered.

Applying these conditions will help us pray for the right thing when we approach the Lord in prayer. May the Lord help us to put these principles into practice.

#### **Summary To Question 20**

#### **What Are The Conditions For Answered Prayer?**

Positive answers to our prayers are not always guaranteed. Indeed, there are specific conditions that the Bible sets down in order for the believer to have their prayers answered.

First, the prayers must be according to God’s will. If we are not certain as to what the will of God is, then there are a few things which we can do.

For one thing, we can search the Scripture to see if it covers the issue about which we are praying.

If it does not cover the specific matter, then we can apply other biblical principles. Above all, the Bible tells us to ask for wisdom in these situations.

In addition, our lives should be living consistently with the commandments of Jesus. This will help us pray godly prayers.

Finally, we need to check our motives to make certain they are not selfish. The Bible commands us to have the proper motives when we make our requests to the Lord.

Applying these things will help us understand the will of God when we pray, as well as give us guidance on what to pray for.

## Question 21

### What Should A Person Pray For?

How should the believer direct their prayers? What does the Bible say that we should specifically pray for? A number of observations need to be made about this very important question.

#### 1. We Should Pray For Everything, Large Or Small

Prayer should always be made for things that are important. However, we should remember that nothing is too small for the God of the Bible. Basically, we can pray for anything, great or small. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done (Philippians 4:6 NLT).

Worry about nothing—pray about everything! Everything should be prayed for. Everything!

#### 2. Pray For Those In Authority

Scripture tells us to pray for those in authority. Paul exhorted Timothy to remember in prayer those who are in leadership:

First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all people, even for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. Such prayer for all is good and welcomed before God our Savior (1 Timothy 2:1-3 NET)

Those who are in authority certainly need our prayers. Therefore, we should not neglect to pray for them as Scripture commands.

#### 3. We Should Follow Jesus' Example

We can get an idea of what sort of things to pray for by observing the prayers recorded in the Bible. For example, the Lord Jesus prayed for workers to be sent into the harvest:

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37,38 NET).

We too, should pray for this. Indeed, more believers need to be sent out to do the work of the Lord.

#### **4. We Should Pray Before We Make Important Decisions**

It is important to pray before we make important decisions. The Bible says that Jesus spent the night in prayer before He chose His twelve apostles:

Now it was during this time that Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent all night in prayer to God. When morning came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles (Luke 6:12,13 NET).

This is an important principle. Major decisions should only be made after we have seriously prayed about them. We need to put them in the hands of the Lord for His leading, His answer.

#### **5. Our Prayers Should Be For Others**

Our prayers should also contain requests for others. The Apostle Paul encouraged us to think of others:

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:4 NKJV).

This includes both believers and non-believers. Jesus said:

But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44 NET).

We need to pray on behalf of others, not merely for ourselves.

#### **6. Making A Prayer List Can Be Helpful**

A practical thing to do is to make a list of those for whom we are praying. Among other things this list should include the following: the unsaved, people who are sick, those who are in the ministry, friends and relatives. This will remind us that we should be constantly praying.

These are some of the principles that we should apply in deciding who and what to pray for.

#### **Summary To Question 21 What Should A Person Pray For?**

The Bible tells us a number of specific things for which believers should pray.

First, we should pray about everything, large or small. Nothing is too small for which we should pray. Pray about everything!

Scripture also command believers to pray for those in authority. They need our prayers. Indeed, God's wisdom is sorely needed by those in positions of leadership.

## Prayer

Jesus prayed specifically that more people would be sent out to do the work of the ministry. There is the constant need for more believers to get involved in God's work.

We also learn from Jesus that prayer should precede important decisions. He showed this by often spending the night in prayer before making major decisions. We should place the same value on prayer.

The Bible also says that our prayers should include others—not merely ourselves. Thus, our prayers should be directed for more than our own specific needs.

Making a list of who and what to pray for can be a practical help in obeying the commandment of the Lord to pray.

These are some of the things that we can apply when attempting to determine what exactly we should be praying for.

## Question 22

### **Whose Prayers Does God Hear?**

There has been much controversy over whose prayers God hears. Does God hear only the prayer of believers, or does He hear the prayers of unbelievers also? What does the Bible say about this subject? Who does the Lord listen to?

From Scripture, we learn the following.

#### **1. God Is All-Knowing: He Hears Everything**

Because God knows everything that happens in the universe, it is obvious that He hears the words that non-Christians pray. The psalmist understood that the Lord knows everything about us. He wrote:

O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away (Psalm 139:1,2 NLT).

However, this is not the question we are addressing. Does God “hear” the prayers in the sense that He answers them?

#### **2. God Has Said He Does Not Answer The Prayers of Unbelievers**

Strictly speaking, it is only the prayer of the believer that God hears and responds to. We read the following in the Book of Proverbs:

The LORD is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous (Proverbs 15:29 NIV).

Peter wrote something similar. He put it this way.

The Lord’s eyes are on those who do what he approves. His ears hear their prayer. The Lord confronts those who do evil (1 Peter 3:12 God’s Word). Consequently, those who are outside of God’s family do not have their prayers answered.

#### **3. Jesus Is The Only Intermediary Between God and Humanity**

The Bible is clear that God only hears the prayers of believers. Furthermore, it is through Jesus Christ alone that our prayers are heard.

Indeed, Jesus is the “go-between.” He is the One who links God and humanity. Paul wrote:

For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human (1 Timothy 2:5 NET).

It is only through Jesus Christ that our prayers can be heard. Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no access to God.

#### **4. God Cannot Be Directly Approached**

In fact, it is only through our intermediary, Jesus Christ God's Son, that a person can have access to the living God.

The Apostle Paul, in describing the nature of God, said:

He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No one has ever seen him, nor ever will. To him be honor and power forever. Amen (1 Timothy 6:16 NLT).

By definition, God cannot be approached by sinful humanity. Because of our sin, no human being has access to God.

Hence, we have the need for an intermediary. It is through this ministry of Christ, and Christ alone, that an individual can come into the presence of God. This is the consistent message of the Bible.

#### **5. The Unbeliever Must Pray For Mercy**

The unbeliever can have their prayer answered by God, if they pray for God's mercy—the salvation of their soul. That is the prayer which God will answer.

The prayer of the tax collector, in one of the parables of Jesus, shows how the unbeliever should pray:

But the tax collector was standing at a distance. He wouldn't even look up to heaven. Instead, he became very upset, and he said, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' (Luke 18:13 God's Word).

This man asked for God's mercy. His prayer was answered. This is the prayer the Lord wants to hear from every unbeliever, a prayer for mercy:

Once a person prays that prayer, then they become a child of God! The Bible says:

Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved (Romans 10:9,10 God's Word).

When a person trusts Jesus Christ as their Savior, they will then have all their prayers answered. Until that time, the only prayer which the Lord will answer is a prayer for salvation from sin.

## **6. Prayer Is The Privilege Of The Believer, Not The Unbeliever**

Prayer, therefore, is the privilege of the believer in Jesus Christ—the unbeliever has no access to God. Consequently, because of this privilege, the believer should come boldly before God’s throne.

The writer to the Hebrews emphasized that we should boldly go before the Lord with our requests. He wrote:

So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most (Hebrews 4:16 NLT).

Only the believer has the privilege to pray to the God of the Bible and have his or her prayers answered. We need to take advantage of this privilege.

## **7. We Should Approach The Lord With A Humble Heart**

There is something else. When we realize that we are able to approach God because of His mercy toward us, we should come to the Lord with a humble heart. James wrote about how the Lord gives grace to the humble:

But God shows us even more kindness. Scripture says, “God opposes arrogant people, but he is kind to humble people” (James 4:6 God’s Word).

James also wrote about our absolute dependence upon Him when we approach Him in prayer. He put it this way:

When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence on him, he will lift you up and give you honor (James 4:10 NLT).

Therefore, we should come boldly to the Lord in prayer, but we come with a humble heart.

### **Summary To Question 22 Whose Prayers Does God Hear?**

Since God is all-knowing, He knows everything that happens in the entire universe. He knows what people pray. This includes the prayers of both believers and unbelievers.

However, although He hears the prayers of unbelievers, that is, the words they speak, He does not answer them. The only prayers that God answers are those from His children.

There is a reason for this. Indeed, believers alone have access to God the Father through God the Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only intermediary, or go-between, for God and the human race. Apart from Jesus, God the Father cannot be approached. The Bible is very clear on this matter.

## Prayer

Hence, the unbeliever has no access to the living God because they are not part of His family. Consequently, those outside of Christ have no right to have their prayers answered. The only prayer of an unbeliever that God will answer is one for mercy. That is the prayer that the Lord will hear and answer.

Once a person trusts Jesus Christ as Savior, access is available to God. All their prayers are then answered.

This is a further reason as to why it is so important for a person to trust Christ as Savior.

## Question 23

### **What Are Some Of The Things We Should Not Do With Prayer?**

While there are a number of things which we should do in our prayers, we also find from Scripture that there are certain prayer practices that we are not to do. They include the following things which we should avoid:

#### **1. We Should Not Say The Same Words Over And Over Again**

One thing we are not to do is to say the same words or phrases repeatedly. Jesus told us not to use endless repetition in our prayers:

When you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the Gentiles, because they think that by their many words they will be heard (Matthew 6:7 NET).

The idea behind endless repetition is repeating the same words over and over again. This will not gain favor with God, or cause our prayers to be answered.

We also read in Ecclesiastes:

Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2 NIV).

Our prayers should get straight to the point, and state exactly what we need.

#### **2. We Should Not Make A Public Spectacle**

When we pray, we should not do it in such a manner as to attract attention to ourselves. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave the following commands:

When you pray, don't be like hypocrites. They like to stand in synagogues and on street corners to pray so that everyone can see them. I can guarantee this truth: That will be their only reward. (Matthew 6:5 God's Word).

Prayer is something that should take place between the Lord and the person praying. It is the business of no one else.

#### **3. We Should Not Be Filled With Pride**

We should not have a proud, or demanding, attitude when we pray. An example of this prideful attitude can be seen in the parable that Jesus gave of the tax collector and the Pharisee. Luke records what occurred at follows:

Jesus also told this parable to some who were confident that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else. “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself like this, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: extortionists, unrighteous people, adulterers, or even like this tax collector’ (Luke 18:9-12 NET).

When we come to the Lord in prayer, we request things from Him—we do not demand anything. This is the proper attitude.

#### **4. We Should Not Come To The Lord In Unbelief**

Unbelief is another thing that hinders our prayers. When we pray, we should pray in faith that God will answer our prayers. He has promised to do just that. James said:

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; *he is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:6-8 NKJV).

This does not mean the answer will always be “Yes.” As we have noted, God answers prayers by saying either “Yes,” “No,” or “Wait.” Whatever request we make He will give us an answer.

#### **5. We Should Not Ask God To Do Something We Could Do Ourselves**

This is very important to understand. We should never ask God in prayer to do something we ourselves are able to do. Prayer is asking *God* to work. If there is some task that we are able to complete, and that the Bible commands us to do, we should not ask God to do it—we should do it.

In other words, we should not be asking Him to do what we ought to be doing.

#### **6. We Should Not Ask God For Something Sinful**

When we pray, we should never ask God for something that we know is sinful. This will guarantee the answer to be, “No!” This is a certainty.

In addition, we can never justify claiming that God answered one of our prayers when we know the request was sinful. Those who do this are merely fooling themselves.

This gives us an idea of some of the things which we should *not* do when we pray.

**Summary To Question 23**  
**What Are Some Of The Things We Should Not Do In Prayer?**

Prayer should be a special personal communication between the believer and God. The Lord has given us instructions as to how we are to pray. In the same way, there are certain practices that the believer should not be engaged in when it comes to prayer.

For example, we are not to pray with endless repetition. This will not cause our prayers to be heard. The continual repeating of the same word, or phrase, does not force God to give us an answer. This is not how prayer is to be done.

Believers are not to make a public spectacle when they pray. Instead, we should pray to the Lord in private. When we pray to Him in private, we are exercising faith that He is hearing our request. This type of faith pleases the Lord.

Pride is something that should not be a part of our prayers. We ask things from God we do not demand. We approach Him with humility. This is what pleases the Lord.

Prayer should be accompanied with an attitude that believes God will answer our request. Indeed, the Bible says that unbelief hinders our prayers. We must believe that He hears us and that He will answer.

Therefore, we must pray with a believing heart. Of course, this does not mean that God will always give us what we ask for. It merely means that we believe that He will give us some answer. The answer to our prayer could be "No." It is also possible that the answer may be "Wait."

In addition, we should never ask God to do something that we are able to do ourselves. We have certain responsibilities which we must fulfill. Thus, we don't need to ask the Lord to do these things for us. That is our job.

Finally, when we pray, we should never ask for something sinful. If we do, we are guaranteed to receive a "No" answer.

This summarizes some of the things we should not do when we pray. We must be careful not to practice any of them. Otherwise, our prayers will not be answered.

## Question 24

### Should The Believer Fast As Well As Pray?

The Bible commands believers to pray, but what about fasting? Should Christians incorporate fasting into their prayer life? What does the Bible have to say?

#### **Fasting Defined**

Fasting can be defined as abstaining from food, or certain types of food, for a period of time. One can fast for an entire day, part of a day, or for several days. Some people practice fasting only during the daylight hours. In sum, fasting takes on various forms.

#### **Fasting In The Old Testament**

We find a number of references to fasting in the Old Testament. We note the following examples of people who fasted:

##### **1. Moses Fasted For Forty Days**

While he was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, Moses fasted for forty days. The Bible says:

Moses was up on the mountain with the LORD forty days and forty nights. In all that time he neither ate nor drank. At that time he wrote the terms of the covenant—the Ten Commandments—on the stone tablets (Exodus 34:28 NLT).

Moses was sustained by God during his fast.

##### **2. Nehemiah Fasted For The Problems In Jerusalem**

Often, fasting is linked to prayer. When Nehemiah heard about the problems that were occurring in Jerusalem, he began to fast and pray for a number of days. The Bible explains what happened in this manner:

When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven (Nehemiah 1:4 NLT).

Here fasting and prayer are linked.

##### **3. Daniel Fasted And Prayed For The Return Of the Nation From Babylon**

As a captive in Babylon, Daniel the prophet prayed and fasted when he sought the Lord. He prayed earnestly for the return of the nation to the Promised Land. The Book of Daniel records this practice. It says:

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes (Daniel 9:3 NIV).

Daniel fasted and prayed for the nation.

#### **4. The Lord Said That There Was A Time To Fast**

The Lord commanded the people to fast through the prophet Joel. Scripture says:

‘Even now’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning’ (Joel 2:12 NIV).

There is indeed a time to fast.

#### **5. The Jewish Nation Fasted For Its Survival**

When the Jews, at the time of Esther, heard of the decree by the Persian King that would put them all to death, the entire nation fasted. We read:

In every province touched by the king’s command and decree, the Jews went into mourning, fasting, weeping, and wailing. Many put on sackcloth and ashes (Esther 4:3 God’s Word).

They fasted before the Lord so that they would not be entirely destroyed.

#### **6. The People Of Nineveh Fasted To Keep From Being Destroyed**

The people of Nineveh fasted when they heard about the destruction that Jonah the prophet announced:

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish” (Jonah 3:6-9 NIV).

God honored their prayer, fasting, and change of behavior. He did not proceed with the promised destruction.

When God saw that the people had stopped doing evil things, he had pity and did not destroy them as he had planned (Jonah 3:10 CEV).

The sincerity of the fasting and repentance was accepted by the Lord.

### **7. David Fasted For His Ill Son**

David fasted when his young child was ill. However, when the child died David ceased his fasting. We read:

David answered, “As long as the child was alive, I fasted and cried. I thought, ‘Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But why should I fast now that he’s dead? Can I bring him back? Someday I’ll go to him, but he won’t come back to me” (2 Samuel 12:22,23 God’s Word).

His fasting ceased when the child died. Indeed, it was a time to feast for that child went to be with the Lord.

### **8. The Psalmist Was Ridiculed When He Fasted**

The psalmist spoke of those who ridiculed him when he fasted. It seems that he was insulted by certain people for fasting:

I weep and refrain from eating food, which causes others to insult me (Psalm 69:10 NET).

Fasting may cause others to ridicule us. However, that should not concern us because our mind should be centered upon the Lord.

### **God Does Not Accept Fasting Without Humility And Repentance**

Fasting, without true repentance, is not acceptable to the Lord. We read the Lord saying the following in the Book of Jeremiah:

When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence (Jeremiah 14:12 NKJV).

It is not enough to abstain from food. Our heart must be right with the Lord.

We find another example of this in the time of Zechariah:

They were to ask this question of the prophets and of the priests at the Temple of the LORD Almighty: “Should we continue to mourn and fast each summer on the anniversary of the Temple’s destruction, as we have done for so many years?” The LORD Almighty sent me this message: “Say to all your people and your priests, ‘During those seventy years of exile, when you fasted and mourned in the summer and at the festival in early autumn, was it really for me that you were fasting? And even now in your holy festivals, you don’t think about me but only of pleasing yourselves’ (Zechariah 7:3-6 NLT).

Unless our mind is on the Lord, our fasting is worthless. This is emphasized for us in God's Word. Therefore, fasting is only valuable, if our hearts are focused on God.

### **There Is Only One Place Where Fasting Is Commanded**

There is only one place in the entire Bible where fasting is commanded—on the Day of Atonement. This was the most sacred day for the nation during the Old Testament period. The Bible says:

This will be a Sabbath day of total rest for you, and on that day you must humble yourselves. This time of rest and fasting will begin the evening before the Day of Atonement and extend until evening of that day (Leviticus 23:32 NLT).

This was the day in which the people were commanded to fast.

### **Observations On Fasting In The Old Testament**

From the passages on fasting in the Old Testament, we can make a number of observations:

While the people during the Old Testament period practiced fasting, this was not always acceptable to the Lord. On a number of occasions, God said their fasts meant nothing to Him because their hearts were filled with evil.

On the other hand, we find a number of places where people fasted and prayed before the Lord, and He answered their prayer. Therefore, it was possible for fasting to be pleasing to the Lord. The key is the condition of the heart.

### **Fasting In The New Testament**

In the New Testament, we also find a number of references to fasting. For example, we find Anna the prophetess practiced fasting and prayer. Luke records what occurred as follows:

There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and was a widow for 84 years. She did not leave the temple complex, serving God night and day with fastings and prayers (Luke 2:36,37 CSB).

The Bible describes her as one who constantly prayed and fasted. This has the idea of someone who was spiritually aware.

### **The Leaders Of The New Testament Church Fasted**

The leaders of the early church fasted before they sent out Paul and Barnabas. The Book of Acts records the following:

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set Barnabas and Saul apart for me. I want them to do the work for which I called them.” After fasting and praying, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul, and released them from their work in Antioch (Acts 13:2,3 God’s Word).

On this occasion, we find the leaders fasting before the Holy Spirit spoke to them. In addition, they continued to fast after He had spoken to them.

We also learn that Paul fasted before he appointed elders in the churches. Again, we read about it in the Book of Acts. It says the following:

They had the disciples in each church choose spiritual leaders, and with prayer and fasting they entrusted the leaders to the Lord in whom they believed (Acts 14:23 God’s Word).

Consequently, the early church took fasting seriously.

### **Jesus Fasted For Forty Days**

Jesus fasted for forty days while being tempted of the devil. The Gospel of Luke records the following occurred:

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry (Luke 4:1-2 ESV).

Unlike most fasts, Jesus did not eat anything during His forty days in the wilderness. He went without any type of food during this period of testing.

### **There Is No Explicit Command For New Testament Believers To Fast**

While Jesus and His disciples practiced fasting, there is no explicit command in the New Testament for believers to fast.

### **Jesus Said That His Disciples Would Fast**

Jesus, however, did indicate that His disciples would fast after He left the world. Matthew records Him saying the following:

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Matthew 9:14-15 ESV).

In another place, He also assumed that believers would fast. We read about this in the Sermon on the Mount:

And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, who try to look pale and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I assure you, that is the only reward they will ever get (Matthew 6:16 NLT).

As we have noted, there are examples of believers fasting after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Therefore, fasting should be part of the experience of the Christian.

### **What Are The Benefits Of Christians Fasting?**

There are a number of benefits that result from fasting. They include the following.

#### **1. Fasting Makes Us Humble Before The Lord**

When we fast, we lose our physical strength. This reminds us of our weakness before the Lord. As we acknowledge our humility before Him, He then honors us. James wrote:

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you (James 4:10 NET).

Fasting is reminder of our humble state. This is something with which we do need to be reminded.

#### **2. We Are Feeding Our Spiritual Selves, Not Our Physical Selves**

By practicing a fast, we are spending time with the Lord that we would have spent eating. In this way, we are feeding our spiritual selves, rather than our physical selves.

Part of the job of the elders in the church is to spiritually feed the congregation. Paul said to the leaders of the church in Ephesus:

I have told you everything God wants you to know. Look after yourselves and everyone the Holy Spirit has placed in your care. Be like shepherds to God's church. It is the flock that he bought with the blood of his own Son (Acts 20:27,28 CEV).

The flock must be fed.

He wrote to the church in Corinth about the necessity of eating "spiritual food." Paul wrote:

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready (1 Corinthians 3:1,2 ESV).

Therefore, spending time eating spiritual food can be of great benefit to our souls.

### **3. It Helps With Our Personal Discipline**

Fasting helps us practice discipline. This is very important. Paul wrote about the need to discipline our bodies:

Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win. All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NLT).

To live the Christian life, one must discipline their body. We must have it under control if we wish to please the Lord.

### **4. It Allows Us To Suffer For A Righteous Reason**

Finally, if we voluntarily choose not to eat food, we are subjecting our body to some degree of physical suffering. This helps us prepare for other types of suffering that will come our way. Peter compared the suffering of Jesus Christ to the suffering that believers in Christ will endure. He explained it in this manner:

So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you are willing to suffer for Christ, you have decided to stop sinning. And you won't spend the rest of your life chasing after evil desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God (1 Peter 4:1,2 NLT).

Suffering for the sake of righteousness should be the experience for every believer. However, each of us will suffer in different ways.

### **Some Important Points About Practicing The Fast**

There are a number of important things that need to be realized when a person decides to fast. They include the following:

#### **1. A Fast Should Be Done Secretly**

First, the fast is a private matter, it is between the believer and God. Jesus made it clear that no one but God should know that we are fasting. Indeed, He made a point of this in His Sermon on the Mount. He said:

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by

others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:16-18 ESV).

While the person fasting may be around other people, no one should know they are fasting. Fasting is something which should be special, it is between the Christian and the Lord.

## **2. There Should Be A Specific Reason For The Fast**

In addition, there should be a specific purpose behind the fast. It should be centered on a definite need that should be addressed in serious prayer.

The religious leaders in Jesus' day made the mistake of routinely fasting. We read about this in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector:

The Pharisee stood up and prayed, 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other people! I'm not a robber or a dishonest person. I haven't committed adultery. I'm not even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my entire income' (Luke 18:11,12 God's Word).

This person missed the reason why fasting was instituted. It is not something we normally or routinely do. It should always be a special time.

## **There Should Not Be Any Physical Work During The Fast**

When fasting, it is best not to be engaged in strenuous physical activity. Since fasting takes away our physical strength, we should not spend the time working. This will defeat the purpose. Fasting should be a time of concentration on the Lord. We must be able to give our complete attention to Him.

## **We Should Use Common Sense When We Fast**

We also need to remind ourselves to use common sense when we fast. God has given us a brain and He expects us to use it. Therefore, we should not take any unnecessary physical risks. If a person is at risk physically, then fasting should not be an option.

These are some of the important things which we need to understand about fasting from a biblical perspective.

## **Summary To Question 24: Should The Believer Fast As Well As Pray?**

Fasting is the abstaining from certain food or foods. It may be for one meal, or for an entire day. There are no set rules. We find fasting practiced in both testaments.

However, the Lord made it clear that the mere act of fasting was not pleasing in His sight. The one fasting must have a humble heart. This is what is required.

There are a number of benefits that come with fasting. They include the following.

First, it helps us realize our humility before the Lord. Indeed, we lose our strength when we fast. This highlights our constant need to rely upon Him.

Second, we are feeding our spiritual, rather than our spiritual selves. This is another important aspect of fasting. It emphasizes our spirit, as well as our body, needs to be fed. We all need to grow spiritually. There are no exceptions.

Third, fasting helps with our personal discipline. We need to learn to say “No” to certain things. Fasting helps us in this.

Finally, it helps us suffer, to some degree, for a righteous reason. The Bible says that believers in Jesus Christ will suffer. Fasting is a way of reminding us of this.

When we choose not to eat certain food, or food in general, for a period of time there are several things which we should keep in mind.

First, it should be done privately between the believer and the Lord. In other words, there should be no outward show that we are fasting. Indeed, only God and ourselves should be aware of what we are doing. Otherwise we are defeating the purpose.

There should be a specific reason why we fast. We should not merely fast because we think it's a good thing to do. Fasting should be purposeful.

Also, no physical work should be involved when we fast. It is a time to concentrate upon the things of the Lord. We do not need to be distracted with work.

Basically, God calls us to use our common sense when we fast. We are not to place ourselves in physical danger or do any harm to our body. This is not the purpose behind fasting.

These are a few of the important things we learn about the practice of fasting. It is probably something which believers should practice every now and then.

### **About The Author**

Don Stewart is a graduate of Biola University and Talbot Theological Seminary (with the highest honors).

Don is a best-selling and award-winning author having authored, or co-authored, over seventy books. This includes the best-selling *Answers to Tough Questions*, with Josh McDowell, as well as the award-winning book *Family Handbook of Christian Knowledge: The Bible*. His various writings have been translated into over thirty different languages and have sold over a million copies. His available books can be found on his website [www.educatingourworld.com](http://www.educatingourworld.com).

Don is now a full-time missionary with GoinChrist Ministries. His website [educatingourworld.com](http://educatingourworld.com) provides free resources for those wanting to know what Christians believe, as well as why we believe. Currently there are 61 books on the site in PDF form, totaling about 13,000 pages of material while answering over 1,900 questions. Eventually we hope to record all the books, as well as translating the material in other languages.