

Fort Bend Christian Academy Department of Worldviews and Apologetics

Chris Henderson

A Thesis Submitted

To the Teacher and Students of Apologetics

The Purpose of Prayer

By:

Elizabeth Bernstein

December 2019

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Historical Review	7
Prehellenistic Period.....	7
Hellenistic Period.....	7
Old Testament.....	8
New Testament.....	9
Jesus in the Bible.....	11
Early Christians.....	12
St Augustine of Hippo.....	13
Benedictines.....	14
John Calvin.....	15
St Thomas Aquinas.....	16
Martin Luther.....	17
CS Lewis.....	18
NT Wright.....	19
William E Biederwolf.....	20
Experiments.....	22
Francis Galton.....	22
Randolph C. Byrd.....	22

William S. Harris.....	23
Sean O'Laoire.....	24
Leonard Leibovici.....	25
MANTRA.....	27
Herbert Benson (STEP).....	27
Justin Brierly.....	29
Thesis Proof.....	31
Purpose.....	31
When to Pray.....	34
What to Say.....	35
Praying through saints.....	37
Ending of prayers.....	39
Posture.....	40
The power of intercession.....	41
Benefits of praying.....	42
Conclusion.....	45
Bibliography.....	47

Introduction

Prayer is an invocation or act that seeks to activate a rapport with an object of worship through deliberate communication.¹ Put simply, the term prayer refers to an act of intercession or supplication directed towards a deity, god or a deified ancestor. In general terms, prayer can be used as a means of offering thanksgiving and praise. In comparative religion, prayer has close associations with more abstract forms of meditation and with charms or spells. Prayer can be found in several different forms, which include: a part of a set liturgy or ritual; a private or group activity; and presented as a hymn, chant, formal creed statement, or spontaneous utterance from the person that is praying.

The act of prayer is attested in written sources as early as 5000 years ago, and is still instituted in most of the major religions today. In some religions, the act is ritualized, requiring an inflexible sequence of actions or placing a restriction on who is permitted to pray. In other religions, it is taught that prayer may be practiced spontaneously by anyone at any time.

Prayer is an important activity in Christianity, and there are several different forms of this activity. The prayers of Christians are very diverse. The prayers can be completely spontaneous, or read entirely from a text, as there are many books filled with common prayers to be recited. The most common prayer among Christians is the "Lord's Prayer." According to the gospel accounts, The Lord's Prayer is how Jesus taught his disciples to pray. The famous prayer is a model for prayers of adoration, confession and petition in the Christian faith. There are three

¹ "Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary." Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster.

general characterizations of prayer. The first is random vocal prayer. The next characterization is a more structured form in terms of meditation. The third characterization of prayer is more complex as the activity involves multiple layers of contemplation, or intercession.

Christian prayer can take place in different settings. The setting can be corporate, or public, and private. Prayer shared within the worship setting or other public places by a group of people would be considered corporate prayer. Corporate prayers can be formally written prayers, but they can also be informal, improvisatory prayers. Private prayer occurs with the individual praying either silently or aloud within a private setting. The act of prayer has been interpreted in several different ways by all people over the centuries, and especially Christians recently. Many doubts and questions have been raised regarding the power of prayer and the ways and guidelines that believers are supposed to follow as they partake in the act.

Prayer has also been a focal point in the scientific community. Scientific studies regarding the use of prayer have mostly concentrated on its effect on the healing of sick or injured people. The fruitfulness of prayer in faith healing has been evaluated in numerous studies, with contradictory results.

This thesis will claim and defend that God always answers prayer but sometimes he says no. People need to change their expectations from receiving a yes to their prayer to receiving the other benefits the act of prayer produces. This conclusion can be derived solely from Biblical evidence and pure logic, but will also include scientific evidence, contextual support, data, and quotes to provide additional support. God's kingdom is at risk with so many believers not understanding this function that is crucial to the act. It is important that a better understanding be implemented so that the Kingdom can be brought to earth. With the historical, biblical,

scientific, and logical support; there will be no denying that the sole purpose of prayer is to seek the Kingdom of God.

Historical Review

Prehellenistic Period

Though there are disputes on the power and purpose of prayer, there is a clear consensus that Greek prayer, in the pre-Hellenistic period, is not what prayer is supposed to look like. This agreement is present because there was an extreme lack of reverence and seriousness toward the act. This is evident in the fact that from the creation of ancient comedies and onwards, comedians used parodies of prayer for a large portion of their content in an attempt to entertain their audience. Many of these parodies can be found in the comedies of Aristophanes, the son of Philippus, of the deme Kydathenaion. Aristophanes was a popular comic playwright of ancient Athens, a poet of Old Attic Comedy, and the creator of forty plays, eleven of which are currently virtually complete.² In his plays, prayers are integrated into the action in a foolish, immoral, ridiculous and even obscene manner. It is said that this integration of prayer caused an uproar of laughter from the audience, reflecting the humor and attitude toward prayer that was present at the time. Thus, the Grecian form of prayer can be thrown out, because of the ridiculous and sinful way that it mocked the Christian.

Hellenistic Period

The act of prayer during the Hellenistic period carried with it a stereotype of being useless and irrational. At the time, Stoicism was a common school of philosophy that was founded by Zeno of Citium in Athens in the early 3rd century BC. It is a philosophy of personal ethics informed by its system of logic and its views on the natural world. Stoics of the time disrupted the belief in God.³ When observing the time period, it is evident that many are

² Hammerling, Roy. *A History of Prayer: the First to the Fifteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

³ Ibid.

skeptical of prayer and the people who take part in the act. For example, Seneca, a Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman and dramatist, identifies the gods and nature, but does not understand why one would pray to gods or nature because he does not see any sense in it. He defends his belief in the senselessness of prayer by saying that if the gods or nature were within a person, there would be no reason for him or her to pray. Epicureanism is another school of philosophy that was prevalent during this time period, but it is based upon the teachings of Epicurus, an ancient greek philosopher and atomic materialist who follows Democritus. The system of philosophy was founded around 307 BC. Epicureans, like Stoics, argue the vanity of prayer. Epicureans build an argument by saying that God can not hear everyone, and if He could, the need for prayer would be nonexistent.⁴ When examining prayer in this time period, these two schools of philosophy cause a large amount of skepticism that overshadows the people who were active prayers. The further undermining of prayer during this time period comes from mystery cults and mysticism. Though prayer never ceases to exist, there is obvious confusion among the people concerning which deity they should be praying to because of the teachings of the mystery cults and mysticism. Additionally, there is confusion among the people during this time period concerning how to call upon the deities, and when called upon, what name the higher authority or authorities would like to be called. The common philosophy on prayer during the Hellenistic period was centered around the idea of prayer being useless and confusing.

Old Testament

None of this is seen in early Judaism, especially in Palestine. The reverence for prayer is maintained and the part prayer plays in the lives of the people is extensive. There is a fixed

⁴ Hammerling, Roy. *A History of Prayer: the First to the Fifteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

pattern for prayer, and the people are taught this pattern from their youth. In pre-Christian times, it was the custom to begin and end the day with prayer. At the time of Jesus, the most basic creed throughout the Jewish community was, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” This creed is known as the Shema Yisrael. Onto this was added, “... And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them... when you lie down, and when you rise.”⁵ The general practice of confessing the one true God in the morning between dawn and sunrise and in the evening after sunset derives from the last words of this commandment. This is attested in the *Letter of Aristeeas*. During this time, between 145 and 100 BC., this act is practiced in Palestine and in the Diaspora, a scattered population whose origin lies in a separate geographic locale. The Essenes, a Jewish sect during the Second Temple period that flourished from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century CE, and the Therapeutae, a Jewish sect which existed in Alexandria and other parts of the ancient Greek world, are also seen to have prayers at sunrise and in the evening. These are some of the first recordings of scheduled prayer.

When following the history of prayer, a similar, yet different, custom of prayer alongside the twice-a-day recitation of the Shema is found. In this custom, the people pray three times a day instead of two. This custom is first attested in the year 164 BC in the book of Daniel. In this account, three times a day, Daniel opens his window and kneels in the direction of Jerusalem to pray. This custom is also seen in the book of Ezra, which takes place towards the end of the third century BC, and in the book of Judith as they pray during the afternoon prayer time. These three hours of prayer were different from the Shema, and it is the Tephilla.⁶ These three hours

⁵ Hammerling, Roy. *A History of Prayer: the First to the Fifteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

⁶ Ibid.

were used for true prayer, and not just as a time for recitation of the creed. A difference must be noted, as the Shema is never spoken of in the terms of praying the Shema, but in terms of reciting the Shema. The Tephilla is a hymn consisting of a string of benedictions, and at the end of the first century AD the number was fixed at eighteen. Thus, the Tephilla is sometimes referred to as the “Eighteen Benedictions.” The person who prayed this is able to add his or her personal petitions to these hymns. Another difference between the Shema and the Tephilla is who can pray each one. Only free men were obliged to recite the Shema, unlike the Tephilla which is to be said by all. Contrary to most of societies rules, “all” includes women, children, and slaves. This continued the tradition of scheduled prayer, but allowed for more inclusiveness in who participated.

New Testament

It seems that by the time of the New Testament, these customs become a general rule. The recitation of the Shema and the praying three times a day, or Tephilla, were fused. In the morning, a devout Jew combines the Shema with the Tephilla. Then, in the afternoon, also known as the hour of the prayer, the Jew prays only the Tephilla. Lastly, the Jew once again recites the Shema and prays the Tephilla. Toward the end of the first century, there is unclarity about whether recitation and prayer is required during the evening prayer. Though scholars find that it is not, most Jews continue to practice this way because of the tradition. These practices serve as the foundation for all Jewish people from their youth upwards, educationally and practically.

Jesus in the Bible

When looking at how Jesus prayed during His time on earth, there are not many that can be observed. In the synoptic gospels, excluding the three exclamatory prayers during the crucifixion story, there are only two prayers. One is the cry of Jubilation, found in Matthew. The other prayer a Biblical reader encounters is the prayer in Gethsemane, found in Mark. Though there are not many explicit prayers from Jesus on record, it is known that Jesus came from a devout family. This means that He participated in the liturgical heritage of His people, which were discussed at length earlier in this thesis. Evidence of this is seen in Luke when a comment is made, “as his custom was,” regarding Jesus’ attendance at Sabbath worship. Though there is no record of all of His prayers, more understanding can be gained about the prayers Jesus was taught to pray as a child, and therefore, the prayers that accompanied Him through His adulthood. Furthermore, insight into how Jesus prayed can be gained through the references scripture makes to Jesus praying. For example, in Mark 1:35, Jesus is at prayer before sunrise. Additionally, after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus ascends a mountain in the evening to pray and before the choosing of the twelve disciples. When Jesus is praying before sunrise and in the evening ascending a mountain, He is praying in isolation, at times when no one would be able to interrupt Him. When He prayed before the choosing of the twelve disciples, He is showing that He wants God’s will to be done as the decision concerning who will be closest to Jesus is being made. These examples of Jesus’ prayers and the meaning behind his actions signify the importance of praying privately and considering the will of God as the highest authority.

Early Christians

The first Christians are recorded to have prayed earnestly, especially in the initial centuries after the death of Jesus. Many took Paul's command to pray without ceasing seriously. When studying prayer in the first four centuries, Clement of Alexandria represented the time period when he said, "Each place, then, and time in which we entertain the idea of God, is in reality sacred."⁷ Of course, many Christians still felt inclined to pray at specific times in the day, not unceasingly. While there does not appear to be unambiguous evidence of Christians gathering for daily prayer until the fourth century, there are indications that the historical witnesses that this imputes is present earlier in descriptions of private prayer at set hours.⁸ This prayer pattern seems to have stemmed from Jewish origins, a common pattern throughout history. The Christians of this time period also prayed at meals, as many do today. So the only specific hours Christians were supposed to pray at that time were at terce, sext, and none, known presently as morning, noon, and evening. Origen also said that prayer needs to be made six times a day due to the pattern of Daniel's prayers. He does later say to pray in the middle of the night which would cause the total amount of daily prayers four. He is saying that prayer can, even should, happen more than three hours a day but it should happen no less than three. Tertullian came to the prayer three times a day conclusion because he observed that the Holy Spirit came on the disciples at the third hour, Daniel prayed three times during the day, Peter was at prayer at the 6th hour. He is recorded to have said that, "Regular prayers are due, without any admonition, on the entrance of light and of night." In the mid-third century Cyprian described the daily prayer pattern in the North African church. They would pray in the morning as a commemoration of the resurrection, and in the night because Jesus is the "true sun and true day."

⁷ Hammerling, Roy. *A History of Prayer: the First to the Fifteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

⁸ Ibid.

They would also pray during the night thinking, “Let us not, then who are in Christ-that is, always in the light-cease from prayer even during the night.”⁹ In summary, Origen, Tertullian and Cyprian all employ Daniel and say to pray three times a day. On the contrary, Clement does not cite Daniel but does say that the third sixth and ninth hours were the standard. Tertullian believed that kneeling should be prohibited on Sundays and the period of Easter through Pentecost. However, he did believe that kneeling in the early morning and during fasting would be acceptable. Origen believed that standing with eyes elevated and hands extended is the most appropriate posture. However, Origen taught that sitting should be acceptable with an ailment and that kneeling is good for confession. Similarly, Cyprian assumes standing is the typical position but does reference Peter kneeling beside Tabitha in the Bible. Another tradition related to prayer began around this time. This is the tradition of believers doing the sign of the cross and saying, “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” as a way to start and end prayers. Tertullian and Origen were two influential figures of the time that instructed believers to do this while praying. The teachings of Christians in the first centuries are the root of many traditions that are still followed today.

St. Augustine of Hippo

St. Augustine of Hippo is recorded to have proclaimed prayer as a sacrament. In his writings, he means this in the broadest sense of the word. He reaches this conclusion by observing that petitioners seek and attain forgiveness when praying, “Forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”¹⁰ In a letter to a woman named Proba, The Bishop of Hippo explains that the Lord’s Prayer, as a whole, has a twofold function. The first function is having the power to

⁹ Hammerling, Roy. *A History of Prayer: the First to the Fifteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

¹⁰ Hammerling, Roy. *A History of Prayer: the First to the Fifteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

make petitioner aware of what they need to pray for. The second function is creating a desire for what is prayed for and to give encouragement to those who pray to lead godly lives. He also analyzes each petition in the Lord's prayer to allow her to understand what each means. This analysis simultaneously allows the reader to understand what can be gained by the one who prays each of the petitions in the Lord's prayer. For example, when analyzing a specific petition, such as the forgiveness petition, he is helping her understand that by praying it, she will know she needs forgiveness and feel encouraged to experience forgiveness. He tells Proba that all prayers that are not consistent with the Lord's prayer are sinful, and that when someone is baptized, they must begin to pray righteously.¹¹ Lastly, he believes that prayer should be a daily activity, as not a day goes by that one does not sin, and praying the Lord's prayer is a way to reconcile Christians with God. St. Augustine of Hippo influences the people of His time in a way that makes them believe that prayer is essential.

The Benedictines

Understanding the role prayer played among the Benedictines is helpful in gaining more insight into the subject. Benedict was a Christian saint venerated in the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Communion and Old Catholic Churches. Additionally he is recorded to have been a patron saint of Europe. When examining the culture of his time period, it is clear that the people often combined different religious practices, and prayer is never distinguished. To be more specific, activities such as psalmody, sacred reading, and prayer are seen to be inseparable. It is obvious in his writings that Benedict makes an effort to help society see the importance of being brief and attentive in

¹¹ Ibid.

prayer, making an allusion to Cassian, a Christian saint of the 4th century, who warned that too long of prayers and worship can induce distraction leading to a lack of purpose in the prayer. Benedict emphasized this, with his main goals being to emphasize reading and listening to the Bible, especially the psalms, and to encourage rest, nourishment and labor in an attempt to build focus in prayer. Benedict's efforts are to have increased the the act of prayer in the lives of the people of his time, similar to St. Augustine of Hippo.

John Calvin

John Calvin, a French theologian, pastor and reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, writes about prayer to a large degree. In the third book of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he writes about prayer, considering it a perpetual exercise of faith and believed that there are many benefits derived from it. He also describes the rules of prayer and writes about the topic of praying through saints. According to Calvin, the only safety in this world is calling out to God in prayer, and no one else. By calling out to God, one invokes the presence of His providence to watch over his or her interests, invokes His power to sustain His people as they are weak, and invokes His goodness to receive humans into favor despite their sin.

¹² He says that people should partake in this because the act should give their consciences extreme peace and tranquility. According to Calvin, some people in prayer must have a correct heart and mind in a correct position to pray, focus, sincerity, stamina, humility, a desire for reconciliation, an acceptance of servanthood, and confidence in succeeding . John Calvin's writings have a long-lasting impact that allows people to understand the correct ways to pray.

St. Thomas Aquinas

¹² Calvin, Jean, and John Allen. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian board of Christian education, 1937.

Another perspective on prayer can be gained from St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*. St. Thomas Aquinas, known within the latter as the Doctor Angelicus and the Doctor Communis, writes as an Italian Dominican friar, philosopher, Catholic priest, and Doctor of the Church. He is seen to be an immensely influential philosopher, theologian, and jurist in the tradition of scholasticism. When discussing interior devotion and prayer, before he defines prayer, he makes sure the reader understands the meaning behind commanding and appealing, saying that both imply directing, arranging that someone does something, and that is a function of reason. He says that prayer is a sort of appeal, and so an act of reason.¹³ Aquinas then examines the beliefs of others regarding the topic of prayer, and he refutes them. One of these is the belief that though there is a divine providence, human affairs are not governed by this higher being, so it is altogether pointless to pray or to honor a god. Believers in this leave all affairs to chance. Believers defend this view from the stance that events seem to escape from a causal ordering, and this escape could not occur under God's divine providence, meaning that it cannot be the thing that governs human affairs. He refutes this position by first commenting that an event can seem to have taken place displaced from causal ordering, but in reality, it has been planned. For example, a master sends two of his servants to a location, not telling either one that the other will be there. The two run into each other, seemingly by chance, but only the master knows that their meeting has been planned.¹⁴ Another is the belief that prayer is useless because everything, including human behavior, is predetermined. The last is the belief that divine providence is not fixed, and that prayer and the honoring of God could change the outcome of a situation. He refutes this by saying that requesting God of something could be honoring, as it is

¹³ Aquinas, Thomas, and Thomas Gilby. *Summa Theologiae. (Law and Political Theory (1a2ae. 90-97))*. London: Blackfriars, 1966.

¹⁴ Ibid.

a way of acknowledging His power.¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas allows readers to have more of an insight into the correct perception of prayer.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Reformation, also speaks on prayer in *A Simple Way to Pray, For a Good Friend*, written in 1535. He first makes it clear that he believes prayer should be the first action of the morning and the last action of the night. He also believes that one should pray all throughout the day, and if their heart begins to grow weary in prayer, they should go and pray immediately. He references a quote from St. Jerome when saying, “He who works faithfully prays twice.”¹⁶ This means that the thoughts and faith of Christians transform their work into prayer and praise. He mentions that the opposite is true, meaning that if Christians have thoughts or a faith that acts against God he is cursing the Lord. The comments show that Martin Luther’s belief in daily life being a form of prayer, yet he urges his audience not to break the habit of true prayer. Martin Luther, like many of those who have shared their own beliefs on prayer, considers the position in which one prays important. When praying, one may sit or stand, but he or she should have their eyes toward Heaven and their hands folded. The position of their heart is also important, as prayer should be intentional and serious.¹⁷ Furthermore, the mouth should not be blurting out words, phrases, and recitations, but the heart should be giving meaning to every word that comes out of the mouth of the one who is praying. Lastly, he goes into depth with each of the petitions of the Lord’s prayer, like Augustine of Hippo, in an attempt to have the reader understand what he is praying and what he

¹⁵ Aquinas, Thomas, and Thomas Gilby. *Summa Theologiae. (Law and Political Theory (1a2ae. 90-97))*. London: Blackfriars, 1966.

¹⁶ Luther, Martin, and C. J. Trapp. *A Simple Way to Pray*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017.

¹⁷ Ibid.

is asking or confessing when praying it, so that it is not just a simple recitation as they were taught as children. Martin Luther is another leader of church history that tries, through his writing, to clarify the complexities of prayer.

C.S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis, a British writer and theologian with academic positions in English literature at both Oxford University and Cambridge University, also writes extensively on the topic of prayer. Lewis, as many other Christians, speaks on starting the day with prayer, in an attempt to start the day well. From his perspective, “One of the purposes for which God created prayer may have been to bear witness that the course of events is not governed by the state but created like a work of art to which every being makes its contribution and (in prayer) a conscious contribution, and in which every being is both an end and a means.” This means that a person is both the end of the story and the way of getting to the end of the story. This allows the reader to understand the importance of prayer, as it is the way that God reaches His conclusion. Obviously, He can reach a conclusion without humans, but He decides not to do so.

NT Wright

NT Wright also writes extensively on his perspective on the act of prayer in his book *The Lord and His Prayer*, where he introduces the topic by explaining that for centuries, people have struggled with how to pray. He proves this by citing Paul who said, “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”¹⁸ Due to this long history of confusion, people have grown comfortable with not being able to fully understand prayer and all of the aspects of it. This is understandable for humans though, as they

¹⁸ Romans 8:26 (All verses are ESV from “BibleGateway.” BibleGateway.com: A searchable online Bible in over 150 versions and 50 languages.)

crave instant gratification. Prayer does not usually give people this and instead makes people put in “hard work with little apparent or immediate reward.”¹⁹ Wright believes that most of the confusion that is around prayer can be cleared with more understanding and further study of the Lord’s prayer. Unlike other theologians, NT Wright believes that it is beneficial to linger in prayer for a while as it “can turn paranoia into prayer, fuss into faith.”²⁰ NT Wright then describes each of the clauses of the Lord’s Prayer extensively, just as many other Christian leaders do in their writings.

William E. Biederwolf

There has always been doubtfulness and confusion regarding prayer, but recently, many respected authors in the Christian community have made an effort to answer these questions in an attempt to give their audience more clarity on the topic. In the book *How Can God Answer Prayer?*, William E. Biederwolf, an American Presbyterian evangelist, speaks extensively on how prayer can work. He proclaims the many different purposes for prayer. He first says that, “Prayer enables us to realize the presence of God.”²¹ He goes into this more by explaining that when someone is looking at the physical world, sometimes the spiritual world with God is forgotten or not seen as clearly. Next, Biederwolf discusses the four products of prayer. He is confident that, “It produces holiness of heart... It produces humility of mind...It produces peace of the soul... It produces submission of will.”²² These are all products people have discussed for hundreds of years, meaning there is much agreement on why it is beneficial to pray. However, there is still disagreement on whether the prayer gets answered. Biederwolf urges his readers to

¹⁹ Wright, N. T. “The Lord and His Prayer.” Amazon. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Biederwolf, William E. *How Can God Answer Prayer?: Being an Exhaustive Treatise of the Nature, Conditions and Difficulties of Prayer*. London: Revell, 1915.

²² Ibid.

understand the difference between their will and God's will saying, "Thus in prayer one comes to see that other interests than his own are in the hands of God, that what He asks might not in the end be best, in view of God's infinite wisdom He must know what is best, in view of His infinite justice He must do what is best, and in view of His perfect love He must desire what is best, and so... he can say with becoming grace, "Thy will, O God and not mine, be done."²³ The will of God, or what God wants for each human life, can be understood by reading His word and laws, as that is how he expresses himself and makes himself known to the people of earth. He makes it clear to the reader that the act of considering God's will above the will of a human heart not only produces holiness, humility, peace, and submission, but it will produce the impression of a becoming sense of dependence on God.²⁴ Though it is agreed that there are several benefits to someone praying, it is argued that prayer is intended for nothing more than its reflexive influence on the supplicant. Refuting this claim, Biederwolf references a verse in Matthew which says, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."²⁵

By reading his book, it becomes clear that William E. Biederwolf believes that in order to have some understanding of how God answers prayer, it is first necessary to have a knowledge of the different types of predestination, a topic that has been disputed for hundreds of years. Absolute Predestination is the first type Biederwolf discusses. "Those who believe this to be true believe that everything that comes to pass is first predetermined in the mind of God, and that God's predestination precedes His foreknowledge as the ground of certainty for human action."²⁶

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Biederwolf, William E. *How Can God Answer Prayer?: Being an Exhaustive Treatise of the Nature, Conditions and Difficulties of Prayer*. London: Revell, 1915.

²⁵ Matthew 21:22

²⁶ Biederwolf, William E. *How Can God Answer Prayer?: Being an Exhaustive Treatise of the Nature, Conditions and Difficulties of Prayer*. London: Revell, 1915.

In other words, God only foreknows the events that he planned. Using basic knowledge of the Bible, God absolutely predetermines some things. A refutation to this is that “God only predetermines what He foreknows is going to occur and the foreknowledge of an occurrence does not necessitate it, for the simple reason that it is mere knowledge and not influence, and so has no effect upon the freedom or certainty of the action.”²⁷ God’s foreknowledge is not so much of a peculiar kind of event, as much as it is a knowledge of a peculiar quality existent in the free agent. God is able to understand the temperament and disposition of every one of His creatures enough to be altogether sure of how each of them will act under any circumstances. Limited Predestination is the next section under the umbrella of predestination. Those who believe this to be true believe that “God’s foreknowledge is necessarily all-com predetermined to take place.”²⁸ This would give all Christians sufficient reason to not do anything else. This would mean God foreordained the means as well as the end. In this scenario it is believed that God would have foreordained that a certain temporal blessing that would be obtained as a result of some prayer. He would have also foreordained the prayer as the influence with Him in securing the blessing. If God's unchangeableness is the main objection to prayer, this becomes the sure ground of our confidence in the action, given that no is still an answer, and just as good of an answer at that. Conditional Predestination is the last form of predestination present. This is the belief that God chooses for eternal salvation those whom he foresees will have faith in Christ, which emphasizes the importance of a person's free will. Biederwolf refutes people who claim God knows all by saying, ““His knowing does not exclude the possibility of our asking being

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Biederwolf, William E. *How Can God Answer Prayer?: Being an Exhaustive Treatise of the Nature, Conditions and Difficulties of Prayer*. London: Revell, 1915.

pleasing to Him.”²⁹ Biederwolf’s writings allow the reader to see how the controversies of prayer and predestination intersect.

Experiments

Since the late 1800s, several experiments centered around prayer have been taking place. These experiments show the extensiveness of the interest prayer has received from people all over the world. This is a topic questioned and doubted, and the scientific community continues to research the effects of it.

Francis Galton

The very first statistical analysis of third-party prayer is recorded to have taken place in 1872 by the Victorian Scientist Francis Galton. In the analysis, he hypothesizes, partly as satire, that if prayer is effective, then members of the British Royal Family will live longer than average, given that thousands pray for their well-being every Sunday. Getting involved in his experiment, he prays over randomized plots of land to see whether the plants grow any faster. At the conclusion of the experiment, he finds no correlation in either case.³⁰

Randolph C. Byrd

The next experiment is recorded to have taken place in 1988 by Randolph C. Byrd, a doctor in the San Francisco General Hospital coronary care unit. In his experiment, Byrd measures 29 health outcomes using three-level (good, intermediate, or bad) scoring.³¹ He finds that those who have been prayed for suffer fewer newly diagnosed ailments on only six of them. Byrd concluded that "Based on these data there seemed to be an effect, and that effect was

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Francis Galton, Statistical Inquiries into the Efficacy of Prayer, *The Fortnightly Review*, August 1, 1872 (from abelard.org)

³¹ Byrd RC (July 1988). "Positive therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer in a coronary care unit population". *Southern Medical Journal*.

presumed to be beneficial", and that "intercessory prayer to the Judeo-Christian God has a beneficial therapeutic effect in patients admitted to a CCU."³² Due to a mixed reaction from the scientific community concerning this study, it is unclear if these results are valid. Several reviewers consider Byrd's study to be well-designed and well-executed, while others remain skeptical. A criticism of Byrd's study, which also applies to most other studies, is the fact that he did not limit prayers by the friends and family of patients, hence it is unclear which prayers, if any, may have been measured.

William S. Harris

About ten years later, William S. Harris, an internationally recognized expert on omega-3 fatty acids and how they can benefit patients with heart disease, a Professor in the Department of Medicine in the Sanford School of Medicine at the University of South Dakota and the President and CEO of OmegaQuant, is recorded to have done the same experiment as Dr. Byrd, but with stricter conditions. He says that he wanted better results because in Byrd's experiment, the participants are not completely blinded and the results are limited to only "prayer-receptive" individuals.³³ He has this opinion because 57 of the 450 patients invited to participate in Byrd's study refused to give consent for personal reasons or religious convictions. In his experiment, using a different, continuous weighted scoring system, Harris concludes that "supplementary, remote, blinded, intercessory prayer produced a measurable improvement in the medical outcomes of critically ill patients."³⁴ Additionally, he suggests that "prayer be an effective

³² Byrd RC (July 1988). "Positive therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer in a coronary care unit population." *Southern Medical Journal*.

³³ Harris WS, Gowda M, Kolb JW, et al. (October 1999). "A randomized, controlled trial of the effects of remote, intercessory prayer on outcomes in patients admitted to the coronary care unit." *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

³⁴ Harris WS, Gowda M, Kolb JW, et al. (October 1999). "A randomized, controlled trial of the effects of remote, intercessory prayer on outcomes in patients admitted to the coronary care unit." *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

adjunct to standard medical care."³⁵ Critics of this experiment suggest that both Byrd's and Harris's results can be explained by chance, leading to no real change in the answers to the questions these scientists, and many others, have.

Sean O'Laoire

There is record of an experiment completed by Sean O'Laoire, a Catholic priest with a degree in mathematics from the University of Ireland, a PhD in Transpersonal Psychology and a license in Clinical Psychology. Seán lectures and conducts scientific research on the effects of prayer in 1997 measuring the effects of prayer on patients with anxiety and depression. In this experiment, there are 496 volunteers: 90 who prayed, referred to as agents, and 406 who were prayed for, referred to as subjects.³⁶ Agents are randomly assigned to either a directed or undirected prayer group. There are photos and names of subjects to be used as a focus. Subjects are randomly assigned to three groups: those prayed for by nondirected agents, a control group, and those prayed for by directed agents. Prayer is offered for 15 minutes daily for 12 weeks, and each subject is prayed for by three agents. Five pretest and posttest objective measures and six posttest subjective measures were taken. Subjects improved significantly on all 11 measures. Agents improved significantly on 10 measures. A significant positive correlation was found between the amount of prayer the agents did and their scores on the five objective tests.³⁷ Agents, the people who pray, have significantly better scores than the subjects, the people prayed for, on all objective measures. Subjects' views of the locus of God's action showed significance in three objective measures. Improvement on four objective measures was significantly related

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶ O'Laoire S (November 1997). "An experimental study of the effects of distant, intercessory prayer on self-esteem, anxiety, and depression". *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*.

³⁷ Ibid.

to subjects' belief in the power of prayer for others.³⁸ Improvement on all eleven measures is significantly related to subjects' conviction concerning whether they had been assigned to a control or an experimental group. Possible explanations include the placebo/faith effect, the time displaced effect, and extraneous prayer. This provides some evidence that results come from prayer, but not a very large amount.

Leonard Leibovici

Retroactive intercessory prayer is also being studied. A 2001 study by Leonard Leibovici uses 3,393 patients with a blood infection at the Rabin Medical Center between 1990 and 1996. The difference in this type of experiment is that prayers are performed after the patients have already left the hospital. Two of the outcomes, the amount of time as a patient in the hospital and the amount of time with a fever, are seen to be considerably improved in the intervention group, implying that prayer could have the power to change events in the past. Additionally, the "mortality rate was lower in the intervention group, but the difference between the groups was not significant."³⁹ Leibovici then concludes that "Remote, retroactive intercessory prayer was associated with a shorter stay in hospital and a shorter duration of fever in patients with a bloodstream infection."⁴⁰ Leibovici notes that in the past, people knew the way to prevent diseases without understanding why it worked, suggesting that if prayer has a positive effect on patients in hospital, then there could be an explanation that has not been discovered. Larry Dossey, the executive editor of the journal *Explore: The Journal of Science & Healing* and an advocate of faith healing, is the author of a paper that responds to Leibovici which discussed

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Leibovici L (2001). "Effects of remote, retroactive intercessory prayer on outcomes in patients with bloodstream infection: randomised controlled trial"

⁴⁰ Ibid.

possible explanations of the results reported, written in 2003.⁴¹ Olshansky, a renowned electrophysiologist and professor emeritus at the University of Iowa Hospitals, who has also directed the Clinical Cardiac Electrophysiology and Fellowship Training Programs at the University of Iowa, Iowa City and Loyola University, co-authored this response to Leibovici's experiment. The two invoke quantum mechanics to attempt to explain not only the benefits of intercessory prayer, but also how it might operate retroactively. In relation to backwards causality, Stenger refutes Olshansky and Dossey by saying that "the results of some quantum experiments may be interpreted as evidence for events in the future affecting events in the past at the quantum level, but no theoretical basis exists for applying this notion on the macroscopic scale of human experience. The atoms in biological systems are quantum in nature ... their collective behaviour does not exhibit any quantum effects. What is more, even if the brain were a quantum system, that would not imply that it can break the laws of physics any more than electrons or photons, which are inarguably quanta."⁴² The two often defend their work from various critics, one of them being the *British Medical Journal's rapid response section*. The responses are not just critical though, Stephen Wright praises the Olshansky and Dossey's paper in an editorial in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* from 2004. The attention of this paper is not lost in 2004 because in 2005, Olshansky and Dossey's work was included in a critical review published in *Explore* which concluded that "Religious activity may improve health outcomes."⁴³ Their work is also defended in the *British Medical Journal*, released in 2004. Lastly, Dothey is the author of an *Explore* paper defending experiments on the

⁴¹ Leibovici, Leonard (March 12, 2002). "Author's Comments". *BMJ*. British Medical Journal.

⁴² Olshansky, Brian; Dossey, Larry (2003). "Retroactive prayer: a preposterous hypothesis?".

⁴³ Dossey, Larry (2015). "Nonlocal Mind: A (Fairly) Brief History of the Term".

medical effects of prayer that was written in 2005.⁴⁴ The amount of recognition this study receives makes it clear that this prayer attracts a large amount of attention and interest, and shows that many want to know if God does answer prayers, and the kind of prayer that makes him do so.

MANTRA

There is data showing MANTRA, or Monitoring and Actualisation of Noetic Trainings, conducting a three-year clinical trial in 2005. The study, led by Duke University, compares intercessory prayer and Music, Imagery, and Touch therapies, also referred to as MIT, for 748 cardiology patients.⁴⁵ Many in the scientific community regard this study as the first with rigorous scientific protocols used on a large scale to assess the power of intercessory prayer. This study by MANTRA has null results and the authors concluded, "Neither masked prayer nor MIT therapy significantly improved clinical outcome after elective catheterization or percutaneous coronary intervention."⁴⁶ This conclusion did not give scientists any answer regarding prayer, but the experiment does show further support that people have a desire to know about the power of prayer.

Herbert Benson

In 2006, a Harvard professor named Herbert Benson conducted a Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer, also referred to as the STEP. The study is also commonly known as the "Templeton Foundation prayer study" or "Great Prayer Experiment." The experiment uses 1,802 coronary artery bypass surgery patients from six different hospitals.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Wright, Stephen (2004). "Digest – a review of research, literature, music and media".

⁴⁶ Ibid.

In an attempt to make the study as controlled as possible, double-blind protocols are used.⁴⁷ The patients are randomized into three groups, not measuring the individual prayer receptiveness. Another way to control the experiment is telling the members of the experimental and control Groups 1 and 2 that they might or might not receive prayers. In this case, and only Group 1 is prayed for. A group is also used as a test for possible psychosomatic effects. This group is informed that they will receive prayer and they subsequently do.⁴⁸ STEP attempted to standardize the prayer method, which is different from most of the other studies on prayer. No photographs are given to the people who pray, and they are only given the first name. Members of the Catholic church and of the New Thought church Silent Unity who pray for the patients “are allowed to pray in their own manner, but they were instructed to include the following phrase in their prayers: "for a successful surgery with a quick, healthy recovery and no complications.”⁴⁹ There were complications from surgery that occurred in 52 percent of those who received prayer, 51 percent of those who did not receive it, and 59 percent of patients who knew they would receive prayers. Regarding major complications or thirty-day mortality, there are no significant differences statistically. In *The God Delusion*, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins theorizes an explanation for this saying, "It seems more probable that those patients who knew they were being prayed for suffered additional stress in consequence: performance anxiety', as the experimenters put it. Dr Charles Bethea, one of the researchers, said, "It may

⁴⁷ Benson H, Dusek JA, Sherwood JB, et al. (April 2006). "Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP) in cardiac bypass patients: a multicenter randomized trial of uncertainty and certainty of receiving intercessory prayer".

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Benson H, Dusek JA, Sherwood JB, et al. (April 2006). "Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP) in cardiac bypass patients: a multicenter randomized trial of uncertainty and certainty of receiving intercessory prayer".

have made them uncertain, wondering am I so sick they had to call in their prayer team?"⁵⁰ The team leader, Benson, does not believe that STEP is the final study on the effects of intercessory prayer. More scientific professionals have raised more questions after the study, meaning that the topic of intercessory prayer requires additional answers and more studies. Study co-author Jeffery Dusek stated that, "Each study builds on others, and STEP advanced the design beyond what had been previously done. The findings, however, could well be due to the study limitations."⁵¹ This is yet another source of support for the extensive research people are willing to do in order to understand prayer.

Justin Brierly

In October of 2012, Justin Brierly, the presenter of Premier's faith discussion show *Unbelievable?*, invites seventy-one atheists and agnostics to take part in an experiment.⁵² The purpose of this experiment is to see if God will reveal himself to atheists if they pray a few minutes per day for forty days. He explains that he got the inspiration for this idea from an Oxford Philosopher who has an academic paper explaining why it is beneficial for atheists to pray to God. The results of this experiment lean mostly toward there being no change in belief, as 48 people claim they did not have any experience with God during the forty days of prayer. However, there are two people who became Christian due to this experiment saying they, "Can no longer deny the existence of God,"⁵³ and one person who is undecided, but seeking faith in the Christian God. Six say they did not do what was required for the experiment and fourteen

⁵⁰ *Harvard Gazette* April 6, 2006 "Prayers don't help heart surgery patients; Some fare worse when prayed for".

⁵¹ Benson H, Dusek JA, Sherwood JB, et al. (April 2006). "Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP) in cardiac bypass patients: a multicenter randomized trial of uncertainty and certainty of receiving intercessory prayer".

⁵² Premier. "The Atheist Prayer Experiment." Premier, September 3, 2014.

⁵³Ibid.

have not yet reached a conclusion.⁵⁴ This experiment, like many others, lead scientists to conclude there is no general change in humans or their lives as a result of prayer, but, logically speaking, if even a single change happens once, it is reasonable to believe that it has the power to change entities.

⁵⁴ Premier. "The Atheist Prayer Experiment." Premier, September 3, 2014.

Thesis Proof

How To Pray

Purpose

A large amount of the confusion surrounding the purpose of prayer comes from the verses that say:

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.⁵⁵

At first glance, it is easy to assume that the Bible is saying that it is not right to ask God for desires that He is already capable of giving, because He would give them anyway. However, the purpose of this passage is to explain to the reader that he or she should make the purpose of prayer to seek first the Kingdom of God, as it directly states and concludes, and if the purpose of prayer is to receive. It is also assumed that people are not allowed to come to God while struggling with anxiousness. Using pure logic, it needs to be understood that someone’s anxiousness should not prevent them from approaching the throne of God in prayer. C.S. Lewis provides support from this when saying, “If one forcibly excludes [their anxieties], don’t they wreck all the rest of our prayers? If we lay all the cards on the table, God will help us to

⁵⁵ Matthew 6:25-33

moderate the excesses. But the pressure of things we are trying to keep out of our mind is a hopeless distraction.” God knows exactly how a person’s heart is and they have no way of hiding their condition, so it is only serving as a distraction to the rest of his or her prayers. Also, God would not want His people to wait until they are no longer anxious to come to Him, He would want them to come to Him as a refuge from their anxiousness. This is seen as true when God tells His children, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”⁵⁶ Additionally, some may assume from this passage that there is no reason to ask God for something because He already knows that he or she needs it. However, “His knowing does not exclude the possibility of our asking being pleasing to Him.”⁵⁷ The purpose of prayer is not simply to ask and receive, but to build an father-child relationship with the ruler of a Kingdom the person praying wants to progress, a desire that must be pleasing to God.

God wants a father-child relationship with His children, and this is seen by how Jesus teaches believers to address God. When teaching the Lord’s prayer, Jesus says to address God as, “Our Father in Heaven.”⁵⁸ NT Wright explains just how significant this is when discussing each clause of the prayer. In the Our Father clause, he discusses the boldness one should use while speaking this. In this clause, the word father is Abba, which is most like the word Daddy in current linguistics. The first time this word is used for God, is by Jesus, creating a type of revolution that allows hope to come from familiarity. When He calls God Abba, he calls people to a new level of intimacy with the Lord. Wright goes on to say that by calling Him Father, one

⁵⁶ Matthew 11:28-29

⁵⁷ Aquinas, Thomas, and Thomas Gilby. *Summa Theologiae. (Law and Political Theory (1a2ae. 90-97))*. London: Blackfriars, 1966.

⁵⁸ Matthew 6:9

is saying, “Please may I too, be considered and an apprentice son,” to the God of this universe.⁵⁹ Taking this thought further, NT Wright assures his reader that this clause is risky and requires boldness. One cannot predict how God will answer their prayers, and it is therefore a risk to step out in faith, proclaiming him as Father.

It would be logical, then, for believers to start speaking to God as they speak to a loving, dependable earthly father. Even more so, as God is a perfect Father and earthly parents are not by any means perfect. A child would go to their earthly father or mother with all of the desires of their heart, knowing that their guardian may not fulfill those desires. One reason the parent may not give the child what he or she is asking for could be that the mother or father does not believe that fulfilling the desire is not what is the most beneficial for the child they love. The reason could also be that the parent does not believe that the child is mature enough to receive. Another scenario could be that the parent believes that the child needs to work for what he or she is asking for instead of just receiving it as an unearned reward. Of course, the parent may just give the child whatever their wish may be, as God does in the Bible or in other instances recorded throughout history. One example of this is when, “[Elijah] stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, ‘O Lord my God, let this child’s life come into him again.’ And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived.” Another time related to King Jehoshaphat, as he prays when the people of Judah are on the brink of war and on the verge of being victimized and destroyed by neighbouring countries. In the story, after the prayer, the Lord sends angels to fight on His behalf and confusion in the minds of the enemies. It is also important to note that many times a

⁵⁹ Ibid.

young child does not understand why his or her parent is making the decision the mother or father is making because they are not wise enough, just as God's children have absolutely no way of understanding all of the ways of God. A parent, just as any person with another, would not feel as if they are giving their child what they really have to offer if their child only communicates with them when he or she needs something. A parent can offer safety, peace, wisdom, and guidance, just as God can, to a much larger extent. Taking all of this into consideration, it is reasonable to conclude that there is no harm that comes from someone requesting something of God, just as there is no harm in a child requesting something from a parent, as long as that is not the only reason for communication between the two parties.

When to Pray

The amount of time that someone spends praying is another layer of how to pray. As discussed in the historical review, people praying at scheduled times during the day is a tradition that has lasted throughout the years. In the Bible, Paul commands believers to "Pray without ceasing."⁶⁰ The definition for ceasing is to bring an action or activity to an end, meaning that the communication with God never really ends. This has parallels with a conversation by text that does not ever reach a completion. Though the two parties are not communicating every second of the day, the conversation never reaches an end, similar to prayer. For people who need more of a structure, it is fine to schedule times throughout the day, and furthermore, in the instances of corporate prayer, scheduled prayer is usually necessary. In saying this, the Bible never says that the tradition of praying morning, noon, and night is required, so believers should not feel as if they are not allowed to go to God if it is not a scheduled time. God is always available to answer

⁶⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:17

a son or daughter's message, so to speak, as Jesus tells His followers, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

What to Say

Though there is not one exact way to pray to God, there are a few guidelines that can be followed because there are wrong ways to pray. Some pastors even say, "Lord forgive our prayers" because it is so common to pray in a way that does not glorify God, and others teach that "The devil does meddle with prayers. He is never so gleeful as when he gets us to intercede with a mistaken zeal, a mistaken end, and wrong motive."⁶¹ Beware of a confession of sins which may be made because of the accusation of evil spirits." The intention of God must be set first, found in the verse, "Seek first the kingdom of God,"⁶² meaning that they should approach the throne with the position of "Lord teach us to intercede with no other motive than Thy glory."⁶³ There has not been much dispute over the guidelines to formatted prayers as the Lord's Prayer is fairly straightforward. St. Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, John Calvin, C.S. Lewis, and NT Wright all give very similar formats that reflect the way that Jesus prayed in Matthew. Typically, it is good for someone to offer a humble confession of the lowliness of human's original nature. After this confession, a confession of the personal sins committed by the one who is praying. Next, a confession that people, who are simply sinners, deserve punishment and not mercy. After, the person praying should offer a humble representation of his or her wants, needs and sorrows of any kind, including mercy from the Lord. Lastly, thankfulness and praise should be given to the Triune God for all He has done, is doing, and will do.

⁶¹ Huegel, F. J. *The Ministry of Intercession*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976.

⁶² Matthew 6:33

⁶³ Huegel, F. J. *The Ministry of Intercession*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976.

The Lord's Prayer is also beneficial to follow as this is the way that Jesus told believers to pray. People may recite this prayer or use it as a template. However, the prayer should never be empty words with no meaning. Jesus makes this clear before He shares the Lord's prayer with His people by saying, "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words."⁶⁴ If they will not be heard for their many words, the only thing they could be heard for is their intentions. The beginning and middle of the Lord's Prayer are important, but the end is just as crucial. Jesus tells His listeners, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses."⁶⁵ C.S. Lewis speaks on the importance of forgiveness, using the story of the prodigal son when explaining:

Instead of genuine forgiveness, our generation has been taught the vague notion of 'tolerance'. This is, at best, a low-grade parody of forgiveness. At worst, it's a way of sweeping the real issues in human life under the carpet. If the Father in the story had intended merely to tolerate the son, he would not have been running down the road to meet him. Forgiveness is richer and higher and harder and more shocking than we usually think. Jesus' message offers the genuine article, and insists that we should accept no man-made substitutes

This is crucial in understanding the level of forgiveness required for the people in believers' lives in order to obtain the forgiveness required for salvation. It is not as easy as just saying that one person forgives another, but rejoicing in the return and joining back together in love alone.

Praying to Mary and Saints

⁶⁴ Matthew 6:7

⁶⁵ Matthew 6:14

Praying to and through the saints and Mary is not acceptable in all circumstances. This is a topic protestants revisit often because the practice continues in the catholic faith. After reading some of the writings of early church fathers, circa 200-300 A.D., it seems reasonable to come away with the idea that it is okay to pray to Mary and the other saints. They argue against apparent logic and reason to reach the conclusion that this is okay, there is an absence of Biblical evidence. If one were to look for the Biblical evidence for praying to the saints, he or she would not be able to find any whatsoever. However, there is evidence that praying to or through the saints and Mary is incorrect. According to Scripture, there are several reasons why praying to the saints is wrong, besides the initially assumed anti-Christ implications. First, the Bible says, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”⁶⁶ There is no person or saint that has ever come close to doing what Jesus did, and that was because they were simply imperfectly and completely human. There is no one else who we can turn to for salvation, eternally or temporarily. When people pray to Mary, they are looking to her as another mediator that is not Jesus Christ, which she simply cannot be. She has nothing to offer humanity for their salvation, whether that be temporarily or eternally. Furthermore, it needs to be made clear that she was just as much a sinner as any other human. Yes, she was set apart because God used her to bring the son of God into the world. Other than that, she was just as fallen as any other human in the history of the world, besides Jesus, of course. By making her a mediator, the person who is praying is also making her an anti-christ, someone who is replacing Christ in His rightful position. Mary, a faithful servant to the Lord, never asked for anyone to

⁶⁶ 1 Timothy 2:5

pray to her and would probably not be pleased that there are millions making her into an anti-christ. Regarding the saints, there is no proof to believe that they are omniscient. If they were, they would be able to know all things and could actually hear the prayers being prayed to them, but there is no reason to believe that they can. There is no way to know if the saints know what is going on here on earth or if they hear any prayers uttered to them. Only God is unarguably omniscient, and His beings tend to not be. In theology, omniscience is often referred to as an attribute of God that is non-communicable. It is not an attribute He shares with creation, because it seems to be specific only to God. It is a common thought that such words can be uttered to the Virgin Mary and the other saints, but there is no evidence that the words can be heard.

Third, it is even more unclear why someone would pray to the saints, because Scripture never tells believers to pray in this way. However, Jesus specifically tells believers to pray to the Father. Through Jesus' role as Mediator, all Christians have been given the blessing of being able to go straight to the Father. This is a privilege only Christians who are in Christ have. There is no reason to not take advantage of this incredible blessing in order to pray to someone like Mary. Fourth, Saul, in the book of Samuel in the Old Testament, is the only person that ever prayed to a saint. In the writings, Samuel is conjured up via a medium, which is not allowed by law. Samuel immediately says, "*Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?*"⁶⁷ It would make sense that those in heaven would want nothing to do with the affairs of earth. If it is believed that there is a heaven and that they are there, they are busy worshipping and being in the presence of Christ, and trusting that He is taking care of the affairs still on earth. If there is not a

⁶⁷ I Samuel 28

present heaven for them to be a part of, they would not be able to be a part of the affairs of earth. The saints are most likely not listening to those on earth, as their focus should be on Christ and Him alone, not other saints. It is also important to mention that there should be no worshipping of angels. Support for this is found in the book of Revelation. The reason given, is another piece of support against praying to saints. In Revelation, this is what the angel tells John: And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”⁶⁸ The angel is just as much a servant to God as John was and did not want John to worship him. To take the point even further, Mary is just as much a servant as John and the angel.

Besides there being no clear point to praying to saints, one could claim that it is wrong to pray to them. Christians are not to pray to them asking for help, but to pray to God alone. To exalt Mary to such a status as mediator, or someone to pray and look to, seems misguided for a couple of reasons. Mary was undeniably special and set apart. However, she was still simply a servant of God who needed a savior as desperately as anyone else needs a savior. Additionally, no one should look to anyone besides the Triune God to have their supernatural desires filled. To do otherwise, looking to someone that is not the Triune God, is exalting the creation over the Creator.

Ending a Prayer

A common phrase at the end of prayers is, “In Jesus’ name.” This has become a habitual way to end a prayer because of the bible verse, “If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Revelation 19:10

⁶⁹ John 14:14

Many have come to interpret this as a command to put the phrase at the end of all prayers, no matter what the believer's conversation with God is about. To its fullest meaning in English, the command do ask for anything in the name of Jesus literally means "Whatever you ask by My command and authority, acting in My behalf, for the advancement of My kingdom, I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."⁷⁰ When looked at in its full meaning, it becomes obvious that God is not telling us to use a phrase at the end of all prayers, but he is telling us to use true purpose all throughout all prayers. "God will not do for me those things which are contrary to His loving nature. He will not do anything that would cause Him to violate His holy character, and He will do nothing that is wrong. He does not answer the prayers of rebels and the willfully disobedient, unless those prayers are for forgiveness. He will not answer those who are selfish and self-centered."⁷¹ To put it even more simply, anything that will help the followers of God do what God has created them to do will be granted. God wants to further His Kingdom, and His people should want the same. Next, doing the sign of the cross has no requirement, and is simply a tradition started by early church fathers. If a believer would like to do the sign of the cross, this is fine, but the action is not a necessity. Though the end of prayers is a layer in understanding this activity, it is not of the highest importance.

Posture

It is important to note that though the posture of someone's body does demonstrate a physical sign of the position in which they are coming to God, the posture of their heart is what really matters. When someone is falling flat on his or her face, this tends to represent a person

⁷⁰ Grimm, Carl Ludwig Wilibald, Christian Gottlob Wilke, Joseph Henry Thayer, and Maurice A. Robinson. *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimms Wilkes Clavis Novi Testamenti*. Place of publication not identified: Christian copyrights, 1983.

⁷¹ Willhite, B. J. *Why Pray?* Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1988.

who is under a deep and uncommon sense of sin. The position of kneeling is usually an expression of humility, of an awareness of needs that need to be met, of supplication for undeserved mercy, and of adoration, and dependence upon him before whom we kneel.

Standing is very common in most places of worship and is not unfit when the other postures are not convenient. Standing before a person whom we respect and revere is a token of honor.

Furthermore, though this action is not necessary, it is common for people to close their eyes in prayer. This causes all distractions to be closed off so that the person praying can really focus on the intimate moments with God. Of course, one can see God in everything because of his beautiful creation, but, one can see Him best with His eyes shut, because that is when one will be the most accepting to understand the way that God is revealing Himself. Because of the distractions of life, “When the world is so visible to the eyes, God appears less clearly to the soul.”⁷² Of course, though, anyone can be in these positions with no meaning or purpose behind their posture, so the posture of the heart is what is most important, and that posture should show humility and reverence in the presence of the Lord over all creation

Intercession

Intercession is a very large part of Christian prayer. Logically speaking, there is no harm that can come from praying for the good of someone that is not the person praying. The person praying will embody Christ more by thinking of someone else and praying to the God of the universe for what they believe is best for them. However, the person praying must be able to comprehend that God may answer this prayer with a no, as he may with any other type of prayer.

⁷² Watts, Isaac. *A Guide to Prayer*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001.

The believers of God must trust that God's will is better and that if He chooses to answer the intercessory prayer with no, that this is what is best for the Kingdom of God.

Benefits of Prayer

The main point in prayer is seeking first the Kingdom of God. This means making a relationship with God a top priority. This will cause several effects to occur. First, prayer allows believers to become aware of the presence of God. It is not uncommon for life to get busy and for a relationship with God to get put on the back burner. This often causes forgetfulness of the fact that God is currently alive and near to His people. Prayer allows the believer to focus their time on God and separate from the craziness of daily life, causing a reconnect in the heart of a believer and the Father. Prayer also produces humility of mind. Humility is necessary in prayer because the person praying is acknowledging the high authority of someone, this being God, other than his or herself. Becoming humble before God repetitively will undeniably cause humility to become a trait of the one who is praying. Furthermore, knowing God's presence more will cause the believer to understand the character of God more. The character of God is to exalt the very least. This is seen when Matthew says, "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."⁷³ Prayer will have the believer becoming more prone to putting others before them in a humble manner. Prayer also produces peace of the soul. God is the only aspect of human life that is consistent and unwavering. Uncertainty is a direct cause of a lack of peace in the hearts of people. The certainty of God's love and presence allows true peace to enter into the soul. Prayer also produces submission of the prayerful person's will to God's will. This is the thought process that though humans have

⁷³ Matthew 23:12

desires and plans they want to come to fruition, they believe that God may have better than these desires or plans. Because God knows everything and people do not, and because He is perfect and people are not, a difference in plans is not uncommon. “Thus in prayer one comes to see that other interests than his own are in the hands of God, that what He asks might not in the end be best, in view of God’s infinite wisdom He must know what is best, in view of His infinite justice He must do what is best, and in view of His perfect love He must desire what is best, and so... he can say with becoming grace, “Thy will, O God and not mine, be done.”⁷⁴ Additionally, prayer changes a believer from being self-reliant to be reliant on God because “prayer impresses the mind with a becoming sense of our dependence on God.”⁷⁵ This makes sense because prayer is similar to a conversation between a father and a child. If the child is independent, they move away from their parental figures and go to live alone. If the child is dependent, they reside near their parents and communicate often. A prayerful person increasing dependence on a loving eternal creator instead of his or her created self can not produce a negative result.

Finally, once one understands the correct function of prayer, they must understand that God will always answer their prayers, but his answer may not be the one they hope for. By submitting to the will of the Lord, a believer needs to understand that God can say yes, but he can also say no. Of course though, this should not cause the person praying to stop. If they have submitted their will to the hands of God, they must trust that the result of His answer of no is better than the result of His hoped for answer of yes. For example, one may beg and plead for God to free them from suffering, claiming that that is what is best. However, James reminds

⁷⁴ Biederwolf, William E. *How Can God Answer Prayer?: Being an Exhaustive Treatise of the Nature, Conditions and Difficulties of Prayer*. London: Revell, 1915.

⁷⁵ Biederwolf, William E. *How Can God Answer Prayer?: Being an Exhaustive Treatise of the Nature, Conditions and Difficulties of Prayer*. London: Revell, 1915.

believers to “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”⁷⁶ God may also wait to answer a prayer in order to produce patience in His people. Patience is a fruit of the spirit and if God is trying to create a patient heart, going through a trivial period of waiting is most likely necessary. God may be working in the heart of His children when they do not even know it, as Jesus says, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ James 1:2-4

⁷⁷ John 13:7

Conclusion

Prayer is an invocation or act that seeks to activate a rapport with an object of worship through deliberate communication that is attested in written sources from as early as 5000 years ago. Today, most major religions involve prayer in one way or another. In some religions, the act is ritualized, requiring an inflexible sequence of actions or placing a restriction on who is permitted to pray. In other religions, it is taught that prayer may be practiced spontaneously by anyone at any time.

Prayer is an important activity in Christianity, and there are several different forms of this activity. The prayers of Christians are very diverse. The prayers can be completely spontaneous, or read entirely from a text, as there are many books filled with common prayers to be recited. The most common prayer among Christians is the "Lord's Prayer." According to the gospel accounts, The Lord's Prayer is how Jesus taught his disciples to pray. The famous prayer is a model for prayers of adoration, confession and petition in the Christian faith. There are three general characterizations of prayer. The first is random vocal prayer. The next characterization is a more structured form in terms of meditation. The third characterization of prayer is more complex has the activity involves multiple layers of contemplation, or intercession.

Prayer has clearly been a focal point in the scientific community for many years. Scientific studies regarding the use of prayer have mostly concentrated on its effect on the healing of sick or injured people. The fruitfulness of prayer in faith healing has been evaluated in numerous studies, with contradictory results. This gives evidence that prayer is a topic many wrestle with around the world.

The act of prayer has been interpreted in several different ways by all people over the centuries, and especially Christians recently. Many doubts and questions have been raised regarding the power of prayer and the ways and guidelines that believers are supposed to follow as they partake in the act.

This thesis defended that God always answers prayer but sometimes He says no, and His believers need to change their expectations from receiving a yes to their prayer to receiving the other benefits the act of prayer produces. This thesis came to a conclusion that can be derived entirely from Biblical evidence and pure logic, but it also includes scientific evidence, contextual support, data, and quotes to provide additional corroboration. God's kingdom is put at risk with so many believers not understanding this function that is crucial to it. It is important that a better understanding be implemented so that the Kingdom can be brought to earth. With the historical, biblical, scientific, and logical support of the thesis statement, there will be no denying that God always answers prayers and that the sole purpose of prayer is to seek the Kingdom of God. Becoming more aware of the correct function of prayer and sharing this with others brings more of God's Kingdom to earth.

Bibliography

“BibleGateway.” BibleGateway.com: A searchable online Bible in over 150 versions and 50 languages. Accessed December 9, 2019. <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.

Biederwolf, William E. *How Can God Answer Prayer?: Being an Exhaustive Treatise of the Nature, Conditions and Difficulties of Prayer*. London: Revell, 1915.

Bloesch, Donald G. *The Struggle of Prayer*. Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1988.

Bounds, Edward M. *Complete Works Of E.M. Bounds*. Place of publication not identified: Wilder Publications, 2018.

Calvin, Jean, and John Allen. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian board of Christian education, 1937.

Carson, D. A. *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World*. Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 2002.

“Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary.” Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster. Accessed December 9, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

Grimm, Carl Ludwig Wilibald, Christian Gottlob Wilke, Joseph Henry Thayer, and Maurice A. Robinson. *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimms Wilkes Clavis Novi Testamenti*. Place of publication not identified: Christian copyrights, 1983.

Guenther, Margaret. *The Practice of Prayer*. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1998.

Hammerling, Roy. *A History of Prayer: the First to the Fifteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Hayford, Jack W. *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible*. New Jersey: Logos International, 1977.

Huegel, F. J., and F. J. Huegel. *Successful Praying*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Pub., 1967

Huegel, F. J. *The Ministry of Intercession*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976.

Jeremias, Joachim. *The Prayers of Jesus*. London: SCM Press, 1967.

Lewis, C. S. *Prayer: letters to Malcolm*. London: Fontana, 1974.

Luther, Martin, and Archie Parrish. *A Simple Way to Pray: Martin Luther, the 16th Century Reformer, Tells His Barber How to Empower His Prayer Life ; with a Brief Summary of Luther's Teachings on Prayer*. Atlanta, GA: Serve International, Inc., 2003.

Premier. "The Atheist Prayer Experiment." Premier, September 3, 2014.

Willhite, B. J. *Why Pray?* Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1988.

Wright, N. T. *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Moves*. New York: HarperOne, 2010.

Wright, N. T. *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*. New York: HarperCollins, 2012.