

Questions about prayer

ADDITIONAL STUDIES IN PRAYER

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STUDY SEVEN: MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

Question: Should we pray for God to intervene in circumstances that have been prophesied - such as wars, persecution and false teaching?

Yes, *because*:

1. All of these things are the result of human sin, contrary to God's ideal creative will for human existence; he knows that they will happen, and he sweeps them into his eternal purpose, but this does not mean that he *planned* them.
2. Jesus himself prayed that, if possible, his suffering would not happen.
3. Jesus specifically said to the listening Jews 'Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath' (Matthew 24:20) when predicting coming judgement. A few verses later he talks of the days of the coming destruction being 'shortened', 'for the sake of the elect'.
4. We are instructed to stand against the evil one and his schemes (Ephesians 6:10-18) - along with God's armour we are to 'pray ... *on all occasions* with all kinds of prayers and requests'.
5. We are instructed to pray for those in authority, so that 'we may live peaceful and quiet lives' (1Tim 2:2).
6. The church prayed earnestly for Peter when he was in prison, and God released him (Acts 12:5ff).
7. Paul and Silas prayed in a situation of persecution (Acts 16:25) and God intervened.
8. God intervened in the life of Paul when the Jews in Jerusalem intended to harm him (Acts 22:17ff). In Acts 26:17 Paul recounts God's promise that he would rescue him from both the Jews and the Gentiles.
9. In Romans 15:31 Paul asks the Romans to pray that he would be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea.
10. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Philippians 1:19 and Philemon 22 Paul speaks of persecution and of deliverance and help coming through the prayers of believers.

Our prayers will not eliminate the presence of sinful group and individual actions; but God wants us to cast on him the fears and anxieties generated by these sinful actions, and, according to his will, to strengthen us in and by them and/or to deliver us from them.

Question: Should we pray for those things that are 'naturally' going to happen in any case - like food supply and rain?

Yes, *because*,

1. Although they are 'natural' we are still dependent on God for them (Psalm 145:15,16); as Martin Luther said 'I would not have even a pig's ear if God had not made it for me.' They all exist only by his powerful word (Colossians 1:16,17; Hebrews 1:3). Prayer for such things is the opposite of presumption: we do not assume or presume that God will automatically and continually provide them. The occurrence of droughts and famines ought to teach us that.
2. When we pray for these things, and receive them, we 'receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand' (John Calvin, *Institutes*, p 852).
3. The Lord's prayer tells us to - 'give us today our daily bread'.

Question: Should we pray for something just once, then leave it? Or should we keep on praying for the same thing? And, if so, for how long - when does prayer become nagging?

[Refer back to Study One: Section A:2 'Waiting on the Lord', and Study Five: Section G 'True Prayer is Confident of God's Favour and Goodness.]

[1] Persistence/perseverance in prayer is commanded in the Scripture (Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 18:1-8). Persistence/perseverance in prayer demonstrates:

- The sincerity and integrity of our requests, based on
- The reality and urgency of the fear, dependence or temptation/testing that provoked the prayers in the first place, and
- Our confidence that God is our loving heavenly Father who will come to our aid.

[2] Persistence in prayer should also demonstrate our confidence that what we are asking is in keeping with God's revealed will and purpose. We should not persist in praying for something if

- It is outside the boundaries set by God's written Word.
- It cannot be described as a 'good gift' that a loving father would want to give his children.
- It is a selfish desire, without thought of God's honour, glory, kingdom and will.

[3] Persistence in prayer should never become 'babbling on', so that we are merely repeating our prayer/s out of a sense of duty or habit, lacking any real sense of need and dependence, and any real faith that what we are seeking is to be obtained only from God's hand (Matthew 6:7; James 1:2-8).

[4] However, none of the above actually says that we *must* keep on praying about the same thing for ever and ever. Persistence or perseverance in prayer refers also to the constancy of prayer as a real part of our life with God, which is obviously a more important issue.

[5] In the lives of Jesus (Matthew 26:36-44) and Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) it is recorded that they each brought a specific prayer before the Lord three times, then left it at that. In both cases their personal request was not granted, but their dominant desire for God's kingdom was. In both cases they were strengthened to live with God's answer (Luke 22:43; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). To continue to pray the same prayer in both of these circumstances would have been to pray contrary to God's purpose.

[6] There are obviously many instances in which persistence in the one prayer is both impossible and impractical: such as cases of acute danger or need - Jonah in the whale, Peter walking on the water and the repentant thief on the cross are examples of this.

[7] There are also those Scriptures which tells us that 'before they call I will answer' (Isaiah 65:24, this is, however, referring to life in the 'new heavens' and the 'new earth'), 'your Father knows what you need before you ask him' (Matthew 6:8), and 'the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows you need them' (Matthew 6:32). These two references in Matthew tell us that our praying should not be fraught with anxious care, nor empty repetitions, because we should be confident of our Father's ability and constancy in provision for us, as he does for the flowers of the field and the birds of the air. These texts will help our persistence in prayer not to become nagging.

Question: What happens when two believers pray for opposite outcomes?

If they both prayed within the Biblical boundaries committing their prayers to God's will, both would be pleased with the outcome, for the dominant desire of each was not their specific prayer but God's will.

Question: Does God 'hear' the prayers of people who are consistently pursuing an obviously sinful lifestyle but believe their lifestyle is okay?

It would seem that such a person is not willing to submit to the Word of God or to acknowledge the right of God to tell him/her how to live. It would seem, therefore, that the Bible would hold a big question mark over the integrity of such a person's claim to believe in God, and that, therefore, such a person should be considered an unbeliever. [Refer back to **Study Five** sections A,B,E and F and **Study Six** section C].

Question: Why doesn't God always protect people for whom others are praying?

The answer to this question can be found by understanding:

1. the Biblical teaching on suffering, including the book of Job;
2. the Biblical teaching on Satan and his opposition to God and his kingdom;
3. the Biblical teaching on the church age - the interim between the first coming of Christ and the end of the age. We are not in heaven yet - only then will suffering be ended.
4. our identification with Jesus Christ, who suffered the opposition of sinful men.
5. that promises of physical blessings in the Old Testament are prophetic of spiritual blessings in the New Testament.
6. the fact that in this life, death comes to all.

We must never fall into the error of attributing the suffering of a Christian to either (a) their inadequate faith, or (b) a hidden or unconfessed sin in their lives. Such an understanding of suffering indicates a failure to understand the significance of the cross of Jesus Christ. See **Studies on Suffering** on this website.

As indicated in the introductory comments to this series of additional studies on prayer, there are many more questions to be answered. Perhaps some of them will be added to this study in the future. In the meantime I hope that these studies have been of help to you and enlarged your understanding of what the Bible teaches about prayer.