

Do We Pray Correctly?

Answer the following questions, in order, and see what you come up with. Use Scriptures to support your answers.

1. In your studies of God's word, have you found that things prayed for, even in the New Testament, required direct intervention by God (the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit)? **YES!**

- One cannot escape the fact that the Spirit directly intervened during the first century (**I Corinthians 12:1-7; 11, II Timothy 1:14, Hebrews 2:4; 6:4, and I Peter 1:12**). The Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the Apostle's hands (**Acts 8:12-24; 19:1-7**).
- We need to carefully read through **I Corinthians 13:8-12** to see that the direct influence of God existed while there was only the ability to know in part. Consider that people could not be given a New Testament after conversion, so they were given the Spirit (**Acts 19:1-7**).
- Prayers were even assisted by the Spirit (**Romans 8:14-16; 26, Ephesians 6:18, Jude v.20, and I Corinthians 14:14-15**).
- The Holy Spirit sent preachers and even appointed elders (**Acts 13:1-4 and Acts 20:28**).
- Praying for wisdom and knowledge involved the miraculous (**James 1:5 and Colossians 1:9; cf. I Corinthians 12:8**).
- Consider that praying for the sick involved the miraculous (**James 5:14-15; cf. I Corinthians 12:9**).
- Even faith had an involvement of the Holy Spirit (**I Corinthians 12:9; cf. Jude v.20**).
- God even guided directly through the Spirit in the first century (**John 16:13 and Acts 16:6-7**).
- Consider this, Peter preached in **Acts 2:39** about the salvation of the Gentiles (the afar off – **Ephesians 2:11-13**). He did not understand what he was preaching, because if we read through **Acts 10-11** we see it took a vision, a command to go from the Spirit, and seeing the Gentiles receiving the Spirit to finally understand what the Spirit guided him to speak in **Acts 2:39**. Consider all of God's direct intervention in that account.
- Folks, we have the instructions of God in written form today. They were just receiving them and had to rely on other means in the first century (cf. **I Corinthians 14:37**).
- Remember these four principles when praying based on things we've already learned:

2. Why would it be important to know if things required God's direct influence or not?

- We need to understand that we may read where disciples prayed for something that, whether explicitly or implicitly stated, involved the direct working of God (**I John 2:27**).
- Today, we do not have the direct influence of God, but we have His indirect influence which is ALL SUFFICIENT (**II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:3**).
- How many prayers do you hear that take away the free will of man (**Acts 2:40, Philippians 2:12, and James 1:21-25**)?

3. In your years attending with brethren (here and elsewhere), have you heard things in prayers that you question? If so, list them for discussion.

First, we must understand that we need to be taught to pray (**Luke 11:1**). Sometimes, the worst way to learn is following the examples of those who've never truly learned how to pray (**Isaiah 9:13-16**; cf. **Proverbs 19:27**). I heard a liberal preacher on the internet say that they allow the young, junior high age children to pray at the congregation where he preaches with three rules. They must pray from the heart ⁽¹⁾, to the Father ⁽²⁾, and through the Son ⁽³⁾ then the congregation will then pray with them. That was it. So, will they be okay with this young man praying to God and asking for a new video game system in his public prayer? How about the young boy asking for a "church widescreen TV for Super Bowl Sunday"? I mean, God did say "Ask, and it shall be given you..." (**Matthew 7:7**), right? Come on, we know better than some of these things. We can pray wrong and for the wrong things (cf. **James 4:3**). The script for the lesson is even online, and sadly, is another error my biological father preaches: <http://www.valeroadcoc.com/Sermons/Young%20people%20must%20realize%20their%20roles.doc>

- Praying for sinners to have open hearts (**Luke 8:15; 11:28**).
- Praying for comfort, which God did directly answer in the 1st century (**John 14:26**), but now provides through the word (**Romans 15:4** and **I Thessalonians 4:18**) and the brethren (**I Thessalonians 5:11**).
- Praying for God to allow us to do all things according to His word. We are commanded to do so, and that is on us, not God (**Colossians 3:17**). This type of prayer is essentially handing back God's commands to Him and asking Him to do it for us. Where's the freewill in that?
- Can we pray for God to give us courage or strength in doing something? Again, this is a command on us (**Ephesians 6:10**). Most lack courage because they do not have faith in God. If it is courage in defending the truth, it is because they do not have the right knowledge and faith in what they do know (cf. **Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29; 42**).
- The prayer for hope. God has already given us hope (**Romans 5:1-2, Romans 8:24-25, I Corinthians 13:13, I Thessalonians 5:8, and II Thessalonians 2:16**; cf. **Romans 15:4** and **Hebrews 11:1**).
- Should we pray for peace in the sense of "world peace", etc.? What about the fact that such may be contrary to the will of God (**Matthew 10:34**)? Rather, shouldn't our unspecific prayer be for the leaders of this world that we might be blessed through such (**I Timothy 2:1-4**)? Consider that if our country actually had God as our leader, we'd be better off (**Psalms 33:12**; cf. **Isaiah 5:20**). As for peace in our hearts, the fact that we can pray to God should provide that (**Philippians 4:6-7**).
- Should we pray "if it be thy will"? Well, the idea comes from **James 4:13-16**. The instruction in that context is for all to realize that our plans in life are in subjection to God's will. The context is not dealing with prayer. However, every prayer includes within itself an inference of the answer to that prayer being in accordance with God's will. We are praying to Him and it is His choice of what to do with that request, thanksgiving, etc. Saying those words in a prayer is kind of like a child asking for something and then telling the parent "but, it's up to you". As a child would say "duh". Is this statement really necessary in a prayer if we realize all is subject to His will? Do

you have to give Him the permission to do what He wants? The question should answer itself.

- Praying for God to help someone get out of credit debt. For one, credit debt is normally a problem caused by one's choices. Thus, you reap what you sow (**Hosea 10:12-13** and **Galatians 6:7-8**). It is not God's will or place to be a bank or credit counseling agency. If one's debt problems are from not paying bills or overspending, they are in more trouble because of their dishonesty (**I Thessalonians 4:12**; cf. **Ecclesiastes 5:5-6**).
- Brethren who quote Scriptures in prayer. These need to realize that you're not talking to the brethren, you're talking to God!!!! He already knows the Scriptures. They're His words which are meant to be taught to men, not back to Him (**Acts 18:9-11**).
- Those who try to preach in prayer: "Lord, we know we are to examine ourselves, we pray that we do so while partaking of this bread... Lord, we know we are to attend every service... Lord, we know that we ought to give as we've been prospered...". Unlike singing (**Colossians 3:16**), prayer is not a time to teach the word of God (cf. **Matthew 6:7-8**). Does God need to know how to properly partake of the Lord's Supper? Who do we think we're talking too?
- Some like to show that they know the Scriptures in their public prayers (**Matthew 23:14**).
- Prayer is not a time to boast, as some do (**Luke 18:9-14**).
- When we look at some of the instructions of Christ for prayer (**Matthew 7:7-13**), we realize not to use empty repetitions. For example, some brethren who pray, on behalf of the saints, can be quoted before they even begin to speak because they have a memorized prayer. In Jesus' example of a prayer (one that is not to be repeated violating the same principle we just discussed), we notice His praying for needs, rather than selfish wants. He was very reverent towards the Almighty. It was a concise prayer. Jesus did not try to be eloquent and sound good using many words in front of others. Remember prayer is to our Father and we are His sons and daughters (**II Corinthians 6:17-18**). However, in Jesus' prayer there are some things we cannot pray for today. The kingdom has come (**Colossians 1:13**). He no longer leads directly today (see earlier points of our study). Finally, As Peter was literally delivered from prison (**Acts 12:1-2**), this direct influence is no longer in effect today either.
- What about praying for God to "forgive our many sins" or "forgive us as we sin from time to time" in a public prayer for the congregation. Shouldn't we cease from sin (**I Peter 4:1-2**)? How can one pray for all present saying that all present are sinning regularly? Shouldn't we establish ourselves as perfect, holy, unblameable, and without rebuke (**Matthew 5:48**, **II Corinthians 7:1**, **Philippians 2:14-15**, **Colossians 1:21-23**, **I Thessalonians 2:10**, **I Thessalonians 3:13**, **I Peter 1:13-16**, and **II Peter 3:10-14**)? Praying continually, on behalf of all present, one must consider his words. If all the brethren are sinning all of the time, something must be done quickly about that (**Ephesians 5:25-27**; cf. **Galatians 6:1**). Really, one should not lead a congregation and ask God to forgive individual sins as we cannot confess to God for another!
- Praying for God to send a sound preacher to a congregation without one (**Matthew 7:15-20**, **Acts 20:28-31**, and **I John 4:1**).

- Praying for men to grow to be elders (**I Timothy 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:5-9**).
- Praying for God to bring the spiritually and physically sick back at the “next appointed time” (**Hebrews 10:24-25**).
- Praying for someone in the congregation to find a job (**Ephesians 4:28** and **II Thessalonians 3:10-12**).
- Praying for God to “take” a non-Christian because they are suffering too much here on earth because of physical problems (**Matthew 18:8-9**).
- Always praying for things tomorrow, this coming week, etc. (**Matthew 6:34** and **James 4:13-15**).
- Praying for something to be said or done to restore the erring (**James 5:19-20**).
- TELLING God “if it rains, we’ll take it” (**Isaiah 55:9-11** and **Matthew 5:45**).
- Praying for God to help us apply what we’ve learned today (**Matthew 7:21**, **Luke 6:46**, **Romans 2:13**, and **I Timothy 4:16**).
- We cannot pray for someone to read and understand His word. Understanding is our responsibility (**I Corinthians 14:20**, **Ephesians 3:4**, and **Ephesians 5:17**). Again, in the first century, God would directly open minds so they could understand (**Ephesians 1:17-18** and **Colossians 1:8-9**).
- All too often, I have heard prayers I cannot say Amen to (**I Corinthians 14:15-17**).
 - If your prayer would call upon God to be a respecter of persons, it is not a scriptural prayer (i.e. praying for God to directly put knowledge in your head when He will later judge those who do not have knowledge unworthy of everlasting life – **II Thessalonians 1:7-9**).
 - If your prayer would cease the freewill of someone, it is not a scriptural prayer (i.e. praying for God to keep someone from doing something wrong or directly move them to do right – **Joshua 24:15**).
 - If your prayer would require the direct working of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit in a supernatural way, such is not correct (i.e. to heal someone of cancer – **I Corinthians 12:1-13:13**).
 - God is not going to remove you from having to fulfill His instructions by doing them for you (i.e. you are commanded to read and understand. If He directly gives you understanding, He has then done something for you He’s commanded you to do. If such were to occur, we could pray for God to do all He’s commanded for us removing personal accountability as it would really all be up to Him instead of us – **Matthew 7:21-23**).

4. Can we pray for God to “guide, guard, and protect us”? **NO!**

- How are we guided? In the times of inspiration, it was direct (**John 16:13** and **II Timothy 1:13-14**). As in question three, do we want to deny the all-sufficiency of the word today (**John 17:17**)? It is the word of God that gives understanding (**Psalms 119:130**). In times past, that was through the Spirit (**II Peter 1:20-21**). Today, it is written and we must search to be guided rightly (**Acts 17:10-11**).
- Who’s to be on guard (**Matthew 26:41**, **I Corinthians 16:13**, and **Ephesians 6:10-17**).

- If God were to directly protect us, wouldn't that be the impossibility of apostasy (**I Corinthians 10:12**)? If that protection was physical, what of persecution (**Matthew 5:10-12, Matthew 10:28, II Timothy 3:12, I Peter 1:3-9, and Revelation 2:10**).
5. Can we pray for God to “help the doctors working with someone”? **NO!**
 - If God will heal by divinely educating doctors, why not just heal without the doctors (**Mark 5:25-29**)? Either way, both would be miraculous.
 6. Can we pray for God to “put his arms around someone”? **NO!**
 - Comfort is provided through the Scriptures (**Romans 15:4** and **I Thessalonians 4:18**) and through brethren (**I Thessalonians 5:11**). Many are praying for something God has ALREADY provided.
 7. Can we pray for God to “deliver someone back home safely” that is traveling? **NO!**
 - Again, God has directly influenced the safety of travel during the times of his direct influence (**Acts 27**).
 - Would allowing a drunk driver to hit a faithful Christian be in accordance with **James 1:17** if God directly influenced the safety or danger of our travel?
 - Consider # 13 in this point along with our previous answers.
 8. Can we pray for the teacher to “have a ready recollection of the things he’s studied”? **NO!**
 - God has directly provided words for men to speak (**Matthew 10:18-20**).
 - It is our charge to remember the words of our Lord (**I Corinthians 15:1-4** and **James 1:25**).
 - Our help is already supplied (**II Timothy 2:14** and **II Peter 1:10-12; 3:1-2**).
 9. Should we pray for all men? **YES!**
 - Yes, and notice how generic that prayer is (**I Timothy 2:1-4**).
 10. Can we pray for God to “keep this congregation sound and growing”? **NO!**
 - The soundness of this congregation is on us (**Acts 20:28-31** and **Revelation 2:5; 15-16; 3:3**).
 - The spiritual growth of the congregation is also up to us (**I Peter 2:2** and **II Peter 3:18**).
 - The numerical growth of the congregation is up to the lost hearing, obeying, and being added to the church (**Acts 2:41; 47; cf. Acts 6:7**).
 11. Can we pray for knowledge, wisdom, or faith? **NO!** See # 2 for more details.
 - Knowledge comes through the word (**Hosea 4:6** and **Matthew 22:29**).
 - Wisdom comes through the word (**Psalms 119:97-100, Proverbs 2:6, and Colossians 3:16; cf. I Corinthians 2:14-16**).
 - Faith comes through the word (**Romans 10:17**).
 12. To whom should we direct all prayers and through whom should we pray?

- We are to pray to God the Father (**Matthew 6:9, Colossians 1:3, and II Timothy 1:3**).
- We are to pray through Christ (**Colossians 3:17 and I Timothy 2:5**).

13. Is God a respecter of persons? Go back through the questions and look at your answers now in light of your answer to question 13. **NO!**

- God is not a respecter of persons (**Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, Colossians 3:25, and I Peter 1:17; cf. Proverbs 24:23**).

14. Do you think we should word some prayers more generically (i.e. pray for God's providence in someone's life rather than something specific we cannot prove God will do)? **YES!**

- We know that God's providence is with the faithful (**Romans 8:28**).
- Therefore, we might pray for His providence in the lives of those sick, traveling, etc. in a generic way (i.e. "... Father, we pray for your providence with brother and sister _____ as they struggle with their health...". Asking God to heal them, be with the doctors, etc. is more than we can say (**James 1:6-7; cf. Romans 10:17**). However, we do know that He is providing in some way (**Hebrews 13:5-6 and I Peter 5:6-7**).
- Moreover, God knows what is best in all cases. We might ask for the wrong things in certain situations, even if He did directly intervene (i.e. asking for someone to live when they are faithful and death is best – **II Timothy 4:6-8**).

Addendum to Prayer Study

We have seen many of the things we should not pray for. We have come to realize that even many things prayed for in the New Testament fell under the direct operation of the Holy Spirit and are not valid today (**I Corinthians 12:1-11; 13:8-13 and II Timothy 3:16-17**). We have come to realize that things often prayed for would make God a respecter of persons, would have God obeying His commandments for us, would have God (the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit) directly intervening in our lives, or would mean that God would interfere with man's freewill. It is good to consider what we should not pray for (**James 4:3**). However, it is necessary to realize what we should pray for (**Luke 11:1**). This is the purpose of this added portion to our study.

1. What do we mean when we talk about God's providence today?

- Well, God provides or cares for us is simply what is meant when speaking of God's providence (**Psalms 37:25, Romans 8:28; 35-39, and Hebrews 13:5-6**).
- God provided life first and foremost (**Isaiah 42:5**).
- God has / does provide salvation for us (**I Thessalonians 5:9, Titus 2:11, Hebrews 5:8-9**) and the means to obtain it (**Titus 1:1-3 and John 5:39**).
- God's word fully equips us to do every good work, this is a major point to consider in His providence (**Luke 4:4, John 12:48, II Timothy 3:16-17, and II Peter 1:3**).
- Though God does not directly intervene in our spiritual decisions today, He does provide for us naturally (**Job 5:8-10 and Matthew 5:45**).

- He is our Father and acts accordingly (**Matthew 6:8; 7:7-11**).

2. Name five things, with Scriptural support considering all the principles we've learned already, that we can pray for today.

- Praying for the necessities of life (**Matthew 6:11; 25-34**).
- Thanksgiving for food (**Matthew 15:35-36, Acts 27:33-35, and I Timothy 4:1-5**).
 - This even of the Lord's Supper, which is not a common meal (**I Corinthians 11:23-26**).
- Prayer is a time to request that God continue to provide the means of life naturally for us (**Hebrews 6:7**). Remember, that does not mean God is a cook, grocery shopper, or wage earner (**Ephesians 4:28, II Thessalonians 3:10, and I Timothy 5:8**).
- Thanksgiving for faithful brethren (**Romans 16:1-4, Philippians 1:2-4, Colossians 3:15, and Ephesians 1:15-16**).
- Thanksgiving for our being taught the truth (**Colossians 2:6-7**).
- Thanksgiving for salvation (**I Corinthians 15:55-57, Colossians 1:12-13, and Hebrews 3:14-15**).
- Prayer, individually, is a time to ask God to forgive us of our sins (**Matthew 6:12, Acts 8:22, and I John 1:9**).
- Be thankful that God placed you in the womb you came from (**Jeremiah 1:5**; cf. **Matthew 1:18-25**) as you were born in a place free to worship, etc.
- Prayer, individually, is a time to ask God to forgive us of our sins (**Matthew 6:12, Acts 8:22, and I John 1:9**).
- Thanksgiving for our homes, physical goods, jobs, etc. Considering that we have prospered because of God (**I Corinthians 16:2**).
- Thanksgiving for brethren who assist us when we've needed help (**II Corinthians 9:8-14**).
- Thanksgiving for all things that God is due credit [i.e. the points in question 1] (**James 1:17, Philippians 4:6, Ephesians 5:20, and I Thessalonians 5:17-18**). Of course, we would not give thanks to God if we sinned, for God had no part at all in that at any point in time.
- Thanksgiving for our families (**Psalms 127:3 and Jeremiah 1:5**).
- Thanksgiving for all that we say and do in the name of Christ (**Colossians 3:17**).
- Prayer is a time to respectfully (**Hebrews 12:28**) let God know of our troubles. He is an ear that wants to hear (**Philippians 4:8 and I Peter 5:6-7**).
- We can pray for our enemies (**Matthew 5:44; cf. II Peter 3:9**).

3. Name at least three principles that you are mindful of, that help you pray properly.

- God's word is all-sufficient for salvation (**Romans 1:16**; cf. **Acts 8:25ff.**), guidance (**Psalms 119:104 and Ephesians 3:4**), comfort (**Romans 15:4 and I Thessalonians 4:18**), edification (**Acts 20:32**), teaching (**Matthew 28:18-20, II Timothy 2:2, and II Timothy 4:2**), etc.
- I remember that we pray to the Father through the Son (**Ephesians 5:20**).
- I remember that the four points covered (highlighted) in the introduction of this lesson.

- I remember that the Holy Spirit did work directly in the New Testament (**Acts 5:32, Acts 8:12-17, Acts 19:1-7, Romans 5:5, and Hebrews 6:4**). This helps me to remember that many prayers in the New Testament were for then and not today {note the few below as pointers}:
 - The Holy Spirit did directly lead the paths of the faithful (**Acts 16:6**), so one could have prayer in the first century not to be lead into temptation (**Matthew 6:13**).
 - The Holy Spirit appointed elders before the instructions existed (**Acts 20:28**), whereas today we'd have to follow the instructions (**I Timothy 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:5-9**).
 - They prayed for wisdom (**James 1:5**), knowledge (**Colossians 1:8-9**), etc. which were provided as gifts of the Spirit (**I Corinthians 12:1-11**).
- I remember how much God has already given me and that I don't want to always be asking for more!
- I remember to show reverence and fear to God (**Ephesians 5:21** and **Hebrews 12:28-29**).

Conclusion:

- Our requests need to be limited to forgiveness of sins (on an individual basis), prayer for God to be longsuffering, requests for natural provisions, and for an ear to listen when we must cast our burdens upon Him (**I Peter 5:6-7**).
- We have a lot to be thankful for which we have only scratched the surface of.