

Questions/answers on Prayer

by James Blaine Chapman

James Blaine Chapman addresses common questions about prayer, emphasizing reverence, persistence, and the pursuit of God's will in our petitions.

Scripture: Matthew 6:7, Mark 11:24, Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 5:16, 1 John 5:14

Topics: "Effective Prayer", "Faith And Trust"

Description

James Blaine Chapman addresses various questions related to prayer, emphasizing the importance of reverence in worship, the need to pray in Jesus' name, and the significance of persistently praying in alignment with God's will. He clarifies misconceptions about God's will in healing, prosperity, and judgment, highlighting the importance of faith and trust in God's higher will. Chapman also discusses the role of prayer in keeping oneself humble and true, the assurance of God hearing our prayers, and the impact of prayer on changing conditions for God to answer. He encourages continuous prayerful living and the earnestness in seeking God's will.

Transcript

QUESTION #243 -- Is it unscriptural to address God with familiar and endearing terms, as "Dear Lord," etc.? And should prayer be made to God in Jesus' name?

ANSWER #243 -- The Scriptures enjoin reverence in worship, and familiar and endearing terms are not in full keeping with the form of reverence. I would say, therefore, that we should train ourselves to use reverent language in prayer and in praise, lest our liberty deteriorate into sacrilege. Yes, that is the correct form: ask of God in Jesus' name.

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QUESTION #244 -- If we pray for things that are in keeping with God's will, and pray on persistently, do you not think in most cases our prayers will be answered?

ANSWER #244 -- All such prayers are answered. We may not in every case get just what we asked and at the time when we expected it, but in His own best way God answers all true prayer.

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QUESTION #245 -- Some say it is God's will to heal all sick people, and that we are to blame for their not being healed when we pray, "If it be thy will." Is this the correct scriptural view?

ANSWER #245 -- I am confident this is not the correct scriptural view. It is God's will to save all men, and we may pray and labor for their salvation without the injection of any if. But sickness, mistakes in judgment, poverty, unpopularity and all other external things are subordinate to the spiritual interests of men, and there is no statement of universal divine will concerning them. I cannot presume that God every time wants me to be prosperous. I must hold fast in faith when poverty looks in at my window. I cannot presume that God wills to me infallible judgment, so I must stand ready always to rectify any error to which my faulty intellect may expose me. Likewise, health and sickness are both servants of righteousness, and I must not become discouraged when healing is denied. God's highest will for me is better than health and all blessings. Healing is indeed in the atonement, as blessings are, but it is not offered on terms that all may meet, as salvation from sin is. Let not the holy sick give up their faith.

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QUESTION #246 -- Some people ask the Lord in their prayers to keep them humble and true. Is it not the part of the Christian to keep himself humble and true?

ANSWER #246 -- Yes, it is the part of the Christian to keep himself humble and true, and one of the most effective ways of so keeping himself is to pray insistently for God to keep him thus. The fact that a thing is our duty does not remove that thing from the realm of prayer.

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QUESTION #247 -- How do we know when God has heard our prayer for any certain thing?

ANSWER #247 -- It is easy for us to mistake evidence that God is pleased with our coming as assurance that a certain thing is going to be as we wish it to be. For example: when a loved one is ill, we go to prayer for him and God receives us and blesses our hearts. We go away and say the loved one is going to get well. But he does not get well. Then we are confused. But what we got when we went to God in prayer was evidence of His good pleasure at our coming and assurance that He has heard and will do what is best in the matter of our petition. Speaking personally, I find the greatest help when I get into the presence of God in prayer and have spiritual evidence that He hears me, to just say regarding the petition in full abandonment, "Thy will be done." Thereafter I claim His favor no matter what happens, for He has assured me that He has taken my matter in hand.

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QUESTION #248 -- Is it ever right to pray for a soul when the real motive is just social or financial betterment?

ANSWER #248 -- I would not attempt to judge the motives of those who pray. I believe it is a good thing to pray, even when the motive at the start is not of the highest. Somehow praying has a tendency to purify one's motives. It is like Bud Robinson's conclusions relating to sinning prayers: he says either the praying will stop the sinning or the sinning will stop the praying.

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QUESTION #249 -- I have been told that God will not answer a sinner's prayers. But five years ago, while I was yet unsaved, my little girl lay at the point of death. I prayed that God would spare her, and I believed He would, and she was spared. My husband would not pray, for he said people who pray only at times like that soon forget their promises. But I have been troubled to understand this. Do you believe God heard and answered my prayer when I was yet a sinner?

ANSWER #249 -- I do not believe anyone understands all the philosophy of prayer, and I think the majority err on the side of "limiting the Holy One of Israel." Yes, I believe God answered your prayer and spared your little one, and I believe He did it for His own glory, and that it has worked out to that end. As to how and why it can be that way-well, "We'll understand it better by and by." I have prayed for the bodily healing of sinners, and God has answered and healed. I cannot explain it, except I know that God is merciful, and His goodness is often more surprising than His severity.

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QUESTION #250 -- Does prayer change the mind of God? I say that prayer changes the conditions so that God can answer. But is not God's mind fully made up as to just what will happen? Our Bible class is somewhat undecided on this question.

ANSWER #250 -- There is a whole science known as Theodicy which deals with the question of the vindication of God in permitting evil to exist, and it is a deep and interesting study. I think this is a field in which we are likely to accept a partial truth as the whole truth. I am sure that prayer does prepare us so that we can receive things that otherwise would be denied us, but I am also quite sure this is not the whole philosophy of prayer. I know it sounds presumptuous for us to suggest that we can influence God, but let us not forget that our God is a person possessed of intelligence and love, as well as of power. And let us not confuse our God in any sense with that blind law which pagans think works on in unmitigated regularity, regardless of all that can be said or done. Prayer does change conditions so that God can answer, and God does do things when we pray that otherwise He would not do. This is a brief statement of a truth concerning which volumes have been written, but it is a true statement, even though it is mysterious.

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QUESTION #251 -- In I Thessalonians 5:17, Paul advises us to "pray without ceasing," and in Matthew 6:7-13, Jesus warns us against repetition. If we pray without ceasing, how can we avoid repetition?

ANSWER #251 -- I do not think either passage is intended to be taken too literally. Speaking personally, I find it much more important to keep "in the spirit of prayer" always than it is to spend a certain amount of time in the attitude of prayer. I believe Paul meant that we are always to live in a prayerful mood, and that we are to keep up our stated prayers regularly -- every morning, every night, no time off for the busy harvest or the time of seed sowing. And then you note that Jesus speaks of "vain repetitions." This was and is yet the practice of the heathen. They think there is virtue in saying prayers repeatedly -- counting beads, turning prayer wheels, etc., and all belong in this category. But to pray in earnest more than once for something that is laid upon our hearts is, I think, not only no violation, but certainly is in keeping with the Master's promise (freely translated), "Keep on asking, and ye shall receive; seek earnestly, and ye shall find; knock persistently and it shall be opened unto you."

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QUESTION #252 -- In our church the pastor sometimes calls on someone to lead in prayer and then he and one or two others just "holler" so loud that the one leading in prayer can scarcely hear his own voice. One sister in particular pounds on the seat and prays so loud that the leader is drowned out. Do you think this is a good practice?

ANSWER #252 -- There are times when united praying is permissible and helpful, but in the regular services of the church, like the morning worship service and the opening part of the evening evangelistic service, united praying is confusing and generally hurtful to true reverence and worship. Even people who are called on to "lead in prayer" often misunderstand their province. Such a person should not get down there in public and pray as he would in private or at his family altar-about things of personal concern. He should do his best to "lead the prayer." That is, he should seek to voice the prayers of the people there assembled for worship. And since this is the case with the "leader," certainly there is something very incongruous in the conduct of those who intentionally or carelessly drown out the leader. An occasional amen is in place, for this indicates that the leader is succeeding in voicing the prayer of at least one person besides himself. But loud, boisterous, noisy interference when the intention is to have an orderly and reverent service is just as bad as static on a radio set. These noisy services are one extreme of which cold, dead, formal quiet is the other. The golden mean in which the leader's voice is respected, and sanctions and repetitions are spoken in a lower tone is, I think, better than either of the extremes.

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QUESTION #253 -- I can pray and believe God for everything except for the salvation of souls. My loved ones reject Him repeatedly and harden their hearts, although I pray for their salvation. I know God is not willing that they should perish, but how can He save them against their will?

ANSWER #253 -- It is in the spiritual as in the natural-best things cost a higher price. But do not be discouraged. George Mueller testified that during a period of fifty-five years he witnessed fifty thousand definite answers to prayer, and his accomplishments were so manifest that men learned to know him as "The Apostle of Prayer." And yet he said one day that there were six men for whom he had been praying for fifty-five years and they were not saved yet But he added, "I still believe they will be saved before they die." Some of them were not saved when Mueller died, but a biographer kept the list and reported that the last of the six did get in before he himself died. As to not saving men against their will, remember it is the devil who interferes with men's making the right choice. Your prayer is not for God to interfere with their will, but to nullify the devil's interference so they can exercise their powers of choice properly and be saved. Perhaps they glory in the thought that they are "free," but they are bondsmen to sin and the devil. Continue to pray for them that the Spirit of God may break the spell that binds them and that thus they may be enabled to repent and believe the gospel. It may be you are nearing a gracious victory even now -- do not slacken your pace. Press on until the light breaks in.

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QUESTION #254 -- We have had family worship in our home for twelve years now, but lately my husband has lost interest, and says family prayer is just a form. What shall we do?

ANSWER #254 -- Family prayer does not take the place of secret prayer or of public prayer, but it takes its place along with the other two, and it cannot be omitted without loss to both the individuals and to the influence of the home. Of course there is something in the nature of form about family prayer, but it should be something more than form. Of course I cannot tell why your husband has lost interest or why his views

are changed, but perhaps the family service was allowed to become too much a routine affair. Have you tried using the quarterly, Come Ye Apart, as an assistance to variety and interest? It will be more difficult without your husband's assistance, but I believe you and the children should go right ahead with the family altar just as you would be expected to do if your husband should die or become helpless with illness. Avoid making it uncomfortable for him, and do not nag or accuse him. But go on and have regular, stated prayer with the children.

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