

7 Questions on Prayer: February 9, 2020



Prayer became the topic in the President's impeachment, acquittal, and the National Prayer Breakfast. Nancy Pelosi said, "I don't know if the president understands about prayer...I pray for him because he is so off the track." Mitt Romney regarding his vote to condemn the president, "I have prayed through the process...but I don't pretend God told me what to do." So how do we know what we need to about prayer? Guaranteed, the answers are in the bible, not congress. The following 7 questions and answers can help us have a clarity and understanding regarding prayer.

1. Does God answer prayers for non-Christians?

God hears and understands every word spoken on this planet, every thought think, and every feeling felt. But does He answer a person who doesn't know Him? Will He decide, "I'm not only hearing, but listening, and responding to this person's prayer, even if they aren't a born again believer." There is a story in the bible (Acts 10) about Cornelius, a non Christian Roman soldier in the occupation of Israel, who heard about Israel's God, **"a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God"** (Acts 10:2). God was impressed. An angel visited Cornelius **"he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, 'Cornelius.'" And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God"** (Romans 10:3-4). God made a monument in heaven because not yet Christian Cornelius was a God seeker and generous to the poor, but he wasn't saved. God came to Peter the Apostle in a vision, told him to go to Cornelius and preach the gospel of Jesus. Then Cornelius and his household accepted Jesus and were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. God promised that any who seek Him will find him. Do you want to seek God? He is a God who will be found by any who seek Him.

2. Can I pray to saints?

God wants to be the one to answer our prayers. People who aren't confident that God hears them ask Christians who've died to use their closeness to God in heaven and put in a good word for them, or *intercede*. All believers are saints and according to Revelation 14:13, those who've died are at rest and blessed and not taking any calls. **"And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'"** Why bother them if they're off the clock? The Bible says that Jesus who rose from the dead, is on the clock working 24/7 to intercede for you and I, **"Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them"** (Hebrews 7:25).

3. Should I be afraid I'll say something wrong?

Never. God knows and loves us. If we can't unload even our worst venom upon God, then to whom? God can handle anything. People can't handle everything. Part of prayer is confessing sin, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9). So tell God all the dirt on your self. But

when we are upset with our situation, we can tell Him how we feel, **“casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you”** (1 Peter 5:7). What about others who bother us, how do we vent to God about them? Tell him how upset, angry, or even how you want bad things to happen to others who treat us badly, of whom we’re jealous, or whom we do not like. David, the author of Psalm 109 did that. These are just a sample of the things he said to God about Saul who persecuted him, **“May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow! May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit! May the creditor seize all that he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil! Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his fatherless children!”** (Psalm 109:9-12). Upset and angry he said, **“But I give myself to prayer”** (Psalm 109:4), **“for I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken within me”** (Psalm 109:22), and finally he broke through, **“With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord...for He stands at the right hand of the needy one”** (Psalm 109 30-31). After unloading on God, he was peaceful. When he had the chance to destroy Saul he was restrained and calm and held back saying, **“He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to put out my hand against him”** (1 Samuel 24:6). What happened is described in Philippians 4:6-7, **“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:6-7).

4. Should I pray for the same thing over and over?

Yes and no. If something is still gnawing at us, Jesus said, **“Because of your shameless persistence...Keep on asking...keep on seeking...keep on knocking...how much more will your heavenly father give”** (Luke 11:5-13), and **“...who cry out to Him day and night”** (Luke 18:1-6).

However Jesus warned, **“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again”** (Matthew 6:7). So it’s fine, sometimes needed, to repeat a matter to God but not because of ritual, rather because we have a relationship with Him.

5. What does it mean to pray in Jesus’ name?

It means to use the authority of Jesus in prayer. **“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it”** (John 14:13-14). Saying, “in Jesus’ name” isn’t using magic words to get God to do something. It’s for God’s glory. What does that mean? It’s praying for things that fit God’s nature, character, and purposes. God is good, so we pray for good things. God is love, so we pray out of love. God is holy and pure so we pray for holy and pure things. God is glorious, so we pray for things that are splendid and majestic. God is powerful so we pray for great things to happen. **“Nothing is impossible with God”** (Luke 1:37). God asked Jeremiah, **“Is anything too hard for me?”** (Jeremiah 32:27). Jeremiah told God, **“Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you”** (Jeremiah 32:17). Praying in Jesus’ name is using all of His authority for God’s plans and purposes, praying God’s will.

6. Who should we pray for?

First of all, everyone! Of course that means

those we love and matter so much to us, but it goes further. A mentor and professor of mine, J. Christy Wilson rarely forgot anyone's name. I asked him how he remembered everyone he met. He responded, "Simple, I pray for everyone I meet!" Then we should pray for those in authority. The purpose for so much prayer is so that people get saved and know what's true. ***"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"*** (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Notice this text says when we do so, it makes God happy!

7. Is the sinners' prayer in the Bible?

Often after an altar call a pastor will have people repeat a prayer for salvation known as the sinner's prayer, or when leading someone to Christ believers lead a person in the sinners' prayer. Wayne Jackson in the Christian Courier (<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/368-sinners-prayer-is-it-biblical-the>) wrote, *"The sentiments of this prayer are not found anywhere in the literature of the New Testament as it pertains to the alien sinner's responsibility under the law of Christ. A careful study of the conversions in the book of Acts will reveal that in not a single instance is the lost sinner instructed or encouraged to "pray" for his or her salvation. Rather, those honest souls who longed for redemption were admonished to believe on the Lord (Acts 16:31), repent of their sins and be immersed for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38; cf. 22:16) in order to enjoy a relationship with Christ (Gal. 3:27) and enter his spiritual body (1 Cor. 12:13)."* He's correct that believing, repenting, and baptism are part of becoming a Christian and every one of his texts is correct. But I must "strenuously object" (like in *A Few Good Men*) to his saying that a sinners' prayer isn't biblical. Calling on the Lord is a sinner praying, **"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then, will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?"** (Romans 10:13-14). And the tax collector who cried out to God, ***"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"*** (Luke 18:13) according to Jesus, ***"...this man went down to his house justified"*** (Luke 18:14). That is a prayer God will always answer.