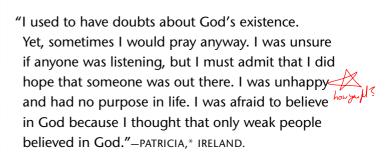
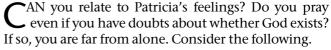


When You Pray, WHO LISTENS?



Does Anyone Hear Prayers?



- A poll of 2,200 British people revealed that only 22 percent believe that there is a personal God who created the world and who hears prayers. Yet, of those polled, 55 percent pray at least occasionally.
- A survey of 10,000 people on four continents showed that of the respondents who describe themselves as atheists, almost 30 percent pray.

Why Do They Doubt?

An Englishman named Allan says: "I used to say that I didn't believe in God because I thought that religion was invented to control people and to make money. Also, if there were a God, I reasoned, then there would not be so much injustice. Yet, sometimes I would sit quietly and talk to 'something.' I would also ask myself, 'How did I get here?'"

Each person with such feelings has his own reasons for doubting whether prayers are answered. In many cases, the doubts may be fueled by unanswered questions, such as the following:

- Is there a Creator?
- Why is religion so often an influence for bad?
- Why does God allow suffering?

If you could know the answers to those questions, would you feel more confident about praying?

^{*} Some names in this series of articles have been changed.



Who is the Hearer of Prayer?

IF THERE is a Hearer of prayer, logically he must be the Creator. Who else but the One who designed the human brain could read your thoughts? Who else could respond to prayers and provide mankind with the help they need? But you may wonder, 'Is it rational to believe in a Creator?'

Many people think that to believe in a Creator, you have to deny the evidence of modern science. But the assumption that belief in God is incompatible with science is simply not true. Consider the following.

■ A recent study of 1,646 professors of science at 21 elite universities in the United States found that only a third chose the statement "I do not believe in God" to describe their view.

The fact is that a number of scientists believe in the existence of God.

Evidence of a Creator

Do we have to accept without proof that the Hearer of prayer exists? Not at all. The idea that faith means believing without evidence is a mistaken notion. The Bible defines faith as "the evident demonstration of realities though not beheld." (Hebrews 11:1) Another translation says that faith "makes us certain of realities we do not see." (The New English Bible) For example, you cannot see radio waves, but your cell phone clearly hot his ration? demonstrates the reality of those invisible waves that transmit voices; so you accept that such waves exist. Similarly, although we cannot see the Hearer of prayer, we can review available evidence that can give us the conviction that he must exist.

Where can we find evidence that God exists? We need only look around us. The Bible



Would you welcome more information or a free home Bible study? Please send your request to Jehovah's Witnesses, using one of these addresses. For a complete list of addresses, see www.watchtower.org/address.

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reasons this way: "Of course, every house is constructed by someone, but he that constructed all things is God." (Hebrews 3:4) Do you agree with the logic of that statement? Perhaps when you contemplate the order of the universe, the origin of life, or the design of that most complex of all structures on earth, the human brain, you reason that something higher than humans must exist.*

But there is a limit to what nature can teach us about God. Observing evidence of God in creation is like hearing the footsteps of someone approaching behind a closed door. You know that someone is there, but who is it? To find out, you need to open the door. We need to do something similar in order to identify the Someone behind creation.

The Bible is a door to knowledge about God. When you open that door and consider some of its detailed prophecies and their fulfillment, you will find evidence that God exists. But more than that, the record of God's dealings with people shows the very personality of the Hearer of prayer.

What Is the Hearer of Prayer Like?

The Bible reveals the Hearer of prayer to be a person—one whom you can know. Surely only a person can listen with understanding. Sadly, it is religion that causes many to doubt that there is a compassionate Hearer of prayer. Religion's involvement in war, terrorism, and the toleration of child abuse has led even prayerful people to say, "I don't believe in God."

Why is religion often an influence for bad? Put simply: Bad people have done bad things in the name of religion. The Bible foretold that Christianity would be hijacked and used for evil ends. The apostle Paul told Christian

Does Religion Make You Doubt?

overseers: "From among you yourselves men will rise and speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves."—Acts 20:29, 30.

God is disgusted with

God is disgusted wit false religion. In fact,

God's Word, the Bible, holds false religion responsible for "the blood . . . of *all* those who have been slaughtered on the earth." (Revelation 18:24) Because false religion has failed to teach people about the true God, whose very essence is love, those religions are bloodguilty in God's eyes.—1 John 4:8.

The Hearer of prayer feels for the victims of oppressive religion. Soon, God's love for mankind will move him to judge all religious hypocrites by means of Jesus. Jesus said: "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?' . . . Yet then I will confess to them: I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness."—Matthew 7:22, 23.

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- # Braille also available.
- + CD also available.
- ^o MP3 CD-ROM also available.
- Audio recordings also available at www.jw.org.

^{*} For a more detailed discussion of the evidence of God's existence, see the brochure *The Origin of Life–Five Questions Worth Asking* and the book *Is There a Creator Who Cares About You?* both published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

^{**}The brochure A Book for All People and the book The Bible—God's Word or Man's? are published by Jehovah's Witnesses to help you to consider evidence that the Bible is inspired of God.

It is reassuring to read: "O Hearer of prayer, even to you people of all flesh will come." (Psalm 65:2) He hears those who pray to him in faith. And he has a name. The Bible says: "Jehovah is far away from the wicked ones, but the prayer of the righteous ones he hears."—Proverbs 15:29.

Jehovah has feelings. He is "the God of love" and is called "the happy God." (2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Timothy 1:11) Concerning his reaction at a time when evil was especially rampant, the Bible says: "He felt hurt at his heart." (Genesis 6:5, 6) The claim that God causes suffering in order to test people is untrue. The Bible says: "Far be it from the

true God to act wickedly." (Job 34:10) Nevertheless, you may wonder, 'If God is the almighty Creator, why does he allow suffering to continue?'

Jehovah has granted mankind the ability to exercise free will, and that tells us something about what God is like. Do we not treasure our freedom to choose how we will live? But sadly, many people misuse their freedom and cause suffering for themselves and others. Now here is a question worth thinking long and hard about: How could God eliminate suffering without taking away man's freedom? We will examine this question in the next article.

Why Does the Hearer of Prayer Allow Suffering?

Let Not though they may pray, some people have doubts that God exists. Why do they doubt? Perhaps it is because they see so much suffering in this world. Have you ever wondered why God allows suffering?

Did God really make humans as they are now—imperfect and subject to suffering? We could hardly respect a god who would purpose for humans to suffer. But consider this: If you walked admiringly around a new car only to find that the far side was damaged, would you assume that the manufacturer made it that way? Of course not! You would conclude that the manufacturer made it "perfect" and that someone or something else caused the damage.

Similarly, when we admire the marvelous order and design in the natural world and then notice the chaos and corruption that blight the human family, what conclusion should we draw? The Bible teaches that God made the first human pair perfect but that later they caused themselves to become damaged. (Deuteronomy 32:4, 5) The good news is that God has promised to repair the damage—to restore obedient humans to perfection. Why, though, has he waited so long?

Why So Long?

The reason has to do with the question of who should rule mankind. Jehovah never intended that humans should rule themselves. He was to be their Ruler. The Bible itself says: "It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step." (Jeremiah 10:23) Sadly, the first humans chose to rebel against God's rulership. Their lawless act made them



sinners. (1 John 3:4) As a result, they lost their perfection and caused damage to themselves and their offspring.

For thousands of years, Jehovah has allowed humans to rule themselves, and history has demonstrated that humans do not have the ability to do so. It shows that all human governments cause suffering. Not one has ever eliminated war, crime, injustice, or disease.

How Will God Undo the Damage?

The Bible promises that God will soon bring about a righteous new world. (2 Peter 3:13) Only those who choose of their own free will to show love to one another and to God will be allowed to live in it.—Deuteronomy 30:15, 16, 19, 20.

The Bible also says that in "the day of judgment" that is fast approaching, God will eliminate suffering and those who cause it. (2 Peter 3:7) Thereafter, God's appointed Ruler, Jesus Christ, will govern obedient humans. (Daniel 7:13, 14) What will Jesus' rulership achieve? The Bible says: "The meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace."-Psalm 37:11.

As heavenly King, Jesus will undo the damage-including sickness, aging, and death-that resulted when humans rebelled against Jehovah, "the source of life." (Psalm 36:9) Jesus will cure all those who accept his loving rulership. Under his rule, these Bible promises will come true:

- "No resident will say: 'I am sick.' The people that are dwelling in the land will be those pardoned for their error."—Isaiah 33:24.
- "[God] will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away."—Revelation 21:4.

Is it not comforting to know that soon God will fulfill his promise to end all suffering? Meanwhile, we need not lose confidence that he hears our prayers just because he presently allows suffering.

God is there. He can hear you, even your expressions of pain and sorrow. And he is eager to see you live to enjoy the time when all your doubts and pain will be gone.

Draw Close to the Hearer of Prayer

ANY who claim to believe in God cannot give a sound basis for their faith. Nor can they explain why religion is often bad or why God allows suffering. At best, they can pray only to a God they do not comprehend.

You, however, can draw closer to God than that. You can build your faith on an understanding of God that makes you love and appreciate him. Genuine faith is based on evidence. (Hebrews 11:1) If you learn the truth about God, you can know him and speak to him as a friend. Consider the experiences of some who used to pray even though they had doubts about God's existence.

■ Patricia, mentioned in the opening article. "One day I was with a group of about ten friends when they began discussing religion. I had told them that I walked out of the house to escape the discussion between my dad, who was an atheist, and one of Jehovah's Witnesses, who had called at our home. 'Maybe Jehovah's Witnesses have something,' said one of my friends.

"'Why don't we go to one of their meetings to find out?' said another. And that is just what we did. Although we were skeptical, some of us continued attending simply because the Witnesses were so friendly.

"However, one Sunday I heard something that changed my attitude. The speaker explained why people suffer. I had never before appreciated that man was originally made perfect and that sin and death started with one man and then spread to all mankind. The speaker also explained why Jesus' death was necessary to restore mankind to what the first man had lost.* (Romans 5:12, 18, 19) Suddenly, everything made sense to me. 'There really is a God who cares about us,' I thought. I continued studying the Bible and soon, for the first time in my life, I found that I could pray to someone who is real."

■ *Allan, also mentioned in the opening article.* "One day Jehovah's Witnesses called at

^{*} For more information about the ransoming value of Jesus' death, see chapter 5 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Genuine faith is based on evidence and a desire to know the truth about God



our home, and my wife invited them in because she was interested in what they said about living forever on earth. I was annoyed. So, leaving the visitors in the front room, I got my wife into the kitchen and told her, 'Don't be foolish. You can't believe things like that!'

"'Well, then, you just go in there and prove them wrong,' she replied.

"Of course, I could not prove anything. But they were very kind and left me a book about whether life originated by means of creation or evolution. Its logic was so clear and well supported that I decided I ought to know more about God. I began studying the Bible with the Witnesses, and soon I realized that what it says is very different from everything I had previously assumed about religion. As I learned about Jehovah, I began to pray to him more specifically. I had some attitudes that were not very nice, so I prayed for help. I feel sure that Jehovah answered my prayers."

■ Andrew, who lives in England. "Although I had strong opinions and a keen interest

in science, I believed the theory of evolution merely because other people said it was proved. I rejected belief in God because of all the bad things that happen.

"Yet, sometimes I would think: 'If there is a God up there, then I want to know what it all means. Why is there so much crime and war?' When in difficulty, I sometimes prayed for help, but I did not know whom I was speaking to.

"Then someone gave my wife the tract published by Jehovah's Witnesses entitled Will This World Survive? I had often pondered that exact question. The tract made me wonder about the Bible, 'Might its answers

"As I came to understand Jehovah's purpose, I felt that I knew him as a real person, someone I could freely speak to in prayer"

be worth considering?' Later, while I was on holiday, someone gave me the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's*?* When I realized that the Bible is in harmony with true science, I felt that I needed to learn more about the Bible. So when one of Jehovah's Witnesses offered to study it with me, I accepted. As I came to understand Jehovah's purpose, I felt that I knew him as a real person, someone I could freely speak to in prayer."

■ Jan, who was brought up as a Protestant in London. "The hypocrisy in religion and the prevalence of suffering led me to give up religion. I also gave up college and began singing and playing the guitar for money. That was when I met Pat. He had been raised as a Catholic and had become a disbeliever like me.

"We lived in an abandoned house along with several other dropouts who were interested in Eastern religions. Late into the nights, we spent hours in intense discussions about the meaning of life. Although Pat and I didn't believe in God, we felt that there must be some 'life force.'

"After we moved to northern England in search of work as musicians, our son was born. One night he got sick, and I found myself praying to the God I didn't believe in. Soon afterward, the relationship between Pat and me deteriorated, and I took our baby and walked out. Again, I prayed for help, just in case there was someone listening. I didn't know it, but Pat did the same.

"Later that day, two of Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on Pat's door and showed him some of the Bible's practical advice. Pat called me and asked if I would agree to study the Bible with him and the Witnesses. Soon we learned that to please God, we would have to legalize our marriage. It seemed a tall order in view of our precarious relationship.

"We wanted to know more about the fulfillment of Bible prophecies, the reason for suffering, and the meaning of God's Kingdom. Gradually, we realized that God does care, and we wanted to do as he says. We got married. The wisdom of God's Word has helped us to raise our three children. We feel sure that Jehovah listened to our prayers."

Examine the Evidence for Yourself

Like millions of others, those quoted in this article saw through the deception of false religion and discovered why God allows suffering. Did you notice that in each case it was an accurate understanding of the Bible that convinced these individuals that Jehovah really does hear prayers?

Would you like to examine the evidence that God exists? Jehovah's Witnesses will be pleased to help you to learn the truth about Jehovah and how you can draw close to the "Hearer of prayer."—Psalm 65:2.

^{*} Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.