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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Seven Things
You Need to Know
About **Prayer**

PRAYER. There are few Bible subjects that elicit so much interest and curiosity. Consider seven commonly asked questions about prayer; then join us in examining the answers provided in the Bible. These articles are designed to help you to pray—to begin praying or to make your prayers more effective.



1 PRAYER

Why?

AROUND the world, in every culture and religion, people pray. They pray when alone; they pray in groups. They pray in churches, in temples, in synagogues, in mosques, at shrines. They may use prayer rugs, rosary beads, prayer wheels, icons, prayer books, or prayers written on small boards that they hang on racks.

Prayer sets humans apart from all other life on this earth. Granted, we have much in common with the animals. Like them, we need food, air, and water. Like them, we are born, we live, and we die. (Ecclesiastes 3:19) But only humans pray. Why?

Perhaps the simplest answer is that we need to. Prayer, after all, is generally seen as a way for people to reach out to the spirit realm, to something they view as holy, or sacred, and eternal. The Bible shows that we were made with an appetite for such things. (Ecclesiastes 3:11) Jesus Christ once said: “Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need.”—Matthew 5:3.

A “spiritual need”—how else could one explain all those religious edifices and artifacts, all those countless hours spent in prayer? Of course, some people look to themselves or to their fellow humans to fill spiritual needs.

Do you not sense, though, that humans are just too limited to help adequately? We are so frail, short-lived, shortsighted. Only someone far wiser, more powerful, more *enduring* than we are can give us what we need. And just what are these spiritual needs that drive us to pray?

Consider: Have you ever yearned for guidance, wisdom, or answers to questions that seem beyond the reach of human knowledge? Have you ever felt in need of comfort when wounded by a terrible loss, of guidance when faced with an agonizing decision, or of forgiveness when crushed by guilt?

According to the Bible, those are all valid reasons to pray. The Bible is the most reliable book on this subject, and it contains a record of the prayers of many faithful men and women. They prayed for comfort, for guidance, for forgiveness, and for answers to the hardest of questions.—Psalm 23:3; 71:21; Daniel 9:4, 5, 19; Habakkuk 1:3.

Such prayers, varied though they were, had something in common. The ones praying each possessed a vital key to successful prayer, one that is often lost or disregarded in today’s world. They knew to whom prayers should be directed.

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PRAYER

To Whom?

DO ALL prayers go to the same place, regardless of who is being addressed? In today's world, it is often popular to assume so. The notion appeals to many who favor interfaith movements and want all religions to be acceptable, despite their differences. Is it possible, though, that the idea is untrue?

The Bible teaches that a great many prayers are, in fact, misdirected. Back when the Bible was written, it was common for people to direct their prayers to carved images. Yet, God repeatedly warned against that practice. For example, Psalm 115:4-6 says about idols: "Ears they have, but they cannot hear." The point is clear. Why pray to a god who will never hear you?

A vivid Bible account enlarges on this point. The true prophet Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to pray to their god, after which Elijah would pray to his. Elijah said that the true God would answer and the false one would not. Accepting the challenge, the Baal prophets prayed long and

hard, even with loud outcries—but to no avail! The account reads: "There was no one answering, and there was no paying of attention." (1 Kings 18:29) How, though, did Elijah fare?

After Elijah prayed, his God answered instantly, sending fire from heaven to consume an offering that Elijah had set out. What was the difference? There is one vital clue in Elijah's prayer itself, recorded at 1 Kings 18:36, 37. It is a very short prayer—there are only about 30 words in the original Hebrew. Yet, in those few lines, Elijah three times addressed God by his personal name, Jehovah.

Baal, meaning "owner" or "master," was the god of the Canaanites, and there were many local versions of this deity. Jehovah, however, is a unique name, applying only to one Personage in all the universe. This God told his people: "I am Jehovah. That is my name; and to no one else shall I give my own glory."—Isaiah 42:8.

Did Elijah's prayer and the prayers of those Baal prophets go to the same place? Baal worship degraded people with ritual prostitution and even human sacrifice. In contrast, the worship of Jehovah ennobled his people, Israel, freeing them from such degrading practices. So think about it: If you specifically addressed a letter to a highly respected friend, would you expect it to be delivered to someone who did not bear your friend's name and whose vile reputation



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Elijah's challenge to the Baal prophets proved that all prayers do not go to the same place

contradicted everything your friend stood for? Surely not!

If you pray to Jehovah, you are praying to the Creator, the Father of mankind.* “You, O Jehovah, are our Father,” said the prophet Isaiah in prayer. (Isaiah 63:16) This, then, is the very One about whom Jesus Christ spoke when he told his followers: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God.” (John 20:17) Jehovah is Jesus’ Father. He is the God to whom Jesus prayed and to whom Jesus taught his followers to pray.—Matthew 6:9.

Does the Bible instruct us to pray to Jesus,

* Some religious traditions say that it is wrong to pronounce God’s personal name, even in prayer. However, that name appears some 7,000 times in the Bible’s original languages, in many cases within the prayers and psalms of faithful servants of Jehovah.

to Mary, to saints, or to angels? No—only to Jehovah. Consider two reasons why. First, prayer is a form of worship, and the Bible says that worship should go exclusively to Jehovah. (Exodus 20:5) Second, the Bible reveals that he bears the title “Hearer of prayer.” (Psalm 65:2) Although Jehovah delegates generously, this is a responsibility he has never passed on to anyone. He is the God who promises to hear our prayers personally.

So if you want your prayers to be heard by God, remember this Scriptural admonition: “Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.” (Acts 2:21) But does Jehovah hear all prayers unconditionally? Or is there anything else we need to know if we want our prayers to Jehovah to be heard?

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PRAYER

How?

WHEN it comes to prayer, many religious traditions focus on physical issues, such as posture, wording, and ritual. However, the Bible helps us to set such issues aside and focus on more important aspects of the question, “How should we pray?”

The Bible depicts faithful servants of God as praying in many settings and postures. They prayed silently or aloud as the circumstances dictated. They prayed while looking up at the sky or while bowing down. Rather than using images, beads, or prayer books as aids in prayer, they simply prayed from the heart in their own words. What made their prayers effective?

As mentioned in the preceding article, they directed their prayers only to one God—Jehovah. There is another important factor. We read at 1 John 5:14: “This is the confidence that we have toward him, that, no matter what it is that we ask *according to his will*, he hears us.” Our prayers need to be in harmony with God’s will. What does that mean?

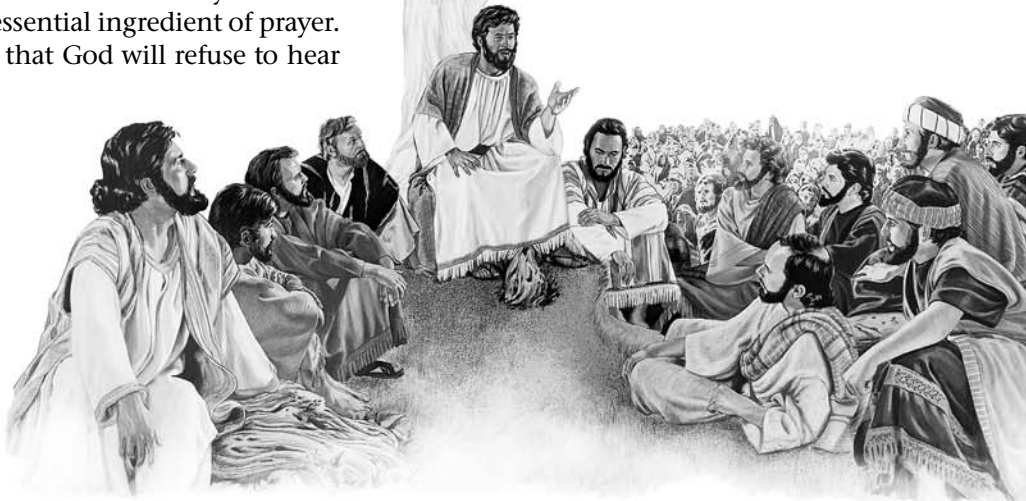
To pray in harmony with God’s will, we need to know what his will is. Study of the Bible, then, is an essential ingredient of prayer. Does this mean that God will refuse to hear

us unless we are Bible scholars? No, but God expects us to look for his will, seeking to understand it and to act on it. (Matthew 7:21-23) We need to pray in harmony with what we learn.

As we learn about Jehovah and his will, we grow in faith—another vital factor in prayer. Jesus said: “All the things you ask in prayer, *having faith*, you will receive.” (Matthew 21:22) Faith does not mean gullibility. Rather, it means believing in something that even though unseen, is supported by very strong evidence. (Hebrews 11:1) The Bible is packed with evidence that Jehovah, whom we cannot see, is real, is reliable, and is willing to answer the prayers of those who have faith in him. Furthermore, we can always ask for more faith, and Jehovah loves to give us what we need.—Luke 17:5; James 1:17.

Here is yet another essential aspect of how to pray. Jesus said: “No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) So Jesus is the means of our approach to the Fa-

Effective prayers are in harmony with God’s will, are offered in faith, and are presented in Jesus’ name



ther, Jehovah. Thus, Jesus told his followers to pray in his name. (John 14:13; 15:16) That does not mean that we should pray to Jesus. Rather, we pray *in the name of* Jesus, remembering that Jesus is the reason that we are able to approach our perfect and holy Father.

Jesus' closest followers once asked him: "Lord, teach us how to pray." (Luke 11:1) Evidently, they were not asking about such basics as we have just discussed. They really wanted to know about content—in effect saying, 'What should we pray about?'

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PRAYER

What About?

IT HAS been called the most widely repeated of all Christian prayers. Whether that is true or not, Jesus' model prayer—sometimes called the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father—is certainly among the most misunderstood. Millions of people utter its words by rote every day, perhaps often during the day. But Jesus never intended for the prayer to be used in that way. How do we know?

Just before relating that prayer, Jesus said:

"When praying, do not say the same things over and over again." (Matthew 6:7) Did Jesus proceed to contradict himself by laying down a set of words to be memorized and repeated? Surely not! Rather, Jesus was teaching us what to pray about, and he was giving us a clear set of priorities to keep in mind when praying. Let us take a closer look at what he said. The prayer is recorded at Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified."

Jesus thus reminded his followers that all prayers should be directed to his Father, Jehovah. But do you know why God's name is so important and why it needs to be sanctified, or made holy?

From the beginning of human history, God's sacred name has been smeared with lies. God's adversary, Satan, has called Jehovah a lying, selfish Ruler who has no real right to govern His creations. (Genesis 3:1-6) Many have sided with Satan, teaching that God is cold, cruel, and vindictive or denying that He is the Creator at all. Others have even attacked his name itself, removing the name Jehovah from Bible translations and forbidding the use of it.

The Bible shows that God will rectify all these injustices. (Ezekiel 39:7) By doing so, he will address your every need and problem as well. How so? The next words in Jesus' prayer provide the answer.

"Let your kingdom come."

Today, there is much confusion among religious teachers about God's Kingdom. But as Jesus' listeners knew, God's prophets had long foretold that the Messiah, a Savior chosen by God, would rule a Kingdom that would change the world. (Isaiah 9:6, 7;



Daniel 2:44) It will sanctify God's name by exposing Satan's lies and then overthrowing Satan and all his works. God's Kingdom will put an end to war, sickness, famine—even death itself. (Psalm 46:9; 72:12-16; Isaiah 25:8; 33:24) When you pray for God's Kingdom to come, you are praying for all those promises to come true.

“Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth.”

Jesus' words suggest that God's will is just as certain to take place on earth as it is in heaven, where God dwells. God's will has proved unstoppable in heaven; there, God's Son waged war against Satan and his cohorts, casting them down to the earth. (Revelation 12:9-12) This third petition of the model prayer, like the first two, helps us to keep our focus on what matters most—not our own will, but God's. It is his will that always brings about the greatest good for all creation. Thus, even the perfect man Jesus said to his Father: “Let, not my will, but yours take place.”—Luke 22:42.

“Give us today our bread.”

Jesus next showed that our prayers do not have to be entirely selfless. There is nothing wrong with praying to God about our daily, practical needs. In fact, doing so reminds us that Jehovah is the one who “gives to all persons life and breath and all things.” (Acts 17:25) The Bible reveals that he is a loving parent who delights in giving his children what they need. Like a good parent, though, he will not grant requests that violate their best interests.

“Forgive us our debts.”

Do you really owe a debt to God? Do you need his forgiveness? Many today have lost sight of the reality and seriousness of sin. But the Bible teaches that sin is at the root of our worst troubles, for it is the basic cause of death in humans. Born in sin, we all sin frequently, and our only hope for a lasting future lies in God's forgiveness. (Romans 3:23; 5:12; 6:23) It is a relief to learn that the Bible says: “You, O Jehovah, are good and ready to forgive.”—Psalm 86:5.

“Deliver us from the wicked one.”

Do you realize how urgently, how desperately, you need God's protection? Many refuse to believe that “the wicked one,” Satan, exists at all. But Jesus taught that Satan is real, even calling him “the ruler of this world.” (John 12:31; 16:11) Satan has corrupted this world over which he holds sway, and he is just as eager to corrupt you, to keep you from developing a close relationship with your Father, Jehovah. (1 Peter 5:8) However, Jehovah is far stronger than Satan and is delighted to protect those who love Him.

That quick summary of the main points of Jesus' model prayer does not cover every subject that is fit for prayer. Remember, 1 John 5:14 tells us about God: “No matter what it is that we ask according to his will, he

hears us.” So do not worry that your troubles are too trivial to bring before God.—1 Peter 5:7.

What, though, about time and place? Does it matter when and where we pray?

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PRAYER

Does It Matter Where and When?

NO DOUBT you have observed that most organized religions emphasize elaborate houses of prayer and prescribe specific times of day when prayers should be offered. Does the Bible limit our prayers to certain places and times?

The Bible does show that there are fitting occasions for prayer. Before eating with his followers, for example, Jesus thanked God in prayer. (Luke 22:17) And when his disciples assembled for worship, they prayed together. They thus continued a practice that had long been carried out in Jewish synagogues and in the temple at Jerusalem. God intended the temple to be “a house of prayer for all the nations.”—Mark 11:17.

When servants of God assemble and pray together, their petitions can be effective. If the group is united in spirit and the prayer offered in their behalf reflects Scriptural principles, God is pleased. The prayer may even move him to do what he might not otherwise have done. (Hebrews 13:18, 19) Jehovah’s Witnesses pray regularly at their meetings. You are cordially invited to come to a Kingdom Hall near you and hear such prayers for yourself.

However, the Bible does not limit prayer to any particular time or place. In the Bible, we find a record of God’s servants praying anytime, anywhere. Jesus said: “When you pray, go into your private room and, after shutting your door, pray to your Father who is in secret; then your Father who looks on in secret will repay you.”—Matthew 6:6.

Is that not an inviting prospect? You can actually approach the Sovereign of the universe anytime, in complete privacy, and be assured that you will have his attention. Little wonder, then, that Jesus often sought to be alone in order to pray! Once, he spent an entire night in prayer to God, evidently seeking guidance on a most important decision.—Luke 6:12, 13.

Other men and women in the Bible record prayed when faced with weighty decisions or daunting challenges. Sometimes they prayed aloud and sometimes silently; they prayed when in groups and when alone. The important thing is that they prayed. God even invites his servants: “Pray incessantly.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) He is willing to listen endlessly to those who do his will. Is that not a loving invitation?

Of course, in today’s cynical world, many wonder about the practical value of prayer. You may ask, ‘Will it really help me?’

We may pray anytime
and anywhere



Will It Help?

DOES praying do us any good? The Bible shows that yes, the prayers of faithful servants of God really do benefit them. (Luke 22:40; James 5:13) In fact, praying can do us a world of good spiritually, emotionally, and even physically. How so?

Well, let us say that you have a child who receives a gift. Would you teach him that it is enough to *feel* grateful? Or would you teach him to *express* his gratitude? When we put important feelings into words, we bring them into focus and even strengthen them. Does the same hold true when it comes to speaking to God? Absolutely! Consider some examples.

Prayers of thanks. When we thank our Father for the good things that come our way, we focus on our blessings. As a result, we may feel more grateful, happier, more positive.—Philippians 4:6.

Example: Jesus expressed gratitude for the way his Father heard and responded to his prayers.—John 11:41.

Prayers for forgiveness. When we ask God for forgiveness, we strengthen our conscience, deepen our repentance, and intensify our awareness of the seriousness of sin. We also find relief from the burden of guilt.

Example: David prayed to express repentance and sorrow.—Psalm 51.

Prayers for guidance and wisdom. Asking Jehovah to guide us or to grant us the wisdom

we need to make good decisions can help us to be genuinely humble. It can remind us of our limitations and help build our trust in our heavenly Father.—Proverbs 3:5, 6.

Example: Solomon humbly asked for guidance and wisdom in ruling over Israel.—1 Kings 3:5-12.

Prayers of distress. If we pour out our heart to God when we are in emotional turmoil, our heart will be soothed and we will lean on Jehovah instead of ourselves.—Psalm 62:8.

Example: King Asa prayed when facing an overwhelming foe.—2 Chronicles 14:11.

Prayers for the well-being of others in need. Such prayers help us to combat selfishness and to grow in compassion and empathy.

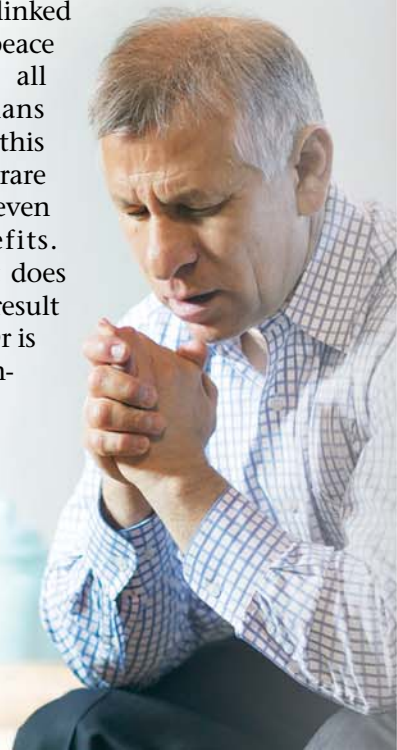
Example: Jesus prayed in behalf of his followers.—John 17:9-17.

Prayers of praise. When we praise Jehovah for his wonderful works and qualities, our respect and appreciation for him will grow. Such prayers may also help us to draw closer to our God and Father.

Example: David warmly praised God for his creation.—Psalm 8.

Another blessing linked with prayer is “the peace of God that excels all thought.” (Philippians 4:7) Finding calm in this troubled world is a rare blessing indeed. It even has physical benefits. (Proverbs 14:30) But does it come solely as a result of our own efforts? Or is something more important involved?

Prayer offers many benefits—physical, emotional and, above all, spiritual



Will God Hear and Answer?

THE above question elicits a great deal of excitement and curiosity. The Bible shows that Jehovah *does* listen to prayers today. Whether he hears ours or not is largely up to us.

Jesus denounced religious leaders in his day who prayed hypocritically; they cared only about making a show of their piety. He said that such men would have “their reward in full,” meaning that they would receive only what they wanted most, the attention of men, but not what they needed, God’s hearing ear. (Matthew 6:5) Likewise today, many pray according to their own will and not God’s. Ignoring the Bible principles that we have discussed, they do not get God’s hearing ear.

What, though, about you? Will God hear and respond to your prayers? The answer does not depend on your race, nationality, or social standing. The Bible assures us: “God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:34, 35) Do those words describe you? If you fear God, you hold him in the highest regard, fearing to displease him. If you work righteousness, you seek to do what God says is right rather than following your own will or that of your fellow humans. Do you really want God to listen to your prayers? The Bible directs you to your goal.*

Of course, many want God to answer their prayers with a miracle. Even in Bible times,

* For more information about how to pray and be heard by God, see chapter 17 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

though, God rarely performed such wonders. Sometimes centuries passed between one recorded miracle and the next. Further, the Bible indicates that the age of miracles ended after the days of the apostles. (1 Corinthians 13:8-10) Does this mean, then, that God does not answer prayers today? Far from it! Consider some prayers that he answers.

God grants wisdom. Jehovah is the ultimate Source of all true wisdom. He is generous with it, sharing it freely with those who want his guidance and who seek to live by it. —James 1:5.

God gives his holy spirit and all of its benefits. Holy spirit is God’s active force. There is no force stronger. It can help us to endure trials. It can fill us with peace when we are troubled. It can help us to cultivate other beautiful and endearing qualities. (Galatians 5:22, 23) Jesus assured his followers that God gives this gift generously.—Luke 11:13.

God enlightens those who earnestly seek him. (Acts 17:26, 27) Around the world, there are people who sincerely seek the truth. They want to know about God—what his name is, what his purpose is for the earth and humankind, how they can draw close to him. (James 4:8) Jehovah’s Witnesses often meet people like that and are delighted to share the Bible’s answers to such questions.

Is that why you have obtained this magazine? Are you looking for God? Perhaps this is how he is answering your prayer.