

How does God help to ensure that we will have faith in His response to our prayers? By urging us to pray *with thanksgiving* (Philippians 4:6). Thanksgiving requires that we look back on the past, on God's answers to our prayers, and remember all that He has done for us. Being reminded of His care for us in the past strengthens our confidence that He will hear our prayers concerning our current needs.

How does God answer prayer?

God is not limited in the tools available to Him to answer our prayers. He can work through people, through events, through time, through physical and spiritual tools. Answering in His own wisdom means that He may do something entirely different from what we asked, but if He does, His way will be better for us than ours would have been.

He may wait about giving the answer, because waiting can strengthen our faith, just as physical endurance strengthens our bodies.

He may say no, because He can see the end result of giving what we have asked, and He knows that it is not best. Regardless of what answer He gives, we know that He has heard us and that He always does what is good for the children He loves.

Can we expect miracles?

Throughout time, God has worked with man in two ways: through His providential care and through miracles. Many people mistakenly think that any response by God has to be in the miraculous form, but the Scriptures don't show this to be true. Miracles were always the exception to the rule, the undeniable evidence used to prove a new *messenger* or a new *message*. When the New Testament was completed, the miraculous age ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

With providential tools, everything is God's to use. Providential response is no less caused by Him than a miraculous response would have been, but it is His power working *within* the laws of nature, not *against* them. A close reading of the Bible will show that providential care has been God's tool of choice to answer the prayers of His children throughout history.

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Choate@WorldEvangelism.org

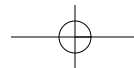
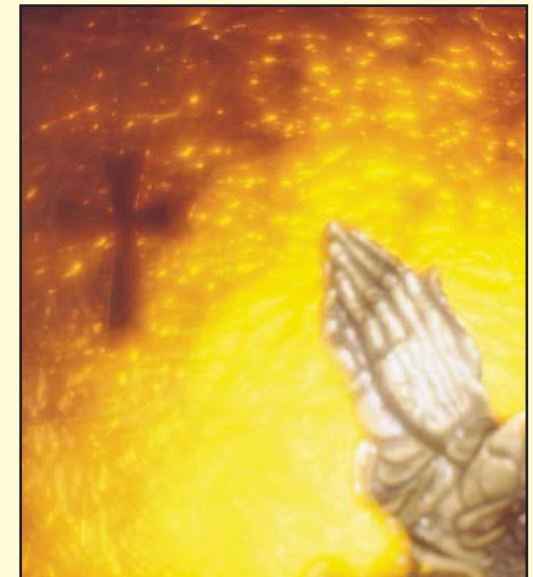
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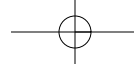
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Praying According to the Rules

J.C. Choate





Praying According to the Rules

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What is prayer? Is it nothing more than a psychological soothing of the human spirit? Is it an empty exercise in “religion”? Or is it a real and effective power in the spiritual life of Christians?

To Whom do we pray?

In order to have the correct answer to the questions, we must turn to the Scriptures. The New Testament pictures prayer as a petition of a child to his father. When Jesus’ disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, He began with, “Our Father...” When the Word was born as the Son of God and the Son of man, becoming the firstborn (Colossians 1:15) in God’s family of children, He opened the way for us to come before God as “Father”.

Through Whom do we pray?

We are sinful creatures, separated from God by the wall of our sin. However, **when we turn to God in faith** (*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*)

Hebrews 11:6), **being baptized into His family** (“...by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...” 1 Corinthians 12:13), **and washed in the blood of His Son** (“...do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” Romans 6:3,4), we can then “...**come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need**” (Hebrews 4:16).

But, **through whom** do we approach our Father? Jesus said, “*And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son*” (John 14:13). We have no access to God except through our Brother who intercedes for us, so every petition must be made in His name.

How do we pray?

Too often, without understanding what we are doing, Christians pray, trying to *convince* God to do what *we* think ought to be done. We want “our will” to prevail, because we think we know what is best. In Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, “*Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; never-*

theless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Before we begin to pray, we should check our hearts and be sure that we want God to overrule our desires with His own knowledge of what is best. Then we may pray earnestly for anything and everything that is on our hearts, knowing that our Father will hear and will answer according to His wisdom.

For what do we pray?

The assurance is given in Philippians 4:6-8, “*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*” We may come to our Father with any petition, any need that we face in life. “*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him*” (1 John 5:14,15).

“*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways*” (James 1:6).

