

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



**WHY
PRAY?**

Have you ever felt that your prayers are not heard by God? If so, you are not alone. Many have prayed to God for help, but their problems still remain. This series of articles will discuss why we can be sure that God hears our prayers, why some prayers are not answered, and how to pray so that your prayers are answered.



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THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, honors Jehovah God, the Ruler of the universe. It comforts people with the good news that God's heavenly Kingdom will soon end all wickedness and transform the earth into a paradise. It promotes faith in Jesus Christ, who died so that we might gain everlasting life and who is now ruling as King of God's Kingdom. This magazine has been published continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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What People Say About Praying

“When I pray, I feel as if God were by my side, holding my hand and guiding me when I feel lost.”—**MARÍA.**

“My wife died after a 13-year battle against cancer. I remember praying to God every day and feeling that he was really listening to me in my pain. I felt at peace.”—**RAÚL.**

“Prayer is a beautiful gift from God to humans.”—**ARNE.**

For María, Raúl, Arne, and many others, prayer is a unique gift. They feel that through prayer, they can talk to God, thank him, and seek his help. They wholeheartedly believe the Bible’s assurance regarding praying to God: “This is the confidence that we have toward him, that no matter what we ask according to his will, he hears us.” —1 John 5:14.

On the other hand, many people find it difficult to accept what the Bible says about prayer. Steve recounts how he felt about praying: “When I turned 17, three of my friends were killed in two separate accidents. One died in a car crash, and the other two drowned at sea.” What did Steve do? “I

prayed to God for answers as to why all that had happened, but I got no reply. So I asked myself, ‘Why pray?’” Seemingly unanswered prayers have led many to ask whether there is really any point in praying.

People also question the value of prayer for other reasons. Some say that since God knows all things, he is already aware of our needs or our problems, so there is little point in telling him about them.

Others believe that God actually refuses to listen to their prayers because of mistakes they have made in the past. “My biggest problem,” says Jenny, “is that I feel so worthless. I’ve done things that I regret, so I convince myself that I don’t deserve to be heard by God.”

How do you feel about praying? If you have ever had similar concerns or doubts

about prayer, you can take comfort from the fact that the Bible can offer satisfying answers. The Bible is an authority on the subject of prayer;* it can help you find answers to such questions as:

- Does God really hear our prayers?
- Why are some prayers not answered?
- How can you pray and be heard?
- What can prayers do for you?

* The Bible contains the prayers of many of God’s servants, including those of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew Scriptures, commonly called the Old Testament, contain well over 150 prayers.



Does God Hear Our Prayers?

Have you ever wondered whether God hears you when you pray? If so, you are not alone. Many have prayed to God about certain problems, yet the problems remain. Does that mean that God ignores our prayers? No! The Bible assures us that God listens to us when we pray to him in the proper way. Let us consider what the Bible says.

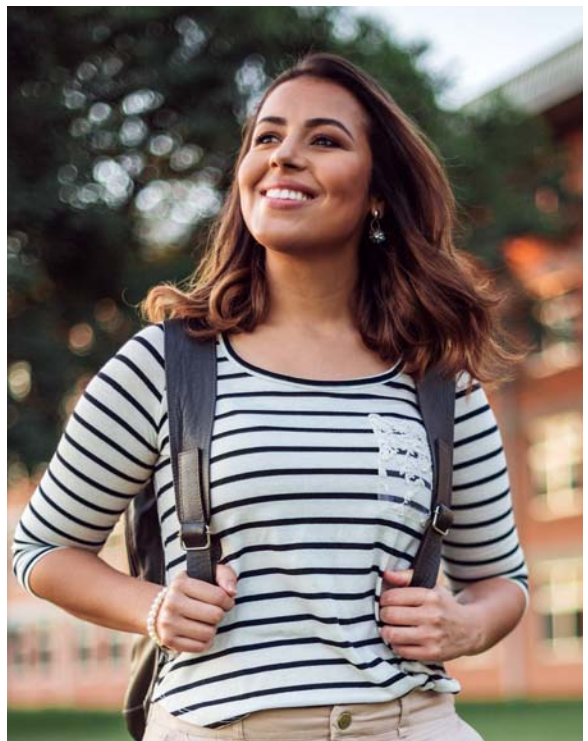
GOD IS LISTENING.

“O Hearer of prayer, to you people of all sorts will come.”—Psalm 65:2.

Some people pray because they say it makes them feel better, even though they do not believe anyone is really listening. But prayer is more than a mere therapeutic exercise to help us get through our problems. The Bible assures us that “Jehovah* is near to all those calling on him, to all who call on him in truth. . . . He hears their cry for help.”—Psalm 145:18, 19.

We can be certain, therefore, that Jehovah God hears the prayers of his worshippers. Lovingly he says: “You will call me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”—Jeremiah 29:12.

* Jehovah is God’s personal name.—Psalm 83:18.



“Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you.”—James 4:8

GOD WANTS YOU TO PRAY TO HIM.

“Persevere in prayer.”—Romans 12:12.

In the Bible, we are encouraged to “pray continually” and to “carry on prayer on every occasion.” Clearly, Jehovah God wants us to pray to him.—Matthew 26:41; Ephesians 6:18.

Why does God want us to pray to him? Consider: What parent would not want his young child to say “Can you help me, Dad”? Of course, a father may already know what his child needs or feels, but when he *hears* those words, it shows him that his child trusts him and is close to him. Similarly, when we pray to Jehovah God, we show him that we trust in him and want to be close to him.—Proverbs 15:8; James 4:8.



GOD REALLY CARES ABOUT YOU.

“Throw all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”—1 Peter 5:7.

God wants us to pray to him because he loves and cares for us. He is fully aware of our concerns and anxieties, and he wants to help us.

Throughout his life, King David prayed to Jehovah God for help and told Him his thoughts and feelings. (Psalm 23:1-6) How did God feel about David? God loved David and listened to his many prayers. (Acts 13:22) Likewise, God listens to our prayers because he cares for us.



“I LOVE JEHOVAH BECAUSE HE HEARS MY VOICE”

Those are the words of the writer of one of the psalms in the Bible. He was sure that God heard his prayers, and that fact had a powerful effect on him. He felt closer to God and found the strength to deal with life's distress and grief.—Psalm 116:1-9.

When we are sure that God hears our prayers, we will persevere in talking to him. Consider the experience of Pedro, who lives in northern Spain. He lost his 19-year-old son in a traffic accident. In his sorrow, Pedro poured out his heart to God and prayed repeatedly for comfort and support. What happened? “Jehovah answered my prayers

through the comfort and support that my wife and I received from fellow Christians,” says Pedro.

While prayers did not bring his son back to life, they did help Pedro and his family in important ways. His wife, María Carmen, recalls: “Prayers helped me to endure my grief. I knew that Jehovah God understood me because when I prayed to him, I felt at peace and a calm came over me.”

The Bible and personal experiences clearly show that God does hear prayers. Yet, it is also apparent that God does not answer all prayers. Why does God answer some prayers and not others?



Answers to our prayers often come through the comfort and support of caring friends

Why Does God Not Answer All Prayers?

Our heavenly Father, Jehovah God, is willing and pleased to hear our sincere prayers. But there are things that would stop him from answering our prayers. What are these things, and what should we keep in mind when we pray? Here are some Bible guidelines.

“When praying, do not say the same things over and over again.”—Matthew 6:7.

Jehovah does not want us to repeat memorized prayers or read them out of a prayer book. Rather, he wants us to speak from the heart. Imagine how frustrating it would be to have a friend recite the same words to you day in and day out. Good friends are open and sincere. When we pray in our own words, we are saying something personal to our heavenly Father.

“When you do ask, you do not receive because you are asking for a wrong purpose.”—James 4:3.

We would certainly not expect God to answer our prayers if we were to ask for things we know he does not want us to do or to have. For example, would Jehovah grant a gambler’s request for good luck when He has clearly warned against greediness and the superstitious belief in luck? (Isaiah 65:11; Luke 12:15) How illogical to expect Jehovah to answer such prayers! For God to answer when we pray to him, we must make sure that our requests are in harmony with what he tells us in the Bible.



“The one refusing to listen to the law—even his prayer is detestable.”—Proverbs 28:9.

In Bible times, God did not answer those who rejected his righteous laws. (Isaiah 1:15, 16) His feelings have not changed. (Malachi 3:6) If we want God to answer our prayers, we must do what we can to live in harmony with his laws. What, though, if we did things in the past that are wrong? Does that mean Jehovah will never listen to us? Of course not! God will lovingly forgive us if we turn our life around and do our best to please him. —Acts 3:19.



“Whoever approaches God must believe that he is and that he becomes the rewarder of those earnestly seeking him.”—Hebrews 11:6.

Prayer is not a mere emotional outlet for us when we are under stress. It is an expression of our faith and part of our worship of God. If we do not “keep asking in faith,” says the disciple James, then we “should not expect to receive anything from Jehovah.” (James 1:6, 7) To build faith in God, we must take the time and effort to get to know him by studying the Bible. Doing so will help us to know his will and to pray with conviction.

DO NOT GIVE UP!

Though God does not answer all prayers, he does hear and answer the sincere prayers of millions of people. The Bible outlines steps you can take so that your prayers will be pleasing to God. The next article will explain.

How Can You Pray and Be Heard?

Jehovah God is the “Hearer of prayer.” (Psalm 65:2) We can speak to him anywhere and at any time, aloud or silently. Jehovah wants us to address him as “Father,” and he really is the best Father we can have. (Matthew 6:9) Lovingly, Jehovah teaches us how to pray and be heard by him.

PRAY TO JEHOVAH GOD IN THE NAME OF JESUS

“If you ask the Father for anything, he will give it to you *in my name*.”—John 16:23.

Jesus’ words clearly show that Jehovah wants us to pray to him, not through images, saints, angels, or departed ancestors, but in the name of Jesus Christ. When we pray to God in Jesus’ name, we show that we recognize the vital role of Jesus. “No one comes to the Father except through me,” said Jesus.—John 14:6.

SPEAK FROM THE HEART

“Pour out your *hearts* before him.”—Psalm 62:8.

When we pray to Jehovah, we should speak as we would to a loving father. Instead of reading out of a book or reciting something memorized, we should speak to him respectfully and from the heart.

PRAY IN HARMONY WITH GOD’S WILL

“No matter what we ask *according to his will*, he hears us.”—1 John 5:14.

In the Bible, Jehovah God tells us what he will do for us and what he wants us to do for him. For our prayers to be acceptable to God, we need to pray “according to his will.” To do so, we need to study the Bible so that we can get to know him well. If we do, our prayers will be pleasing to him.



WHAT MIGHT WE PRAY FOR?

Pray for Your Needs. We can pray to God for our daily needs—food, clothing, and shelter. We might also pray for wisdom to make right decisions and for strength to endure our trials. We can pray for faith, for forgiveness, and for God’s help.—Luke 11:3, 4, 13; James 1:5, 17.



Pray for Others. Caring parents are pleased when their children love one another. Jehovah too desires that his children on earth care about one another. It is appropriate to pray for our mate, our children, our family, and our friends. “Pray for one another,” wrote the disciple James.—James 5:16.



Express Thanks. Of our Creator, the Bible says: “He did good, giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying you with food and filling your hearts with gladness.” (Acts 14:17) When we think about all that God has done for us, we will be moved to express our thanks to him in prayer. Of course, we should also show our gratitude to God by the way we live.—Colossians 3:15.

BE PATIENT AND KEEP PRAYING

At times, we may feel disheartened because of not getting an immediate answer to our sincere prayers. Should we conclude that God is not interested in us? By no means! Consider the following experiences that emphasize that we may simply need to keep praying.

Steve, mentioned in the opening article, admits, “Had it not been for prayer, I would have given up on life years ago.” What led to the change? He started to study the Bible and learned about the need to pray and to persist in it. “I pray to God to thank him for all the loving support I have received from my dear friends,” says Steve. “I am happier now than I’ve ever been.”

What about Jenny, who felt that she was not worthy of being heard by God? She says, “At my lowest point, I begged God to help me understand why I felt so worthless.” How did that help her? “Talking to God has helped me put things into perspective, to see that even if my heart condemns me, he does not. It has also helped me not to give up but to keep trying.” The result? “Prayer has helped me to see Jehovah as a real, loving, caring God, Father, and Friend, who will always be there for me and help me as long as I keep trying to do what he wants.”

Consider, too, the experience of Isabel. When she became pregnant, her doctors told her that her child would be born severely handicapped. She was devastated. Some even advised her to end the pregnancy. “I felt as if I were going to die from all the anguish in my heart.” What did she do? “I prayed and prayed to God for support,” she says. In time, she gave birth to a son, Gerard, and he was handicapped. Does Isabel feel that God answered her prayers? Yes, she does! In what way? “As I see my son, who is now 14 years old, enjoying life despite his disability,” says Isabel, “I realize that he is the best answer to my prayers, the greatest blessing Jehovah God has given me.”

Such heartfelt expressions make us think of the words of the psalmist: “You will hear the request of the meek, O Jehovah. You will make their hearts firm and pay close attention to them.” (Psalm 10:17) What wonderful reasons for persevering in prayer!

The Bible records many of Jesus’ prayers. The best known is surely the one he taught his disciples. What can we learn from it?



“I realize that he is the best answer to my prayers,” says Isabel when she sees her son Gerard enjoying life despite his disability

The Lord's Prayer—A Model for You

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave his disciples a model prayer, often called the Lord's Prayer. (Matthew 6:9-13; see also Luke 11:2-4.) Over the centuries, this prayer has become so popular that many have memorized and repeated it word for word. Was that Jesus' intention for this prayer? It hardly seems likely because

earlier in that sermon, Jesus had told his disciples to avoid repetitive prayers. (Matthew 6:7) Rather, Jesus was teaching his followers how to pray and what to pray about. Let us see what we can learn from the model prayer.

“Our Father in the heavens”

We should address our prayers only to God himself.

“Let your name be sanctified”

God's name, Jehovah, should be honored and viewed as sacred.

“Let your Kingdom come”

God's Kingdom is a heavenly government with Jesus as King, and it will soon exercise its rule over the entire earth.

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

God's will is for humans to live forever on earth in peace and security.



“Give us today our bread for this day”

Jehovah is the one who provides the things we need to live.

“Forgive us our debts”

We all make many mistakes and need forgiveness.

Keeping those points in mind can help you to offer meaningful personal prayers.

What Prayers Can Do for You

Faced with a serious illness, Pamela sought professional medical help. However, she also prayed to God for strength to endure her ordeal. Did prayer help her?

“During my cancer treatment, I often felt a sense of dread,” Pamela explained. “But when I prayed to Jehovah God, a feeling of calm came over me and I could think clearly. I still suffer from chronic pain, yet prayer helps me to maintain a positive outlook. When people ask me how I feel, I say, ‘I don’t feel well, but I am in good spirits!’”

Of course, we do not have to wait until a life-threatening crisis comes on us before we pray. All of us face challenges, large and small, and we often feel we need help to deal with them. Can prayer help?

The Bible says: “Throw your burden on Jehovah, and he will sustain you. Never will he allow the righteous one to fall.” (Psalm 55:22) What a comforting thought that is! So how can prayer help you? When you pray to God in the proper way, he will give you what you need to deal with your challenges.—See the box “What Prayers Can Bring You.”

WILL YOU BENEFIT?

Jehovah, of course, does not force you to pray to him. Instead, he lovingly invites you to do so. (Jeremiah 29:11, 12) What, though, if in the past you felt that your prayers were not answered? Do not lose heart or give up. Loving parents may not help their children in the exact way or at the very moment that the children expect. Perhaps the parents have a better solution. One thing, however, is certain: Loving parents help their children.

Jehovah God—the most loving of parents—wants to help you too. If you carefully examine the guidelines we have considered and do what you can to put them into practice, God will answer your prayers in the best possible way!—Psalm 34:15; Matthew 7:7-11.

What Prayers Can Bring You

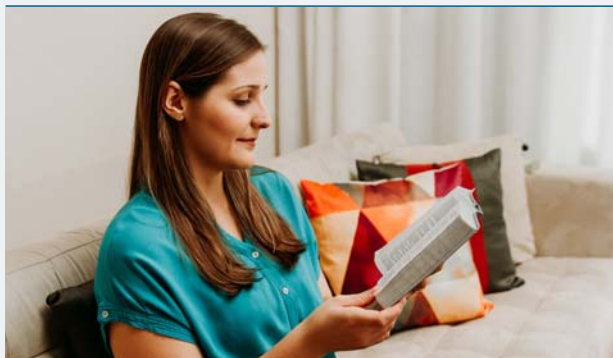
Peace of mind

“Let your petitions be made known to God; and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your mental powers by means of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6, 7) When you pour out your concerns to God, he will help you to stay calm and act wisely under stress.



Strength and comfort

“For all things I have the strength through the one who gives me power.” (Philippians 4:13) Being the almighty God, Jehovah can give you the strength you need to deal with your challenges or to sustain you through your trials. (Isaiah 40:29) The Bible also calls Jehovah “the God of all comfort.” He can comfort us “in all our trials.”—2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.



Wisdom from God

“If any one of you is lacking in wisdom, let him keep asking God, for he gives generously to all and without reproaching, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5) When we are under pressure, we do not always make the best decisions. If you pray for wisdom, God can remind you of the many helpful principles in his written Word, the Bible.



DOES GOD HEAR YOUR PRAYERS?

When you pray, do you think God really hears you?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

- **God is listening.** The Bible assures us that “Jehovah is near to all those calling on him, to all who call on him in truth. . . . He hears their cry for help.”—Psalm 145:18, 19.
- **God wants you to pray to him.** The Bible invites us: “In everything by prayer and supplication along with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God.”—Philippians 4:6.
- **God really cares about you.** God is fully aware of our concerns and anxieties, and he wants to help. “Throw all your anxiety on him,” says the Bible, “because he cares for you.”—1 Peter 5:7.



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What Can the Bible Teach Us?

For more information about how to draw close to God, see chapter 17 of this book, published by Jehovah's Witnesses and available online at **www.jw.org**

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