

“FAITH & FOUNDATION: THE GROUND ZERO OF PRAYER”
BASED ON A PROMISE OR PRINCIPLE

FROM: JERRY

TO: GOD

SUBJECT: WHAT MUST I BASE EVERY PRAYER ON?

“OK, God. I’ve prayed and I’m not getting what I’m asking for. Is there a trick to this? Is there something else I should know before I pray? What am I doing wrong? Why aren’t you answering me?”

FROM: GOD

TO: JERRY

CC: THE CHURCH

SUBJECT: WHAT MUST I BASE EVERY PRAYER ON?

“Jerry—I AM answering you! Yes, there is something you need to know before sending me your prayers, but it’s not some trick, magic code, or formula! What I want you to know is clearly spelled out in your Bible! It’s the Instruction Book for everything. Please read it.”

Principle: You can’t just expect God to answer every prayer the way you want Him to. Your requests must be based on a *principle*—or a *universal promise*—expressed in Scripture. This assumes you know His Word, and assures that when God does answer, the answer will align with His perfect will.

ILLUSTRATION

I recall when my mother was sick with cancer. I ‘claimed’ Isaiah 53:5 “...with His stripes we are healed.” My mother died. Only later did I understand that the passage was true as a universal promise for *salvation*—not a universal promise for physical healing. *All* who seek salvation, receive (Isaiah 45:22). But *not* everyone (including my mother) is *physically* healed. Matthew tells us that Christ fulfilled the promise of *physical* healing in His *life* (Matthew 8:17). But we are saved by Christ’s *death*—not His *life*. To claim Isaiah 53 for universal physical healing is inappropriate. By His stripes (death) *spiritual* healing is available to *everyone*. When you pray, only ‘claim’ what you *know* God has promised to you in Scripture, not what you *think* you want or need through (so-called) faith. Seek God’s will above your own, and His glory above your desires.

PRAYER QUOTE

“Praying without faith is like trying to cut with a blunt knife—much labor expended to little purpose.”

—James O. Fraser

“Prayer is taking our troubles to heaven. Faith is leaving them there.”

—Unknown

“Faith that cannot be tested is faith that cannot be trusted. Put your faith where God put your sins—in Jesus Christ.”

—Adrian Rogers

“It is not that we don’t have confidence in our God to save us from Hell; we just don’t have confidence in Him to do everything else He has promised to do while we are still on Earth.”

—Leslie Ludy

FAITH: DIRECTION, NOT AMOUNT!

In praying to God, one of the first things we learn is that we must have *faith* in order to get answers to our prayers. Someone has said: "Faith is putting all your eggs in God's basket, and counting your blessings before they hatch". Have you ever felt you needed to 'work up' faith in order to please God, or get Him to answer? You don't. The *amount* of faith you have is not important (Matthew 17:20). Remember, if you bring enough faith to even pray at all, God can *increase* it (Mark 9:24; cp. Matthew 17:20)! The *fact* of your faith is more important than the *fullness* of your faith (Mark 4:24). What's important is the *object* of your faith (what you lock your faith on to)—*God!* Think of two men standing on an iced-over lake. The ice begins to break. Both men are about to sink into the frigid waters. One man has a *great deal* of faith that the melting ice below his feet will hold him as he crosses the ice to safety. The second man has only a *small* amount of faith that grasping a rope thrown to him by a friend standing on the frozen shore will actually keep him from drowning. Which man is most likely to survive?

You see, it's the *object* of their faith (the ice or the rope) which is important, not the *amount* of faith. If there were any other way to God other than faith, talented people would have a head start. Much faith in the wrong thing profits absolutely nothing. Or, think of it this way, does it matter how strong the cord to your electrical appliances are if they are not plugged into a working outlet? Remember—it's the *direction* and the *connection*—not the amount or type—of your faith that pleases God.

FAITH: ALIGNED WITH GOD WILL

Faith must also be in accordance with God's will (James 4:13-15; cp. Acts 21:13-14),* and based upon His *Word* (Proverbs 28:9)! This is faith in the character of God (Hebrews 11:6). It is God alone who knows and does everything right (Philippians 2:13), and it is *alignment* with that perfect will which gets your prayers answered. You cannot simply ask God for anything and think because you *believe*, it will come to pass.

You must know and align with God's will, and place the will of God above your own desires (1 John 5:14). Even Jesus prayed this way (Matthew 26:39). Only when *you seek, know, and desire* God's will does He promise that you can 'believe and receive' (Matthew 21:22; cp. John 7:17).

FAITH: BASED ON A SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE OR PRECEPT

The great pastor and author Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said: 'pleading the promises of God is the whole secret to prayer'. God's *promises* are God's *will*. But how can you know God's will? You know God's will through knowing God's *Word* (cp. Daniel 9:2, 11; Psalm 119:167; Proverbs 28:9). Faith in prayer must be based on a universal *promise* (such as His willingness to save), or a universal *principle* (such as sin resulting in negative consequences). All God's Word is *for* us, but not all God's Word is *to* us. You have to understand this distinction before claiming 'faith'. To not do so is to ask *wrongly* (James 4:2-3). For example, God's instruction to "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6) is a universal truism for *all* of us. Of course, there are exceptions, but this is *generally* true. But to claim prosperity and health, based upon III John 2, is not proper. John was not talking to *us* (in order that we might all be rich and healthy), but to Gaius, as part of a traditional greeting. This is why Paul encourages us to 'rightly divide the Word' (II Timothy 2:15). In the same way, Namaan the Syrian was instructed to go to the Jordan River to be healed of leprosy. That is not an instruction to every Christian for healing, but a lesson *for* us regarding *obedience*. Remember, your faith must be anchored properly (Psalm 119:49, 89). Someone has well said that prayer is the rope tossed from the boat to the rock—not in order to pull the rock to the *boat*, but to pull the boat to the *rock* (I John 5:14-15). Prayer is *not* to get your will done in Heaven, but to get *God's* will done on earth. God's Word is the 'rock' of our prayers, and faith based on emotion—or any other such foundation—is mere foolishness. Prayer is not so much getting *answers*, but getting hold of the *God* who gives answers! Remind God of His Word when you pray (Nehemiah 1:8). He won't mind a bit.

FAITH THAT DOESN'T WAVER

We've all heard the quote: "Prayer is asking for rain; faith is carry the umbrella". But sometimes we might feel a bit odd, or look strange to others, when the requested 'rain' never seems to come (I Kings 18:41-43). It is then that doubt creeps in. Sometimes we it difficult to stand on our faith without doubting, and most certain God understands these occasional doubts. But faith that *constitutes* wavers is not pleasing to God (James 1:6-7; cp. Romans 4:19-21). Notice the determination of the men bringing the paralytic to Jesus (Luke 5:18-20). Not only did they find another way when the method didn't work, it was also *their* faith—not the paralytic's faith—which brought the healing (cp. Luke 4:38-41). Determination is the key. Again—be sure your faith is anchored to the Word. Then, ask—not just believing God *will* answer (Matthew 21:22)—but believing He *already has* (Mark 11:24)!

FAITH BASED ON GOD'S PAST ANSWERS

Finally, as you pray, remember how God has answered your prayers for you. Let Him know you trust His *past* faithfulness & assurance of His *future* dependability (Daniel 9:15-16; cf. Chronicles 17:16-22). Too often today, we forget God's answers to our past prayers, and grumble about the small delay when He delays His answer (Daniel 10:12-14).

My Blog!

Knowing God's Word will help us pray. By knowing instructions through His Word, we can know *how* to ask, and to ask for. Putting faith in God's Word and God's will is to anchor ourselves to the only One who can and will protect us through everything. You don't have to work up faith. You just need to put it, and put it in the right Person. If our faith is right, so will be our prayers.

Heavenly Homework!

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- Do you *really* want to know God's will? Why is it important?
- What does 'all God's Word is *for* us, but not all God's Word is *to us*' really mean to you?
- Do you know *enough* of God's Word to remind Him of His promises and principles?
- How is it that even small faith is able to 'uproot trees' (Luke 17:6)? Is this literal?
- In prayer, what's the difference between working *with* your faith and working *up* your faith?
- Why is it that even with faith, some of our prayers seem to get a 'no' from God?

To do—

- ✓ If you find you don't always have enough faith, or if you feel your faith is wavering, spend time reading God's Word, and ask Him to help your faith to grow. Keep in mind, growth is not always a quick or easy process, but to know and grow in Christ is the most important part of your Christian growth.
- ✓ Study God's Word—His principles and promises—to learn His will (John 7:17; II Timothy 2:15; I John 5:14).
- ✓ Develop an attitude of drawing your prayers toward God's will rather than trying to bend God's ear toward what *you* really want.