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Question Answer For the Christian, praying is supposed to be like breathing, easier to do than to not do. We pray for a variety of reasons. For one thing, prayer is a form of serving God (Luke 2:36-38) and obeying Him. We pray because God commands us to pray (Philippians 4:6-7). Prayer is exemplified for us by Christ and the early church (Mark 1:35; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:23-31; 6:4; 13:1-3). If Jesus thought it was worthwhile to pray, we should also. Another reason to pray is that God intends prayer to be the means of obtaining His solutions in a number of situations. We pray in preparation for major decisions (Luke 6:12-13); to overcome demonic barriers (Matthew 17:14-21); to gather workers for the spiritual harvest (Luke 10:2); to gain strength to overcome temptation (Matthew 26:41); and to obtain the means of strengthening others spiritually (Ephesians 6:18-19). We come to God with our specific requests, and we have God's promise that our prayers are not in vain, even if we do not receive specifically what we asked for (Matthew 6:6; Romans 8:26-27). He has promised that when we ask for things that are in accordance with His will, He will give us what we ask for (1 John 5:14-15). Sometimes He delays His answers according to His wisdom and for our benefit. In these situations, we are to be diligent and persistent in prayer (Matthew 7:7; Luke 18:1-8). Prayer should not be seen as our means of getting God to do our will on earth, but rather as a means of getting God's will done on earth. God's wisdom far exceeds our own. For situations in which we do not know God's will specifically, prayer is a means of discerning His will (see James 1:5). Prayer was instrumental in the Spirit's sending of Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3). Solomon asked for "wisdom and knowledge," and God gave him that and much more (2 Chronicles 1:10-12). Prayers un-prayed will be prayers unanswered. If the Syrian woman with the demon-influenced daughter had not prayed to Christ, her daughter would not have been made whole (Mark 7:26-30). If the blind man outside Jericho had not called out to Christ, he would have remained blind (Luke 18:35-43). God has said that we often go without because we do not ask (James 4:2). In one sense, prayer is like sharing the gospel with people. We do not know who will respond to the message of the gospel until we share it. In the same way, we will never see the results of answered prayer unless we pray. A lack of prayer demonstrates a lack of faith and a lack of trust in God's Word. We pray to demonstrate our faith in God, that He will do as He has promised in His Word and bless our lives abundantly more than we could ask or hope for (Ephesians 3:20). Prayer is our primary means of seeing God work in others' lives. Because it is our means of "plugging into" God's power, it is our means of defeating Satan and his army that we are powerless to overcome by ourselves. Therefore, may God find us often before His throne, for we have a high priest in heaven who can identify with all that we go through (Hebrews 4:15-16). We have His promise that the fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much (James 5:16-18). May God glorify His name in our lives as we believe in Him enough to come to Him often in prayer. Return to: Questions about Prayer Why pray? Question Answer To understand Jesus as God on earth praying to His Father in heaven, we need to realize that the eternal Father and the eternal Son had an eternal relationship before Jesus took upon Himself the form of a man. Please read John 5:19-27, particularly verse 23 where Jesus teaches that the Father sent the Son (also see John 15:10). Jesus did not become the Son of God when He was born in Bethlehem. He has always been the Son of God from eternity past, still is the Son of God, and always will be. Isaiah 9:6 tells us that the Son was given and the Child was born. Jesus was always part of the tri-unity, along with the Holy Spirit. The tri-unity always existed, the Father God, the Son God, and the Spirit God, not three gods, but one God existing as three persons. Jesus taught that He and His Father are one (John 10:30), meaning that He and His Father are of the same substance and the same essence. The Father, Son and Spirit are three co-equal persons existing as God. These three had, and continue to have, an eternal relationship. When Jesus, the eternal Son of God, took upon Himself sinless humanity He also took on the form of a servant, giving up His heavenly glory (Philippians 2:5-11). As the God-man, He had to learn obedience (Hebrews 5:8) to His Father as He was tempted by Satan, accused falsely by men, rejected by His people, and eventually crucified. His praying to His heavenly Father was to ask for power (John 11:41-42) and wisdom (Mark 1:35; 6:46). His praying showed His dependence upon His Father in His humanity to carry out His Father's plan of redemption, as evidenced in Christ's high priestly prayer in John 17. His praying demonstrated that He ultimately submitted to His Father's will, which was to go to the cross and pay the penalty (death) for our breaking God's law (Matthew 26:31-46). Of course, He rose bodily from the grave, winning forgiveness and eternal life for those who repent of sin and believe in Him as the Savior. There is no problem with God the Son praying or talking to God the Father. As mentioned, they had an eternal relationship before Christ became a man. This relationship is depicted in the Gospels so we can see how the Son of God in His humanity carried out His Father's will, and in doing so, purchased redemption for His children (John 6:38). Christ's continual submission to His heavenly Father was empowered and kept focused through His prayer life. Christ's example of prayer is ours to follow. Jesus Christ was no less God on earth when praying to His Father in heaven. He was depicting how even in sinless humanity it is necessary to have a vital prayer life in order to do His Father's will. Jesus' praying to the Father was a demonstration of His relationship within the Trinity and an example for us that we must rely on God through prayer for the strength and wisdom we need. Since Christ, as the God-man, needed to have a vibrant prayer life, so should the follower of Christ today. Return to: Questions about Jesus Christ If Jesus was God, how could He pray to God? Was Jesus praying to Himself? Question Answer In Ephesians 1:15-23, the apostle Paul prays for the Ephesian believers to be filled with spiritual insight to know Jesus better and understand the fullness of God's blessings in Christ: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe" (verses 17-19). Throughout the Bible, the "heart" often represents the center of a person's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual life—the whole inner person, encompassing the mind, will, and emotions. Thus, "the eyes of your heart" refers to our inner perception. Our "inner eyes" are "enlightened" when they open and light is cast on them, allowing them to see and understand the things of the Spirit. Paul prays for the Father to give believers the "Spirit of wisdom and revelation." True spiritual enlightenment can only come from the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2; John 14:25-26; 16:12-14; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16). The natural mind cannot comprehend the things of God. Christians "have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us" (1 Corinthians 2:12, NLT). The Spirit of God opens the eyes of the heart to see, receive, and understand the truth in God's Word (Psalm 19:8; 119:18). Paul says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened" because he wants all believers to comprehend the great hope, riches, and power they have received in Jesus Christ. Paul himself would have remained a blind Pharisee had the eyes of his heart not been opened on the road to Damascus. Acts 9:1 says Paul (then Saul) was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (ESV). While on his way to arrest followers of Jesus in the city of Damascus, Paul was struck down by a blinding light. He heard the voice of Jesus calling him to salvation. Three days later, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and his sight was restored (Acts 9:17-19). The restoration of physical eyesight symbolized Paul's inner transformation as the eyes of his heart were enlightened to see the truth of salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul tells the believers in Corinth that the same God who spoke light into existence in Genesis 1:3 "has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6, NLT). The apostle wants Christians to grasp three things: the hope of our calling (Romans 8:30; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; Philippians 3:14), the riches of our glorious inheritance (Colossians 1:12; Ephesians 1:14), and the matchless power that is available to us who believe (Ephesians 3:7, 16; Philippians 3:21; 4:19). The Christian life is an ongoing experience of growing in our faith, knowledge, and understanding of God and our relationship with Jesus Christ. Before salvation, we lived in darkness until the true light of the world shined in our hearts (Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4:16; John 1:9; John 8:12; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 5:8). But once we come to know Him through salvation, the eyes of our hearts are opened (John 17:3; Hebrews 6:4). He becomes our Savior and Lord. Jesus says to us, "Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear" Matthew 13:16 (NLT). If we keep seeking the Lord throughout our lives, we will increasingly get to know Him through experiential sanctification (Philippians 3:10-16). We will discover that He is our "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15), "Good Shepherd" (John 10:10-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4), and "Bright Morning Star" (Revelation 22:16). We will slowly transform into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10) until one day the eyes of our hearts are fully enlightened, and we know Him "face to face" in complete perfection (1 Corinthians 13:9-12). Return to: Questions about Ephesians Why does Paul pray "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened" (Ephesians 1:18)? Question Answer The most basic definition of prayer is "talking to God." Prayer is not meditation or passive reflection; it is direct address to God. It is the communication of the human soul with the Lord who created the soul. Prayer is the primary way for the believer in Jesus Christ to communicate his emotions and desires with God and to fellowship with God. Prayer can be audible or silent, private or public, formal or informal. All prayer must be offered in faith (James 1:6), in the name of the Lord Jesus (John 16:23), and in the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26). As the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia puts it, "Christian prayer in its full New Testament meaning is prayer addressed to God as Father, in the name of Christ as Mediator, and through the enabling grace of the indwelling Spirit" ("Prayer" by J. C. Lambert). The wicked have no desire to pray (Psalm 10:4), but the children of God have a natural desire to pray (Luke 11:1). Prayer is described in the Bible as seeking God's favor (Exodus 32:11), pouring out one's soul to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:15), crying out to heaven (2 Chronicles 32:20), drawing near to God (Psalm 73:28, KJV), and kneeling before the Father (Ephesians 3:14). Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). Worry about nothing; pray about everything. Everything? Yes, God wants us to talk with Him about everything. How often should we pray? The biblical answer is "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17, ESV). We should keep a running conversation going with God all day long. Some find the ACTS formula of prayer helpful, but there is really no special formula for how to pray in the Bible. We should just do it. We can pray under any and all circumstances. Prayer develops our relationship with God and demonstrates our trust and utter dependence upon Him. Prayer is the Christian's way of communicating with God. We pray to praise God and thank Him and tell Him how much we love Him. We pray to express His presence and tell Him what is going on in our lives. We pray to make requests and seek guidance and seek wisdom. God loves this exchange with His children, just as we love the exchange with our children. Fellowship with God is the heart of prayer. Too often, we lose sight of how simple prayer is really supposed to be. When we make petitions to God, we let God know exactly where we stand and what we would like to see happen. In our prayers, we must admit that God is greater than we are and ultimately knows what is best in any given situation (Romans 11:33-36). God is good and asks us to pray. In prayer, we pray, essentially, "Not my will, but your will be done." The key to answered prayer is praying according to the will of God and in accordance with His Word. Prayer is not seeking our own will but seeking to align ourselves with the will of God more fully (1 John 5:14-15; James 4:3). The Bible contains many examples of prayer and plenty of exhortations to pray (see Luke 18:1; Romans 12:12; and Ephesians 6:18). God's house is to be a house of prayer (Mark 11:17), and God's people are to be people of prayer: "Dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love" (Jude 1:20-21). Return to: Questions about Prayer What is prayer? Question Answer Is it best to pray standing up, sitting down, kneeling, or bowing down? Should our hands be open, closed, or lifted up to God? Do our eyes need to be closed when we pray? Is it better to pray in a church building or out in nature? Should we pray in the morning when we get up or at night before we go to bed? Are there certain words we need to say in our prayers? How do we begin our prayers? What is the proper way to close a prayer? These questions, and others, are common questions asked about prayer. What is the proper way to pray? Do any of the above things even matter? Far too often, prayer is viewed as a "magic formula." Some believe that if we do not say exactly the right things, or pray in the right position, God will not hear and answer our prayer. This is completely unbiblical. God does not answer our prayers based on when we pray, where we pray, where we are, what position our body is in, or in what order we word our prayers. We are told in 1 John 5:14-15 to have confidence when we come to God in prayer, knowing He hears us and will grant whatever we ask as long as it is in His will. Similarly, John 14:13-14 declares, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." According to these and many other Scriptures, God answers prayer requests based on whether they are asked according to His will and in the name of Jesus (to bring glory to Jesus). So, what is the proper way to pray? Philippians 4:6-7 tells us to pray without being anxious, to pray about everything, and to pray with thankful hearts. God will answer all such prayers with the gift of His peace in our hearts. The proper way to pray is to pour out our hearts to God, being honest and open with God, as He already knows us better than we know ourselves. We are to present our requests to God, keeping in mind that God knows what is best and will not grant a request that is not His will for us. We are to express our love, gratitude, and worship to God in prayer without worrying about having just the right words to say. God is more interested in the content of our hearts than the eloquence of our words. The closest the Bible comes to giving a "pattern" for prayer is the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Please understand that the Lord's Prayer is not a prayer we are to memorize and recite to God. It is an example of the things that should go into a prayer—worship, trust in God, requests, confession, and submission. We are to pray for the things the Lord's Prayer talks about, using our own words and "customizing" it to our own journey with God. The proper way to pray is to express our hearts to God. Sitting, standing, or kneeling; hands open or closed; eyes opened or closed; in a church, at home, or outside; in the morning or at night—these are all side issues, subject to personal preference, conviction, and appropriateness. God's desire is for prayer to be a real and personal connection between Himself and us. Return to: Questions about Prayer How to pray? What is the proper way to pray? Question Answer The phrase Thy kingdom come is part of the Lord's Prayer, a prayer that Jesus taught His disciples (and all future servants of His kingdom) as a pattern for prayer. In Luke 11:1, the disciples observed Jesus praying and wished to learn from Him how to pray. They recognized that Jesus' day-to-day actions flowed from His intimate prayer life with God, and they wanted their lives to reflect the same. So Jesus taught them this model prayer: "Whenever you pray, say, Father, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone in debt to us. And do not bring us into temptation" (Luke 11:2-4, CSB). A fuller version of the Lord's Prayer features in Matthew 6:9-15 as part of Jesus' extensive teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. In both passages, Jesus includes the statement Thy kingdom come. One component of Christ's training in prayer involves understanding that God's kingdom has not yet been wholly fulfilled on this earth. Thy kingdom come is not just an expectant yearning for the coming of Christ in the future, even though this longing is contained in the plea. But Thy kingdom come also expresses the prayerful desire of Christ's servants to see God's Kingdom broaden and become increasingly established throughout the world in the here and now. Within our prayers ought to be a mindset that recognizes God's kingdom purposes and concerns itself with furthering those purposes. First and foremost, the Lord's dominion must be evident in the lives of His followers. Praying, "Thy Kingdom come," means asking the heavenly Father to help us in our own lives to be faithful, obedient, authentic, and effective Christians. We spread God's kingdom not only with words but also through our actions and the observable qualities of our character (Matthew 7:16, 20; John 13:35; 1 John 3:10). We also know from Scripture that God wants all sinners to be saved (Ezekiel 18:23; Matthew 23:37; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). So in Christ's model for prayer, we have confirmation that intercessory prayer for the salvation of souls is a worthwhile endeavor. Praying, "Thy Kingdom come," is the same as saying, "Dear Lord, please open the hearts of my loved ones, friends, co-workers, and neighbors to receive Your gift of salvation in Jesus Christ." God's kingdom will expand as more people turn to Christ for salvation. They enter the kingdom when they come to know the crucified King of that kingdom. People need the gospel. Another way we seek the establishment of God's kingdom in the here and now is to pray for aspects of God's nature to be revealed and known in the world. We can ask God to show His holiness to us and others so that all might see and understand it, and be changed by it. In Isaiah 6:1-5, when the prophet Isaiah captured a glimpse of God's holiness, he was completely undone. So overwhelming was Isaiah's experience, that he saw the glory of God's holiness filling the whole earth: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (verse 3). When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we ask God to shine His light into the world so that others may respond to Him with awe and reverence (John 1:1-15). Jesus is the light of the world who breaks through the darkness of sin by His work on the cross (John 8:12). Through Christ's sacrifice, believers become lights to the world as well (Matthew 5:14-16). God's Word is also a light to the world, revealing His kingdom so it can be seen in God's world (Psalm 119:105, 130; Proverbs 6:23; 2 Peter 1:19). As believers in Jesus, we acknowledge God as our King. Praying, "Thy Kingdom come," means we desire for His sovereign rule over our lives here on earth, as we submit to His authority and yield to His control in every aspect of our existence. Likewise, praying, "Thy Kingdom come," means we earnestly yearn for God's reign to be established throughout the whole earth and over every human being. We pray, "Thy Kingdom come," so that God's sovereign rule will come now and in the future in its fullness and permanence. Return to: Questions about Prayer What does it mean to pray, "Thy kingdom come"? Question Answer All prayer should be directed to our trine God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Bible allows for prayer to one or all three, because all three are one. To the Father we pray with the psalmist, "Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray" (Psalm 5:2). To the Lord Jesus, we pray as to the Father because they are equal. Prayer to one member of the Trinity is prayer to all. Stephen, as he was being martyred, prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). We are also to pray in the name of Christ. Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers to always give "thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20). Jesus assured His disciples that whatever they asked in His name—meaning in His will—would be granted (John 15:16; 16:23). We are told to pray in the Spirit and in His power. The Spirit helps us to pray, even when we do not know how or what to ask for (Romans 8:26; Jude 20). Perhaps the best way to understand the role of the Trinity in prayer is that we pray to the Father, through (or in the name of) the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. All three are active participants in the believer's prayer. Equally important is whom we are not to pray to. Some non-Christian religions encourage their adherents to pray to a pantheon of gods, dead relatives, saints, and spirits. Roman Catholics are taught to pray to Mary and various saints. Such prayers are not scriptural and are, in fact, an insult to our heavenly Father. To understand why, we need only look at the nature of prayer. Prayer has several elements, and if we look at just two of them—praise and thanksgiving—we can see that prayer is, at its very core, worship. When we praise God, we are worshiping Him for His attributes and His work in our lives. When we offer prayers of thanksgiving, we are worshiping His goodness, mercy, and loving-kindness to us. Worship gives glory to God, the only One who deserves to be glorified. The problem with praying to anyone other than God is that He will not share His glory. In fact, praying to anyone or anything other than God is idolatry. "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols" (Isaiah 42:8). Other elements of prayer such as repentance, confession, and petition are also forms of worship. We repent knowing that God is a forgiving and loving God and He has provided a means of forgiveness in the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. We confess our sins because we know "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9) and we worship Him for it. We come to Him with our petitions and intercessions because we know He loves us and hears us, and we worship Him for His mercy and kindness in being willing to hear and answer. When we consider all this, it is easy to see that praying to someone other than our trine God is unthinkable because prayer is a form of worship, and worship is reserved for God and God alone. Whom are we to pray to? The answer is God. Praying to God, and God alone, is far more important than to which Person of the Trinity we address our prayers. Return to: Questions about Prayer To whom are we to pray, the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Question Answer Life is full of decisions that do not have absolute, specific-by-name, how-to directions in the Bible. How many hours a day should my kids spend on screens? Is it okay to play certain video games? Am I allowed to go on a date with a coworker? Is it okay to miss work because I stayed up too late the night before? We all have notions about the truth, but how do we know for sure that these ideas are coming from God? Am I hearing God? Or am I only hearing myself? Worse yet, am I hearing the temptations of Satan disguised as the leading of the Holy Spirit? Sometimes distinguishing our own ideas from God's leading is difficult. And what if our urges are actually coming from the enemy of our souls and not from God? How do we "take every thought captive" (2 Corinthians 10:5) when we aren't sure where the thoughts are coming from? Most commonly, God communicates through the Bible. His inspired Word, preserved through the centuries for us today. It is through the Word that we are sanctified (John 17:17), and the Word is the light for our path (Psalm 119:105). God can also guide us through circumstances (2 Corinthians 2:12), the promptings of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), and godly mentors providing wise counsel (Proverbs 12:15). If God wants to speak to us, nothing can stop Him. Here are some ways to discern the source of our thoughts: Pray If we are confused about whether or not we are hearing God, it is good to pray for wisdom (James 1:5). (It's good to pray for wisdom even when we don't think we're confused!) We should ask God to make His will known to us clearly. When we pray, we "must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6). If we have no faith, we "should not expect to receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:7). Talk to God in prayer and earnestly wait for His answer. However, keep in mind that God doesn't give us everything we desire, and sometimes His answer is, "No." He knows what we need at any given time, and He will show us what is best. If God says, "No," then we can thank Him for the clarity of His direction and move on from there. Study the Word The Bible is called "God's Word" for a reason—it is the primary way God speaks to us. It is also the way we learn about God's character and His dealings with people throughout history. All Scripture is "breathed out by God" and is the guide for a righteous life (2 Timothy 3:16-17). While we speak to God in prayer, He speaks to us through His Word. As we read, we must consider the words of the Bible to be the very words of God. Any thought, desire, inclination, or urge we may have must be brought to the Word of God for comparison and approval. Let the Bible be the judge of every thought. "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). No matter how urgent the urge, if it goes against what Scripture says, then it is not of God and must be rejected. Follow the Holy Spirit's Leading The Holy Spirit is God—a divine Being with a mind, emotions, and will. He is always with us (Psalm 139:7-8). His purposes include interceding for us (Romans 8:26-27) and giving gifts to benefit the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). The Holy Spirit wills to fill us (Ephesians 5:18) and produce in us His fruit (Galatians 5:22-25). No matter what decisions we're making day to day, we can't go wrong when we exhibit love, joy, peace, etc., to the glory of God. When we have a random thought pop into our heads, we must learn to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1). Will following this inclination lead to more Christlikeness? Will dwelling on this thought produce more of the fruit of the Spirit in me? The Holy Spirit will never lead us to gratify the sinful desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16); He will always lead us toward sanctification (1 Peter 1:2). Life on earth is a spiritual battle. The enemy is eager to supply diversions to distract us from God's will (1 Peter 5:8). We must be vigilant to ensure that what we heed is more than a feeling but is truly from God Himself. Remember, God wants to show us the right path to take. He's not in the business of hiding His will from those who seek Him. Here are some good questions to ask as we examine whether or not we are hearing God: Are the promptings confusing or vague? God is not the author of confusion; He is the bringer of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33). Do the thoughts go against God's Word? God will not contradict Himself. Will following these promptings lead to sin? Those who "keep in step with the Spirit" have "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24-25). In addition, it is good to seek counsel from a Christian friend, family member, or pastor (Proverbs 15:22). Our pastors are there to help shepherd us: "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account" (Hebrews 13:17). God does not want us to fail. The more we listen to God, the better we will be at distinguishing His voice from the other noises in our heads. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gives His promise: "He goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice" (John 10:4). Others may speak, "but the sheep [do] not listen to them" (verse 8). The better we know our Shepherd, the less we have to worry about heeding the wrong voice. Return to: Questions about the Christian Life How can I know if I am hearing God, hearing Satan, or hearing my own thoughts? Question Answer Man's highest aim should be to bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31), and this includes praying according to His will. First, we must ask for wisdom. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). In asking for wisdom, we must also trust that God is gracious and willing to answer our prayers: "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt" (James 1:6; see also Mark 11:24). So, praying according to the will of God includes asking for wisdom (to know the will of God) and asking in faith (to trust the will of God). Here are seven biblical instructions that will guide the believer in praying according to God's will: 1) Pray for the things for which the Bible commands prayer. We are told to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44); for God to send missionaries (Luke 10:2); that we do not enter temptation (Matthew 26:41); for ministers of the Word (Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:1); for government authorities (1 Timothy 2:1-3); for relief from affliction (James 5:13); and for the healing of fellow believers (James 5:16). Where God commands prayer, we can pray with confidence that we are praying according to His will. 2) Follow the example of godly characters in Scripture. Paul prayed for the salvation of Israel (Romans 10:1). David prayed for mercy and forgiveness when he sinned (Psalm 51:1-2). The early church prayed for boldness to witness (Acts 4:29). These prayers were according to the will of God, and similar prayers today can be as well. As with Paul and the early church, we should always be praying for the salvation of others. For the power of the Holy Spirit. All three are active participants in the believer's prayer. Equally important is whom we are not to pray to. Some non-Christian religions encourage their adherents to pray to a pantheon of gods, dead relatives, saints, and spirits. Roman Catholics are taught to pray to Mary and various saints. Such prayers are not scriptural and are, in fact, an insult to our heavenly Father. To understand why, we need only look at the nature of prayer. 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