

***Question: What do you think Jesus would say about attempts to prove through scientific methods that God really does answer prayer?***

While I understand the desire of some Christians for scientific proof in support of prayer, we need to realize that the nature of prayer as taught in the Bible places it outside our ability to verify it in this manner. We cannot place God in a box or under a microscope for human investigation. Jesus taught his followers to pray to God as “Our Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9) because he is an eternal, active and transcendent person. We can no more predict what our God may do or when he might act than modern psychologists have been able to predict what humans may do. His answer to our prayers will always be dependent upon what his wisdom and love decide is best.

By teaching his followers to pray, “Your will be done” (Matthew 6:10), Jesus was teaching that God is not an impersonal force that responds to input in some automatic and predictable fashion. Neither is he a celestial Santa Claus who automatically puts our requests on his list, checks it twice and delivers on time. Even flawed humans exercise their judgment to determine what is best for the children they love. As our loving father, God wisely exercises his judgment to determine when and how he should answer our prayers. We cannot quantify these factors in a scientific experiment.

Just before his death on the cross, Jesus prayed fervently and tearfully that the cup of suffering might be removed from him. Yet, he placed himself in submission to the Father by saying, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Scientific studies would count this prayer of Jesus as unanswered. The cup of suffering was not taken away; instead, he suffered and died on a Roman cross. God, the father, knew this was best for Jesus and for the entire world. How do you factor things like this into the design of a scientific study of prayer?

In addition, any attempt to design a scientific study of prayer cannot factor in the goodness and love God has for those who do not pray as well as for those who do pray. Jesus said, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). God created all of us in his own image and loves us even when we do not love him (Genesis 1:26-27; Romans 5:8). We cannot realize the

full benefit of that love until we love and trust him; however, this does not keep him from trying to draw us to him by answering prayers for blessing and healing even when we do not love him back.

I believe that only by faith can we know that God answers our prayers. He has promised to hear our prayers, including prayers for the sick (James 5:14-18). We must also understand that prayer is not about getting what we humans may ask. It is about submissively placing ourselves in the hands of a wise, loving and all-knowing God so he may do what is in our best interest eternally. Whatever may happen, I choose to trust him absolutely. What about you?

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