

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is a subject that all believers hear about on a very regular basis. We are told to pray daily or to pray continuously. We are told to pray at certain times, and on specified schedules, or to "pray through." Unfortunately, most of us receive very little instruction on exactly how we should pray. It can be very frustrating for new believers and experienced believers when they know that they should pray and yet they have no idea of what to say or do.

New believers, young believers, and even "old timers" may kneel down to pray and be completely lost as to what to do. As a result, many people neglect prayer or say things in their prayers that they should not. If you have ever tried to pray and did not know what to say, it will be easy to understand why some people avoid prayer while others seldom receive what they ask for.

It has been said that God answers every prayer. Sometimes He says, "Yes." Sometimes He says, "No." And sometimes He says, "Wait." While there is a lot of truth in that statement, why would you ever pray a prayer that God would say "No" to? There are, of course, reasons why we do that (mostly a lack of knowledge); but the purpose of this article is to teach you how to pray prayers that God will say "Yes" to.

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

In order to accomplish this:

1. We will attempt to overcome some of the problems people face when they do not know how to pray.
2. We will give you some fundamental knowledge and understanding that is essential to an effective prayer life.
3. We will look at what makes a prayer effective so that God will say "Yes" to your prayer.
4. And we will look at the "hands on" use of prayer in practical application.

This article is not intended to give you all of the answers to every circumstance that you might face. But if you will learn the principles that we will examine here, you will have the tools you need to develop an effective and rewarding prayer life.

It should be said that there are many different kinds of prayer that may be used at various times under differing circumstances. There are prayers of thanksgiving when you thank God for His goodness and mercy. There are prayers of praise when you tell God how good He is. There are prayers of petition and supplication in which you will make a special request to God. There are scripted prayers, spontaneous prayers, and ceremonial prayers. The prayer that we will focus on here is the prayer of faith.

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

The prayer of faith is a "prayer that changes things." Please note that it changes things and not people. Too often we try to help someone by praying that they change their behavior. But people do not change against their will. What people need is to recognize their need for God and to give their life to Him. Once they do that, then God can show them what He wants them to be and give them the ability to change.

The prayer of faith changes things or circumstances. Anything that can be seen is subject to change and can be affected by a prayer of faith. "...for the things which are seen [are] temporal; but the things which are not seen [are] eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18) The prayer of faith changes things like physical ailments, lack of wisdom, or your employment status. Through the prayer of faith, you can have healing and health for your body, wisdom for your mind, and even a good job.

Before you get the wrong idea, the prayer of faith is not a magic wand or a genie in a bottle. But the prayer of faith is a tool that we can use to implement God's will in our lives. Through the prayer of faith, we can have the things that God desires for us to have. God desires us to be healthy, wise, and gainfully employed, etc. Although these good things may not be a reality in your life right now, with the prayer of faith, these things that you are hoping for can become reality.

WHAT FAITH IS

To understand the prayer of faith, we should first know what faith is and where it comes from. The Bible says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence (or reality) of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) In other words, faith is the spiritual substance that causes the things you are hoping for to become reality. When you are sick, the thing that you are hoping for is health. Faith causes the thing that you hope for (health) to become real (you get healing). When you are confused and do not know what to do, faith causes the thing that you hope for (wisdom) to become reality. Faith is far more than simple mental agreement or sincere hope. When you have faith, the thing that you are hoping for is more real to you than whatever you may see with your eyes. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence (or reality) of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

WHERE FAITH COMES FROM

So where does this faith come from? The Bible says, "So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17) In other words, filling yourself with God's Word causes faith to

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

grow in your spirit. Now, of course, this implies more than a mere listening or simple reading of the Scriptures. "Hearing" God's Word requires that you seek out and devour the Scriptures as a source of nourishment for your spirit. An occasional or casual reading of Scripture will not cause your faith to grow any more than an occasional meal will cause your physical body to grow. But if you will seek out God's Word with the same zeal and dedication that you seek out your three physical meals each day, then you will see your faith grow strong.

ELEMENTS OF THE PRAYER OF FAITH

In our examination of the prayer of faith, we will use the Scriptures as the basis for our understanding. The passage upon which we will base our examination is James 5:16b "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (The word "man" means mankind and therefore includes women.) There are three elements here that are required for a prayer that avails much; that is, a prayer that God will say "Yes" to.

1. First, the man praying must be righteous.
 2. Second, the prayer must be fervent.
 3. And third, the prayer must be effective.
- The first two are widely taught to believers in most circles so we will only

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

cover those topics briefly. Then we will look in depth at the elements of an "effective" prayer.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

The first element of a prayer that avails much is that the man praying must be righteous. Righteousness is a word that is used in religious circles that may be confusing for new believers. However, the term simply means "a condition of being right." In the context that we are using it, righteousness is being right with God.

A man is right with God when he has surrendered his life and his will to the Almighty and accepted the grace (unearned favor) that God offers to men. As Jesus said, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:50) When this is incorporated into your daily life, it will affect every aspect of your thought and behavior. Perfect submission to God's will is a life-long endeavor. But a righteous man is that man whose heart, mind, and body long for that perfect submission.

Following God's will means far more than obeying the Ten Commandments. While they are a good starting point and a reliable guide for all men, the Ten Commandments do not cover every aspect in your life. The

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

Scriptures do not tell us which television shows to watch or which radio station to listen to. The Ten Commandments provide you some direction in making these decisions but you should listen to your heart to get specific direction in matters that are not clearly defined in the printed Word of God.

The Scripture says that God will write His Laws on our hearts and on our minds. (Hebrews 10:16) Often the best way to listen to your heart is with your conscience. If you feel guilty when you do something, it is probably because you are breaking the Law that God wrote on your heart.

Of course, much more could be said about righteousness. Entire books have been written that only scratch the surface of this subject. Although it will not be examined in depth here, you are encouraged to learn about righteousness and experience that condition of being right with God.

PRAYER MUST BE FERVENT

The second element of a prayer that God will say "Yes" to is that the prayer must be fervent. A fervent prayer is one that is heart-felt and taken seriously. A man who goes to God in prayer with a light hearted frivolity should not think that his prayer will avail much.

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

Too often, the ones who are guilty of frivolity in prayer are those who pray the most often. If your prayers have become an empty ritual or a social obligation, then your prayer is not fervent. (Please note that there is a difference between a "social" obligation and the obligation to obey God.) But if your prayer is heart-felt, serious, in love and obedience to the Almighty, then your prayer is fervent.

I know of a man who once made a special request of God. Before making the request, he prepared his words. He wrote his prayer on paper and then typed it neatly before placing it in an attractive folder. Then he bathed, combed his hair, shined his shoes, and put on his best suit of clothes. Then he went to a private room, closed the door, knelt down, and presented his written request to God. This man received an answer of "Yes" from God and was granted his request. Now please understand that the typewritten prayer, fancy clothes, and shined shoes did not move God. What moved God to grant the request was the faith that the man displayed. His actions were not important in any religious sense; but his actions did affect the man by helping him to have a fervent attitude in his prayer.

We will sometimes need to do extra things to help us focus on the importance of our prayer. We may go to a special place or wear a certain item of clothing or carry a special printed version of the Scriptures. Remember; do not let the things be more

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

important than the prayer. Those things may help you but God is more concerned about the condition of your heart than the condition of our clothes.

PRAY EFFECTIVELY

If you are righteous (right with God) and your prayer is fervent (heart-felt and taken seriously), then it must also be effectual in order for it to avail much; that is, in order for God to answer "Yes". If the words of your prayer are ineffective, then you have not given God much to answer. In fact, some prayers are so horribly ineffective that God will answer "No" in order to protect us from ourselves.

Consider the man praying for a loved one who was stricken with cancer. In his prayer, he said, "Dear God, I ask you to help his cancer." The prayer was not effective because his loved one's cancer did not need any help. It was already killing him. Now, of course, he did not mean it that way but that "is" what he said. In this situation, it would have been effective to ask God to remove the cancer and help the man's health. You can see then that it is important to choose your words carefully so that you are praying for the thing that you actually want.

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

At other times, we pray ineffective prayers by asking for the wrong things. The Bible says, "...yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume [it] upon your lusts." (James 4:2-3) For example, if you ask God to make you rich so you can have nicer things, your prayer is ineffective. A more effective prayer is to ask God to meet your needs and give you extra so that you can be a blessing to others with your generosity. There is nothing wrong with having nice things, but if your motivation in prayer is greed, then your prayer is ineffective.

Still more prayers are ineffective because you might pray with wrong motives. If your purpose for praying is based in pride, bitterness, anger, etc., then your prayer will be ineffective. You should continually examine your own motivations so that you are praying prayers that will accomplish God's will rather than your own selfish ambitions.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER

We have shown that in order to pray prayers that God will say "Yes" to, we must be righteous, fervent, and pray effectively. So let us look at some of the fundamental elements that make a prayer effective. There are four things that will always make your prayer effective. Those things are:

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

1. The Word of God.
2. The Name of Jesus.
3. The Holy Spirit.
4. Activated faith.

If these four things are employed properly, your prayer will bring God's will into reality no matter what your need may be.

WORD OF GOD

God's Word goes by many different names. Sometimes it is called His Law. Sometimes it is called Scripture, or His precepts, or His will. Regardless of the label, His Word communicates His desires and His ways to men.

We need to learn God's Word in a manner that results in an understanding of His desires. It is not enough to simply have the ability to quote Scripture (although it is good if you can). When we know His Word, we will know what He wants and how He does things. When we know what He wants and how He does things, we will be able to make our prayers effective because we will be able to ask for the things that God has said He wants.

The Bible says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." (1 John 5:14-15)

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

Since we know that God's Word is His will, we can be confident that He will answer "Yes" when we base our prayers on His Word.

When we have a need, we can base our prayer on a portion of God's Word that deals with the problem we are having. In this way, we know that we are praying for something that God wants. When we know that we are praying for something that He wants, then we can be confident that He is willing to say "Yes" to our prayer. We know that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us and we have the petitions that we asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

For example, if you are facing a situation where you need to make a decision but do not know what decision to make, you can base your prayer on the passage of God's Word which says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all [men] liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." James (1:5) Because God's Word says that we can ask for wisdom and God will give it, we can be confident that asking for wisdom is an effective prayer and we can expect that God will say "Yes" and grant our request because His Word says that He will.

Another example is in the area of sickness and disease. If we become ill, we can base our prayer on the portion of Scripture which says, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess [your] faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:14-16) Because of this passage, we know that if we are sick, healing is promised through the prayer of faith. If we base our prayer on this portion of God's Word, we can expect that God will say "Yes" and grant us the healing that the Scripture promises. There are also many other passages which promise healing and health for the believers.

Remember; this is an exercise of faith. We have previously shown that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. And we have shown that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. So, when we base our prayer on God's Word, it builds our faith. That built-up faith causes the thing we are hoping for to become reality.

It is clear why we should not pray for God to help someone's cancer. God's Word gives no indication that He wants to make cancer stronger. It says that God wants us to have healing. I know that God understands our intention even when our words are misguided; but He also hears our words and responds to them so it is important to speak the right words. Using God's Word in our prayer makes us certain that we are using the right words. If our words are

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

consistent with His Words, then His response will be favorable.

The Word of God contains many promises of blessings for the believers. Health, peace, wisdom, security, and joy are only a few of them. Of course, there are also promises of chastisement for unbelief; but if a righteous man will fervently pray for the promised blessings, God will honor His Word and say "Yes" to the request. Remember, God can not lie; so when He promises a blessing, we can be confident that He will give it to us.

There are some matters where the Word of God is not as clear as it is in others. The Bible is very clear that we can pray for wisdom or healing. It specifically says that we can. It is not so clear about praying for a good job. However, it does say that if we do not work, we should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10) and it does say that God will supply all of our needs according to His riches in glory. (Philippians 4:19) Now we should not use this as an excuse to be greedy and hoard wealth for ourselves. But it is very clear that it is God's will for us to work and be prosperous. So we can pray for gainful employment because the Word of God is clear that God wants us to work and have our needs met.

Many of the promises in God's Word are conditional. That is to say that the promised blessings depend upon your actions. For example, I often hear people

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

quoting the passage which states that God will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4) However; if you desire things that are contrary to God's will, do not expect your desire to be granted by God. We often ignore the first part of this quotation which says, "delight yourself in the Lord" and He will give you the desires of your heart. This promise is conditional. "IF" your delight is in God, "THEN" He will give you the desires of your heart because you will desire the same things that He desires.

God looks for opportunities to honor His Word. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper [in the thing] whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11) "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth [in] righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." (Isaiah 45:23) "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received [it] not [as] the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13) "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with [them,] and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." (Mark 16:20) If we will base our prayers on His Word, then He has the perfect opportunity to confirm His Word by saying, "Yes" to your prayer.

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

It may seem obvious, but you can not use God's Word in your prayer if you do not know His Word. The primary way that we learn His Word is to read it. Our lives become so cluttered with everyday life that we easily neglect the Word. But anyone can find ten or fifteen minutes each day to read the Word. You can also listen to the Word on tape, CD, or mp3. Listen to it while driving to work, while jogging, exercising, or even while you are in the shower. Just a few minutes each day will add up to a tremendous amount of knowledge and understanding. You can also "make time" to do in-depth study of a particular subject or problem that you may be facing.

There are many inexpensive study materials that you can buy. There is also a wealth of material available for free on the internet. But whatever the format or method you use; "feeding" on God's Word is the essential element. When you read the Word begin with a simple prayer like, "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law." (Psalm 119:18) As He opens your eyes, the Word will get inside your spirit. Your faith will grow and you will have a powerful tool that you can use to help you get the answer "Yes" when you pray.

NAME OF JESUS

Praying "in the name of Jesus" is a privilege given to believers. But it is far

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

more than simply adding the words to the end of a prayer. When properly understood, the name of Jesus is a powerful tool which will help to make your prayers effective. So let us:

1. look at how we know that we can pray in the name of Jesus.
2. Then we will examine what it means to pray in the name of Jesus.
3. And finally we will discuss how we can use this in our prayers.

Praying a prayer in the name of Jesus is a privilege granted to us by Jesus himself. We know that we can pray "in the name of Jesus" and expect results because Jesus said that we could. John 14: 13-14 says, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

Again in Mark (16:17-18) "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Note that Jesus said those who believe will act in his name. If you are a believer, then you can act in the name of Jesus.

In the Book of John (16:23-24), Jesus says, "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

give [it] you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

Jesus makes a tremendous statement in verse 23 when he says, "Whatever you ask."

"Whatever" means whatever. It covers every area of life. But he adds the condition, "in my name." It may not be immediately apparent that this is a condition, but when we examine what it means to pray "in his name," we will discover that there are conditions that must be met for a prayer to truly be "in his name."

When you act in someone's name, you are acting with their authority in order to promote their interests. This is true even if we are referring to concepts, ideas, or organizations. You may have heard expressions, such as, "in the name of justice," "in the name of the law," or "in the name of a government agency." In each case the actual meaning is "with the authority of justice and to promote the interest of justice," "with the authority of the law and to promote the interest of the law," and "with the authority of the government agency and to promote the interest of the government agency." When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are praying with his authority and to promote his interests.

Some have compared acting in the name of Jesus to the "power of attorney." When you give someone the power of attorney, you are giving them the legal authority to act on

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

your behalf and serve your best interest. Someone who has been given the power of attorney will conduct legal and business affairs in your absence. This is exactly what Jesus has given us.

When we act in the name of Jesus, we are conducting business for Jesus in his absence. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians (5:20), "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." When we pray in the name of Jesus we are standing in his place acting as he would act.

It should be obvious then that our prayer must be in agreement with God's will in order for it to truly be made "in the name of Jesus." Jesus would never pray anything that was contrary to God's desire. Jesus would never pray a greedy or selfish prayer. If we are to pray with his authority and to promote his interests, we must pray like Jesus would pray if he were here. We know that Jesus did everything in accordance with God's will; so when we pray "in the name of Jesus", we are praying to change the circumstances so that they are in line with God's will.

We know from our study of God's Word that it is His will for us to be healthy. So when a believer is sick, we can stand-in for Jesus and pray for the health of the sick person. By basing our prayer on God's Word and acting as Jesus would act, faith will change the circumstances so that the

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

illness is replaced with health. When we begin our prayer, health is not seen but it is hoped for. Faith is the substance of things hoped for and causes the health to be seen in reality.

The same idea holds true when praying for wisdom, gainful employment, or "whatever" circumstance that needs to change in order for it to be in agreement with God's will. If you base your prayer on God's Word (faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God) and you act as Jesus' ambassador (in his name), then faith will change the circumstance so that it agrees with God's will.

HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in your prayer life. People from different backgrounds have had very different teaching as to the role of the Spirit. There are different views as to how one receives the Spirit. And there are even varying opinions as to when one receives the Spirit. Some Christian groups believe the Holy Spirit gives them the gift and ability of "speaking in tongues." Others believe that "tongues" only existed in the first century. What we can be certain of is that the Bible has some very definite things to say about the Holy Spirit and his interaction with men. So let us try to avoid too much disagreement by focusing our

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

understanding on what the Scripture actually says.

The Holy Spirit can assist us in praying prayers which God will say "Yes" to. We know this because the Holy Spirit will never do anything that would be contrary to God's will. "And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what [is] the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to [the will of] God." (Romans 8:27)

The Holy Spirit can give you understanding of the truth of God's Word. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, [that] shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." (John 16:13) So, our interaction with the Holy Spirit will have a positive impact on our prayers.

He can remind you of the right Scripture for a given occasion. "But the Comforter, [which is] the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26)

He can pray for you. "Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Romans 8:26)

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

The Holy Spirit can speak through you. "But when they shall lead [you,] and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost." (Mark 13:11)

He can strengthen you and encourage you as well as those around you. "But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." (Jude 1:20) "He that speaketh in an [unknown] tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church." (1 Corinthians 14:4)

He can comfort you and give you peace. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." (John 14:16) "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17)

Now, these things do not happen by themselves. In order to receive the benefits offered by the Holy Spirit, you must seek out his assistance. The knowledge that the Holy Spirit can help you with your prayer is not enough. Action is required on your part. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." (James 2:17)

In the Bible, people received the gift of the Holy Spirit after taking action. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38) They took action; they repented and were baptized. And also, "When they heard [this,] they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." (Acts 19:5) They took action; they repented and Paul laid his hands on them. In both of these passages, it is clear that action was taken before these people received the gift and benefits of the Holy Spirit.

The same is true with you. You must take action in order to begin receiving the benefits that the Holy Spirit offers. You may begin that action by doing these things:

1. If you have not repented towards God and accepted His grace and mercy, do so now.
2. Then ask the Spirit to come into your life and become actively involved in your prayers.
3. Read this section on the Holy Spirit again in order to reinforce your understanding of what the Holy Spirit does to help you.
4. Finally, look for opportunities to allow this interaction with the Holy Spirit to take place.

You can ask the Spirit to show you truths in God's Word that will help you with the particular circumstance that you are facing. You can ask him to remind you of the Scriptures that apply to your given

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

situation. You can ask him to pray through you. You can ask him to pray for you. You can ask him for peace, comfort, joy, and encouragement.

You can be confident that the Holy Spirit will help you pray prayers that God will say "Yes" to. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit."
(Ephesians 6:18)

LAYING ON OF HANDS

The "laying on of hands" is a practice which is often used in prayer. It is widely used when a person is praying for someone other than himself. Unfortunately it is misunderstood and avoided by many believers. Even many of those who practice the laying on of hands do not understand its use and therefore they frequently misuse it.

Let us look at a proper understanding and use of the laying on of hands. To do this we will:

1. Begin by looking at what the laying on of hands is not.
2. Then we will examine what the laying on of hands is.
3. And finally we will explore the effective usefulness of this Biblical practice.

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

To begin with let us say that laying on hands is not magical. When you lay hands on someone, you are not conveying any power from your hand to their body. That is a concept found in witchcraft and other pagan religions; but it is not a part of Christianity. If someone claims to "have power" (to heal or anything else) in their hands, they are misguided at best. The Scripture says, "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul" (Acts 19:11). Note that God did miracles by Paul's hands. So the power is from God and not someone's hands.

The laying on of hands is properly termed "a point of contact to release (or activate) your faith." We have previously seen that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the reality of things not seen. Or in other words faith is the spiritual substance that causes the thing you are hoping for to become real. When faith is activated, the thing that you are hoping for becomes real. At some point in time something will trigger your faith into action so that the circumstances change and the thing you have been hoping for becomes reality. The laying on of hands is one of those things that can serve as a trigger to activate your faith.

This is what Jesus did when he faced people with unbelief. "And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed [them.] And he marvelled because of their unbelief." (Mark 6:5-6) This passage

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

teaches that Jesus could not do any great works in that region because of the unbelief of the people. But he did lay hands on a few of them and activate their faith for healing. Even though the people in that area did not believe in him, he was able to use the point of contact to activate faith in some of them.

It was through the use of the laying on of hands that the men in Ephesus received the Holy Spirit. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard [this,] they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." (Acts 19:1-6) Before meeting Paul, these men knew only repentance. Paul taught them about Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They accepted Jesus and when Paul laid his hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit. It was at that point of contact that their faith was activated and they received the gift that was being offered.

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

The laying on of hands works the same way for us. During prayer, the laying on of hands serves to release faith so that we receive the thing that is hoped for. When you are praying for someone (or being prayed for) to receive healing, wisdom, etc., faith becomes active at the point of contact so that the person being prayed for receives the gift (healing, wisdom) that God has already promised in His Word.

A physical point of contact can be achieved without the traditional laying on of hands. There is an example of a different point of contact in the woman with an issue of blood. (Mark 5:25-34) This woman had faith for healing. But her faith was not activated until she reached a point of contact (touching the hem of his garment) that triggered her faith. At that point, the thing she hoped for became reality. Touching the hem of his garment was her point of contact and worked for her in a similar way as the laying on of hands.

We find another example of an alternate form of a point of contact in Acts 19:12. "So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them." There was not any "power" in the handkerchiefs or aprons but they served as a mechanism to trigger the faith of those that were sick so that they received in reality the thing that they were hoping for.

It is not the physical touching that is

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

important. The important thing is establishing a point in time where your faith becomes active. This can be accomplished by any of a number of means. You might lay hands on someone or slap them on the back. You might draw a line on the floor and step over it with the one you are praying for. Or you might simply stand up from a seated or kneeling position. Or it could be a deliberate act of your will. Whichever method that you use, determine in yourself that at that point in time you are accepting into reality the thing that you have hoped for. At that point in time, your faith becomes active and you receive the answer "Yes" to your prayer.

This is what the laying on of hands does. It provides a definite point in time where your faith can become active. You believe God's Word. You act as Jesus' ambassador with his authority. You receive the assistance of the Holy Spirit. And when you lay your hands on the person you are praying for, faith is released (activated) and the thing that you are hoping for becomes reality.

IN THE REAL WORLD

So let us consider a real-world situation in a church setting. A pastor is praying for someone who is sick. In most churches this occurs at the end of the service. The sick person has spent an hour or more

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

listening to God's Word in song and sermon. As we have seen, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. So the faith of the sick person has been growing throughout the service. Then as the pastor prays for them, he will quote (or otherwise refer to) passages of Scripture which promise healing. This builds faith specifically for healing in the sick person as well as himself. The pastor prays in the name of Jesus acting as Jesus would act. He allows the Holy Spirit to guide him in his use of Scripture and choice of exact wording that will make the prayer most effective for that specific person. Then he says, "We receive healing, NOW." As he says the word "NOW," he gently touches the sick person with his hand. The faith that had been building throughout the service and during the pastor's prayer is released (activated) and the sick person receives the health that they had hoped for.

Of course, that was only an example. The exact wording and specific actions will vary from one situation to the next. But the underlying principles will not change. Your prayer must be based on the truths found in God's Word. You will act in the name of Jesus. You will seek and receive the assistance of the Holy Spirit. And you should find a definitive point in time to activate your faith.

Remember to use the laying on of hands properly and not frivolously. Never allow yourself to be deceived into thinking that you are something special. Or that you are

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

exercising some kind of magic power. All you are doing is exercising faith within the framework established in the Scriptures.

The laying on of hands is a "tool" that you can use to make your prayer effective. When you use the laying on of hands properly, God will say "Yes" to more of your prayers because you are establishing a specific point in time for your faith to become active. You are choosing that exact moment to accept the gift that God has promised in His Word (healing, wisdom, etc.).

The prayer of faith is effective when you:

1. Build your faith on God's Word.
2. Pray in the name of Jesus. (As his ambassador, acting as he would act.)
3. Allow the Holy Spirit to assist you.
4. Provide a definite point in time to activate your faith.

"I TRIED ALL THAT AND IT DOESN'T WORK"

You may reach a point where you have tried to pray and you are still getting the answer "No." There can be many reasons why you do not get the results you are looking for. Most often people who do not get what they ask for simply do not know how to ask or they ask for the wrong things. But there are many other things that can cause you to receive an answer of "No." So let us look

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

at some of the problems that you may face and give some practical examples of these problems.

First, let us look at the positive items listed above and consider the possibility that you may not be doing them properly. The Word of God, the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and activated faith will get results only when they are actually used. If you think that you are using them but are actually using them improperly, then you are not using them at all.

For example, you may think that you are praying God's Word when you are actually praying what you think it means. Consider the passage quoted earlier regarding "the desires of your heart." You will find people who believe that this verse means, "If you want it bad enough, God will give it to you." Or, "If it is important to you, God will give it to you." Or even, "God will give you anything you want." Although those ideas sound nice, they do not reflect the meaning of the verse.

Look at the text of the verse, "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." (Psalms 37:4) The first half of the verse is the part that will help us in our prayers. It tells us to delight ourselves in the Lord. When God is what delights us, then our desires will be like His desires. When our hearts and minds are focused on Him, then we will desire the same things that He desires. When we pray for things that He

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

desires, He will give us the desires of our heart.

If your prayer says, "God, you said that you would give me anything I wanted," then you are not actually using God's Word in your prayer. You are using a misunderstanding of God's Word. This will not produce an effective prayer.

So if your prayers are not receiving the answer "Yes," review the Scriptures you are using to insure that you have an accurate understanding of the meaning. Of course, this concept applies to any passage of Scripture that you may be basing your prayer on and not just the one example we gave here.

Your prayer may also be ineffective if you are not using the "name of Jesus" properly. Are you acting as Jesus' ambassador when you pray? Are you acting with his authority? Are you serving his interests? Or are you serving your own selfish interests? Only you and God know the answers to those questions.

Jesus prayed to fulfill the will of God in the lives of people. If you pray to satisfy your selfishness or any other wrong motive, then you are not praying in the name of Jesus even if you add the words to the end of the prayer. When you pray in the name of Jesus, you will be making God's will a reality in the circumstance you are facing. This will make your prayer effective and God will say "Yes" to your prayer.

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

You must also use the assistance of the Holy Spirit properly. The most common cause of misuse of the Holy Spirit is misunderstanding of his role in your prayer life. If you do not know that he can assist you with your prayers, then you will not be seeking his assistance. If you have been a part of an organization that teaches things contrary to the Scriptures mentioned above, you are encouraged to place your confidence and understanding on the Scripture. If you seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit, he will help you with your prayers.

Another reason that you may not use the assistance of Holy Spirit properly is because you try to do it on your own. You can become so proud of your knowledge and ability in prayer that you think you do not need any help. But of course, "Pride [goeth] before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." (Psalm 16:18) If you become too proud to seek the help of the Holy Spirit, your prayers will fall.

YOU CAN NOT VIOLATE FREE WILL

There are also other circumstances that may cause you to receive the answer "No" to your prayer. One of those things is the fact that you can not force your will on another person. Even if you are praying that a person be blessed, God will not give it to them if they do not want it.

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

I know of a man who asked God to heal a loved one of a chronic disease. His loved one had been in horrible pain for many years and was prepared to die. They had even asked the man to help them commit suicide. Instead of assisting in their death, this man prayed that they be healed. God said "No" to this man's prayer because He would not force the loved one to live against their will. The loved one eventually died of their illness despite the man's prayers.

The same principle applies even in less serious circumstances. For example, you may pray for someone who is ill with the common cold. But if that person revels in the attention they receive when they are sick, God will not heal them against their will.

SIN

Another thing that causes you to receive the answer "No" is sin. Remember the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. So if you have sin in your life or if the person you are praying for has sin in their life, then that requirement has not been met.

I knew a man who was healed of heart disease. Following many years of poor health, his heart was healed and this fact was verified by doctors who told he man that he no longer needed the medications he

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

had been taking. After he was healed, he began to sin. This man became involved in gossip and malicious back biting. Approximately two years later, his heart disease returned and he died of the very thing from which he had previously been healed.

I know of another man who received healing from a disability but he continued to collect disability payments from the government. This man's sins of lying, laziness, and ingratitude caused him to lose the healing he had gained. Your situation may not be as dramatic as these. You may be praying for healing from the flu or allergies. But if you have the sin of bitterness, pride, rage, etc., you may receive the answer of "No" until you repent of your sin.

CONCLUSION

God wants to say "Yes" to our prayers. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11) However, we do not give our children everything they ask for. Children learn which things they will get from us and which things they will never get. For example, our children know that they should never ask to eat sugar for dinner. We should be as smart as our children and

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

learn those things to which God will say "Yes" and avoid asking for those things to which He will say "No."

When you pray, examine yourself and your prayer. Ask yourself the following things:

1. Am I righteous?
2. Is my prayer fervent?
3. Is my prayer effective?
 - a. Is my prayer based on God's Word?
 - b. Am I praying in the name of Jesus?
 - c. Am I seeking the assistance of the Holy Spirit?
 - d. Have I established a definite time for my faith to become active?
4. Am I trying to violate someone's free will?
5. Is there any sin in my life?
6. Is there any sin in the life of the person I am praying for?
7. Are my motives pure?
8. Has my relationship with God developed to the point that I know which things He will say "Yes" to?

If you are a new or immature believer, do not be discouraged. By following the principles outlined here, your relationship with the Almighty will grow and flourish. You may not have had many positive results in your prayer life before, but now you have the tools that equip you to pray prayers that God will say "Yes" to.

Remember, this article is not meant to cover every situation or circumstance that you might face. It is intended to serve as a guide that will lead you towards praying

LEARN the PRAYER of FAITH

effective prayers. If you are facing a problem that you need help with, please seek the advice of your local pastor or feel free to contact me at the e-mail address given below.

I pray that you will grow in grace, love, faith, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. I thank God in advance for your increase because I know that He is faithful and will cause you to grow. Seek Him and He will cause you to be fruitful.

In the Service of the Almighty,

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