THE CONDITIONS OF PRAYER



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whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.
I John 3:22



We are beginning a two-part study on "The Conditions of Prayer." In this Messianic Bible Study, we will deal with the first part, "The Subjective Conditions of Prayer." The second part, "The Objective Condition of Prayer," will be covered in mbs149 under the title, "The Components and Content of Prayer."

INTRODUCTION

By way of introduction, there is no such thing as an unconditional prayer. All biblical prayers are conditional either explicitly or implicitly. In fact, Yeshua (Jesus) Himself taught at least three conditions for individual prayer: the necessity of faith; the necessity of abiding; and, the necessity of praying in His name. Thus, there is no such thing as unconditional prayer. In His own prayer life, Jesus prayed according to the will of the Father.

I. THE SUBJECTIVE CONDITIONS OF PRAYER

A. Personal Prerequisites

In Scripture, there are thirteen personal prerequisites to prayer.

1. Sincerity

The first personal prerequisite is sincerity. This is clearly taught by Scripture.

For example, in Job 16:17, Job says: *And my prayer is pure. It was sincere.*

Psalm 145:18: *Jehovah is nigh unto all them that call upon him. To all that call upon him in truth.*

Matthew 6:5 states: *And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites:* [who pray only to] *be seen of men*. This is a mark of insincerity.

Mark 12:40: *for a pretence make long prayers.*

Praying pretentiously is insincere. Praying in sincerity is one important prerequisite to prayer.

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2. Reverence

A second personal prerequisite is reverence.
Ecclesiastes 5:2 states: *Be not rash with your mouth.*

Rashness is a sign of irreverence.

Matthew 6:9 teaches that we are to approach God the Father and say: *Our Father who are in heaven, Hallowed be your name.*
When we approach God on that basis, there is a sense of reverence.

Hebrews 12:28-29 speaks about: [coming] *to God with reverence and awe: for our God is a consuming fire.*

3. Humility

The third personal prerequisite is humility.
Psalm 10:17 states that: *Jehovah heard the desire of the meek.*
In Luke 18:9-14, Yeshua gave the story of the Pharisee and Publican. The Pharisee used his prayer time merely to inform God how lucky He was to have this Pharisee on his team; the Pharisee expressed no need and no petition, he expressed pride. The publican, however, expressed a prayer of need. It was a petitionary prayer and there was a clear acknowledgement on the part of the publican of divine adequacy.

4. Importunity or Persistence

The fourth personal prerequisite is importunity or persistence.
This is taught by the parable that Jesus spoke in Luke 11:5-13. A man suddenly had a visitor. He did not have anything to serve the visitor, so he kept pestering his neighbor until his neighbor was willing to get out of bed and provide for his needs. The persistence arose out of a crisis, which prompted a petition. The reason for persistent prayer is that it will get results. The tense of verse 9 does imply continuous action and that is what persistence is: *continuous action.*

Persistence has three levels of prayer. The first level is that of asking: to keep on asking, for this shows that the petitioner believes enough to receive and this is important (Jas. 1:5-6). The second level of prayer is seeking: keep on seeking for the purpose of finding the answer (II Cor. 12:9). The third level is knocking: keep on knocking for the purpose of getting those doors opened (Rom. 1:9-12).

5. Submission

The fifth prerequisite of prayer is submission to the will of God. We must be in submission to God's will so that we are willing to receive whatever answer to our prayers He so chooses to give.

According to Matthew 6:10, we should pray: *your will be done.*

In Matthew 26:39, Yeshua Himself prayed: *not as I will, but as you will.*

In II Corinthians 12:8-9, Paul himself was willing to be in submission to the will of God concerning removal of the thorn.

According to I John 5:14, we are to pray according to His will.

6. Obedience

A sixth prerequisite is that of obedience. In I John 3:22, John wrote: *whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.*
Prayer is not effective if it does not align itself with the character of God. By aligning ourselves with the character of God, we are characterized by obedience and God will answer our prayers because we keep His commandments.

7. Earnestness

The seventh prerequisite is that of earnestness. Luke 22:44 states: *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly*. The context is that of the agony at Gethsemane. Three times Jesus prayed and the agony with which he prayed showed earnestness.

In Acts 12:5, we read that: *prayer was made earnestly* [of the church] *unto God* [for Peter].

8. Abiding in the Messiah

The eighth personal prerequisite is abiding in the Messiah. This means being in fellowship with the Lord. John 15:7 states: *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*
John 15:1-8, the context of verse 7, is the simile of the vine and the branches. The branch produces what the vine has determined. It is the vine that determines the fruit that the branch is going to produce. If we abide in Him, if we remain in fellowship with the Lord, we ask *whatsoever* He determines. In other words, this is not a blanket promise that we get whatever we ask. But if our desires are His desires, if the fruit we are producing is what the vine wants us to produce, then our desires are His desires. In that sense, of course, God will answer the specific request.

The meaning of *abide* is "to remain," to remain in vital contact with someone or something. It is a word that means, "to be joined with," "to be totally submitted to," and "to be depended upon." So, in the context, Yeshua said: *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you*.

Then in verse 10, He says: *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love*. Thus, the way we show that we are in fellowship with the Lord is by keeping His commandments.

To *abide* in the Messiah means to be so adjusted to Jesus as to have uninterrupted fellowship with Him. A believer is abiding when he decides to conscientiously depend upon Yeshua as the condition for being fruitful. When He said: *my words abide in you* (v. 7) *and I in you* (v. 4), it points out that Jesus is also in submission to His Word (Jas. 1:22).

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9. Forgiveness

The ninth prerequisite is having a forgiving spirit. In Matthew 6:12, the context of the model prayer, Yeshua said that we can ask for the forgiveness of our sins because we forgive those who sin against us.

In Mark 11:25, Jesus said: *And whensoever you stand praying, forgive*.

In other words, a forgiving spirit is a vital prerequisite to prayer life. If we have a bitter spirit, we may be mouthing prayers, but those prayers are unreal and, even worse, they are not heard.

10. Repentance

The tenth prerequisite to prayer is true repentance. This is the point of Luke 18:13-14 when the publican prayed: *be merciful to me a sinner*, he was expressing true repentance. Merely confessing our sins without true repentance does not avail.

11. Righteousness and Godliness

The eleventh prerequisite to prayer is righteousness and godliness. Psalm 32:6 reads: *let everyone who is godly, pray unto you.*

Psalm 34:15: *The eyes of the Jehovah are toward the righteous,*
And his ears are open unto their cry.

Psalm 145:19: *He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him; He also will hear their cry, and will save them.*

Proverbs 15:8: *the prayer of the upright is his delight.*

I Peter 3:12: *For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, And his ears unto their supplication: But the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil.*

12. Boldness

The twelfth prerequisite to prayer is boldness. This is the point of Hebrews 4:16. We are to approach His throne *with boldness*, in light of the fact that we have *a high priest* that can be *touched with the feeling of our infirmities* (v. 15).

13. Fervency

The thirteenth personal prerequisite for prayer is fervency. James 5:16 18 teaches: *The supplication* [fervent prayer] *of a righteous man avails much in its working.*

B. The Confession Of Sins

We need to confess our sins; we need to "wipe our slate clean" as part of our prayer life.

Psalm 66:18 states: *If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.*
We may be mouthing prayers, but if we dwell on iniquity, the prayer is not being answered.

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Proverbs 28:9 teaches: *He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.*

Isaiah 59:1-2: *your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear.*

Confessing sin is an important element as a subjective condition. Ideally, we should confess our sins when we first become aware of them. But there are two time limits that the Bible provides. First, Ephesians 4:26 states: *let not the sun go down on your wrath*. This teaches that sin should be confessed by nightfall. Secondly, I Corinthians 11:23-33 admonishes us to examine ourselves before we partake of Communion. Confessing sin is vital to prayer life.

So when we sin, we need to apply I John 1:9:
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

C. Watchfulness

By watchfulness we mean wakefulness; the wakefulness of the body with the mind; mental alertness. This is taught by Matthew 26:41: *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

Yeshua coupled watching with prayer.

That same point is made in Mark 14:38-39: *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And again he went away, and prayed, saying the same words.*
After informing the disciples that they needed to be characterized by watchfulness, He showed them what watchfulness was by taking off again to pray. Watchfulness emphasizes wakefulness because, in this context, the disciples were sleeping when Jesus made these statements.

D. Faith

Because faith is so important, we will discuss it in relationship to prayer in four parts.

1. Belief

First, we must believe. So Matthew 21:21-22 states: *have faith and doubt not, ... And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*
Have faith in God; for he that does not doubt, but believes that which God says will come to pass, then he will have it. All things *whatsoever* you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them.

Ephesians 3:12: *in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him.*

James 1:6-8: *But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting.* A doubter will not have his prayers answered, for one who doubts is *a double-minded man.*

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And, James 5:15 speaks of answered prayer and calls it the prayer of faith.

So clearly, the Bible teaches that we must believe.

2. The Content of Faith

Secondly, we need to raise a question. What is it that we need to believe in connection with prayer? We need to believe three things. This is where we exercise our faith.

a. The Existence of God

First, we must believe that God is; it is important that we believe in the existence of God. Hebrews 11:6 states: *and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him.*

b. God's Ability to Hear Our Prayers

The second thing we must believe is that He is able to hear and answer prayer. This is brought out a number of times in the Book of Psalms.
Psalm 4:1: *hear my prayer.*
Psalm 6:9: *Jehovah has heard my supplication, ... will receive my prayer.*
Psalm 17:1: *Give ear to my prayer.*
Psalm 39:12: *Hear my prayer, O Jehovah.*
Psalm 54:2: *Hear my prayer, O God.*
Psalm 55:1: *Give ear to my prayer, O God; And hide not yourself from my supplication.*
Psalm 61:1: *Attend unto my prayer.*
Psalm 88:2: *Let my prayer enter into your presence.*
Psalm 102:1: *Hear my prayer, O Jehovah.*
Psalm 143:1: *Hear my prayer, O Jehovah; give ear to my supplications.*
Notice how frequently in the Book of Psalms the emphasis is upon God's hearing the prayer. The psalmist, who comes to God in these prayers, clearly believed not only that God existed but that He was able to hear and therefore able to answer their prayers.

c. God's Disposition to Answer Our Prayers

The third thing we need to believe is that God is disposed to answer our prayers; that He wants to answer our prayers.
Psalm 66:19 states: *He has attended to the voice of my prayer.*
Psalm 66:20: *Blessed be God, Who has not turned away from my prayer.*
Matthew 7:9-11: *how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?* (v. 11)
Hebrews 11:6: *he is a rewarder of them that seek after him.*
James 1:5-6: *let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally.*

3. The Promises of God

Thirdly, the faith must be based upon the promises of God. Philippians 4:19 emphasizes God's promises, therefore we pray.

4. The Prerequisite Subjective Condition to Prayer

Fourthly, faith is a prerequisite subjective condition to prayer. This is brought out in two accounts in Scripture.

a. Inadequate Faith

The first account concerns the powerless disciples who were unable to

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cast out a demon, found in Matthew 17:19-20 and Luke 9:37-42. From these two passages, we can draw eight deductions. First, the disciples had *little faith*; that is, too little for this occasion. Second, it is not necessary to have great faith since even the amount measured by *a mustard seed* would have been sufficient. Third, it is important to have consistent faith. Fourth, the seed is a small thing, but it has the ability to shoot forth into flowering plants. By the same token, faith is a little thing that has great ability. Fifth, a little faith consistently applied can shoot up to great accomplishments. Sixth, correct prayer is impossible without faith, without faith we are not praying correctly (Jas. 1:6). Seventh, deficiency in faith will render prayer ineffective. And, eighth, this context of casting out a dumb demon, requires the prayer of faith.

b. Adequate Faith

The second account concerns the withered fig tree, found in Matthew 21:18-22 and Mark 11:20-24. The believer must continually believe that what he is asking for is happening right now; faith is to be exercised continually. This statement implies a note of expectation. Furthermore, asking is praying and praying is asking. In Greek, the action of the verb "receive" actually takes place before the action described in the verb "believe." What that means grammatically is: go on believing that you have received it, asking with expectancy. We are to go on believing even while we are asking knowing that God has already heard and answered our petition; maybe not the way we wanted Him to; maybe not the answer we wanted, but He has answered and we need to believe that.

c. The Order

This raises a theological question. What is the order? Is it prayer and faith or faith and prayer? Mark 11:22 teaches that it is not faith in faith nor is it faith in your prayer, but your faith is in God. It is impossible to exercise faith in one's prayer petition without at the same time having faith in God from whom the answer is going to come. So, faith in God comes first before any praying.

E. In Accordance With the Will Of God

1. The Principles

There are five principles of praying in accordance with the will of God.

First, God will answer every prayer positively that is consistent with His own purposes and with our own best good. In other words, God will say, "yes" to every prayer we pray that is consistent with His own purposes and for our own best good. If it is not for our own best good or if it is not consistent with His own purposes, God will say, "no."

The second principle is that God's will is what He purposes and plans. So if our prayer request is consistent with His purposes and plans, he will say, "yes." If they are inconsistent, then he will say, "no."

The third principle is that God binds Himself to answer every prayer

that comes within the scope of His will.

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The fourth principle is that prayer is a means of aligning our desires with the will of God. It is the means by which we grow sensitive to the will of God and, therefore, align our own desires with the will of God.

The fifth principle is that when the will of God is clear, we can ask with full confidence.

2. The Scriptures

There are eight specific passages where these principles are found.

a. Matthew 21:21-22

The first is Matthew 21:21-22. Verse 21 states: *If you have faith, and doubt not, ... it shall be done.*

True faith aligns personal desires with the will of God and such requests are guaranteed. Whenever we ask something that aligns with His will then positive answers are guaranteed. In Scripture, a request was often based on the promises of God and, where a promise is made, it is a guaranteed answer to prayer. But if God has not made a promise in a specific category, there is no guarantee that He will answer the prayer positively.

Verse 22 states: *And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

The believing of verse 22 is the *faith* of verse 21 and the *all things* of verse 22 are the personal desires which are aligned with the will of God.

b. Matthew 26:39 and 42

The second passage is Matthew 26:39 and 42 with a parallel account in Luke 22:42, which records both the prayer and the answer. First is the prayer. The request was: *let this cup pass away from me.* The condition was: *not as I will, but as you will*. Then came the answer. This request was not in accordance with the will of God. The result was that the request was denied. God the Father did answer the prayer of Yeshua but He did not answer it the way Yeshua wanted because it did not align itself with His will, with His plan, or with His purposes.

c. Mark 11:22-24

The third passage is Mark 11:22-24. Verse 22 admonishes: *Have faith in God.*

Faith is the means of receiving answers to your prayer. True faith always aligns personal desires with God's will.

So verse 23 adds: *Whosoever ... shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he says comes to pass; he shall have it.*

Negatively, one should *not doubt*, not doubting in what God has promised because there should be no doubt about that which God has promised. We can have doubts whether something is God's will when God has not spoken specifically or made a specific promise. But in

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those things that God has promised, there should be no doubt. Such prayers have guaranteed answers.

Not doubting is the negative but believing is the positive. If God has promised it, when we pray, we should believe that God will do it, and the result is, we shall have it. In James 1:5, for example, God made a promise: that those who prayed for wisdom will get it. So when we approach God and ask Him for wisdom, we need to believe that God will give it to us because this is a promise. When our prayers are based upon a clear promise of God, we have a guaranteed answer.

Verse 24 goes on to state: *All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and you shall have them.*
If the request is in alignment with the will of God, then, after praying, one should believe with all confidence that he will receive. If he believes with full confidence, he will receive, because it was a promise that God has made.

d. John 14:13-14
The fourth passage is John 14:13-14: *whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask anything in my name, that will I do.*
Again, the *whatsoever* in this verse is limited to that which will bring glory to God. If it will not bring God glory, He may not answer positively. But if it will bring God glory, He will answer. If a "no" answer will give God the greater glory, so be it. God may be glorified with a "yes" answer or He may be glorified with a no answer. Whichever way God is glorified, that is the way He is going to answer the prayer.

A good example of this is Paul's *thorn in the flesh* in II Corinthians 12:7-10. Was God going to get the greater glory with a yes answer or a no answer? The context indicates that if God gave a yes answer, it was more likely that Paul would have gotten the glory rather than God. By refusing the request Paul made, the no answer gave God the greater glory because Paul was going to learn how to be sufficient in God's grace. So in this case, a no answer did give God the greater glory.

e. John 15:7
The fifth passage is John 15:7: *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*
The context of this verse is that of "abiding in the Messiah" which means, "to be in fellowship with Him." The issue in this context is not salvation, but fruit-bearing. So if one is abiding in the Messiah, he will not be asking anything outside the will of God. If we are in fellowship with God, we will not ask for things outside His will. The *whatsoever ye will* statement in this verse is limited by the context, which is speaking of fruit-bearing. Whatever you ask in the realm of fruit-bearing, God will answer because fruit-bearing is part of the revealed will of God.

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It is something he wants to see in every believer. Every prayer in this regard will definitely be answered.

f. John 15:16

The sixth passage is John 15:16: *that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

The context here is also that of fruit-bearing, and prayer here is prayer associated with productivity. The *whatsoever ye shall ask* is limited in this context to fruit-bearing. Since fruit-bearing is part of the revealed will of God, God will answer every prayer in this regard. So what was taught by John 15:7 is also taught by John 15:16. Believers were chosen by God for two reasons: first that they *should go* [out] *and bear fruit;* and secondly, that *whatsoever* [they] *shall ask*, He will answer. In this context, He will answer their prayers that they become fruitful. Fruit-bearing believers is definitely a part of the will of God.

g. John 16:23-24

The seventh passage is John 16:23-24: *If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name.*

This is not a "blank check" that anything you ask for God will give you, no matter what. The context has to do with joy and sorrow (v. 22). A believer's joy is very much part of the revealed will of God. Because such prayer is within the realm of God's will, the request will be answered. So if we ask for joy in the realm of our salvation, we will get it. If we ask for joy in living out the spiritual life, we will get it. God wants to answer these types of prayer.

h. I John 5:14-15

The eighth passage is I John 5:14-15. Verse 14 states: *if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*

This is an absolute principle. Anything we ask in accordance with His will, He will hear us. The *anything* of the previous passages is limited by this passage to *according to his will*. So anything according to His will, will be granted. Anything not according to His will, will be denied. That is why it is so important to remain in fellowship with the Lord. That is why it is so important to realize that we stand on the promises of God; that is why it is so important to understand that these promises are limited by specific conditions. The condition here is: according to his will.

Then verse 15 states: *and if we know that he hears us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him.*

Again, the *whatsoever* and *the petitions which we have* of verse 15 are all limited by verse 14: they need to be prayed in accordance with the will of God. If they are according to the will of God then, yes, we have them. God will answer prayers, which are in accordance with His will.

These eight passages provide the principles of prayer discussed earlier. God will answer every prayer positively that is consistent with His own

purposes and for our own best good. God's will is what He purposes and plans so that if we ask in accordance with His purpose and plan, the answer is "yes," but if not, the answer will be "no." God binds Himself to answer every prayer that comes within the scope of His will. Fellowship is a means of aligning our desires with the will of God. When the will of God is clear or when we have a clear promise from God, we can pray confidently that prayer is going to be answered.✡

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IF YOU ENJOYED THIS BIBLE STUDY, DR. FRUCHTENBAUM RECOMMENDS:
MBS144, 145, 146, 147, 149, 150, and 151.