

Pray for Yourself

READING

John 15
Matthew 6
Matthew 7
John 17
Luke 18
1 Samuel 1:James 4
Psalm 139
Philippians 4
1 Peter 5

Search me, God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

I read someone recently who said that it’s wrong to pray for yourself. Let’s see.

This one doesn’t specifically say “for yourself”, but in John 15 Yeshua said, “If you remain in me, and my declarations remain among you, you’ll request whatever you want and it’ll come to pass for you.”

Now it’s hard to tell in modern English, but all the “you”s are plural. So he’s speaking to a group, and telling them that they can collectively request anything.

Maybe it *is* wrong to pray for yourself? This paragraph definitely doesn’t explicitly say you can. But of course it doesn’t exclude it either...

Earlier, in the “Sermon on the Mount”, Yeshua said, “But you, (singular), whenever you pray, enter into your storeroom and shut your door, and pray to your father who’s in secret. And your father, who observes things done in secret, will repay you in the open.” That sounds more personal. But again, not explicitly saying you should pray hidden away for yourself, just that you should pray hidden away so it doesn’t become about looking good in front of others. (“Look at me!” Is a bad strategy for Christians. If you ever find yourself thinking that, ... stop what you’re doing).

He then told us to not just pray the same thing over and over. Sadly I did that once, when I had been a Christian for just a couple of weeks. Graciously Yahweh did answer the prayer after a couple of hours. But I don’t do that any more. To the point that I often just pray for things once. Even big things. After that I know he heard me, and it’s up to him whether to respond, and which answer to give.

And then Yeshua went on to give us the example which has become known as “The Lord’s Prayer” - although he prayed many times in the Bible, and based on what he just said, he would not have just repeated exactly the same phrase every time. (Where do we get these teachings from!)

Now, in that prayer there is nothing specifically where we’re praying for ourselves.

There are some collective “we”, “us” things like... daily food, forgiveness based on our forgiveness of others, and deliverance for us as a group from evil and future trials.

(Difficulties, not necessarily legal trials).

Matthew 7 is also you in the plural.

So again, we, as a group, can ask for things and we will receive. But as individuals?

Hmm...

Although verse 8 does talk about “the one” ... which could be you, individually.

If you are the one who seeks, you’ll be the one who finds.

If you are the one who knocks, you’ll be the one to whom it’s opened.

And in John 17. Yeshua prays... for himself!

“And now father, glorify me with yourself, to the glory which I had with you before the world was.”

And for his followers. “I ask about them, I don’t ask about the world but about those whom you’ve given to me, because they’re yours.”

“But now I’m coming to you, and I say these things in the world so that they may have my joy completed among them.”

“I’m not asking that you should lift them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the wicked one.”

“Just as you sent me into the world, I’ve also sent them into the world.”

“And I’m not only asking about them, but also about those who trust in me through their message.”

Well that’s pretty basic right? If Yeshua does something, then it can’t be sinful, so we’re also allowed to do it?

He prayed for himself in Matthew 26. “My father, if it’s possible let this cup pass from me — except not as I want but as you want.”

And in Luke 18, he rebuked the Pharisee for trying to get attention and trying to sound righteous. But not for praying for himself.

And the tax collector, who also prayed for himself, for his forgiveness, ... went away having been declared righteous.

Hannah prayed for herself, (in 1 Samuel 1).

And, btw... Eli didn’t hear her. Doesn’t mean she didn’t speak. If she was whispering her prayer, that would explain why her lips were moving. If she was only “thinking” it, they probably wouldn’t be.

I might be wrong, decide for yourself. “As she continued praying before Yahweh, Eli saw her mouth. Now Hannah spoke in her heart. Only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk.”

Honestly, I know God can hear your thoughts, but I think if you only think your prayer, then you’re just thinking about praying.

Say your prayers. It might change a lot of things for you.

But that suggests another issue. Not who we’re praying for, but what we’re asking for.

So far everyone has been basically praying for their own spiritual growth. Their own righteousness.

About something they’ve done, or are about to do for God

But let’s be honest. Most modern Christians pray for money, easy healthy life, longer life, things like that.

Maybe you are praying for yourself and wondering why they’re not answered? Maybe that’s why.

James 4 - “Where do battles and fighting among you come from? Aren’t they from your pleasures, warring in your body parts? You desire but you don’t have. You murder, and you’re jealous, and you aren’t able to attain. You fight and you battle. You don’t have, because you don’t request. *You request but you don’t receive, because you request evilly, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*”

”Adulterers and adulteresses. Don’t you know that fondness of the world is enmity with God? So whoever intends to be a friend of the world is appointed as an enemy of God.”

Your choice really.

And let’s just finish with David’s famous prayer for himself. Psalm 139

”Yahweh, you have searched me, and you know me.

You know my sitting down and my rising up.

You perceive my thoughts from afar.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

For there is not a word on my tongue, but, behold, Yahweh, you know it altogether.

You hem me in behind and before.

You laid your hand on me.

This knowledge is beyond me.

It’s lofty; I can’t attain it.

Where could I go from your Spirit?

Or where could I flee from your presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, you are there.

If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there!

If I take the wings of the dawn, and settle in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand will hold me.

If I say, “Surely the darkness will overwhelm me; the light around me will be night”;

even the darkness doesn’t hide from you, but the night shines as the day.

The darkness is like light to you.

For you formed my inmost being

You knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Your works are wonderful.

My soul knows that very well.

My frame wasn’t hidden from you, when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my body.

In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them.

How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is their sum!

If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand.

When I wake up, I am still with you.

If only you, God, would kill the wicked.

Get away from me, you bloodthirsty men!

For they speak against you wickedly.

Your enemies take your name in vain.

Yahweh, don’t I hate those who hate you?

Am I not grieved with those who rise up against you?

I hate them with perfect hatred.

They have become my enemies.

Search me, God, and know my heart.

Try me, and know my thoughts.

See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

That sound like your prayer?

Like something you might say?

Or is yours more like a shopping list?

Sometimes I even think that a shopping list is better than no prayer at all. At least it reveals my heart in an honest way.

You’re not pretending. But if you can manage it, I would recommend praying for your character, your relationships, your faith.

Paulus in Philippians, and Peter in 1 Peter both talk about casting your anxiety on God. You’re free to do that. But your answer might not be delivered to your door in a box.

It might be a change in your heart. Be ready for that.

You can pray for yourself.

So pray for your character. Your relationships. Your faith.