Is prayer clinically effective?

Is prayer good for you? No one argues that prayer by those who believe in prayer's healing power might indeed calm the soul, relieve

Abstract

Anecdote and research on prayer's clinical effectiveness has become big news of late. A 1997 *Christianity Today* cover story (preceding a *Newsweek* prayer cover story) explains "how the medical community is discovering the healing power of prayer." Although the magazine acknowledges that "petitionary prayer is not 100 percent effective" (imagine if it were), it welcomes the conclusion of Georgetown University internist and prayer researcher Dale Matthews, "that, scientifically, prayer is good for you. The medical effects of faith on health are not a matter of faith, but of science."

Is prayer clinically effective?
stress, and lead to reduced hypertension, controlled headaches, and strengthened immune functioning. But a sugar pill, offered as if it were a real therapy, can do as much. Such is the power of positive belief (a fact of life that guarantees some successes for the devotees of alternative medicine gurus such as Deepak Chopra and Andrew Weil, regardless of whether their specific recommendations have any intrinsic healing power).

But modern advocates of prayer's power have something more in mind than a placebo effect. Prayers of intercession and petition can change reality, they believe. Did not Jesus say, "Ask, and it will be given you"? Why not, then, pray for health, wealth, parking places, better grades, safe air travel, and even a sunny day for the church picnic? One presumes that Pat Robertson had Jesus' promise in mind when he asked God to steer hurricane Gloria away from his Virginia Beach television headquarters: "I felt that if I couldn't move a hurricane, I could hardly move a nation." General George S. Patton held the same concept of prayer when he ordered that all chaplains pray for an end to the winter rains that in 1944 immobilized his troops:

General Patton: Chaplain, I want you to publish a prayer for good weather. I'm tired of these soldiers having to fight mud and floods as well as Germans. See if we can't get God to work on our side.

Chaplain O'Neill: Sir, it's going to take a pretty thick rug for that kind of praying.

General Patton: I don't care if it takes the flying carpet. I want the praying done.

The resulting prayer, which was distributed by the U.S. Army with Patton's Christmas greetings, called upon God to restrain these immoderate rains with which we have had to contend. Grant us fair weather for Battle. Graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call upon Thee that, armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory, and crush the oppression and wickedness of our enemies, and establish Thy justice among men and nations. Amen.
Some religions claim that praying for somebody who is sick can have positive effects on the health of the person being prayed for. Meta-studies of the literature in the field have been performed showing evidence only for no effect or a potentially small effect. For instance, a 2006 meta analysis on 14 studies concluded that there is “no discernible effect” while a 2007 systemic review of intercessory prayer reported inconclusive results, noting that 7 of 17 studies had “small, but significant, effect The key to effective prayer is a heart of dependence. Pray with the holy urgency of one who has a need that only Jesus can meet. Your prayers will not mean anything to God until they mean everything to you. These are the marks of effective prayer. The last passage of chapter 1 (verses 40-45) records the miracle of Jesus cleansing a leper. It is also recorded in Matthew 8:1-4 and Luke 5:12-15. But there is a lesson about effective prayer in the actions and words of the leper. The way he came to Jesus shows us how to go to God in prayer. Mark 1:40 teaches us… Five Marks of Effective Prayer… Urgent Prayer. Mark 1:40 begins, “And a leper came to him.” What is prayer and key to praying effectively? Understanding God and growing closer to Him can lead to comfort and healing of problems. Prayer is communicating with God and spiritualizing thought. Prayer and belief in God are a foundation upon which we rely in times of trouble and when we need comfort. Many use prayer as their tool of choice for guidance and solving problems, resulting in healing. What is the key to effective prayer? Mary Baker Eddy's chapter on Prayer in Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures is a very thought-provoking analysis of prayer, and how it benefits us and those around us. She talks about the motives for prayer and how we can pray effectively, using Christ Jesus as a prime example. The L