

The Silence of Heaven: Assessing Answers to Prayer — 10

Phil Stilwell
Independent Scholar
ORCID: 0009-0009-3725-8682
Revised August 2026

Central claim

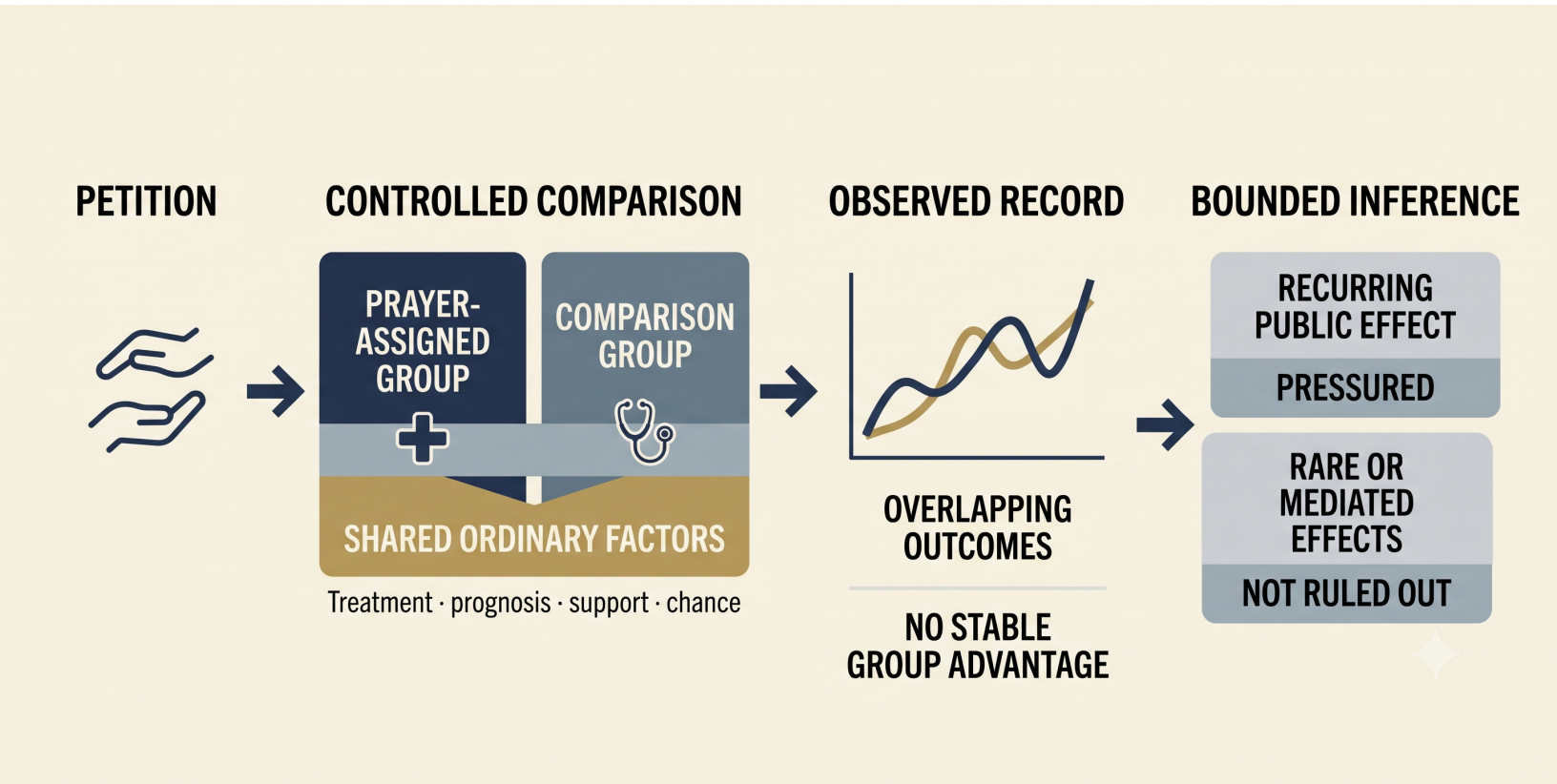
The Bible presents faithful prayer as making a real difference to what happens. If that promise were being fulfilled, the world should display some clear, repeatable difference between outcomes with suitable prayer and outcomes explained by treatment, human action, circumstance, and chance. No such difference is publicly manifest. The most reasonable conclusion is that petitionary prayer does not reliably change external events, even though praying may comfort, focus, or unite the people who pray.

Preview:

1. Biblical promise	2. Expected difference	3. What reality shows	4. Rational conclusion
Faithful asking is tied to receiving, healing, and effective action	Suitable prayer should sometimes produce a visible advantage over ordinary causes	Testimony is uncontrolled; rival religions report it; controlled studies find no stable benefit	The promised external effect is not manifest, so belief in it should be surrendered

This is not the claim that no god could ever act. It is the more focused claim that the Bible’s prayer promise has not produced a publicly recognizable pattern that separates divine answering from ordinary events.

Visual preview:



The visual isolates the controlled-evidence strand: when prayer and comparison groups share the same ordinary causes, the promised advantage should appear as a stable separation. It does not. The paper adds the wider evidence from ordinary testimony, failed predictions, and rival religious traditions.

Abstract

Christian scripture does not present petitionary prayer merely as private reflection. It repeatedly connects faithful asking with receiving, healing, and effective action. That promise creates a reasonable expectation: if God answers suitable prayers in a way that changes external events, reality should show some dependable difference between a world with answered prayer and a world running on treatment, human effort, circumstance, and chance. No such difference is publicly manifest. Personal stories usually omit the unanswered requests and the ordinary chance of the desired event. Rival religions can produce the same kind of stories. Controlled studies of distant intercessory prayer have found no stable, repeatable health benefit. And the familiar reply that God may say yes, no, wait, or give something better makes every possible outcome fit the claim, which means no outcome can genuinely test or support it. These points form a cumulative case, not a claim that every alleged miracle has been individually disproved. They support the plain conclusion that petitionary prayer does not reliably change external outcomes. Prayer may still comfort people, organize attention, encourage care, or strengthen a community. Those human effects are real possibilities, but they are not evidence that God granted the request. The paper ends by proposing a fairer and more decisive test, designed jointly by believers and critics, that could reveal either a repeatable benefit or strong evidence that no meaningful recurring benefit exists.

Keywords: petitionary prayer; intercessory prayer; biblical promises; answered prayer; prayer efficacy; evidence; philosophy of religion

1 The Promise Is Plain; the Fulfillment Is Not

This paper is addressed especially to Christians who believe that prayer works—not merely that prayer can calm the person praying, but that God sometimes grants requests and thereby changes what happens in the world. The challenge is direct: the Bible speaks loudly about answered prayer, while reality supplies no equally clear sign that the promise is being kept.

The relevant passages are not hard to find. Jesus tells hearers to ask, seek, and knock, then compares God’s generosity with that of ordinary parents (Matthew 7:7–11). He says that believing prayer can move a mountain and that what is asked in prayer will be received (Matthew 21:21–22; Mark 11:22–24). In John’s Gospel, requests made in Jesus’ name, by disciples who abide in him, are tied to divine action and fruitfulness (John 14:13–14; 15:7, 16; 16:23–24). James links the “prayer of faith” with the sick being raised up and presents Elijah’s prayer as effective in the natural world (James 5:14–18). First John adds a condition: requests are heard when they accord with God’s will (1 John 5:14–15).

These passages contain conditions and belong to different literary settings. They do not promise that every careless wish will be granted. Yet taken together, they appear to say more than “prayer may improve your mood.” They connect suitable asking with receiving and with events that matter outside the petitioner’s mind. Christian preaching and practice normally assume this. People pray for healing, safety, employment, rain, reconciliation, conception, rescue, and conversion because they hope the prayer will help bring about one future rather than another.

That hope may be false. To say so is not to mock the petitioner or deny the emotional value of prayer. It is to ask the question Christians ask about the miracle claims of other religions: what reason is there to think that the desired event happened *because of* the prayer?

Philosophers of prayer make the same basic distinction in more formal terms. A request is not shown to be effective merely because the requested event occurs later. The request must help explain why that event occurred rather than not (Cohoe, 2014; Davison, 2017). Rain after prayer is not yet answered prayer. Recovery after prayer is not yet divine healing. “After” is not “because of.”

The thesis. The biblical promise of answered petition is not publicly, repeatedly, and recognizably manifest in reality. Where ordinary causes can be compared, prayer reveals no stable added effect. Where they cannot, believers rely on stories that would be equally available if prayer did nothing. The reasonable conclusion is that petitionary prayer does not reliably change external events.

This is stronger than saying that one old medical study failed. It is also more careful than claiming to know that no divine action has ever occurred. A hidden and unrepeatable act is always logically possible. But a promise can fail as a public claim even when its defenders can imagine exceptions. The issue is whether the world displays the kind of difference the promise gives us reason to expect.

2 What Difference Should Answered Prayer Make?

Suppose a church prays for a member with cancer and the person recovers. The recovery feels like an answer. But before assigning a divine cause, we must ask what also happened: surgery, chemotherapy, spontaneous remission, an early diagnosis, a mistaken prognosis, or some combination. We must also ask how often comparable patients recover without that church's prayers, and how many equally sincere prayers ended in decline and death.

The same logic applies outside medicine. People find work after prayer, but people also find work without prayer. Rain follows prayer, but it falls on fields belonging to people with incompatible religions and on fields belonging to people with none. A missing child may return after thousands pray; another does not return despite the same devotion. The bare sequence "we prayed, then the hoped-for event occurred" cannot tell us whether the prayer changed anything.

Imagine a town that credits every fire outcome to an invisible firefighter. If the building is saved, the firefighter intervened. If it burns, the firefighter had a hidden reason. If the fire pauses and returns, the firefighter said "wait." If a neighboring building survives, the firefighter supplied a better answer. This story can be made consistent with any outcome. That is exactly its weakness. Nothing that happens helps us tell whether the firefighter was there.

The problem is not that God sometimes says no. Any personal agent may refuse a request. The problem is that Christian interpretation commonly gives us no reliable way to distinguish "God answered" from "things happened as they would have happened anyway." If answered prayer changes external events often enough to ground confident testimony and biblical preaching, some pattern should survive that comparison.

No single kind of evidence has to carry the whole case. The expectation arises from four facts together:

1. the scriptural language is broad and confident;
2. prayer is practiced on an enormous scale;
3. petitions concern many outcomes that can be observed; and
4. believers regularly treat favorable outcomes as evidence that prayer works.

Prayer is not a rare practice with only a handful of chances to succeed. A 2025 Pew Research Center survey found that prayer was widespread across many societies; majorities reported praying daily in 14 of the 35 countries surveyed, including 44% of U.S. adults, and daily prayer was common among Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in several countries (Evans et al., 2025). Not all of that prayer is petitionary, but even a small petitionary share creates a vast field of opportunities for apparent answers.

This scale matters. With enough requests, striking coincidences are inevitable. Some very sick people will recover, some unlikely meetings will occur, and some desperate needs will be met shortly after prayer. The rational question is not whether remarkable successes exist. It is whether successes occur more often, more specifically, or more reliably than they would without a prayer-produced effect.

3 The Cumulative Case from Reality

The negative case does not rest on an absence of anecdotes. There are many anecdotes. It rests on the failure of those anecdotes to become a clear pattern when the missing information is restored. Four lines of evidence converge.

3.1 Ordinary testimony hides the denominator

A church may celebrate the one recovery that followed prayer without announcing the twenty similar cases in which prayer was followed by deterioration. The success enters testimony; the failures become “God’s mysterious will,” a lesson in patience, or a reason to keep praying. This is denominator neglect: the number of apparent answers is reported without the total number of requests from which those answers were selected.

Without that denominator and a fair comparison rate, a testimony cannot show efficacy. A one-in-a-thousand event is impressive only if it was less likely than one in a thousand without prayer. A recovery rate of 30% after prayer is evidence of benefit only if similarly situated people recover at a lower rate without the added prayer. Ordinary testimony rarely supplies this information.

This does not mean the witness is lying. Human beings naturally remember emotionally powerful matches between hope and outcome. The point is logical, not accusatory: sincere memory is not a controlled comparison.

3.2 The same evidence appears in rival religions

Christians are not the only people who pray and later experience fortunate events. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and members of other traditions also ask for help, healing, protection, and guidance. The religions make incompatible claims about God, revelation, and salvation. Yet their followers can use the same argument: “We prayed; the desired event happened; therefore our prayer was answered.”

That method cannot establish the distinctively Christian conclusion, because it appears to confirm incompatible religious systems with equal ease. A Christian may believe there is an independent reason to trust Christian testimony over all the others. But the favorable outcome itself does not supply that reason. Unless Christian prayer produces a recognizable advantage, the symmetry remains.

3.3 Controlled intercession shows no stable benefit

Controlled trials are imperfect, but they ask the question ordinary testimony usually avoids: when similar people receive similar medical care, does assigning additional organized prayer improve outcomes?

Two of the best-known large studies did not find the promised advantage. MANTRA II assigned 748 cardiac patients to interventions that included off-site prayer; the prayer assignment did not improve the main combined outcome (Krucoff et al., 2005). STEP enrolled more than 1,800 coronary-bypass patients. Assigned intercessory prayer did not improve complication-free recovery. Patients who knew they would receive prayer had more complications, a result that should not be inflated into “prayer causes harm,” but the added prayer plainly did not produce the expected benefit (Benson et al., 2006).

Reviews are mixed in detail but do not reveal a stable, repeatable clinical advantage. One meta-analysis found an overall effect that did not differ from zero and that nearly disappeared when a controversial study was removed (Masters et al., 2006). Another reported a small pooled effect while stressing differences among the studies and their design problems (Hodge, 2007). A Cochrane review covering ten randomized studies and 7,646 participants found no clear effect on death, general clinical state, coronary-care readmission, or rehospitalization (Roberts et al., 2009).

These studies are old and narrow. They do not test every prayer, and control patients may also receive unrecorded prayer. But those limits do not turn the record into evidence for efficacy. At most they leave room for an effect too selective, too small, too hidden, or too dependent on unknown conditions to produce a stable advantage. That is already far from the confident public promise many Christians defend.

3.4 The world looks as it would if prayer did not work

When a request succeeds, ordinary causes remain sufficient. When it fails, theology supplies a reason the request was refused. When rival religions report successes, their stories look structurally the same. When controlled comparisons are made, no stable added benefit appears. This is not the record we would expect from a clear promise reliably fulfilled. It is the record we would expect if prayer sometimes comforted people but did not alter

external events.

Table 1 gathers the cumulative case. No row alone claims universal proof. Together they show that the promised difference never becomes publicly identifiable.

Table 1: The promised difference and the observed record

Evidence source	If prayer reliably changes events	What we actually observe
Personal testimony	Successes should exceed relevant ordinary success rates.	Successes are selected from an unknown total and are rarely compared with base rates.
Religious traditions	The true tradition should show some distinctive advantage.	Incompatible religions generate the same kind of answered-prayer testimony.
Controlled health studies	Added organized prayer should repeatedly improve declared outcomes.	Large trials and reviews show no stable, repeatable clinical benefit.
Failure and interpretation	At least some outcomes should count clearly against efficacy.	Yes, no, wait, and “something better” allow every result to be called an answer.

The recent philosophical literature increasingly treats this as an evidential problem rather than merely a puzzle about how an all-knowing God could respond. Oren argues that the actual pattern of outcomes should bear on belief in petitionary prayer’s effectiveness (Oren, 2025). The point can be stated without technical machinery: a claim that makes no recognizable difference to what we observe has not earned confidence from what we observe.

4 Three Arguments Christians Must Answer

The cumulative case can be stated as three short arguments. Their form is deductive—if the premises are true, the conclusion follows—while their key factual premises are supported inductively by the broad record just reviewed.

Argument 1: The missing difference

1. If the Bible’s promise of answered petition is being fulfilled in the ordinary external sense, then across the enormous number of suitable prayers there should be some clear and repeatable prayer-linked difference in outcomes.
2. There is no publicly established difference of that kind: stories lack fair comparisons, rival faiths produce parallel stories, and controlled studies show no stable benefit.
3. Therefore, the Bible’s promise is not manifest as an external effect, and belief that petitionary prayer reliably changes events is not warranted.

The first premise does not require that God answer every prayer. It requires only that a practice advertised as effective make some discoverable difference across a huge number of opportunities. A freely acting God could answer selectively and still produce a pattern. Total elusiveness is not what the confident promise leads readers to expect.

Argument 2: The every-outcome problem

1. An outcome can support a claim only if some possible outcomes would count more against the claim than for it.
2. The rule “God may say yes, no, wait, or give something better” fits every possible outcome.
3. Therefore, outcomes interpreted by that rule cannot show that prayer works.
4. If a favorable result is counted as evidence for answered prayer, unfavorable results must be allowed to count as evidence against it; otherwise the method is rigged.

This argument does not deny that a God could refuse. It denies that a believer may count the granting as evidence while ensuring in advance that refusal, delay, silence, and contrary outcomes never count the other way. A claim protected from every loss is also cut off from every evidential win. The semantic expansion of “answer” is treated at greater length in a companion paper (Stilwell, 2026b).

Argument 3: The rival-religion test

1. A method that equally confirms incompatible religious claims cannot, by itself, establish one of them as true.
2. Post-prayer success stories are used in the same way by followers of incompatible religions.
3. Therefore, post-prayer success stories do not, by themselves, establish the Christian claim that the biblical God answered.

Christians routinely apply this standard to other religions. They do not accept a Hindu’s recovery, a Muslim’s rescue, or a psychic’s lucky prediction merely because the claimant is sincere and the event was striking. Intellectual honesty requires the same standard at home.

5 The Christian Fork

The debate reaches a fork that should not be hidden under theological language.

Table 2: Two ways to understand the biblical promise

Reading	What it predicts	Evidential result
External promise	Suitable petitions sometimes change which external event occurs.	A stable difference should appear. Its absence counts against this reading.
Outcome-proof promise	God may answer through any result, hidden purpose, ordinary cause, refusal, delay, or inner change.	Every result fits. The claim may remain logically possible, but no favorable outcome can publicly confirm it.

On the first path, the promise says something bold about the world. It is then exposed to the evidence, and the evidence is unfavorable. On the second path, the promise is protected from the evidence. It then says little about which world we should expect and cannot be supported by the fortunate outcomes believers call answers.

This is the central dilemma. Either prayer is expected to make a recognizable external difference, in which case the missing difference is evidence against it; or no recognizable difference is expected, in which case events cannot be evidence for it. Theology cannot fairly choose the first reading after a success and the second after a failure.

6 Common Replies—and What They Give Up

6.1 “God answers according to his will”

First John explicitly includes this condition, and no thoughtful view of prayer should treat God as a vending machine. Yet “according to God’s will” helps only if we can identify in advance which sorts of petitions God is more likely to grant. If God’s will is inferred only from whatever occurred, the explanation goes in a circle: we know it happened because God willed it, and we know God willed it because it happened.

The appeal to divine freedom blocks the demand that every prayer succeed. It does not explain why the total record shows no stable advantage at all. Philosophical accounts may show that a perfectly good and all-knowing God *could* allow prayer to play a causal role (Cohoe, 2014; Stump, 1979; Swinburne, 1998). Possibility is not manifestation. A story about how God might answer is not evidence that he does.

6.2 “God refuses to be tested”

Perhaps God deliberately hides from experiments. Then a null experiment is compatible with God. But compatibility is cheap: the same null result is also expected if prayer has no external effect. More importantly, this reply gives up controlled outcomes as evidence for prayer. One cannot say that God hides whenever a fair comparison is null but reveals himself whenever an uncontrolled success occurs.

The biblical warning not to test God concerns demanding signs or acting presumptuously; it does not turn weak evidence into strong evidence. Researchers are not commanding God. They are asking whether the public claim already made by believers produces the public difference it appears to promise.

6.3 “The control group was prayed for too”

This is a real limitation of intercessory-prayer trials. Researchers cannot prevent family members, friends, or strangers from praying for control patients. The studies therefore test the effect of *additional assigned prayer*, not prayer versus a perfectly prayer-free world.

But notice the cost of the reply. If background prayer already saturates the benefit, adding large organized prayer teams makes no difference. The effect is then unlike the ordinary assumption that more sincere intercession can help. And contamination does nothing to strengthen personal testimony, which still lacks the comparison needed to identify a causal effect.

6.4 “God works through doctors and ordinary events”

That may be theologically coherent. A believer can view medicine, human care, and natural recovery as providence. But if the very same recovery is fully expected from medicine and ordinary causes, calling it providence does not show that the petition changed the outcome. Divine and natural explanations may be compatible, but the observed event does not select the divine prayer-answering story over the ordinary one.

6.5 “Prayer changes the person who prays”

It may. Prayer can slow attention, express grief, strengthen resolve, encourage mutual care, and give a community a way to act together. These are testable human effects and may matter greatly. But they are not what is promised when Christians say that God healed the patient, brought the rain, opened the job, or protected the traveler. Moving from external intervention to inner formation may save a practice. It does not save the original claim.

6.6 “Only faith can see the answer”

Faith may shape interpretation, but an interpretation available only after commitment cannot serve as public evidence for that commitment. Otherwise every religion can protect itself in exactly the same way. The more the promised effect retreats into hidden purpose, private meaning, or an unseen spiritual realm, the less it resembles the concrete biblical language that prompted the belief.

These replies do not all fail as theology. Some offer coherent ways to continue praying without expecting a measurable external effect. Their evidential price must simply be admitted. They abandon, weaken, or remove from public assessment the claim that prayer changes what happens. A companion paper examines how repeated qualifications can function as a retreat from expansive biblical promises after disappointment (Stilwell, 2026a).

7 A Fairer and More Decisive Test

The older clinical studies are not the last experiment humanity could perform. A better test should be designed with believers rather than imposed on them, and it should be able to produce a clear result in either direction. No finite study can prove that no prayer has ever affected any event. It can, however, test the claim that suitable intercessory prayer produces a recurring benefit large enough to matter.

First, Christian defenders and skeptical researchers should agree in advance on the claim. They should specify

who will pray, what makes the prayer suitable, what exactly is requested, who is eligible to receive it, when the effect should appear, and what result would count against efficacy. These conditions must be fixed before anyone sees the outcomes. Public preregistration would prevent researchers on either side from changing the question after the answer is known (Nosek et al., 2018).

Second, the study should be large, spread across several independent sites, and repeated. Within each site, comparable patients could be randomly assigned to usual care with no study-organized prayer, one verified intercessory team, or several independent teams. Background prayer would be measured rather than denied. Patients, clinicians, outcome judges, and primary analysts would not know the assignment. The study would use one objective main outcome in a fixed period, not a long menu from which a favorable result could later be selected.

Third, the investigators should define in advance what size of benefit would matter. The study should enroll enough people to distinguish that meaningful benefit from an effect so small that it has no practical value. Statistical methods for equivalence and Bayesian comparison can distinguish evidence of a negligible effect from a merely inconclusive result (Dienes, 2014; Lakens, 2017). The exact thresholds should be agreed by both sides rather than chosen to manufacture defeat.

Fourth, the same protocol should succeed under independently managed teams. A single favorable finding should not establish prayer, and a single negative finding should not bury it. Three well-powered replications showing no meaningful benefit, no benefit from additional prayer teams, and no prospectively identified subgroup effect would provide very strong evidence that assigned intercession does not work in those settings. Three replications showing a meaningful, specific, and dose-related benefit would force skeptics to update in the other direction.

Finally, a public registry could test ordinary prayer outside the clinic. Petitioners would record specific requests and deadlines before knowing the results. The registry would retain successes, failures, delays, changed requests, and “better answers” alike. Independent judges would compare fulfillment with relevant ordinary base rates. This would not provide the causal control of random assignment, but it would reveal whether real-world prayer claims survive complete recordkeeping.

Table 3: What would make the new test genuinely informative

Safeguard	Plain-language design	What it prevents
Agreement beforehand	Believers and critics jointly freeze the prayer, recipients, outcome, time, and failure rule.	Redefining suitable prayer or success after the result.
Fair comparison	Randomly add zero, one, or several study prayer teams to otherwise similar groups.	Mistaking treatment, prognosis, or background prayer for the added effect.
One objective outcome	Use a fixed, independently judged main outcome.	Searching many measures and advertising only a lucky one.
Enough information	Size the study to separate a meaningful benefit from a negligible effect.	Calling an insensitive study a decisive negative result.
Independent repetition	Require the same result in several separately run multisite trials.	Letting one unusual site, error, or chance result decide the question.

What would count as an unequivocal result? As far as empirical inquiry can deliver one, it would be this: defenders agree that the test captures a real prayer promise; the intervention is delivered as agreed; the study is highly capable of detecting the smallest benefit they regard as meaningful; and several independent repetitions find the effect confined to the negligible range. That would not prove that a hidden God never acts. It would show, with much greater force than the old studies, that intercessory prayer produces no meaningful recurring external benefit under conditions its defenders accepted as fair.

The proposal matters even if no church accepts it. A refusal to state what result would count against efficacy reveals the deeper problem. The believer is then not protecting a well-supported claim from a bad experiment; the believer is protecting the claim from the possibility of failure itself.

8 Conclusion: The Promise Is Not Manifest

The Bible repeatedly links faithful asking with receiving and effective action. Christians act on those words when they pray for healing, rescue, rain, work, protection, and changed lives. Such a promise should not vanish when we ask what difference it makes.

Yet the expected difference is nowhere publicly established. Personal testimonies select successes without supplying the full denominator or the ordinary success rate. Followers of incompatible religions offer the same kind of testimony. Controlled intercessory-prayer studies find no stable, repeatable benefit. And the rule that God may say yes, no, wait, or something better makes every outcome fit, leaving no outcome able to confirm the claim.

This is an inductive argument from a broad and stubborn pattern: enormous opportunity, confident promise, many alleged successes, but no prayer-linked signal that survives fair comparison. It also supports a deductive challenge. If the promise were being fulfilled in the ordinary external sense, some recognizable difference should be manifest. It is not. If instead every outcome is made compatible with the promise, outcomes cannot be used as evidence for it.

Prayer may still have human value. It may comfort, focus attention, encourage endurance, or gather a community around someone in need. Those effects require no supernatural answer, and acknowledging them does not rescue the claim that a divine being granted the petition.

The conclusion is therefore plain. The divine promise to answer suitable prayer, stated so confidently in Christian scripture, is not manifest anywhere in reality as a clear, repeatable, and publicly distinguishable effect. The world looks as it would if prayers were voiced, people sometimes found comfort, ordinary causes continued to operate, coincidences occurred, and no divine petitioner changed the external outcome. Christians who want their beliefs to answer to evidence should stop calling that silence an answer.

A final challenge to the Christian reader

Accepting this argument does not by itself require accepting atheism. It does require giving up a familiar piece of Christian reasoning. A recovery after prayer should no longer be announced as evidence that God intervened unless comparable failures, ordinary recovery rates, and rival religious claims are counted by the same rule. A refusal, delay, or hidden purpose may remain part of a private theology, but it cannot be used to make the promise look successful in public.

The fair question is simple: *What outcome would lead you to conclude that petitionary prayer does not work?* If the honest answer is “none,” then the belief is not being held because of the outcomes. If some outcome would count, state it before the next result and apply it consistently. Do not credit faith after success while blaming deficient faith after tragedy. Do not call an ordinary coincidence miraculous merely because it meets a desperate hope. And do not demand less evidence for the religion inherited at home than for a religion encountered elsewhere.

Faithlessness about petitionary prayer is not cynicism about human need. People still deserve medicine, companionship, practical help, courage, and hope. The rational change is to place confidence in actions whose effects can be seen and checked, while refusing to advertise divine intervention where reality supplies no distinguishable trace of it.

References

- Benson, H., Dusek, J. A., Sherwood, J. B., Lam, P., Bethea, C. F., Carpenter, W., Levitsky, S., Hill, P. C., Clem, D. W., Jr., Jain, M. K., Drumel, D., Kopecky, S. L., Mueller, P. S., Marek, D., Rollins, S., & Hibberd, P. L. (2006). Study of the therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer (STEP) in cardiac bypass patients: A multicenter randomized trial of uncertainty and certainty of receiving intercessory prayer. *American Heart Journal*, 151(4), 934–942. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ahj.2005.05.028>
- Cohoe, C. M. (2014). God, causality, and petitionary prayer. *Faith and Philosophy*, 31(1), 24–45. <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil201312302>
- Davison, S. A. (2017). *Petitionary prayer: A philosophical investigation*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198757740.001.0001>
- Dienes, Z. (2014). Using Bayes to get the most out of non-significant results. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, Article 781. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00781>
- Evans, J., Lesage, K., Miner, W., Starr, K. J., & Corichi, M. (2025, May 6). *Believing in spirits and life after death is common around the world*. Pew Research Center. <https://doi.org/10.58094/tk92-mf49>
- Hodge, D. R. (2007). A systematic review of the empirical literature on intercessory prayer. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 17(2), 174–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731506296170>
- Krucoff, M. W., Crater, S. W., Gallup, D., Blankenship, J. C., Cuffe, M., Guarneri, M., Krieger, R. A., Kshetry, V. R., Morris, K., Oz, M., Pichard, A., Sketch, M. H., Jr., Koenig, H. G., Mark, D., & Lee, K. L. (2005). Music, imagery, touch, and prayer as adjuncts to interventional cardiac care: The MANTRA II randomised study. *The Lancet*, 366(9481), 211–217. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(05\)66910-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(05)66910-3)
- Lakens, D. (2017). Equivalence tests: A practical primer for *t* tests, correlations, and meta-analyses. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 8(4), 355–362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617697177>
- Masters, K. S., Spielmans, G. I., & Goodson, J. T. (2006). Are there demonstrable effects of distant intercessory prayer? a meta-analytic review. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 32(1), 21–26. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324796abm3201_3
- Nosek, B. A., Ebersole, C. R., DeHaven, A. C., & Mellor, D. T. (2018). The preregistration revolution. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(11), 2600–2606. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1708274114>
- Oren, N. (2025). The evidential challenge for petitionary prayer. *Religious Studies*, 61(3), 681–698. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412524000209>
- Roberts, L., Ahmed, I., Hall, S., & Davison, A. (2009). Intercessory prayer for the alleviation of ill health. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, (2), Article CD000368. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD000368.pub3>
- Stilwell, P. (2026a). When “ask and you shall receive” fails: Hermeneutic immunization, spiritual self-blame, and the epistemology of petitionary prayer. *PhilArchive*. <https://philarchive.org/rec/STIWQM>
- Stilwell, P. (2026b). When every outcome is an answer: Answer-inflation, diagnostic content, and the semantics of petitionary prayer. *PhilArchive*. <https://philarchive.org/rec/STIWEH>
- Stump, E. (1979). Petitionary prayer. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16(2), 81–91. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20009745>
- Swinburne, R. (1998). *Providence and the problem of evil*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198237987.001.0001>