



Do Not Put the Lord Your God to the Test

Editorial Comment by Warren Krug

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Atheists were undoubtedly thrilled and many Christians confused by the results of a recent study that sought to test the effectiveness of prayer.

In the \$2.4 million study funded primarily by the John Templeton Foundation, 1,802 bypass patients at six hospitals were put into three groups. Two of the groups were uncertain that anyone would be praying for them. The third group was told they would be prayed for.

Two Catholic groups and one Protestant group were recruited to pray for the patients. The prayer groups were to pray “for a successful surgery with a quick, healthy recovery and no complications” using each patient’s first name and the last name initial.

For a month the patients were tracked. About 52% of patients in the first two groups experienced complications with no difference noted between those patients who were prayed for and those who weren’t.

Surprisingly, 59% of the patients in the groups who knew they were the objects of prayers experienced complications. Because the most common complication was an irregular heartbeat, the researchers speculated these patients may have been under increased stress knowing that people were praying for them.

Several points can be made to try to make sense of this experiment.

First, knowing the unbiblical views about God held by many people today who call themselves Christians, we wonder how many of the people in the prayer groups were actually praying to the true living God? And how sincere were their prayers?

Secondly, we all learned in confirmation class that there are three possible answers to a prayer—yes, no, or wait a while. The researchers in this study apparently expected a “yes” to every prayer.

Thirdly, God wants us to come to Him in faith. Let’s suppose that this study had showed prayer to be extremely effective in helping people recover from their illnesses. Would people then begin taking up the prayer habit out a relationship with God or would they do so on the basis of scientific research alone?

Most sincere Christians have experienced the power of prayer in their lives, but prayer should never be treated like a good luck charm.

—Warren Krug, editor