

Chapter 1 : The Folly of Prayer | Rummaging

*The Folly of Prayer: Practicing the Presence and Absence of God [Matt Woodley] on calendrierdelascience.com \*FREE\* shipping on qualifying offers. Prayer can feel mysteriously difficult, boringly perfunctory and frustratingly out of our control.*

Log in here Dislike seeing ads? It suggests that prayer, on its own, is not a viable subject for study. After all, it belongs to the definition of prayer that it is not an autonomous activity, not simply something human beings do, like eating and sleeping. The significant thing about prayer is not that we pray, but who we pray to, what we pray for, and why we think our prayers have a chance of being heard and granted. In other words, prayer can only be understood as a part of religion. To treat it anthropologically, as if it were merely an instinctive behavior, and to bestow on it the vague approval with which our age greets all nonthreatening manifestations of "spirituality," is to violate its essence and reduce it to triviality. That triviality is on display, in different ways, in James Moore Jr. Moore, an earnest amateur in the study of history and religion he is a business school professor by trade, approaches the subject of prayer in American history in an extremely literal-minded fashion. He simply proceeds chronologically through an outline of American history, from pre-Columbian times to the present, and notes that many prominent people in that history made a habit of praying. Moore makes no attempt to account for the place of prayer in American life or to explain what makes American prayer different from, say, Mexican or Japanese prayer. Sometimes he quotes an unusually quirky practice or memorable text - Mather, for instance, came up with appropriate prayers to say over each type of person he passed in the street, including the tall "Lord, give that Man High Attainments in Christianity" and the lame "Lord, help that Man to walk uprightly". But no matter who is doing the praying - politicians, artists, ministers, slaves - Mr. Moore draws the same, blandly patriotic conclusion: Moore cannot really understand why. But he has nothing to say about the importance of this decision, or its implications for the separation of church and state. The fact that the Founders deliberately refused to inject prayer into politics simply does not fit his pious program. Instead, he reassures us that "While the subject of daily prayer was deferred Moore concludes his survey with a homily on the need for Americans to pray more: For Philip and Carol Zaleski, who know much more about religion, prayer ought to be a thornier subject. The married authors, who teach at Smith College and edit and write for various religious publications, know full well that any prayer can only be understood as the expression of a particular faith, and that not all faiths are compatible. But they still repeat, on a more sophisticated level, the central mistake of Mr. Their syrupy, boosterish prose "creation as a whole becomes a shimmering web of irrefragible mystery," "to trace prayer through the history of art is to track a bird of paradise through a sunset sky" makes them sound less like scholars of prayer than like New Age cheerleaders, eager to give any form of prayer a pat on the head. Accordingly, the Zaleskis practice a form of ecumenical leveling, lumping together the most disparate kinds of believers - Hindu mystics, Native American shamans, Catholic nuns, Japanese poets, modern painters. Rather than dwell on the incommensurable differences between these various types of faith, the Zaleskis put all their subjects into four basic categories: Refugees, who turn to prayer in adversity; Devotees, who order their entire lives by prayer; Ecstatics, who escape ordinary reality through prayer; and Contemplatives, who aspire to a complete knowledge of God through prayer. The Zaleskis obviously admire their athletes of prayer and want us to do the same. But in curating this Prayer Hall of Fame, they have unwittingly provided the most devastating possible indictment of the religious mind. In ordinary life, if we encountered a man who repeats the same phrase, times a day, or a man who regularly falls into catatonic insensibility, or a teenage girl whose sexual desires fuel sickly fantasies of martyrdom, we would have no qualms about pronouncing them mentally ill and in need of treatment. But if the obsessive-compulsive is reciting the Jesus Prayer, and the catatonic is a swami, and the girl is a nun, then the Zaleskis expect us to admire and revere them. Moore, they want us to throw out the precarious secularism the West earned after centuries of religious war so that everyone can pray their fill: In their insistence on making prayer happily uncontroversial, the Zaleskis and Mr. Moore both take it far less seriously than did its great antagonist, Samuel Butler, whose devastating image of prayer, from "The Way of All Flesh," finds no

response in either of their books: As I thought of the family prayers being repeated night and morning, week by week, month by month, and year by year, I could not help thinking how like it was to the way in which the bees went up the wall and down the wall, bunch by bunch, without ever suspecting that so many of the associated ideas could be present, and yet the main idea be wanting hopelessly, and for ever. [Log in here](#) [Comment on this item](#) Submission of reader comments is restricted to NY Sun sustaining members only. If you are not yet a member, please [click here to join](#). If you are already a member, please [log in here](#):

**Chapter 2 : Book Review: The Folly of Prayer | Christian Forums**

*Prayer can be a lot of things--praise, argument, groans, tears and listening, to name a few. In The Folly of Prayer Matt Woodley explores the paradoxes and practice of prayer, showing that each type of prayer is legitimate and effective communication with God.*

There is an almost infinite number of writings, texts in the old-school sense , books, and essays related to the power of prayer. Which is meaningless since none offer any real proof. Now my friend and fellow blogger, Kent Harrop, always accuses me of being enamored of science. He would say I see science as the only path to truth. In some ways, he is correct. But I would modify that position with a caveat. I adhere to the philosophy we may not be able to explain everything. But accepting things without challenge is dangerous. To believe prayer works in the complete absence of any evidence is fraught with danger. We would not tolerate praying over a broken arm as an acceptable form of treating an injured child. Why should we accept praying for something to change as opposed to seeking to make changes happen? That should frighten every thinking American. Thus, my point that if you see a value for prayer in school, or in government proceedings, show me how it makes things better, or offers any beneficial effect. Given this position, let me say this. A prayer is a powerful tool for the individual. It can bring focus. It can bring revelation. It can bring realization. What it cannot do is influence the physical world, never has and never will. Only human actions have ever done that, for good or bad. Now I could spend time recounting the writings of Thomas Aquinas, Bertrand Russell, Rene Descartes, Plato, or even Paul Simon about prayer and how none ever demonstrated any measurable effect in the world. Instead, I will offer two examples as evidence of my position. One of historical significance and one personal. Between the years and two out of every three European Jews were killed during the Holocaust. I stood in the barracks at Auschwitz and Birkenau. I passed mere feet from the ovens used to burn millions of men, women, and children. Acts of horror committed by people from a predominantly Christian country, people who prayed to god as well. Did their prayers for success in their actions bear fruit with God? The pleadings of mothers. The crying of the children. The helplessness of men praying to God for help. Obliterated by death and flames. Unanswered prayers while 6 million Jews were murdered. Unanswered prayers while 50 to 60 million died in the war. Unanswered prayer to end the war. A war that ended with the development of the weapons of our own destruction. Our prayers went unanswered unless you see the answer in our discovering the power of the Gods in the form of Atomic weapons. The war killed millions while people prayed. There were billions of unanswered prayers. Prayers rose, intermingled with the ashes of human beings murdered because of hatred, and God did nothing. For mankind to find a way to kill not just his fellow man, but to vaporize entire cities and perhaps the planet? Where was the power of prayer then? Now, the more personal example. Some would argue such an argument is disingenuous since I believe prayer does not work. This example is not about me, but my mother. No one embraced her faith with more certainty than my mom. She faced life-threatening health issues. She was a victim of infidelity and the breakup of her marriage. She suffered the loss of a child. Despite it all, she held onto her religion. To the point many would find troubling. Because in her faith, marriage was forever. My mother believed and never wavered. Because her faith compelled her to. What has this to do with prayer? When my sister Mary was diagnosed with breast cancer, no one prayed harder or in a more sincere way than my mother. No one lived the life expected of her based on the tenets of her Roman Catholic faith more purposefully than my mother. No one held more hope in the power of prayer than my mother. A mystery of faith. She would say the prayers worked because God took Mary home. No, because they gave her hope in her helplessness to save her child. What I would say is blind faith absent proof is a pox on mankind. It tricks us into wasting our time and effort. Many would argue God answers all prayers, it is our inability to understand the answer that is the problem. I find that sad. Or, if volume matters, the mothers of six million Jews.

**Chapter 3 : The Folly of Prayer vs. Guns – The Writing of Joe Broadmeadow**

*The Folly of Prayer has 11 ratings and 0 reviews. Prayer can feel mysteriously difficult, boringly perfunctory and frustratingly out of our control. Ofte.*

March 07, The folly of prayer I recently saw a group on Facebook called Praying for Layla Grace , a support group for a beautiful little girl suffering from stage 4 neuroblastoma, which is cancer of the nervous system. Presumably, they hope that God will cure her. Presumably, they want a miracle. I can only imagine the pain of losing a child to cancer. When I worked as a physical therapy tech in college, I witnessed first-hand a child wasting away from brain cancer. It was difficult for me to witness, as a total stranger; for her family, the tragedy was certainly overwhelming. At worst, those false expectations can make already difficult situations that much more difficult as believers are forced to fabricate rationalizations on the behalf of God when their prayers do not come to pass as they hoped. I know a great many others have taken a crack at debunking prayer, which is now a fair bit easier thanks to a number of well-designed scientific studies that have done just that. But believers are never short on rationalizations when science strikes down such a commonplace behavior. Or, you have to pray for the right kinds of things. Theological hurdles Whenever people pray for someone like Layla Grace, it begs the question: But this raises another important question: Sometimes believers will rationalize that God wants to test his faithful, or give them an opportunity to act with compassion and love. But this feeble rationalization presumes that God would afflict a toddler with deadly cancer just to test the faith of his followers. What reasonable person would wish to follow such a god? Such rationalizations remind me of the following quote by Bertrand Russel, commenting on the rationalization that such tragedies are the result of "original sin": In order to bring himself to say this, a man must destroy himself in all feelings of mercy and compassion. He must, in short, make himself as cruel as the God in whom he believes" Much of these theological conundrums hearken back to the problem of evil, or as I prefer to describe it, the problem of suffering. These types of prayers beg two important questions – in just what way is it that God has intervened such that he is found to be deserving of thanks, and why has he excluded so many others in need? Why, for example, would God be thanked for the bountiful food on your table while millions of children all over the world face death from famine? Does God think your life is more valuable than theirs? Does this omnipotent God choose to control some things, but not others? Prayer has no effect The meta-analysis of intercessory prayer to which I linked above concludes thus: Given that the IP literature lacks a theoretical or theological base and has failed to produce significant findings in controlled trials, we recommend that further resources not be allocated to this line of research. Believers die of tragic illnesses and circumstances at the same rate as non-believers. Imagine, for example, that you are driving cross-country, and pray to God that he will protect you on your trip. Unfortunately, the probability of being in an auto accident – fatal or otherwise – is a statistically predictable phenomenon; believers are no more or less likely to be spared than non-believers. Little Layla Grace is statistically no more or less likely to survive her cancer than any other child, despite the fact that innumerable people are undoubtedly praying on her behalf. When natural disasters strike such as the recent earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, believers are affected just the same as non-believers. Believers and non-believers divorce at the same rate actually, one study by the Barna group – headed by an evangelical Christian – found that atheists have a lower divorce rate than Christians, though I suspect that is for other reasons, such as the tendency for believers to marry younger , and have the same rates of mental illness such as depression again, some studies have found this to be higher for believers. I believe that rather than confound ourselves as we attempt to reconcile the behavior of an omnipotent but completely invisible and undetectable god with the harsh indifference of the natural world toward human suffering, we should accept reality as it truly is that we may face it with realistic expectations and better cope with tragedy and disappointment, rather than persist in wishful thinking. It is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring. I believe the existence of a theistic god is a much more relevant question than the existence of a deistic god, and I believe the existence of a deistic god is best addressed with other, distinct arguments such as the ones I have posted previously.

**Chapter 4 : Folly in the Bible (78 instances)**

*"Matt Woodley's Folly of Prayer puts language, meaning and practical helps around vital modes of prayer. The truest folly would be to ignore this biblical guidance in those murky, shifting waters of the soul's authentic connection with God!"*

It has to do with idolatry and its folly. If ever there was an example of utter foolishness or folly, it is found in the actions and words of the enemies of Israel, who, after capturing the ark of God from Israel, were struck with a plague by God as punishment. Is there a more astounding case of utter folly than this? They were fully aware that God was the cause of their affliction and that they were in serious danger of being annihilated. So did they then repent of their idolatry and worship of a false god and accept the true God and thus save themselves from destruction? Instead of getting rid of their sin and folly, they sought to get rid of God! But this is no more incredible than people even today clinging tenaciously to their sin and defiance of God even to the point of being destroyed by that very refusal to repent. Like those people of old, they are so imprisoned and blinded by their attitude that they do not even sense the utter folly of trying to live apart from God, clinging to the modern-day idols of this world. But lest you think that such folly is restricted only to pagans and unbelievers, consider the folly of Israel itself after its great exodus from slavery in Egypt. There, in the wilderness, Moses left them briefly to meet with God on the mountain. God produced man out of the earth and gave him life. An ox, by its strength, could similarly provide for them from the earth what was needed for life: Thus the idol is appropriate as an idol. But it is still an idol, not the real thing. In fact it is twice removed from the real God: The life the ox produces still requires God to furnish rain and growth of the seed, its life, and it also needs man to tend the soil once planted. Thus man and his efforts are the focus, not God. It is an idol. But of course, this is what man desires in an idol: These idol makers did not have vision to see beyond the natural to the supernatural, nor faith to believe in this supernatural way. They were totally bound up or enslaved to this world and its ways. Even after being set free from bondage in Egypt, they were still slaves to the ways of that world and lifestyle. Notice also that they made their idol out of gold, a sign that they recognized that whatever God existed must be precious and valuable. It would be folly to create a false god who was so repugnant to people that no one would bow down to it. No, those who indulge in presenting the false as true know that there must be some semblance to the glory of God in order for a false god to be acceptable to people. At the same time, however, it was still just a piece of inert matter, a dumb idol. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. I am warm; I see the fire. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood? One dictionary defines folly as: Nevertheless, that is what idolators do, even those who pride themselves, such as modern man, on their intelligence and rationality. All that is different from them and the idolators of old described above is the idols they worship. This too is folly. Why does man do this? Why is he so determined to embrace foolishness and folly, even to his own hurt, rather than to accept the truth? Because admitting the truth would require him to admit things about himself that he does not want to admit, such as the truth that he is a sinner in need of a savior. It would also require him to submit to Jesus as that Savior and God, and this is distasteful to him. He will not submit to anyone else. He wants to be in control. Even the apparent submission to an idol is not really submission. For he created it himself and man also can easily fool himself into thinking that by setting up all kinds of severe requirements for worship of this idol that he is not worshipping himself but the idol. Created gods are under the control of their creators. The creator is higher than the creation. It is all a game and a show. But all games must come to an end. In this world, there are multitudes of religious games people play to avoid facing the truth. They are all idols. And God has warned that there will be a day when all idols will fall down to the truth, who is Jesus, just as the pagan idol Dagon fell down before the ark of God. That day is fast approaching.

**Chapter 5 : The Folly of Idolatry | Christian Faith**

*Prayer can feel mysteriously difficult, boringly perfunctory, and frustratingly out of our control. Often prayer brings us comfort, but sometimes, especially when there aren't easy resolutions.*

Joe Broadmeadow 5 Comments Here we are, just a few days out from the latest mass shooting, and what have we learned? A systemic failure allowed the shooter to buy firearms. He escaped from a mental health facility. He was court-martialed, imprisoned, and then dishonorably discharged from the Air Force for a conviction relating to domestic violence. Murky and unclear on what happened. We also learned that bump stocks, the accessory which acted as a force multiplier in Las Vegas converting a legal semi-automatic weapon into what was essentially a full-auto, are once again for sale. This restarting of sales, despite now long forgotten long-winded speeches on the floor of the House and Senate to ban such items, boils down to one thing; profits matter more the people. The company that sells them, after what they must have considered a respectful pause perhaps it was 58 days, one for each of the dead ramped up sales again understanding the short-term memory of Americans and the inertia that is our government. Not one prayer, in the history of the world, has ever prevented anything from happening. No matter how sincere the individuals gathered in prayer may be, not one prayer ever worked. I saw hundreds of thousands of people, sincere people, pray after each mass shooting incident. It underscores the wasted energy and placebo effect that is prayer. Even my friend and co-blogger on the Heretic and the Holy Man , Kent Harrop, concedes that prayer is not enough. People prayed to end each and every war. Followed by more wars. People pray and the world continues to turn. What we require is action. And in our capitalist society, economic action produces results. To change things, to motivate Congress and your fellow Americans to come to grips with the problem of gun violence, you must hit them in the pocketbook. If profits matter more than people, there lies opportunity. But what about the Second Amendment and the sacred right of bearing arms? It is a difficult aspect of America to reconcile. But, this article in the NY Times does a good job of putting the heart of the problem in perspective. Our willingness to allow easy access to high-capacity weapons is what differentiates us from the rest of the world. You cannot stop someone intent on causing harm, but you can limit the means available for him to do so. To interpret that to mean carrying concealed weapons to and fro in society is a stretch. To interpret the Second Amendment to mean there can be no limitation on weapons possessed by a citizen, or the amount of ammunition, magazine capacity, or other factors is a fallacy. We already do it to a certain extent, albeit minimal. The latest shooting underscores the issue. There is not one logical, rational, or legal argument to support an individual owning such level of firepower. That is the risk of adhering to a strict, inviolable Second Amendment. Safeguarding innocent lives should trump any such interpretation. It is an argument supported by the NRA and those members of Congress on their payroll, and it must end. If we accept this, we must resign ourselves to future incidents. There is one common denominator in most incidents we see from our home-grown shooters, domestic violence. And the history of our dealing with this issue is one fraught with inconsistency and failure. We have prisons full of non-violent drug offenders, yet treat those who commit domestic violence in a much less serious way. Will jailing all those convicted of domestic violence solve the entire problem? No, but I think it a better use of prison space than someone caught possessing marijuana. Until we recognize domestic violence as a warning sign and deal with it, i. Until we impose reasonable limitations on magazine capacity and quantity and type of ammunition, these incidents will continue. To kowtow to the argument that AR type firearms are necessary for hunting and limiting weapons capacity infringes on Second Amendment rights is idiocy. I have no issue with anyone of sound mind owning firearms. I have no issue with anyone owning an AR if they choose that as a weapon for hunting or self-defense. I have an issue with the availability of bump stocks and no restrictions on owning high-capacity magazines and enough ammunition to fire rounds in a church. On the argument that an armed citizen was the answer to ending the problem, such a philosophy frightens me. The qualifications for getting a concealed carry permit are a joke. There are minimal requirements to show not only the ability to fire a weapon but the wherewithal to judge the circumstances under which identifying and firing on a target is necessary and prudent. Responding officers face not only

dealing with an armed suspect but sorting out the good guys from the bad guys. Add minimally trained civilians into the mix, and it is only a matter of time before a cop kills or is killed by a well-intentioned civilian. Thus, compounding the tragedy. There are no easy solutions to these problems, but motivating Americans to do something about it may lie in my earlier point. If companies sell unlimited quantities of ammunition, stop patronizing them. If we do not work toward a solution to the problem, resign yourself to future similar headlines. If you want to waste time praying, have at it. But know this, it will fail, and more innocent people will die because we are unwilling to face our responsibilities. One definition of insanity is repeating the same action and expecting a different result. Hold your faith in any manner you chose, but human intelligence and effort are necessary to solve this problem. I recall these words, God helps those who help themselves. Time for us to do something, save praying for the World Series where no one dies.

### Chapter 6 : The Folly of Prayer: Practicing the Presence and Absence of God by Matt Woodley

*The Folly of Prayer Practicing the Presence and Absence of God About the Book. Prayer can feel mysteriously difficult, boringly perfunctory and frustratingly out of our control.*

### Chapter 7 : Christian Bible Studies (Editor of The Folly of Prayer)

*The folly of prayer I recently saw a group on Facebook called Praying for Layla Grace, a support group for a beautiful little girl suffering from stage 4 neuroblastoma, which is cancer of the nervous system.*

### Chapter 8 : The Folly of Prayer : Matt Woodley :

*Prayer can feel mysteriously difficult, boringly perfunctory and frustratingly out of our control. Often prayer brings us comfort, but sometimes, especially when there aren't easy resolutions or prayers go unanswered, it intensifies and focuses our sense.*

### Chapter 9 : The folly of pretence | Daniel Dennett | Opinion | The Guardian

*Not one prayer, in the history of the world, has ever prevented anything from happening. No matter how sincere the individuals gathered in prayer may be, not one prayer ever worked. Now I know there be wailing and gnashing of teeth by the religious who'll say I cannot know for certain what prayers worked.*