

The Power of Prayer

Earlier this week, a situation was resolved that had caused me much stress, grief and sorrow for over three years. In more recent times, perhaps for the past year, I have prayed to God for this problem to end, specifically that the Lord would soften the hearts of the two individuals who wrongly perceived some of my actions and my motivations, and were thus undeservedly hostile and suspicious of me. It seemed as though there was nothing I could do or say that could change this. As a result, for the first time in my entire career as an engineer I did not enjoy going to the office, nor did I find my daily presence there anything but stressful and depressing. The situation was all the more unhappy because I love these people and have great respect for them, both as human beings and as professionals. Further, I had continually shared with them most generously and to a fault, from a business viewpoint, the fruits of our collective efforts, sharing that seemed to be neither appreciated nor in any way mitigating, in terms of the ill feelings that they seemed to have.

Then suddenly, through the grace of God, I sensed that this great burden had been lifted. That is, this long-held distrust, or whatever it was, seemed to float away. This change, this sudden release of tension didn't just happen. It was the result of a process, which, in turn, was the culmination of a series of other events through which, it would seem, I was pushed and over which I felt little control. At this writing however, it is too early to tell how beneficial or how sustaining will be this new direction and this changed atmosphere.

To a non-believer, this would be clearly a coincidence, a logical series of causes and effects. However, the Jewish Rabbis have an expression that concludes that coincidence is not a "kosher" word; that there is a reason for everything. In this particular case, it is the culmination of two years of prayer wherein I asked the Lord for a resolution to the problem. In these last few months, as I have continued to learn more of what it means to be a true Christian, I revised my prayers from those where I asked Him to help me with the problem, to where I handed it over to Him entirely and asked Him to solve it in any way He saw fit. Jesus wants us to do just that. He made it very clear, in John 14:14, when He said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." Not I will help you, but I

will do it. That is not quite as all-encompassing as it sounds on the surface, however. The “in My name” is a very significant qualifier. Its meaning is much deeper than the words would seem to suggest. It does not apply to everyone, but only to true believers, to those who have placed their complete faith and trust in Him totally, without reservations or equivocations, and even under the most adverse and painful circumstances. Even to those of this level of faith, it does not mean that He will abide by a request in the manner in which it is desired or expected, because His reasoning and judgement, His vision and plan, are each infinitely superior to ours and thus His response may be much different than we expect or even think we want.

Chuck Missler has a great example to make the point about God’s answer to our prayers. He notes how careful we should be in what we pray for, and cites the example of a boy hopelessly in love with the prom queen and praying for the fulfillment of his desires. God seemingly ignores these prayers and does not allow for the desired union. Then, 20 years later at a class reunion, the boy again meets the object of his first love, and realizes how blessed he was by God’s superior judgement in the matter.

There is only one overriding purpose for our lives here on earth, and that is to qualify for, and to prepare for, eternal life in heaven. The true believer tries with all his might to live that purpose, and his every request to the Lord is, I believe, judged in that context and acted upon in a manner appropriate to that purpose. When the prayers of even the most sincere believer seem not to be answered, it may be a matter of timing or it may be that the request is not consistent with God’s greater plan which, when implemented, will prove superior to the intended purpose of the prayer. Even Paul, certainly one of the most saintly and complete believers in Jesus, and who had a severe affliction, possibly blindness, asked the Lord three times to remove this affliction. The Lord later told him no, that his grace was enough, and indeed it was, because Paul gratefully accepted this highest of all rewards, his assurance of a place in heaven, and continued to do God’s work here on earth, probably even more effectively because of his affliction.

I am convinced that the chain of events referred to above was divinely orchestrated and was the direct result of my prayers. This does not mean that I have achieved any state of worthiness, whereby my prayed for requests should be granted. It simply means, to me, that my prayer in this instance was not inconsistent with God's plan. It may also have been a token of encouragement to a novice, an old and confused but doggedly determined novice, who is eagerly seeking to understand and to apply His requirements, to become one of His chosen.

To break away from a life-long obsession with self-reliance and to ask for help, even from the Lord, has been a very difficult transition. However, as I have learned more about what He wants from and for us, I realize that even this is not enough. He wants faith, absolute unqualified faith. Faith that reserves nothing, or that retains any form of hesitation, exception or doubt. This is where the going gets really rough. This ultimate state of faith is extremely difficult to achieve. God knows this and does not expect it overnight. He does require, however, that we continually strive earnestly toward that state of total submission.

He doesn't want us to ask Him for help. He isn't a helper. He is the creator, the doer of all things. He wants us to dump our problems on Him for Him to take care of in the way only He can. Again, however, He will only accept these chores if they are given with the full confidence of the giver that He will attend to them, and whatever way He chooses to do this, and whatever the result, will be accepted with love and gratitude and complete faith in its rightfulness.

Because He wants us to dump our problems on Him does not mean that we are free to walk away and do nothing. He doesn't need our help, but He nevertheless wants, in fact He insists, on our involvement, our concerted effort and our righteous concern. In one way, just as a good mother doesn't need her 4-year old to help prepare supper, she appreciates her involvement and effort and the learning process it provides. While the Lord wants us to hand Him our problems, I believe nevertheless in the old saying that God helps those who help themselves. The seemingly conflicting views here are readily

reconciled if one recognizes that we are probably more often than not the instruments through which the Lord solves many of our problems, as well as the problems of others. If you have a financial problem, for instance, the Lord may soften your boss's heart so he gives you a raise, but you have to be worthy of it and do the improved work that justifies it. When Joseph knew that there would be seven years of famine after seven good years, he didn't sit around for seven years hoping that God would take care of the coming problem. Yes, he prayed and had unswerving faith in the Lord and the Lord took care of the problem by giving Joseph the good sense, the managing skills and the authority to increase and store the over-abundance of the first seven years in preparation for the next seven years. God solved the problem but did it through Joseph. When problems cannot be solved using intervention through human agency or natural events, God will use supernatural means such as the ten plagues against the Pharaoh and finally the parting of the Red Sea.

Examples of this true, complete and saving faith are provided throughout the Bible. Look at Abraham, who, at the direction of the Lord, proceeded toward, and intended to, sacrifice his only beloved son, and would have done so had the Lord not stopped him at the last minute. He had complete faith in the Lord and he knew that the Lord had the problem. The Lord told Abraham that through Isaac he would be the father of many nations. Therefore, if he proceeded to kill Isaac as he was told to do, the Lord would have to resurrect him in order to fulfill His promise. The fact is that Abraham was really acting out a prophecy, because 2000 years later, on that same spot, another father did sacrifice His son, and then resurrected Him.

So, what is the point of all of this, and why do I keep writing about this "stuff," you may ask. The point is that prayer and faith in Jesus is where "it is all at! When you reach that conclusion and truly believe it, there is nothing more of any importance that you don't already know, because along the way toward reaching that conclusion, you already picked up everything else worth knowing about life and its purpose. Fundamental corollaries to this conclusion regarding prayer and faith are the following:

1. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are real; They are alive and well, as is Satan.
2. Jesus was and is God and He was also man. He lived, preached, was crucified as man, died, and was resurrected to return to Heaven.
3. Both the Old and the New Testament are the inspired Word of God, although written by some 40 authors over a period of several thousand years, they are one integrated message, actually “ghost” written by the Holy Spirit. They convey the ultimate truths and are, in the original texts, accurate in every detail.
4. There is but one purpose for all life and that is for the glory of God. For mankind, this purpose is fulfilled by loving Him, striving to live in accordance with His commandments, and most of all by having complete, unqualified faith in Jesus, our Savior.

I say all of this very empathetically, and believe it sincerely. However, at this point in my life I fear that it is more believed intellectually than spiritually. That does not mean that I believe it less fervently than I should, it just means that placing total faith in the Lord, under any and every circumstance, without hesitation or exception, is a tall order and one that I doubt I have achieved. How can one know unless one has been tested in some manner equivalent to the lion’s den, as was Daniel? Putting my thoughts in writing in this manner is my way of searching myself and trying to make clear, in my own mind, just where and who I am.