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## Are Answers to Prayer Real or Happenstance?

### Introduction

Four months ago I was visiting some of my neighbours and one told me about her aunt who was in hospice and not expected to live. We stood at the open door to her condo and prayed. Two days before that I was at another friend's house to speak comfortingly to him. His wife of some 60 years had died. We prayed together. A week or so later I got a call to inform me that my niece, fifty years of age, has three months to live and I prayed. A range of questions flow like a river through one's mind as emotions rush over the mind like cascading rapids. What do I pray for? What is happening? How can I comfort such? Will my prayers really be heard? Will they be answered in the affirmative? Is this praying just the done thing, a ritual that makes me feel I have done what I could? Is it just a religious exercise to give a quietness to my mind? Is there really a God who deigns to listen to this poor individual of six foot of dust? How do I know anything in such situations?

### The Parable

In pondering such questions there came to my mind a parable of the Lord (Lk. 11:5-8). In the parable a man had unexpected company arrive at his home expecting to receive a bed and something to eat. Unfortunately the host had nothing to give his guest and in his helplessness, he went to another friend's house, at midnight, to ask for three loaves of bread. Changing the wording, in his great need he prayed to another for that which was needed. There are several observations that relate to our prayer life.

- a) The man had to understand, not intellectually but in reality, he had nothing to set before those in need. (Lk. 11:5-6)
- b) He had to believe that the one he went to was a real person, not some figment of imagination.
- c) He had to believe that the friend had the resources he needed.

### The man had to understand, not intellectually but in reality, he had nothing to set before those in need.

When the visitor came to the man in the parable the host knew he had nothing. I expect he had fed his children and wife for the night and would go in the morning and get some fresh bread. It was all very ordinary. Then there was an unexpected visitor and having opened the door to them he realized, "I have no bread". This was real, the visitor was sitting in the living area waiting for some refreshment and he had nothing.

- a) This is sometimes how the Lord deals with us. We are brought into a situation where we have no earthly resources that can help. My niece is so ill, my friend has an empty chair, another friend needs a job and I have no contacts that can help, neither does anyone else. Just like the disciples in the boat in the storm, they realized they were helpless (Matt. 8:24-25); Jairus when he hear his daughter had died (Mk. 5:22-23), he and all the physicians were helpless.
- b) The Lord at times brings us to the situation where we have no one to turn to for help. They can express sympathy but they cannot help.
- c) The man in the parable had to understand he needed outside help and needed it now.

### He had to believe that the one he went to was a real person, not some figment of imagination

On the ancient Mount Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to bring down fire on the sacrifice they had prepared (1 Kgs. 18:20-38). They cried to Baal all morning and afternoon. They cut themselves, they did everything they could but Baal did not respond for a simple reason. Baal is a worthless piece of material which had eyes but could not see, ears which could not hear and was so helpless he had to be carried about. He and his images were pieces of material void of life. Elijah calls on God, he prayed, not for hours on hours but a simple prayer to the Living God. Suddenly, after he prayed, fire and lightning came down from Heaven and consumed the sacrifice. Was this an answer to the prayer or a lucky happenstance?

- a) There is no sense in praying to a piece of wood, stone, silver or gold. How foolish would I be if I got down and asked my wife's wedding ring to help someone who is suffering, to help someone find a suitable home.
- b) The scriptures inform us that, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is" (Heb. 11:6). God is and is all knowing, omnipresent. He is everywhere. He is all powerful having unimaginable resources and loves to be trusted. When we pray it is not speaking to space, like blowing air into bubbles that burst giving

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happiness for a moment and then gone leaving the situation as it was. Prayer is communing with the God who is alive, who knows all we are experiencing and how to help us in the distress.

- c) Failure to have a big understanding of God results in a small God and therefore prayers can be somewhat superficial with a wait and see attitude. We leave a little latitude so see if it works and end by saying, "If it is Thy will". In other words, we are verbalizing a "grocery list" of what we would like the Lord to do, but will have to wait to see what happens.

#### He had to believe that the friend had the resources he needed

Had he known his friend was like himself without any bread, there would have been no intelligence in asking him. That would be an exercise in futility. Furthermore, he had to know that if the friend gave him the three loaves it would not leave him in need, he had to have more than what was needed.

#### Application

As I think of the situations at the beginning of the paper, what can I do for any of these folk? I recall when Jean and I were totally penniless. We did not even have a mattress and slept on sleeping bags loaned to us. I had pneumonia and was out of work. When the doctor gave me a prescription my wife went to the pharmacy and asked if we could get the medications and pay them off at the end of the month. We knew we had nothing. Often times people do not know what it is like to be totally penniless. Poverty was a stark reality, to whom could we go? The shame of having to borrow money from a friend. There was only one thing to do, pray! My wife was supported by a hymn called "The Lighthouse" being the light on a stormy night at sea. We prayed for health for somehow to get some money for food for ourselves and our three children. Then it happened. A brother and his wife gave us an envelope with \$200.00. Back in 1976 that was a lot of money. We went and got some groceries and thanked God. Was that an answer to prayer or happenstance? In times of storm the only one we can depend on is God. He has the resources and in kindness He uses human beings to be His channel to supply the needs

Before prayer it is a good exercise before God to ask, do I believe God is? I know He is because I have been told so, and I understand that the things I see in creation are His handiwork, but have I ever been enlightened as to the immensity of God? A reading of Isaiah 40:21-28 will impress on the mind the glorious reality that God is. He is glorious in power; all excelling in wisdom; sovereign and supreme in administration; great in mercy, grace and love; perfect in righteousness; and he deigns to give us the blessing of calling Him "Father". Daily He guides our footsteps, provides our meals, preserves us mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. We are never out of His sight nor from His listening ear. His voice is full of wisdom and tenderly He speaks to us.

Does He have the resources for my needs? Consider His resources. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the earth is His and the fulness thereof. What is there in this world, what is there outside of this world that God does not own? What political power, kingdom, dictatorship, usurper, is there which is not under His control? What nation, empire, country can never be out of his sight or power? No matter what any individual in the world thinks, be he Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos or Bill Gates, they are paupers compared to God for He owns every penny they have. No matter what property the Queen, Pham Nhat Vu, or the MacLahlan family has, it all belongs to God. The fishing rights of every nation mean nothing to Him for He owns every ocean, sea, lake and river. God is never short of land for all the stars, planets, suns and moon known and unknown are His. When we pray to God we are speaking to the greatest property owner of the world, the greatest mind there is and the greatest financier ever known. Dare I wonder if He can, by His channels, provide for me. The question is a virtual insult to even consider.

#### Concluding Thoughts

When we get a big view of the immensity of God, then when we pray we know that He has all the resources to meet our need. Furthermore, He will never deprive us of that which is beneficial to us if it is for our spiritual learning.

. . . . Rowan Jennings