

All the Prayers of God's People
August 11, 2020

I have a friend who is a diligent Christian. She will move mountains to do what needs to be done within her church. When there was conflict, she stepped in and led the youth. When the pastor left, she led the group that helped find a replacement. Her husband serves as an elder; she is a backbone in her church. But one day in our conversation, she was speaking about the new pastor and she expressed that she is somehow dis-content. Covid doesn't help, certainly, but her new pastor doesn't have that "grandfather" feel that their old pastor rocked. She feels a bit lost and doesn't know how to help either herself or the church.

I offered that perhaps prayer could be the answer, at least in part. To pray for this new pastor to "find her footing", to pray for their relationship that it may grow, to pray for patience and to pray for some rest in her soul so that she personally can re-engage in this work of the church which she loves.

What came across was a huge bug-eyed look and a stark realization that for her, prayer is not something that "works". Like many in our world today, prayer is not a magic button that says "that was easy", believing that God made it happen. Prayer is also not about "getting our way". And my friend has seen prayer used so many times exactly to "get our way", that she is dubious at best, and resistant to prayer at worst, even though she is a faithful Christian. We see this misunderstanding of prayer across our world.

What follows is from an article recently that describes how Christians do wield this power of prayer in a negative connotation and then describes how it actually does "work" in our lives. May we find our way to God in relationship, despite our unbelief, through prayer.

PRAYER WORKS

Should we really stop saying that prayer works? Well, yes and no. Most people who say prayer works these days really mean *God did what I wanted God to do*. As if prayer was a button to be pushed to release exactly what they wanted from the vending machine. Prayer is *not* a button to be pushed; it's a **relationship** to be pursued. Prayer does "work," but it works very differently than we'd like. It still "works":

When we can't trace out any direct result from our prayer.
When the opposite of what we prayed for happens.
In those moments when we feel very distant from God.
When we bang down the door of heaven for years and are not sure anything is going on up there at all.

There are scores of people inside and outside the church whose spirits are crushed because they prayed (fervently) and:
They didn't get the job.
Their mom died of cancer.
Their child was born without a heartbeat.
They ended up in a car crash that left them permanently disabled.

Prayer doesn't "work" because I got what I wanted and they didn't. The parade of saints across the centuries would have been shocked to see prayer reduced to God-doing-what-I-asked-him-to-do-when-I-asked-him-to-do-it. God is not a puppy to be trained or a chef in the kitchen who prepares food to suit our every whim. God is sovereign.

As Richard Foster says:

For those explorers in the frontiers of faith, prayer was no little habit tacked on to the periphery of their lives; ***it was their lives***. It was the most serious work of their most productive years. Prayer—nothing draws us closer to the heart of God. Do things happen supernaturally when we pray? Well, yes they do. But often in ways we cannot understand or even trace out.

I think Christians can take consolation in the fact that when we pray, we often don't know what to pray for or even how to pray, yet the scriptures tell us the Holy Spirit will translate the prayer into something better than we could phrase in the moment.

So pour your heart out to God. Pray about the things the scripture says are close to God's heart. And when something "goes your way," be grateful and offer it back to the God who gave it to you. And when things don't go your way, understand that God is still very much in control and very much loves you. Just because God is silent doesn't mean God is absent.¹

Let us pray!

¹ <https://careynieuwhof.com/christians-stop-saying-prayer-works/>