

## PRAY

Philippians 1: 3-11; Matthew 6: 9-13

Many people believe that life is a journey; a journey lived out daily. Some choose to view their life as a road that stretches out before them. Yes, there are forks in the road, and ruts, and places where it gets smooth. But the road also climbs to higher ground and drops into valleys; it curves into the woods and can become nothing more than a narrow path. The road can also become like a rush-hour traffic jam funneling across a bridge. I can put it another way: like a rose bush, life is not all soft petals, but sharp thorns as well. Still, we learn not to pray for a softer life, but for the strength to be able to carry our burdens. (I won't ask for a show of hands of who would like to trade for a softer life!) The temptation is great, isn't it? If the burdens of day-to-day living may compared to different types of terrain, then prayer is the best all-terrain vehicle I know. Here are some examples.

I once saw these words written: "If Christians spent as much time praying as they did grumbling, they would soon have nothing to grumble about." I don't think that is actually true, but let's consider it. The rough times of life would be the rocky places. In Jesus' parable of the sower, the sower sowed a seed that landed on a rocky place, and it could not take root. There may have been harsh conditions surrounding the seed. In Deuteronomy 26:5 we read about a wandering Aramean who came into Egypt and was oppressed by taskmasters. Their conditions might be similar to what some found in POW camps. Presbyterian missionary Benjamin Weir was in such a camp and philosopher Dietrich Bonhoeffer was in a German prison. Those men said in their toughest times that prayer got them through; through the long days, the exhausting work, the oppressive conditions, and the emotional anger. What are *your* rocky places? Arguments at home or with neighbors? Poor working conditions? School? Peer pressure? Wondering if your money will last? Although some might first dismiss their issues as being too trivial

compared to the agony of being captured by an enemy; or being nailed to a cross for a fabricated crime; I am certain your hard times feel just as real and often very painful. *Allow prayer to be the main vehicle that brings you through the rocky times.* And remember the famous and well-known passage in the Bible: “And it came to pass ....” None of the rocky times in your life came to *stay*; they came to *pass*, by the grace of God.

Next, what would you call the times you have of grief, sorrow, depression, or despair in life? They too are aided by prayer and perhaps by some good counselors or doctors. In David’s most famous declaration of faith, he wrote: “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23) When you are down, way down in the valley of life, prayer is the vehicle that can offer you a way out. Prayer, and a friend can climb down into the valley and help you from the pit of despair. Christ forever offers an outstretched hand too. But in the valley of the shadow, it is hard to help yourself, isn’t it? Those who have been there never want to return to that depth again. And those who have tried to help people in such a valley know that, even together, it is hard to climb back up to the top without getting exhausted or sliding back down. Dr. Larry Dossey, in his book *Healing Words*, has shown that when prayer is added to a hospital setting for healing, those who received prayer too healed faster than those who received treatment without prayer. Jesus said in John 14:18, “I will not leave you desolate; because I live, you will live also.” Prayer is a great help to move through the valleys of life.

On the other end of the spectrum, some have had mountaintop experiences and wonder about the purpose of prayers there. Prayers in joyous times remind us to thank our God, who has given us amazing grace. God *loves* prayers of gratitude

and of praise! David depicted it in Psalm 23 also: My cup runneth over.” When we get to the mountaintop—the birth of a healthy baby; getting a promotion or a new job; or a cancer victim hears a doctor say, “You are in remission”—do not forget to thank God in prayer too! In the story of the 10 lepers that Jesus cleansed, nine ran away to tell others. But one realized the blessing that Jesus had offered, and he returned, praised God in a loud voice and fell down at Jesus’ feet.

In between our mountaintops and valleys are the smooth places, times when things happen without hassle; that are predictable and have fairly simple solutions. Sometimes we yearn to have more of those days! Those who love the old television shows from the 60s often love to look at the simpler life back then. But those shows were pretend. Life is not really a rose garden, but if you long for some days when your life is smooth sailing, pray for that too! Ask God to steady your boat or put the wind at your back. Prayer can keep life balanced and on an even keel. Maybe reminders to pray can be put on your refrigerator or your computer; otherwise, we only pray when we are in trouble. If a grown child only calls home when she is in trouble or needs money, the relationship can get strained. Calling home “just because” can bring joy to a parent, and certainly to our Creator!

Someone once told me that if a fisherman comes in late from fishing, it either means the fish were biting or they weren’t biting! If they are biting, he wants to stay to catch more fish; if they aren’t biting, he wants to stay to try to make his fishing trip worthwhile. When things are going well, we want to share our *stories* with God. When things are not going well, we want to share our *requests* with God. Keep in touch with God! As Paul wrote to the Philippians: “I thank God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you.” [Philippians 1:3] And although he gave us an example of prayer, he

more importantly let us know that he prayed too, and that he prayed a lot. If the Savior prayed and prayed often, how important is that example? This month especially, you can work on starting or picking back up that prayer connection. No matter where you are on life's journey, consider prayer to make it through all the conditions of life.

Now, of course, let us pray:

Dear Almighty One: you made mountains and rivers, but you also made us. You are amazing. Right now, we are not dropping a weight of worries on you or asking for a hundred healings; we are just stopping to talk with you. What do you think about the world right now? We are quite troubled. What makes you constantly love us? We feel especially blessed to have times like these with you. Well, gotta go now! Until next time, much love. Amen.

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