



Your Prayers can Draw You Closer or Drive You Away

from God

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Severe daily pain: prelude to a profound moment. The “moment” actually developed through discussion about how to cope with something that never “should” have happened and now appears to be a permanent addition to a life. There is anger, fear and hopeless despair about ever experiencing joy in life again. In such a dilemma, faith and belief in the goodness of the God we serve is central to maintain any hope as we seek Him in prayer. Knowledge of His character and intent toward us is crucial to keep emotional balance. What if we don’t have it? No amount of intellectual conviction or academic study alone will endure when pain is a constant companion. On the other hand, illusions maintained do not accomplish good either.

“Jennifer,” who suffers with daily severe pain, was strongly advised by a prayer partner/mentor that she needed to demand that God heal her, that God owed her healing, and that she has every right to expect it to be relatively soon. It was further indicated she was not to contemplate or express any “negative” feelings or concerns, but remain speaking in bold confidence that her healing is indeed already accomplished and act on that, no matter how she felt! Speak only positive things into reality! Initially, despite some reservations, she found comfort in this kind of assertion. Over time, when the pain continued and even worsened, the partner’s inference was that Jennifer must not have enough faith to claim her healing or she was not walking in it boldly so it couldn’t happen. Jennifer’s fears were not reduced by this approach but exacerbated by it! Clearly, so she thought, she must be at fault for not being faithful enough. The only other apparently inescapable conclusion was that God is ignoring her prayers, that He doesn’t care about her circumstances and worse yet, that He is not loving. After all, what human parent would stand by and allow suffering if it were in their power to undo it?

This approach is what some have termed, “Name it, Claim it” style or more recently, “Word of Faith” or even “Prosperity Gospel.” It is just as strongly promoted by some as it is decried by others. I agree with

the perspective that it is not Scriptural, and far more “human centered” than is wise or accurate. The idea of personal control and the directive to tell God what we need rather than look to Him for His way is key to a metaphysical “New Age” perspective of creating reality by how you think and behave. It is rampant as our church bodies move toward experiential sources, rather than Scriptural truths, in apostasy.

As I walked through this matter with Jennifer, her insights seem far more specific and revealing so we both thought others might find them helpful. Her discomfort with the approach went unspoken with the mentor because the authority or charisma of the individual was strong. She seemed to allow no room for questions or disagreement, intimidating Jennifer, unintentionally or not. In her own heart, she had not quite felt comfortable to “tell” God what to do. As we considered what it is for a created being to tell the eternal Creator what to do, Jennifer was quick to assert her recognition of this:

*“Yes! Even Jesus, in the garden said, If possible, let this cup pass from me.
Nevertheless YOUR WILL not mine be done.”*

So the first barrier to greater understanding fell as she clearly knew that Messiah is our model. This aspect was more easily recognized and accepted but others seemed to wax and wane as her level of pain fluctuated day to day. Greater pain brought greater fear, hurt and rejection as she struggled to understand why He didn’t “just fix it!” It became evident that her awareness of the character of our God was not deeply formed or informed by the Word but shaped greatly by her expectations of how human parents should respond. (Even there, it was difficult for her to accept; though she did recognize that parents or other authorities **do** have to take or refuse action on behalf of others for their own good even when it isn’t fully understood.) Her heart knowledge of “Who He is” and what it is like Him to do was not a substantial strength for her to resist the interpretation that He is not a loving Being for not immediately healing her pain.

As we studied how the Psalmists dealt with pain, walking through the insights presented by Matthew Jacoby’s book, *Deeper Places: Experiencing God in the Psalms*, a greater revelation burst out of Jennifer. The psalmists deeply expressed their pain, anger, or fear and then went on to express their awareness of His covenant love and promises for them. This then inspired their confidence that He would move His Hand on their behalf, even when they couldn’t see or understand the timing. This was an entirely new concept to Jennifer! As her understanding widened, she realized that she didn’t really **want** to face the depths of the reality of her pain. It is too big! **The illusion that she could exert control seemed more comforting and preferable.**

She realized with a shock that if she continued in that way, she would maintain an illusion of having control over her circumstances—demanding healing is owed to her, and speaking only of good things, ignoring what is happening in reality-- which would actually keep her in fantasy, and from admitting she **doesn’t have control and needs Messiah.**

Even though it comes out of fear and suffering rather than arrogance the result is the same. Self-sufficiency and pride: refusing to acknowledge our sin and need for Him.

Like the Psalmists, when she brings the depths of circumstances to Him in prayer, she can then follow it up with her declaration of His covenant faithfulness, and that she is expectant that He is fully aware of what is happening and is working it together for her good, even when it doesn't look that way.

This personal process is not yet complete but Jennifer is taking a different path these days, all Praise to our Messiah.