

Petty Prayers

The doctor believed in prayer. He really did! A younger Christian brother had once commented, “Your prayers at the prayer meeting are different. Others pray about things, but you pray about issues.”

It was those petty prayers that bothered the doctor. How could he not be irked by a prayer request like, “Pray for Brother Smith—he has a cold,” when the doctor had seen a dozen people with common colds that day? The doctor sometimes had a cold at that moment himself, and maybe a couple of his kids did too. Colds were the natural result of encounters with relatively harmless viruses that caused a few days of minor to moderate discomfort, and left the victim a bit more resistant thereafter. Colds were one of the vicissitudes of life, like a blister from doing unaccustomed labor, or brushing an arm against a hot oven rack. Thank heavens such petty prayers wouldn’t spam out the system!

Then there was that ubiquitous prayer for safety while traveling home from church. Every place had its own cliché for that one. The folks at the church where the doctor was raised always prayed for “Journeying mercies.” While he was a missionary in Africa the natives had always prayed for safety while “Traveling in a vehicle made by human hands.” Come on! Where’s your faith? The Lord never slumbers or sleeps. He always watches over His people. Only once had the doctor actually voiced his objections. That was when his aged mother burst into an anguished prayer for the Lord’s mercy when they ran out of gas. “For pitty sake, Mom”, he exclaimed. “Let the Lord alone. We’re only a half of a block from home.”

The African experience was over now. So was the doctoring. The doctor had realized that he was no longer mentally sharp enough to practice medicine, and had retired. Now he depended on other doctors to treat his blood pressure, and they were trying yet another medicine. Still, it didn’t seem that the Lord was done with him yet. He kept getting requests to preach, and he loved it.

The doctor’s sermon that morning was on God’s agenda, from Ephesians 2:9 & 10—How God had determined that everything in creation was eventually to be centered around His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He explained how every born-again believer had an interest in that agenda because we are sons of God. As part of His family, our heavenly Father’s agenda becomes our agenda too; and all the resources of heaven are available to us for the advancement of that agenda through prayer. The doctor grinned tolerantly at the inevitable request for “Traveling safety” for the congregation as the final prayer was offered. The sermon had gone well. He hung around a few minutes to field any comments or questions, pocketed a generous token of thanks, and headed home feeling satisfied with the way the morning had gone.

Twenty minutes into the rural drive home the doctor found himself fighting drowsiness. “It’s that new medicine,” he mused. He had discontinued a similar drug years ago after falling asleep at the wheel several times while driving. “You’re going to die sooner taking that medicine than you would without it,” his wife had warned him. It was raining, so he couldn’t open the window, but he stretched, switched positions, and turned the radio on full blast. “I’ve got to concentrate on staying awake,” he told himself.

The ominous sound of gravel pelting the underside of the car awakened the doctor. He was headed into a deep ditch which seemed almost certain to cause a roll-over crash. Time exploded into vivid fragments as he fought for control of the careening vehicle, steering parallel to the water on the far side of the ditch with little hope of avoiding an accident. Suddenly the narrow stretch of dry land opened into a mowed waterway—an old road that stretched out ahead like an aircraft runway for at least a tenth of a mile. Easing the slithering vehicle down to a controllable speed on the wet grass, he traversed the “runway” to a small country lane, and turned shakily back toward the highway.

“Thank you, Lord,” the doctor prayed silently as he regained his composure. “Thank you for watching over me and not letting that happen until there would be a way of escape. Thank you for traveling safety... and journeying mercies in a vehicle made with human hands.”

*A confession by Bud Morris, M.D.
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