

“Prayer can change outcomes”

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Text: 2 Kings 20: verse 5. “I have heard your prayer, seen your tears, I will cure you.”

Surveys show that 65% of Canadians believe in God, but only 20% pray.

If you ask people about the wonders of the night sky, or the magic experience of holding a newborn baby, or the intricacies of just one dragonfly wing, many will people say that they believe in a creator God. But if you believe in God, what then? Is it also possible to connect with God or is God remote?

A lot of people have tried church in the past. They looked for a connection with God there but there were too many questions, too many doubts and too much dogma. They have decided that they are not “Church persons”. On balance, the weekends for them are better without Church. Sure, they don’t mind helping out with a worthwhile project from time to time at the church, but connect with God there?

“I don’t think so,” they say. “It doesn’t work for me!”

Tom Harpur, former religion editor for the Toronto Star, documents in his book ‘ The Uncommon Touch’, two significant surveys done in California, one at San Francisco General Hospital and the other in Palo Alto.

At San Francisco General, 192 patients in coronary care were prayed for regularly by home prayer groups, 201 others were not. The ten-month study revealed those prayed for, differed strikingly from those not prayed for. They were five times less likely to need antibiotics, three times less likely to develop fluid on their lungs, none needed intubation and fewer of them died during the study. After these impressive results one skeptic doctor said: “Maybe we should write on our order sheets, ‘Pray three times a day. If it works, it works’.”

The other Palo Alto study was a double blind, to study the effects of prayer on mood, self esteem, anxiety, depression and other indicators of psychological ill health. 496 People were involved. Of these 90 people offered to pray, 147 was a control group, only 259 were prayed for. Results showed that there was a significant testable improvement in how the 259 felt about their relationships, creativity, spirituality and overall physical emotional and intellectual well being...

Two things to note about these studies, which I also find in Scripture.

1)The words are not important, the focus on God is. We simply talk to God as we understand God. There is no formula.

2)We can either pray ourselves/ or we can have others pray for us, even without our knowledge that this is happening, and prayers seem to make a difference.

I can remember one morning attending worship in Timothy Eaton Memorial church in Toronto. The minister Stanford Lucyk was a gifted preacher. He soon had our rapt attention. He was talking about Hezekiah and the phrase that he highlighted was that Hezekiah **turned his face to the wall.**

Suddenly I was there. Seeing him turn in the bed away from the man who had told him that he was to die. So Isaiah, that man, probably embarrassed that he had made the king cry, went away. But suddenly he was stopped in his tracks and told by God to go back, with the words: “ I have heard your prayer, seen your tears, I will cure you.”

So, there in the pew, I suddenly realized that the God of the Old Testament was moved when a man in the noon of his life wept bitterly when told he was to die. This God had compassion, was paying attention to a sick man, heard his prayer and extended his life.

Hezekiah had said: “God, remember I beg you, how I have behaved faithfully and with sincerity of heart in Your Presence and have done what is right in your eyes.”

When he turned his face to the wall, he was not interested in talking to Isaiah who was at his bedside...only to God. He was at the far end and he shed many tears.

Have you ever visited someone in hospital who is depressed and they turn their faces to the wall? I have. It is usually a sign of desperation and depression. In this case it was an attempt to speak only to God. Hezekiah was in absolute earnest.

In the New Testament, Peter is imprisoned. He expects to be beheaded by Herod. But there was a group praying for him, when he was in prison. The key verse to note is this; “So Peter was kept in prison under constant watch, **while the church kept praying fervently to God for him.**

So, other people were praying for Peter, and Peter would not know that, although he might have hoped for that.

Let’s note this: Peter at first thinks that he must be dreaming. As well, when Peter gets released, those who are praying for him **can’t believe it either**. In fact, Peter is left outside the house and the people inside when they are told that he is outside the door, say to the young servant girl:

“You are crazy!” Meanwhile Peter keeps knocking at the door of the house. When they finally opened the door to him, they were blown away, **that their prayers were actually answered.**

Aren’t we all a bit like that?

We have so much doubt, that when a prayer is answered positively from our point of view, when it actually happens, we are bowled over.

In my experience I prayed for a woman one evening, who was on her death bed in Palliative Care in Stratford General and I prayed that she

would get better. There was no hope for that, and I knew that, **but I asked anyway.**

To be perfectly honest, when a bouquet of flowers were delivered to my home the next morning with a note on them that she was completely recovered, you could have bowled me over.

I had to learn that even when I don't feel like praying, yet when I do it, it can make a difference, often a very big difference!

Because I am a minister, people expect me to pray. Sometimes it is very hard though. But every time I do, I learn that prayer makes a difference. So now I always pray.

So, only two pints to remember here about connecting with God:

- 1) Do Pray for yourself. Shut the world out. Turn your face to the wall. Pray for yourself.**
- 2) Get a group to pray for you or your loved one.**

How can we connect with our Creator? We simply talk and direct the prayers to the One who made everything.

A true story for you:

Michael Gray, of Scranton Arkansas, wrote that his marriage to his wife Allyson began to fall apart after four years and the birth of two sons. On the first Friday night in April, they were sitting in a restaurant working out the details of divorce and child custody. Their tempers flared. Allyson wanted the boys to live up north with her and Michael wanted them down south with him.

Suddenly in the midst of the argument they both fell silent and Michael heard himself saying something that shocked Allyson, and himself, to his very core.

He said suddenly: “If we want this marriage to work, we will have to give it and ourselves to God.” **Now this was said when they were negotiating a divorce, not renegotiating a marriage.** It was far too late for that.

But, then and there, they both prayed to God and gave the marriage over to God.

Over the months of healing to the relationship that followed, Michael wondered many times, how those words came to him? Then one morning on his job as a plumber, a customer asked Michael “Is your wife’s name Allyson?” Michael nodded.

The customer said that a friend of Michael’s had come to church one evening to request prayers for their troubled marriage. She and other members had prayed for two hours one evening,

“What evening was that?” said Michael.

She thought for a moment and said: “The first Friday night in April.”

At that time, Allyson and Michael had been in the restaurant to break up, at the precise moment when people were praying for them at a meeting called specifically for them.

They had no idea that anyone was praying for them. It was a modern story like that of St. Peter when a group were praying for him.

After a long career in the ministry this is what experience has taught me:

Prayer can change outcomes.

When I was minister here at Knox, the reverend Bob Cochrane was my associate. One day he was taken to the hospital in London after a collapse. When he got there, he was in the Intensive Care, without brain activity. The doctors contacted his wife Sheila and daughter Maureen with that information.

After some more time passed with no brain activity, the doctors told them that they should consider disconnecting life support.

Sheila and Maureen called me in to the hospital. I saw dear Bob who was a mass of tubes and wires with a respirator going. It looked very serious.

Sheila and Maureen took me to a quiet room off the Intensive care unit. I said to them that I would pray that I might have an animated conversation with Bob. Sheila and Maureen said they would pray with me. We asked God for Bob's life.

Then I went to Knox on the next Sunday, paused the service, told them about Bob and asked for 2 minutes of silent prayer for him.

The next week I had my animated conversation with Bob in intensive care with no tubes or wires. The following Sunday he was back here in church! I spoke to his Doctor John Spears who attended the service that morning and said "John what do you make of Bob's recovery?" He paused and said "It is a miracle!"

I have discovered that prayer can be a **great key, where God can make a way, where there is no way.**

How about trying it in the lock of your life to see what doors open for you that would otherwise be closed?

Potentially you have a lot to gain, and absolutely nothing to lose!

Amen.