

Prayerful Problem Solving

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Human beings are by nature problem solving creatures. Our basic needs and urges interact with environmental stimuli in search of organismic satisfaction and fulfillment. All problem solving from birth to death is set in the context of our nature, experience, and learning. How we solve our problems is most fundamentally determined by our nature and resources. We are material beings integrated and controlled by a neural system directed by mind and indwelt by spirit. Human beings, therefore, have physical, mental, and spiritual resources to aid in problem solving. All of these capacities and capabilities interact and function holistically.

Centuries of experience—verified by scientific discovery, rational insight, and spiritual revelation—have taught us that these triune human resources exist in a hierarchical relationship. Our material nature is directed by the meanings and quality of mind, and mind is eventually influenced and determined by the values of spiritual reality. The more immature and underdeveloped the individual is psychologically and spiritually, the greater the domination of the physical laws and conditions will be. Conversely, the more mature and developed we are mentally and spiritually, the less we are influenced and controlled by our physical condition and the material world.

The human approach to problem solving reflects this hierarchical relationship of resources and leads to a differential strategy in finding a solution to our difficulties. Usually we start by analyzing the situation, attempting to break it down into its simplest components. We isolate facts and influences. If this initial analytical process does not lead to a solution, we have learned to employ the more systematic techniques of the scientific method. The scientific method is especially helpful in understanding and solving problems related to the material world.

When these analytical-empirical attempts at problem solving bring inadequate results, we turn to the more holistic or integral method of creative thinking. Graham Wallas, a pioneer in creative thinking research, describes this type of thinking as a four-step process: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. This is solution by insight. In creative thinking we are able to cross the border line between our empirical-rational capacities for the resolution of difficulties and prayerful problem solving. We cannot distinguish whether insights originate in our conscious or subconscious mind or if they are received from spiritual, superconscious resources.

We do find that sooner or later we reach the limit of our human ability to solve difficult problems. At this point those of us who accept the reality and availability of spiritual resources

and the efficacy of prayer may consciously engage in prayerful problem solving. At the outset, spiritually mature people need to rule out prayer as a form of magic or a technique in which we can bargain with or change God. God is infinite in goodness and love and does not need to be persuaded to do good. Secondly, we must have an understanding of God and universe laws

which enable prayerful problem solving to operate effectively. Physical, mental, and spiritual laws were established by God to regulate the world and our lives. Prayer is not a means to circumvent these laws.

While God's relationship with material reality is largely through the utilization of impersonal laws, God's relationship with people is personal. Through personal communication God seeks to assist us in using universe laws more effectively to augment our welfare. We receive this spiritual ministry primarily through our minds and the minds of others. Mind is the area in which prayerful problem solving takes place.

Efficacious prayer is not a rocking chair solution to tough problems or an easy detour around the hilly road of rigorous living. When prayer is used as an escape mechanism or psychological safety net by the fearful, slothful, or cowardly, it does not achieve genuine spiritual quality or power. Prayer is not a spiritual crutch or magic wand. It is the actualization of an indigenous partnership with God. God works with us, not "for" us, as an indulgent wonder worker. There are elemental spiritual requirements which must precede problems solving prayer. We are required to face reality courageously, and to have exhausted our human ability to cope with our difficulties. Egocentric, selfish, or purely personal objectives must be surrendered for a dedication to spiritual values and growth. Indecision and vacillation are barriers to divine guidance. Only a wholehearted decision to follow God's will as we sincerely understand it will bring spiritual wisdom. Our prayer should be for guidance, not some miraculous happening. Finally, we need to pursue our quest with living faith, not doubting that our spiritual resources will be sufficient for any mortal eventuality.

Even though prayer does not change God's mind and is not a way of changing natural or spiritual laws, it is a process through which the natural course of events may be altered. We live in an open universe in which human thought and action may influence the sequence and quality of events. Prayer is a spiritual technique through which we sometimes discover or utilize higher laws that may nullify or counteract lower laws. It is a psychological-spiritual relationship that may change our thinking and behavior. As a result, different options or events take place, higher and more inclusive laws may be set in motion, or superior resources may be made available to help us solve or cope with problems.

The editors of *Guideposts in His Mysterious Ways* (1988, Guideposts Associates, Inc.) have compiled the stories of over a hundred people who have escaped tragedy or death or whose lives have been dramatically changed by seemingly miraculous happenings brought about as the result of prayer. How do we understand these unusual events And why are people in similar situations,

who appear to be just as good and righteous, not the recipients of such miraculous deliverance through their prayers

While the answer to these questions is hidden by our incomplete knowledge and limited view of divine wisdom, it appears that the basic factor in God's relationship with persons is a spiritual quality of love which is unique for each individual in any given situation. The effect of every personal relationship with God is determined by the quality and circumstances of its singular reality.

It may be helpful to speculate about the methodologies of prayerful problem solving. Our minds are indwelt by the spirit of the Universal Father and nurtured by the Spirit of Truth and the Holy Spirit. There are, no doubt, many ways in which we may be assisted by this triune spirit ministry. The following avenues are suggested as ways in which prayer may bring spiritual help in problem solving:

- 1. New ideas or insights which result in changed attitudes and/or actions that alter our lives and the reactions of our associates.
- 2. Augmented faith and imagination activate psychological and spiritual resources which are able to change body chemistry and functions. Scientific research is building incontrovertible empirical evidence for the efficacious power of prayer in the healing process. Many medical schools and physicians now openly recognize prayer as a significant modality in healing. Visualizing in prayer that particles, atoms, cells, organs, functions, and the entire body and mind are being perfectly renewed is an effective healing resource. These changes appear to be miraculous only because we are largely ignorant of universe laws which enable psychological-spiritual activities to change body functions when fully undergirded by faith visualization and creative imagery.
- 3. Possible greater utilization of latent extrasensory capacities: telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. In unusual situations and times of crisis we observe the association of prayer and exceptional perception, awareness, and other unusual events.
- 4. The activity of angels or other superhuman beings to minister to needs and bring help which is sought through prayer. The ministry of Seraphic Guardians may be more extensive than we realize. Such events may take place more frequently in extremely critical situations or when larger providential purposes are served.
- 5. Prayer may enable us to use channels, energy forms, or laws unknown to us. We are learning that entities are often connected even though widely separated in space. In the quantum world of physics we know that particles are connected even when distantly separated. Space, it appears, is filled with fields—invisible structures that are indigenous to the universe. There is

considerable evidence that there are mental and spiritual fields or energy lanes that link and influence people across space. Sometimes it appears that prayer brings about a mysterious coordination of people and events.

Any or all of these methods of ministry may be involved in prayerful problem solving. Sometimes prayer enables us to find approaches to our difficulties which were not available to us through analytical-rational-creative thinking. At other times we find that prayer does not bring those ideas, attitudes, or actions which alter the the external conditions of the problem. It is still there in all its terrible reality. But even in these situations prayer is spiritually efficacious. It is a dynamic spiritual fellowship which inspires creative attitudes and courage, enabling us to live with even the most difficult problems such as personal deficiencies, tragedy, injustice, pain, and death.

One of the most difficult questions associated with prayerful problem solving is the place of intercessory prayer. Is it a legitimate spiritual technique for helping others or only a psychological-social way of expressing our concern for their welfare Certainly intercessory prayer cannot be used to manipulate people. God does not need to be informed of their condition nor be persuaded to perform good deeds. God is our loving Universal Father whose spirit indwells each of us, and we do not need saints, supermortal beings, or fellow mortals interceding for us. Nevertheless, we are social beings and I believe the indwelling Spirit of God leads us to share in the ministry to others through prayer.

Jesus engaged in intercessory prayer and urged his apostles to pray for others. Jesus did not play spiritual games. He was sincere, forthright, and honest, and as a Creator Son he was thoroughly conversant with universe laws and resources. Jesus' attitude toward and practice of intercessory prayer assures us that there are channels through which we can minister to others through prayer.

Furthermore, there are many double-blind scientific studies demonstrating the efficaciousness of intercessory prayer in healing. Other scientific studies show the influence of prayer on enzymes, fungi, bacteria, and cells. It is my assumption that there mental and spiritual fields or energy lanes which can be accessed through prayer to undergird others; and in our personal relationship with God there is always the opportunity, within God's loving discretion, to share in personal divine ministration to those in our loving concern.

Regardless of its effect, we spontaneously pray for those we love. There is great value in the psychological-social ramifications of intercessory prayer. There is evidence, however, that intercessory prayer has more than autosuggestive or sociosuggestive validity. If this is so, how do we understand this form of ministry One explanation is that our extrasensory capacities have the ability to enter other minds and bring comfort, strength, and love. Another possibility is that God not only gives us the opportunity to be co-partners with him in shaping our own lives, but, as we

have intimated, may have created spiritual channels through which we are privileged to be co-ministers with him in helping others within the limits of their spiritual autonomy.

In concluding our thinking about prayerful problem solving, we should remember that the stimulus of problems is basic to personal and spiritual growth. Problems are really opportunities for development and service. There are, therefore, inherent limits to problem solving in the

evolutionary universe. These limitations are germane to our glorious destiny and the quality of spiritual perfection which we are forging out between the hammers of anguish and the anvils of necessity here on planet earth.

The best picture of the efficacious use of prayer is to observe the prayer life of Jesus: "Jesus never prayed as a religious duty. To him prayer was a sincere expression of spiritual attitude, a declaration of soul loyalty, a recital of personal devotion, an expression of thanksgiving, an avoidance of emotional tension, a prevention of conflict, an exaltation of intellection, an ennoblement of desire, a vindication of moral decision, an enrichment of thought, an invigoration of higher inclinations, a consecration of impulse, a clarification of viewpoint, a declaration of faith, a transcendental surrender of will, a sublime assertion of confidence, a revelation of courage, the proclamation of discovery, a confession of supreme devotion, the validation of consecration, a technique for the adjustment of difficulties, and the mighty mobilization of the combine soul powers to withstand all human tendencies toward selfishness, evil, and sin. He lived just such a life of prayerful consecration to the doing of his Father's will and ended his life triumphantly with just such a prayer. The secret of his unparalleled religious life was this consciousness of the presence of God, and he attained it by intelligent prayer and sincere worship—unbroken communion with God—and not by leadings, voices, visions, or extraordinary religious practices." (U. B. p. 2089)