

His Kingdom or My Comfort Praying?



Longtime Presbyterian minister, Dr. Wilbur Chapman (early 1900s) was 26 when called to be pastor of Wanamakers Church in Philadelphia. His first Sunday, an old gentleman came up to him and said, “you’re much too young to be the pastor of such a fine church as this.” Chapman thought the guy was a kook. But the gentleman went on to tell him that he had decided to pray for him, that the Holy Spirit’s power would fall on him each time he stepped into the pulpit. And he had another man who would pray with him.

Chapman report that those two men soon turned into 10, the 20, then 50, and finally more than 200 men who gathered each Sunday morning before services and pray for the Holy Spirit’s enablement. Over the next three years the church saw 1,100 people come into the kingdom—more than 600 of them men.

Somewhere along the line churches have lost sight of what they should be praying for! Today, most churches’ prayers are almost exclusively for needs within the body. Prayers that each person’s life would get back to normal. Seldom are there prayers that cry out for the fullness of Jesus Christ to come upon a body, for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto a church, that Joe’s life would glorify God and people would be drawn to Christ as he walks through this difficult time, that our youth would desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit. No, we stay focused on the “little answerables” that have upset

our people's ease in life. No thought is ever given as to "God what do you want to do in this situation in Bill's life"; no our prayers are always, "Get Bill out of this!"

I'm struck by the prayers of Paul. Even though he had many people with life and death needs under his care, Paul—at least in the prayers we see in Scriptures—never prayed for a logical answer to a specific need. (His own request that his thorn in the flesh be removed is the closest he comes; but God said, "no," so he stopped asking.) Instead, Paul focused on spiritual fruit and spiritual growth issues.

For the Roman believers, who were undoubtedly suffering intense persecution, Paul prayed "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). No "Get them out of this!" Paul knew the Holy Spirit would draw people to Christ if they saw believers go through tough times with a sense of hope, joy and peace.

How do you pray when faced with a situation in your life or in the life of another? Do you simply default to "get them out of this" mode? Or do you recognize that God wants to do something in and through this situation in someone's life. Spiritual growth, maybe. Glory to His Son, maybe. Growing the kingdom, maybe. Maybe we and our churches would see more kingdom growth if we changed the way we prayed.

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To read more about praying kingdom prayers, we recommend Jon's book *Praying Like Paul*.