

Devotion: Monday, March 23, 2020

Prayer is vastly superior to worry. With worry, we are helpless; with prayer, we are interceding. When I hear sad news, I try to say a prayer for the victims. When I am troubled, I will say a prayer that asks for relief for myself and for all those who suffer as I do. "I pray for all other people who feel anxious and edgy at this moment." When I am concerned about my relatives or friends I say a short prayer to myself — "May they be happy and free of suffering."—Mary Pipher

Psalm 31

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

¹ *In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.*

² *Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.*

*Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.*

³ *You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
⁴ take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.*

⁵ *Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.*

¹⁵ *My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.*

¹⁶ *Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love*

When all you can do is pray.

A few years ago, a group called American Atheists put up a billboard outside the Super Bowl, which said, "A 'Hail Mary' only works in football." Then the group issued a press release that said, "It's time to stop believing that prayer works."

The atheists had a point. Fans should not pray for their team to win. Players should not ask God to help them catch a pass or get the ball into the end zone. Prayer does not change the outcome of football games.

But the American Atheists were wrong to say that prayer does not work. Prayer changes the people who pray, making them more peaceful, accepting and connected to Almighty God. “*You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me,*” says Psalm 31 in its appeal to God. (v. 3). Prayer doesn’t change the path of hurricanes or the outcome of the corona virus, but it does change us. It draws us into a deeper relationship with the God who saves us, even as it asks for God’s leadership and guidance.

One of the most well-known modern prayers is the Serenity Prayer, said first by Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr during World War II. It is now central to the recovery from addiction being achieved in thousands of 12-step groups: “*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*”

Notice that God is not being asked in this prayer to miraculously eliminate a desire for alcohol or narcotics. Instead, God is being asked to give serenity, courage and wisdom to people so that they can become well.

In other words, praying people turn to God and ask for help to live better lives. By praying to God in this way, millions of people have become sober through 12-step groups across our country and around the world. In each of these groups, the Serenity Prayer is said to change the hearts and minds of people, not the heart and mind of God.

This is a time for prayer. A time for all of us to become “prayer warriors” for all of our brothers and sisters.

I pray you stay healthy

God Bless you All

Pastor Jack