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ANXIETY AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

A praying mother

Troubleshooting With God

The implausible deadline

A Stranger In The Parking Lot

Unexpected answer



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE ANSWER

Have you ever wondered why it seems that some prayers aren't answered? Have you even ever, like me, wondered why it seems that it's *your* prayers, specifically, that aren't answered?

Having been a believer all my life, I've prayed for many, many things, and I've also often experienced the disappointment of my prayers not being answered—at least, not in the way that I'd expected or hoped.

I'm also familiar with many of the usual explanations for why this happens, and—when my emotions aren't involved—those make sense. At other times, I admit the learned explanations for why my prayer “wasn't answered” felt pretty dry and cold.

Recently, I came across a poem that approaches the issue from a slightly different perspective—one that I found more positive and that spoke to me on a personal level. I feel it's relevant enough to include here in full. I hope you'll find it encouraging as well.

Most Richly Blessed¹

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve.
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do great things.
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy.
I was given poverty, that I might become wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need for God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers and true needs were fulfilled.
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. By an unknown Civil War veteran, displayed in the lobby of the Shreveport, LA, Veterans Hospital

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BY VICTORIA OLIVETTA

THE GIOVANNA SOLUTION

AFTER FOUR YEARS AND A 44-HOUR BUS RIDE, I was finally visiting my daughter and son-in-law and seeing my young granddaughter, Giovanna, for the first time. She had my heart instantly—so cute, so smart, so active. Other grandparents will understand if I say that my granddaughter is the most adorable, wonderful girl in the world!

One day she was running around, playing, and being a little rowdy. In a flash she went from doing her famous “A-frame” exercise on the bed (head and feet firmly planted on the mattress, bottom up, arms crossing the A) to landing on the floor with a thud. She looked surprised, but thankfully wasn’t seriously hurt. She sat there for a moment with an expression that was a mix of shock, disbelief, and embarrassment.

After she recovered and stood up, I offered to pray for her because I was sure that such an unexpected fall must have been at least a little painful. As soon as I finished the prayer, Giovanna opened her big brown eyes, and there it was—that unmistakable sparkle of playfulness. She unfolded her hands and was ready to get back to the important affairs of her young life: more jumping and playing.

A few days later, her father needed to travel to another city and was gone for a couple of days, and she missed him. He’s made a habit of spending time with her after dinner each day whenever possible, and that time was when she missed him the most. One evening, my daughter told Giovanna that instead of being upset, she should pray for her daddy, and they prayed together. Immediately her expression changed from worry and

loss to peace and trust—she was her happy, playful self again.

Her simple faith made me reevaluate my own. It’s one thing to pray and trust that God will answer (that’s why we pray in the first place), but it’s something else to pray and immediately stop worrying about the situation, because we truly believe the answer is already on the way. Giovanna really believed, so she could happily get on with life.

So why worry? We can apply the Giovanna solution to our own problems and disappointments. We simply need to commit those situations to Him in prayer, trust that He will work them out, and then not worry about how or when the answer will come.

VICTORIA OLIVETTA IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN ARGENTINA. ■

By MARIA FONTAINE

OPTIMIZING PRAYER

THERE ARE MANY INSTANCES WHEN WE PRAY FOR PEOPLE

and they are healed immediately or within a short time. But we also experience situations where we pray for some very serious afflictions repeatedly over months and even years, and still don't see the results we've asked for. We could then be tempted to wonder what has happened. Has something gone wrong?

What the Bible says about not becoming weary in doing good¹ certainly applies to praying for long-term afflictions. We might be tempted to think, *Why waste our time if it doesn't seem to be working?* But we only see the moment rather than the more extensive timeframe that God sees. We have to trust that He knows what will bring the greatest good. After all, isn't that what we are really seeking?

Of course, it's human nature that when we don't see the results we expect, we can feel defeated and frustrated and full of questions, because

we've prayed so earnestly, so sincerely, but that's exactly the time to trust. It reminds me of that verse: "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, [by praying] you will receive what he has promised."²

Take my own situation, and how after so many years of prayers, I still have a debilitating eye condition. Does that mean that my prayers have somehow been wasted or ineffective? I can assure you that the answer is an absolute, unequivocal, definite *no!* They haven't been wasted. They're not useless or ineffectual. The Bible tells us that our prayers are "powerful and effective."³

When I take the time to stop and look for God's perspective, I see a more balanced picture of my situation. When I talk about how my eyes haven't been healed yet, I realize that this is only a part of the big picture. True, I haven't been "permanently" healed yet, but I've experienced temporary healings many times.

1. See Galatians 6:9.
2. Hebrews 10:36 NIV
3. James 5:16 NIV
4. See Luke 17:12-19.
5. See 2 Corinthians 5:7.

The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.—*Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)*

The joy which answers to prayer give, cannot be described; and the impetus which they afford to the spiritual life is exceedingly great.—*George Müller (1805–1898)*

I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me.—*C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)*

If I focus too much on the importance of being healed completely and permanently, I'm minimizing and neglecting the much greater things that God has done in my life. When I put too much importance on eliminating the affliction entirely and in my timeframe, I'm not emphasizing the wonderful things that God has done for me in temporarily healing me for short periods time and again when it was most needed.

I still pray for full healing, because I know He can answer in this way; however, I also thank Him for how He has *already* answered me. While I have a long-term affliction, He has long-term healthcare that has provided what I've needed every day, tailor-made just for me. In fact, it's beneficial that I've had this affliction for so long, because it's given me a much longer period of time to experience repeated touches of healing. These times when Jesus temporarily improved my eye condition to accomplish some task or meet a specific need reinforce my faith in healing even more than if I'd received complete healing from the start. Those times weren't the complete and "final" healing, but I always received the healing

that *He* knew I needed at the time! His touches of healing came at the times when I needed them most.

This long-term eye affliction has continued to work greater things in my life than if I'd had one permanent healing. God has taken all those prayers for my healing and channeled their power into so many good things. He has answered my prayers by helping me to learn compassion and dependence on Him through *not* being fully healed.

Sometimes, quick healing may not be what is going to bring the greater good overall. Consider the ten lepers who, as they went, were healed. Nine of them were so distracted by their instant healing that they ran off and forgot to even thank Jesus.⁴ This is something that encouraged me when I meditated on it, as my not receiving full healing has helped me to continue to walk more by faith than by sight⁵ and to thank God for His touches of healing.

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER AMSTERDAM, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SPEND TIME ALONE WITH GOD?

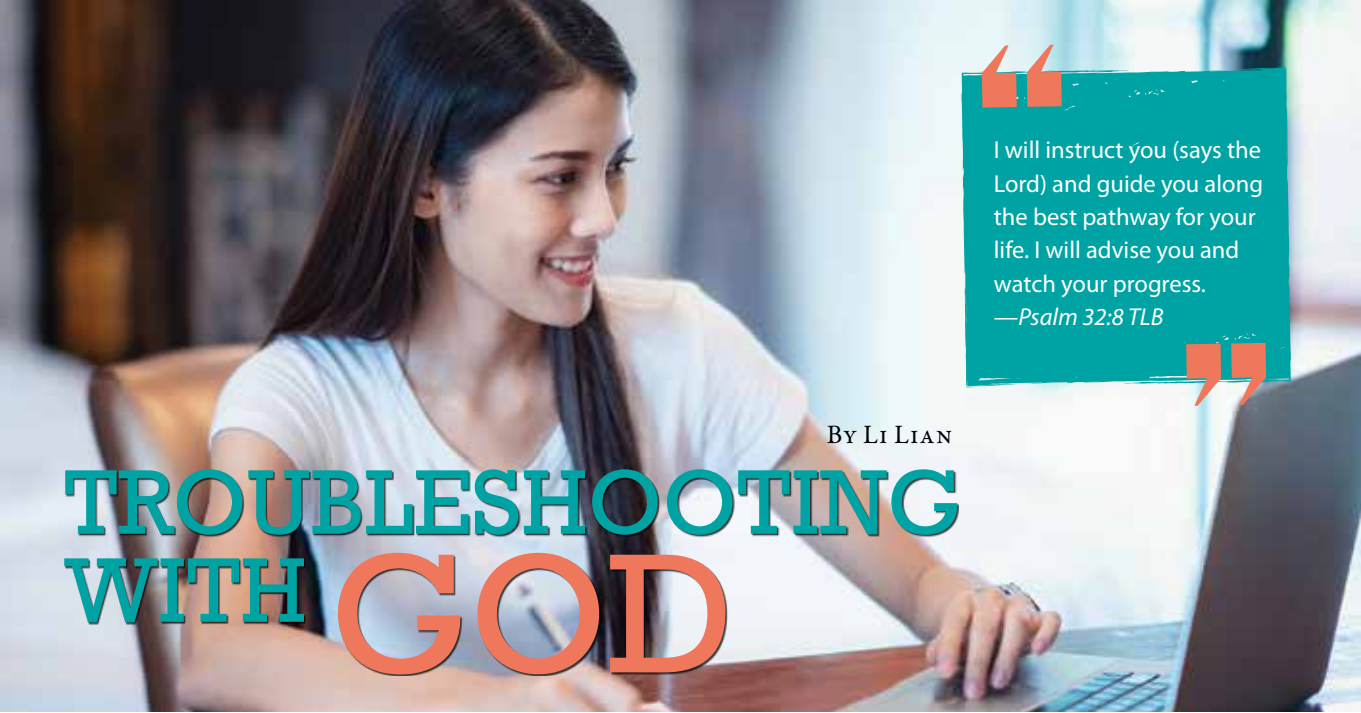
ALL RELATIONSHIPS TAKE TIME. A relationship with God, while unlike other relationships in many ways, still follows the rules of other relationships. The Bible is filled with comparisons to help us conceptualize our relationship with God. For example, Christ is depicted as the bridegroom, and the Church is depicted as the bride. ... Such intimacy involves time spent alone with one another. Another relationship is that of father and child. Close parental relationships are those in which children and parents have special “alone time” together. Spending time alone with a loved one provides the opportunity to truly come to know that person. Spending time alone with God is no different. When we’re alone with God, we draw closer to Him and get to know Him in a different way than we do in group settings.

1. See Psalm 139:13.
2. See Luke 12:7.
3. Matthew 10:31 NIV
4. See Isaiah 1:18; Revelation 22:17; Song of Solomon 4:8.
5. See Psalm 63:1.
6. See Luke 10:39.
7. See Matthew 5:6.
8. See Psalm 57.
9. See Matthew 14:13; Mark 1:35; Mark 6:45-46; Mark 14:32-34; Luke 4:42; Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12; Luke 9:18; John 6:15.
10. Matthew 6:6 NIV

God desires “alone time” with us. He wants a personal relationship with us. He created us as individuals, “knitting” us in the womb.¹ God knows the intimate details of our lives, such as the number of hairs on our heads.² He knows the sparrows individually, and “you are worth more than many sparrows.”³ He invites us to come to Him and know Him.⁴ When we desire to know God intimately, we will seek Him early⁵ and spend time with Him. We will be like Mary, sitting at Jesus’ feet listening to His voice.⁶ We will hunger and thirst for righteousness, and we will be filled.⁷ ...

In the Old Testament, we see God call prophets to come to Him alone. Moses met with God alone at the burning bush and then on Mt. Sinai. David, whose many psalms reflect a confident familiarity with God, communed with Him while on the run from Saul.⁸ God’s presence passed by as Elijah was in the cave. In the New Testament, Jesus spent time alone with God.⁹ Jesus actually instructed us to pray to God alone at times: “When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.”¹⁰ ...

Spending time alone with God rids our minds of distraction so that we can focus on Him and hear His Word. Abiding in Him, we enjoy the intimacy to which He calls us and come to truly know Him.



I will instruct you (says the Lord) and guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch your progress.
—Psalm 32:8 TLB

BY LI LIAN

TROUBLESHOOTING WITH GOD

ON MY SECOND DAY ON THE JOB, my new supervisor handed me his laptop: “I need you to upgrade this to the latest Web-based operating system.”

I was in a foreign country, surrounded by coworkers speaking a foreign language, and as a junior IT technician, I was finding it challenging to familiarize myself with the new work environment, understand foreign technical terms, and handle the inevitable problems that exceeded my level of experience.

Back at my desk, I began backing up all the files and system settings, while creating a plan of action. It was the first time I’d ever worked with this particular cloud-based technology, and it didn’t take long for me to realize that this assignment was more complicated than anticipated. There were a number of compatibility and security issues, there wasn’t any straightforward method to migrate the files between the old and the new operating systems, and to top it off, I

discovered that the new OS would be unable to connect to our networked office printer without specialized software.

After a couple of hours researching solutions and poring over the company’s network map, the office was about to close, and I still had a long list of tasks. I began to worry about how long this process was taking and whether the final outcome would meet expectations. I breathed a silent prayer asking Jesus to guide me to the right solution.

You will finish by 10 am tomorrow! His voice quietly whispered to my heart.

10 am? I questioned. *That doesn’t sound realistic.*

You will finish by 10 am tomorrow! Jesus repeated.

Honestly, I began to wonder if Jesus really understood the challenges of working with technology. Nevertheless, I decided to see what the next day would bring.

Back at the office the next morning, I took a deep breath and prayed for guidance, then booted the system. Not long after, I discovered a solution I hadn’t known about the day before.

By 10 am, I was done. All the files had loaded, and there were no longer any compatibility issues. Although I wasn’t sure why or how, I was also now able to print from the office printer. A colleague said he would set up the security certificates. And my supervisor thanked me for my work.

Experiences like this convince me that God is personally interested in my life. And when we quiet our busy minds and take time to listen, God can speak directly to our hearts, bringing peace of mind.

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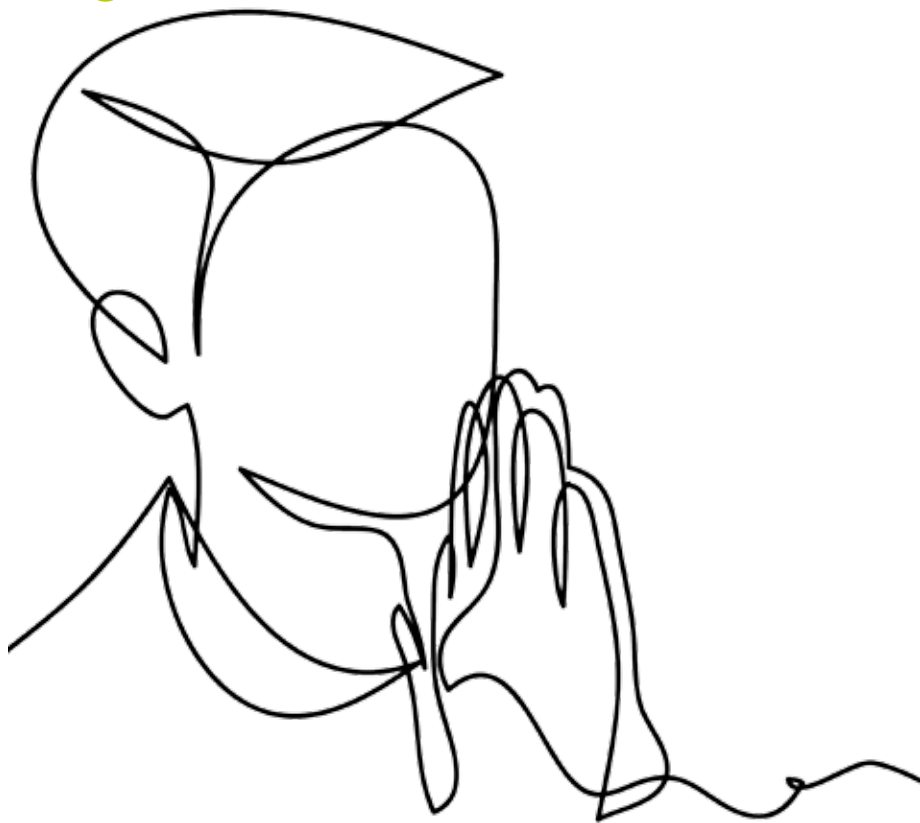
Prayer Secrets

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA VALDIVIESO

IN HIS BOOK *A Year of Living Prayerfully*, Jared Brock describes in a humorous but poignant way his journey around the world to discover and explore how different believers pray—their practices, methods, habits, and styles. More than compile a list of techniques, he wanted to experience prayer in full from different perspectives and denominational outlooks. So he and his wife dedicated an entire year to the task.

Among other places, his travels took him to:

- Ontario, Canada, where a prayer strategies specialist told him of the spectacular answers to prayer he has witnessed.
- New York, where he learned the prayer traditions of Hasidic Jews.
- Jerusalem, where he visited the different sites and churches and



1. 1 Corinthians 16:14 ESV
2. Psalm 66:18–19 NIV
3. Matthew 6:7–8 AMP
4. Jeremiah 29:13 NIV
5. Daniel 9:18 CSB
6. James 1:6
7. Mark 11:25 NLT
8. 1 John 3:22 KJV
9. James 4:3 NASB
10. 1 John 5:14

learned about traditional and ritualistic prayer, and realized that prayer isn't the practice of the right poses, but a relationship you pursue.

- Mount Athos in Greece, where the resident Orthodox monks consider prayer to be the art of arts and science of sciences and find inspiration in simple living and repetitive prayers.

- Spain, where he immersed himself in mysticism.

- France, where he visited the Carmelite monastery and saw where Brother Lawrence had turned common tasks into times of prayer, as described in *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Then on to Taizé, an international ecumenical gathering place where Catholic, Protestant, and

Orthodox Christians pray together in peace and unity.

Brock relays that he tried to find quick, easy and efficient ways to come to God, but found that the true meaning of prayer is just *being with God*.

We don't have to go around the world to learn about prayer like Brock did. We just have to learn to *connect with God* by using the approaches that work best for us. The important thing is being with God, or talking with Him, regardless of the method we employ.

For some it could be a sung prayer, for others a written prayer. Many times, all we can do is send a short prayer; other times it's good to take longer to pour out our hearts, followed by a time of silence to hear what God may speak to our hearts in reply.

Sometimes our prayers will be very eloquent and articulate; other times, we find ourselves tongue-tied or stammering. Not to worry. God hears every prayer and makes sense of each one, even those that sound clumsy or fuzzy.

Sometimes we feel like expressing ourselves with our plain candid words; other times we might want to pray with the Scriptures, paraphrasing Bible verses or the Psalms.

At times we might yearn for a solemn place like a church or a sanctuary or a beautiful natural spot where we can easily disconnect

from the noise and distractions of the world; other times we might be walking down a busy street and sending prayers up for the people we pass or for a friend or a relative in need or for the sad state the world is in.

Variety is the spice of life, and it's also the spice for prayer. Follow routines that help you concentrate and be regular, but also venture out and try different methods, or pray in different places, or with different people. Learn from others' experiences.

God's Word does give us some guidelines, such as:

START WITH LOVE.—"Let all that you do be done in love."¹

CLEANSE YOUR HEART.—"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer."²

AVOID SENSELESS REPETITIONS.—"When you pray, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. For your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."³

BE MOTIVATED NOT MERELY BY A SENSE OF DUTY OR OBLIGATION.—"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."⁴

BE HUMBLE.—"We are not presenting our petitions before you based on our righteous acts, but based on your abundant compassion."⁵

HAVE FAITH.—"Ask in faith, with no doubting."⁶

FORGIVE FIRST.—"When you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against."⁷

ALIGN YOUR LIFE WITH HIS RULES.—"Whatever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."⁸

BANISH SELFISH MOTIVES.—"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives."⁹

STAY WITHIN GOD'S WILL.—"This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."¹⁰

It is the *quality*, not the *quantity* of our prayers that count. He is more concerned with *sincerity* than *eloquence*. He hears every prayer that comes from the heart, and often answers in ways we would have never imagined. It pays to trust in Him.

GABRIEL GARCÍA V. IS THE EDITOR OF THE SPANISH EDITION OF *ACTIVATED* AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

ANXIETY AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

BY JOSIE CLARK

I GREW UP AROUND CREEKS, lakes, and rivers, but when I was sixteen I went to Atlantic City, New Jersey, and saw the ocean for the first time. At the boardwalk the night we arrived, I walked out on a wooden pier. As the first thunderous waves crashed beneath my feet, I grabbed the railing, terrified. Since then I have had a cautious fondness for the ocean. I've never been a strong swimmer, but I love the look of the ocean, the feel of sand between my toes, and even the weightless feeling of being lifted from my feet and carried about by gentle waves—as long as I have something buoyant to hang onto.

So when we spent a summer near the beach and my two teenage sons developed a keen interest in boogie boarding, I could relate. I was happy to see them securely tethered to their boards a hundred yards out in the water, waiting for that perfect wave. But as time went on, they got more daring, insisting that the perfect wave was to be found further and further out at sea. I would sit on the shoreline watching the dots that were

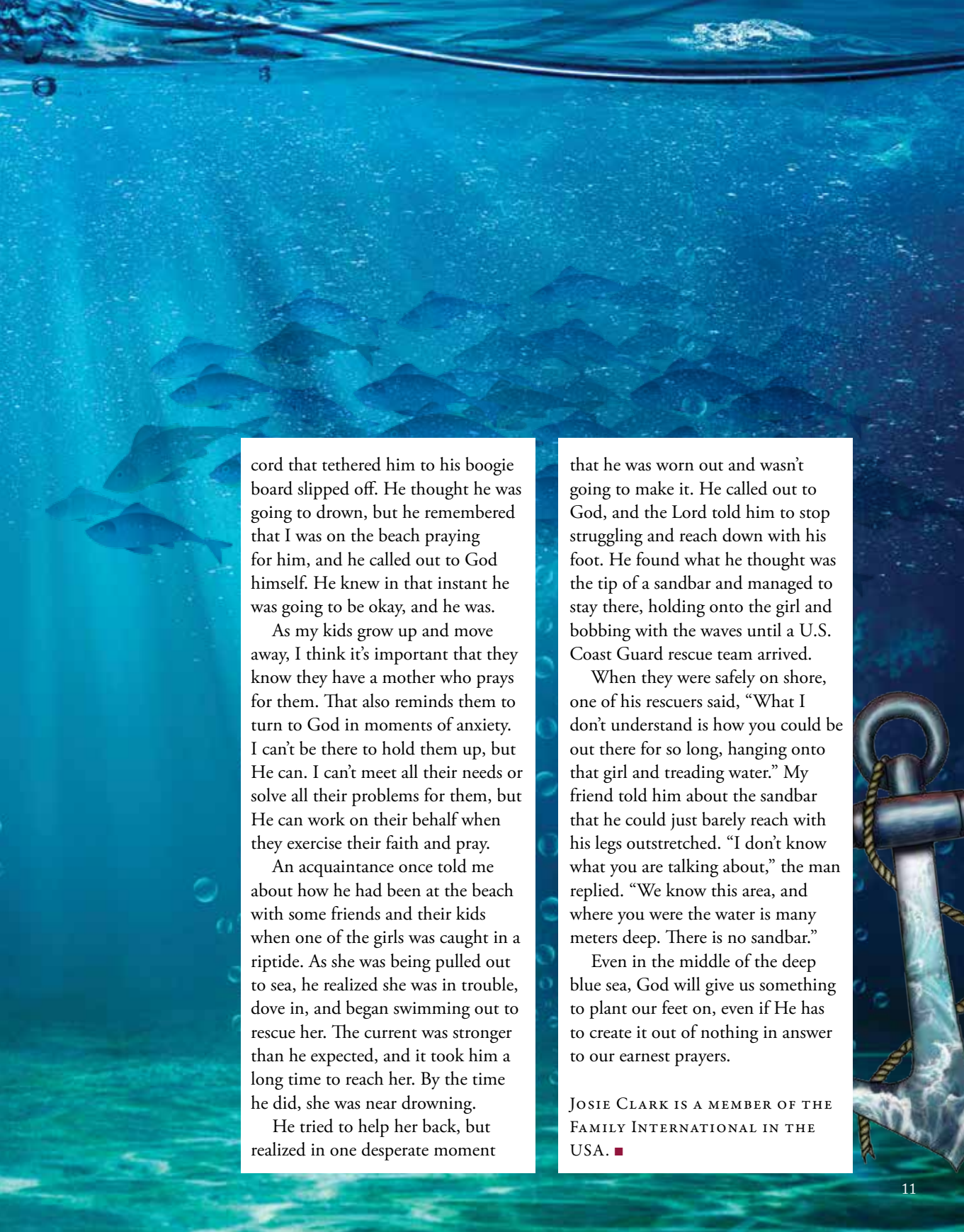
my sons in the midst of all that blue ocean and try to control my anxiety.

Worry seems almost a necessary part of parenting. It is a sign of love and concern. It is also a warning signal that it's time to pray. I think worry can actually be a good thing when it causes us to channel our negative, anxious thoughts into a prayer that can help bring about a positive outcome in that situation.

It is our responsibility to train our children and lead them in the right direction, but at a certain point we need to pull back and trust God to keep them from serious harm. As children grow, they need to be able to learn through an ever-broadening range of experiences; they need to learn to take responsibility for themselves, and they need to learn to pray themselves when “out in the deep blue sea.”

It gives them a sense of security, though, to know that their parents are “on the shore,” still looking after them and still vigilant in prayer—like the time when one of my sons experienced a moment of sheer panic after a wave caught him off guard and knocked him for a loop, and the





cord that tethered him to his boogie board slipped off. He thought he was going to drown, but he remembered that I was on the beach praying for him, and he called out to God himself. He knew in that instant he was going to be okay, and he was.

As my kids grow up and move away, I think it's important that they know they have a mother who prays for them. That also reminds them to turn to God in moments of anxiety. I can't be there to hold them up, but He can. I can't meet all their needs or solve all their problems for them, but He can work on their behalf when they exercise their faith and pray.

An acquaintance once told me about how he had been at the beach with some friends and their kids when one of the girls was caught in a rip tide. As she was being pulled out to sea, he realized she was in trouble, dove in, and began swimming out to rescue her. The current was stronger than he expected, and it took him a long time to reach her. By the time he did, she was near drowning.

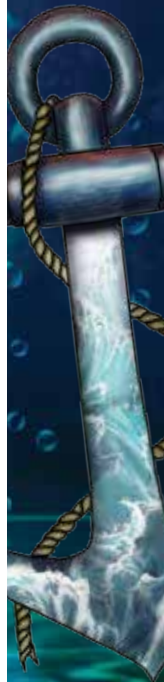
He tried to help her back, but realized in one desperate moment

that he was worn out and wasn't going to make it. He called out to God, and the Lord told him to stop struggling and reach down with his foot. He found what he thought was the tip of a sandbar and managed to stay there, holding onto the girl and bobbing with the waves until a U.S. Coast Guard rescue team arrived.

When they were safely on shore, one of his rescuers said, "What I don't understand is how you could be out there for so long, hanging onto that girl and treading water." My friend told him about the sandbar that he could just barely reach with his legs outstretched. "I don't know what you are talking about," the man replied. "We know this area, and where you were the water is many meters deep. There is no sandbar."

Even in the middle of the deep blue sea, God will give us something to plant our feet on, even if He has to create it out of nothing in answer to our earnest prayers.

JOSIE CLARK IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE USA. ■



SOMETIMES, YOU DON'T NEED A MIRACLE

BY MARA HODLER

I WASN'T BORN A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. Earning the right to be here was a process. I had to fill out piles of forms, spend hours on the phone with officials, pay a hefty sum, get fingerprinted, and have an interview to determine if I indeed met the requirements to earn residency. And, yay, I did! That was a happy day!

Now I can come and go freely. When I get on an airplane to go to another country, I don't have to worry if I will be allowed to return. I can pull out my little green card and prove that I have the right to be here. This means a lot to me, because there was a time when I didn't have a green card, even though I had an American husband and American children.

So what did I do? It took a while, but I went through all the steps. I

had to spend hours on the phone with immigration officials as they walked me through the complicated forms and requirements. On the day of my interview, I was a little nervous. What if, for some random reason, they denied my application? But as I thought and prayed about it, I realized that I had done all the necessary work. I had met all of the requirements, and there was no reason that they should deny my application. I could be confident as I went for the interview because I had done my part.

I certainly prayed for God to allow my application to be granted, but I wasn't praying for a miracle. It would have been very foolish of me if, throughout the immigration process, I just planned for a miracle and didn't diligently do my work, and then right at the time of the interview begged God for a miracle.



Maybe it's because I'm a mom and I know what it's like to have my little people come at me all day with requests like, "Can you get me a cup of water?" Yes, I *could* get you a cup of water, but you are seven years old and could also get *yourself* a cup of water. I think God might sometimes feel like that when we pray for things that we are perfectly able to take care of ourselves.

My seven-year-old might need advice on how to not pinch her fingers in the cupboard door or how to clean up after herself, but she's definitely able to get herself a cup of water. And I expect her to. If she was sick or hurt, that would be a different story, but in general, I expect her to get up from whatever she's doing and get the things that she needs for herself.

The Bible is full of examples of God expecting people to take care of

the things they were able to manage before He did what they *couldn't* do. God saved Noah and his family from the flood, but He expected Noah to build the ark. God miraculously provided manna for the children of Israel, but He expected them to gather it up each day. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but before doing so, He told the crowd to roll away the stone.

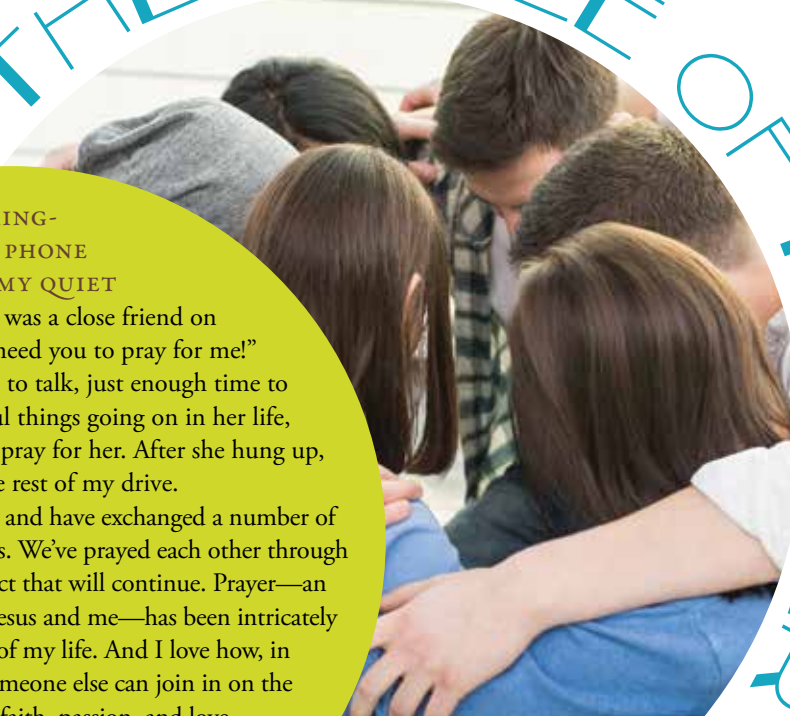
When Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes, He probably could have done it without the "starter kit" of five loaves and two fishes. He also could probably have made the food appear in the hands of each person in the crowd rather than having His disciples pass the food out. But again, He expected each one to do their part. When you've done your part, you can have expectation and confidence that God will do His part in accordance with His will.

All of these instances were situations where a miracle was actually needed. There are also times where you *don't* need a miracle. You just need to do some work. "It's on you," so to speak.

My point in all of this isn't, "Don't pray!" It's rather, "Don't expect God to do what you are responsible to take care of!" And if you have done what you should and could, have the confidence to proceed. Just like the citizens of a country have certain rights, so do we who claim heavenly citizenship. As we fulfill the requirements, we earn the rights and privileges. And the privileges of a child of God are off the charts.

THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST 1 THING,¹ A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■

THE CIRCLE OF PRAYER



BY MARIE ALVERO

THE RING- ING OF MY PHONE INTERRUPTED MY QUIET

EVENING DRIVE. It was a close friend on the other end, “Marie, I need you to pray for me!” She only had a few minutes to talk, just enough time to tell me about the very stressful things going on in her life, and I assured her that I would pray for her. After she hung up, I prayed for her out loud for the rest of my drive.

We’ve been friends for a while and have exchanged a number of “emergency” prayer calls and texts. We’ve prayed each other through some big life changes, and I expect that will continue. Prayer—an ongoing conversation between Jesus and me—has been intricately woven into the highs and lows of my life. And I love how, in a time of need or rejoicing, someone else can join in on the conversation and lend their faith, passion, and love.

Among Christians, the phrase “I’m praying for you” is casually tossed around, often lacking impact because of a lack of commitment. When someone is

in crisis, we tend to look around for something we can actually *do*, because that seems more helpful than “just praying.” But the truth is that committed prayer is one of the greatest services we can perform.

My mom has demonstrated this to me over and over. She’s not a woman of influence or means, but when she tells me that she’s praying for me, I know things will work out. She has prayed me through

many a difficulty, and just knowing that she was praying for me was always strengthening and comforting. At least I knew that she was confident in God’s faithfulness even when I wasn’t.

Praying for one another is a major way Jesus’ followers serve one another. The Bible says that Jesus “lives to make intercession for [us.]”¹ And He allows us the privilege of interceding for one another as well. I’m not a prayer expert, but I believe that my tiny effort in prayer can help to lift up discouraged loved ones and change situations for the better.

When my friend asks me to pray for her, I pray from my heart. I know that she will do the same for me. I know that, through prayer, we can love and care for each other despite any distance or separation.

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■

1. Hebrews 7:25



A STRANGER IN THE PARKING LOT

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

I WAS SITTING IN THE CAR INSIDE A PARKING LOT, taking a moment to think about changes in my life and work. It felt like I had hit a plateau, and I was honestly a little worried.

Suddenly a man popped up next to my window. Short, straggly, and with an air of boundless cheer, he greeted me warmly. I was a little surprised, and even more cautious. Crime is rampant in South Africa, and there are plenty of opportunists looking for an easy mark. But as I sat there giving him a suspicious sideways stare, he continued: “Beautiful day today!”

I grunted, making a mental list of the valuables in the car.

“God just really knows how to make each day special!” Again I curtly agreed, unsure of where he was going with the topic.

“One thing about God, He knows everything! He’s our Savior, and He

doesn’t just save us from hell, but also from our problems here!” Now I was intrigued, and responded more enthusiastically.

He then leaned in, resting his arm on the car with the familiarity of an old friend, and said, “You know another thing? God has seasons in our life. Each one is different, and each one requires our full attention at that time. But His presence is in every season and time, regardless of when it comes or what it brings to our life. He’s always with us to help us into a new season.”

I can’t quite remember what I said in response; I was overwhelmed. He smiled, wished me a nice day, turned, and strolled away, whistling a tune as he went. I wanted to say more, to tell him that he was heaven-sent to encourage me, to let him know what his words meant to my troubled soul. But the more I think about the whole experience, the more I realize he already knew.

Jesus can be with you always too, if you ask Him:

Dear Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God and that You love me. Please come into my life, forgive me for all my wrong actions, and stay with me always. Amen.

That quiet day, my turbulent heart was calmed by the same one who calmed the sea for His disciples. I don’t know who that man, whose name I never even discovered, was. What I do know is that he was there for me, Jesus manifested to a frightened disciple. The seasons of my life will continue to change, but Jesus will not.¹

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1. See Hebrews 13:8.



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

SHARPSHOOTER PRAYERS

When you want to target your prayers in order to bring about the best results, try to shut everything else out of your mind. You can do this anywhere, anytime, even in a crowded public place—a busy airport, while riding on the bus or train, anywhere you happen to be. Just stop for a few moments, close your eyes, and concentrate on Me, and I'll help you to focus your thoughts enough to target your prayers.

Targeted prayers bring you right into the action. You're not standing on the sidelines watching and supporting from a distance. You're putting yourself right in the middle of the fight. You don't just sympathize or pity, but you empathize, you show compassion, and you get in there and do what you can to help bring about the victory, because you're praying as if you were in that person's shoes, and the battle becomes real to you.

Focus your prayers on the problem, aim carefully so that you can do your part to improve the situation, and pull the prayer trigger and count it done. Then commit the situation to Me.