

Living on a Prayer

If you've met me, you'll know that there's not much about me that screams "Classic 80s Rock" as alluded to in the title. I'm more of a Taylor Swift fan myself.... Sorry. But also not sorry? You'll be thankful to know that I'm borrowing the title alone and am not about to plunge into a painful exegesis of macho power ballads (even if I do admit that this one is a belter).

With headphones plugged in during my daily street-roaming escapes, I've noticed what feels like an increasing number of buses driving past me with the words 'Try Praying' plastered along the side. It's quite a confronting notion. Amidst the muddle of ideas, pressures, and Baby Shark excerpts that are long-term occupants of my stream of thought, why should I bother wasting my time with the awkwardness and naivety of prayer? Aside from the fact that 'mindfulness' is a more comfortable concept to prayer, don't those producing the slogans know that genies don't exist?

It's actually quite a dangerous pragmatism to fall into if we think that God's existence is based on how closely He answers our prayers to our preferences. If 'Try Praying' was only about God meeting our expectations in terms of comfort and stability, then it has always been set up to disappoint. If God's existence depends on making those who have a pretty easy life even easier, then Jesus' life and ministry makes absolutely no sense. You only need to flick through the gospels to see Him reveal His heart for social reform and our spiritual well-being.

Though I can understand why the simple solution of 'Try Praying' can seem almost insulting in the face of intense pain and suffering, perhaps it's worth approaching it from another angle. Rather than our prayers looking like a shopping list of things we'd like God to improve on, what if we tried praying in conversation with someone who knows and loves you more deeply than anyone else? What if we tried lamenting our pain and confusion to Him. Or what if we asked Him to reveal what it is that we need in order to get through our circumstances- there's a chance He might know what we need more than we do. There's a description of prayer written by E. Stanley Jones that reads "If I throw out a boathook from the boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God."

Even though I've been a Christian for a long time now, I've found that the nature of my prayers change with whatever is happening in my life. For the last few years of parenthood, my prayers have changed accordingly. Parenting toddlers is obviously a blessing but it is *hard*. Yes, yes, I expect it to get harder as their needs grow more complicated, but right now I'm happy to admit that I'm finding juggling everything mentally and physically taxing. My eldest child woke 8-10 times a night for the first 12 months of her life. I prayed every single night that this beautiful gift I had been given would just go to sleep, and still my situation did not change. It would have been so easy for God to wave the wand and grant me 12 hours sleep every night, but it wasn't to happen. Instead I leaned into his promises. He says in Lamentations 3:22-23 "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.." I learned to rely on His new mercies every morning whilst asking for my situation to change- both are ok. But soon enough my focus was on asking God for enough patience, joy, energy, and companionship to get me through that day. Or through that hour, depending on whether they're teething. Each day I lived from prayer to prayer (also, a big shoutout goes to coffee).

Eventually both of my kids learnt to sleep through the night for the most part. But there are other, harder, situations in life that continue to remain and stun. I apply the same principle. I talk, lament, confess, and celebrate with God, and hope that my will starts to look more like His.

If you're reading this thinking that you don't think you like the look of God's will, then I understand (the Church in the past hasn't always done a great job of representing it!) But what I would challenge you to do is to read about it straight from the horse's mouth. Open a bible and read about what Jesus did in the context He was in. Look at how he acted and how he prayed.

And then, if you feel inspired, try praying.