

Thy will be done

As a kid, I was obsessed with knowing how things work – hence my engineering background and hence why I’m so happy now at being paid to read books about ‘how things work’.

I’ve already confessed how I’ve found prayer difficult over the past decade. For my first 40 years as a Christian it was less of a problem; I had file cards listing different circles of contacts and concerns, using one card a day. A bit mechanical, but it seemed to work.

But I did have issues with prayer. For example, thousands of people all over the world prayed for David Watson’s healing, and he died. These days we get prayer alerts by mobile/email, so huge numbers of people pray about something. Why? What’s the point? What does it achieve?

Another issue for me was ‘shopping list praying’ – intercessory prayer meetings where we maybe didn’t even bother to say ‘Hello’ to God before we listed all the things we wanted him to do.

So a stage on my journey was to decide that prayer should be more about listening to God to find out what he wants, rather than telling him what we want. I’ve found that really freeing, and I bless God for using Sue and Colin and others to teach me the value of silent prayer. I sometimes sit in silence, noting down things like ‘buy All Bran’, if they come to mind, quickly returning to silence, or the names of people to pray for. Then I come back later to actually intercede for them.

But something has occurred to me which, assuming I’m right in my thinking, might be helpful.

Thinking about suffering and an almighty God: God is loving and he creates us in love, and by the nature of love, real love, he allows us to choose our own path. So that means some suffering is quite simply our fault. However, in the face of innocent suffering, say natural disasters, we might say that either (1) God really is almighty but is heartless because he doesn’t prevent it, or (2) he’s loving, but he’s not really almighty.

What if, in love, God chooses to submit to the natural order, allowing tectonic plates to keep moving in sudden violent jumps, rather than putting in some WD40 to make them move slowly. That means that he has allowed the world to be ‘subject to decay’.

To go back to (intercessory) prayer, might the Lord’s prayer be of some help? When first at St Ed’s I was struck that they seem to use the Lord’s prayer at every end and turn. I confess that I thought it a bit OTT. I now repent; that prayer has gained hugely in significance for me.

Jesus taught us ‘**when** we pray’ to say ‘they **will** be done’. Now I used to think that was a bit pointless, if I was honest: if God is almighty then his **will** is going to be done regardless, isn’t it?! But what did Jesus say? ‘For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the **will** of him who sent me.’ (Jn 6:38) and very pertinently, ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my **will**, but yours be done.’ Lk 22:42.

OK, there are passages that seem to say that, by praying, people have encouraged God to change his mind, but maybe prayer isn’t about getting God to do things, but about Christians cooperating so that God’s will *is* done on earth, as it is in heaven?

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