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CHAPTER TWENTY

Praying For Wisdom, Strength, and Courage

Like most people, I always had a problem with not having prayers answered. We have all heard the quote in the Bible when Jesus said, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it shall be opened to you."

So, why doesn't someone get cured of cancer when I ask God to do so? Why isn't there peace in the Middle East when I ask God to accomplish that? Most importantly, why can't the Chicago Cubs win a World Series, or even get to one, when so many fervently pray for that to happen? (To put that sentence in proper context, I wrote this chapter in 2010. I doubt that prayer had anything to do with it, but the Chicago Cubs actually won the World Series in 2016. Who'd of thunk?)

When I pray, I don't expect cures for my ailments, winning a game, good fortune for my family, etc. I don't think God intervenes in those matters very often or at all. Instead, I pray for wisdom, strength and courage. Those are qualities of the Spirit/spirit which the second half of the quote above makes reference to. Jesus said, "And I will ask God to send you the Holy Spirit who will guide you."

My first request is to ask for wisdom.

Wisdom is a very broad term in my way of thinking.

Wisdom is a combination of knowledge and love (head and heart) that leads to practical action.

I pray for knowledge as an aspect of wisdom to help me understand as much as I can about a situation; to correctly identify the problem and core issue; to bring as broad an array of

knowledge as I can and is relevant to the situation, taking into account a wide range of disciplines including, but not limited to: science, history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics, business, theology, etc.

I think that the more I know in as broad a range of relevant topics, the better decisions I can make.

I pray for and include love in my definition of wisdom because it adds a very important element to knowledge. I think that we know with both our head and our heart. Love is part of wisdom because it puts knowledge in perspective. Love speaks to the relational nature of people and things. Love is a choice; an act of the will to choose the true, the good, and the beautiful. Love helps me choose what is good for me and for others (they are usually not mutually exclusive goals).

Through knowledge, we know as best we can what is.

Through love, we can apply that knowledge and make decisions about what should be.

Wisdom is the combination of mind and heart which helps us choose what is right...what is good...what promotes life and love.

In addition to wisdom and finding a course of action which is best to pursue, I pray for strength and courage to actually do it.

Though strength and courage are similar in many ways, they mean two different things to me when I pray.

Strength is the capability to act:

- To start something
- To see it through
- To not give up prematurely just because it gets tough

I pray for strength to go from a state of inertia to a course of action. Wisdom without strength doesn't get the job done.

Courage is related to strength because it often takes courage to do what wisdom may lead us to do. The wise decision may require a new course of action that others may consider foolish, or a waste of time, or won't be successful. Wisdom sometimes leads us to a course of action which is not generally accepted by society. A wise course of action might actually cause people to want to harm us in some way. Sometimes it takes courage, because we may end up standing alone in our understanding of a situation and what we decide we should do about it. Sometimes it means risking failure. So, I pray for courage.

I also pray for wisdom, strength, and courage to protect me from my own stubbornness and bullheadedness, and sticking with a course of action until it hurts me or someone else.

Wisdom knows when to stop a course of action if the circumstances change or we learn new things that should lead us to choose differently.

Our strengths are also often our weaknesses. Wisdom helps us see when our strength is killing us. It tells us when to change and helps us decide what to change and how to change.

So when I pray for wisdom, strength, and courage, I pray for help to see what truth, beauty, goodness, and love requires of me in a situation and then helps me to act on it.

The reason I pray for wisdom, strength, and courage is that I am pretty confident my prayer will be heard. I think and believe that God always grants wisdom to carry out God's work in our world. It is a Spirit to spirit, relational thing. It is like asking a good friend for advice and support. A good friend will always give it to us because they love us. If a good friend will give us her or his advice, love and support, how much more so will God give us wisdom when we ask for it? God grants us wisdom so our hearts and minds are led to be open to reality and to respond in a knowledgeable and loving way...a wise way...a way that promotes as much of a heaven on earth here and now that we are capable of doing.

And when I pray for others, I basically pray for the same things for them. Life can be challenging and hard as well as wonderfully enjoyable. When times are hard, whether due to our own actions, natural disasters, the actions of others, etc., I think the best we can do for ourselves and others is to move forward in our lives wisely, with courage and strength, and with dignity...making and carrying out decisions and actions that are worthy of the best that each of us is capable of doing.

But even then, I do not expect total success or some type of visible sign of God's intervention in response to my prayer. First of all, I don't know what total success in a particular situation might be. Sometimes it may take years to see the results of a decision and action. Also, I know for myself that, even with the guidance of God's Spirit, I still may not act appropriately. My tendencies to take action too quickly, or my anger, or my impatience, or my fear of the unknown may hinder the work of God's grace within me.

But at that point, I am at peace knowing that I have the help of God's Spirit to deal with whatever difficulties come my way. That doesn't mean that I sit back and wait for God to solve my problems. What it means is that I will do everything I can to solve the problem or face the challenges that confront me or others for whom I pray. But I know that in addition to bringing the best I have to the situation, God will help me understand and act as wisely as I or the people I pray for can do within our human limitations and circumstances.