

Prayers God Is Answering in His Children

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When Queen Elizabeth II was a girl, so the story goes, the teacher of a class where she was present asked the children what they wanted to be when they grew up. They knew Elizabeth was the heir apparent to the throne, but they wanted to include her in the exercise. When her turn came, Elizabeth replied with dignity, "When I grow up, I shall be queen."

Elizabeth had a destiny, and she focused her life on that destiny. The church has a destiny. Believers are predestined to be conformed to the character-image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-30). This is our high calling, our life purpose, our reason for being.

The prayers for believers recorded in the New Testament embody God's purpose for us--what He desires to do in us and for us. He calls us to live for the same purpose, to pray for it, to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He works to accomplish it in us, and to expect it to happen. The New Testament records at least six such prayers: (John 17; Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-19; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-12; 2 Thess. 1:11, 12). Although each is complete in itself, as we read them some major themes emerge.

The keynote is our Lord's high-priestly prayer (John 17). Four things stand out to us: Jesus prayed that the Father will keep us by His name, sanctify us by His word, unite us by His glory, and that we will be with Him and behold His glory. That prayer will be answered. The Father is doing exactly what Jesus asked. This strengthens what Jesus asked. This strengthens our faith, challenges us to holy living, brings us together, and fills us with assurance!

Paul's inspired prayers blossom out of the prayer of Jesus. Everything Jesus prayed for is the result of our living relationship with Him. For that reason Paul prays that Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:17). This is a love relationship. We are to be rooted and established in love and to grasp the love of Christ in all its dimensions (Eph. 3). We are to abound in love, and to do so in all wisdom and insight so we can discern what is best (Phil. 1). Love must be educated: Our feelings have no brains.

First is the personal knowledge of the Father and the Son (John 17:3; Eph. 1:17). This is to be an ever-increasing knowledge (Col. 1:10). Second is purposeful knowledge--the hope of His calling (our destiny, our ambition), the riches of His inheritance in the saints (what God has invested in us), and the surpassing greatness of His power toward us (the power that raised Christ from the dead is directed toward us and is working on our behalf [Eph. 1]). Third is practical knowledge--the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col. 1).

This develops into strong, stable character--pure and blameless until the day of Christ (Phil. 1). We are to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man (Eph. 3); empowered with all power according to the might of His glory to all patience and long-suffering (Col. 1).

Character shows itself in conduct. We are to walk worthy of our calling and to fulfill all of His (and our) desires for goodness (2 Thess. 1), filled with the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1). We are to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in every way, and being fruitful in every good work (Col. 1). Love is the root; righteousness is the fruit.

So love leads to knowledge, producing character, and resulting in conduct. As all of these are fulfilled in us, we are filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3). We live a joy-filled life, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints (Col. 1).

Thus the ultimate goal is realized--the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified in us and we in Him (2 Thess. 1). It is summed up in the prayers of Epaphras for the Colossian believes that they would "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12).

All of these prayers to the Father are exactly according to His will. And God, Who fulfills His Word, is answering. This is our confidence, our hope, our certainty, our joy. We can go through anything in the power of the Spirit if we keep this destiny clearly before us.

What destiny are you pursuing?