

I Am Directionally Challenged, But God Isn't: A Lay Leader's Perspective

Hello, Aldersgate Family!

I hope all is going well with each and every one of you. Here in the O'Hara household, it's just me and Boston, but we have regular drop-in visits from Bill, which thankfully help break up the tedium of sheltering in place. Of course, there have been some good things that have surfaced from this house arrest situation. One of them is that my prayer life has been strengthened.

There are several reasons for that beneficial outcome. One, I am a chatty person and now that I don't have as many available ears to fill with conversation, I am turning my energy upwards. Two, there are just a lot of people to pray for and circumstances to pray about.

Recently, in the midst of a fervent prayer, I had a long-buried memory resurface. I remember a pastor once saying that many of us approach God like we are traffic cops. In our prayers we try to send God in the direction we want him to go - oftentimes in multiple directions at once: "Please, God, keep my family safe from COVID-19." "Dear Jesus, preserve my friend's business as it is faltering now." "Heavenly, Father, please restore some peace to our world."

Now, I am not saying that we shouldn't ask God for such things because we are counseled in the Bible to make the ask. One of my favorite verses in that vein is 1 John 15:7: "*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*" Being human I have always been attracted to the "whatever you wish" part of that verse. However, this verse is a conditional statement and we shouldn't miss that reality. In order to reap the benefits of prayer, we must abide in Him and His words must abide in us as well. In essence, we need to be smack dab in the middle of His will and, if we are, we won't be praying amiss.

Unfortunately, many times I do approach God like I'm a traffic cop. I get impatient when He moves slowly while I am waving Him ahead. When things aren't moving at all, I jump to the conclusion that He is stalled - maybe paying attention to another traffic cop besides me. As I pondered that long ago sermon, I had an "aha" moment about my prayer life. I feel His presence most when I prepare for it — by reading His Word daily and reflecting on it.

Yes, there have been moments when I have been "away for awhile" and I have called on his name in desperation and felt the return of His comforting attention. But the times when I have felt the most connected, the most serenity, and the most confidence are the times when I have abided in His Word and heeded His counsel. 1 John 5: 14 says, "*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.*" It's simple really: When I spend time with Him, I am more likely to ask according to His will and less likely to scream at Him for moving in the opposite direction I think He should go.