

Why Pray? Series

What is the hardest thing you can imagine yourself being successful at?

- I would not try out for a choir, even though my son said I was in tune when I sang Happy Birthday to him this week. I am not good enough.
- I did not pursue being a dancer after high school, even though I was well trained, because an injury to my feet requiring surgery dashed all hope.
- I have been invited to submit some sermons to a publisher but it's a hard opportunity to follow up on. Though I have the training and experience, what if I get rejected?

Let's put that question in the context of our faith. What is the hardest thing you can imagine yourself being successful at in terms of faith practices? We might avoid some things because we have not studied enough, or our setbacks and injuries are too great, or we are simply afraid it will not work. These things may hinder our praying about impossible challenges.

I would like to tell you the story of a man who was ill. He had a terrible disease in which he was isolated and ostracized. Because there was no known physical cause, the disease was thought to be related to sin—although the type of sin was not specified. In advanced cases like this man had, the hands, feet, and nose become misshapen and the person becomes extremely difficult to look at. Those who had it were seen as untouchable because their disease was communicable. If it was diagnosed early, it could be cured. If not, its damage could not be reversed.

Well, the man heard about Jesus and Jesus came to his city. Jesus had a reputation of being an unusually effective teacher with a healing ministry.

How hard do you think it was for the man to seek out Jesus and ask for help? What thoughts might have gone through his head?

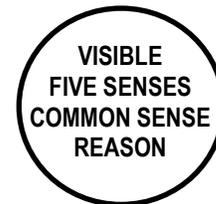
- He wouldn't help me; I'm not as good as others.
- My problem is not curable.
- What if I ask and it doesn't work?

Let's also include the fact that we might have caused the problem, and so conclude that Jesus might not be willing to help us.

Ever feel that way?

If you do feel any of those things, it is only natural. The reason you feel unworthy or unloved or that Jesus wouldn't help is that you are human and you live in a tangible world. Let's describe it using Paul Maconochie's diagram.¹ Let's call this

“THE REALM OF EARTH”



This is our worldly experience. Reality is what you see or sense. There are laws of cause and effect which are approached by common sense, reason, and education. We have a sense of right and wrong. We believe things like *you reap what you sow*, and *you can't walk on water*, and *what goes up must come down*. These earthly laws are true. There is order in our world and we know quite a lot about it.

So we live in this world and it's only natural that we live by the rules defined by the visible world.

The man's overwhelming illness caused him to be isolated and alone and there was no known cure. His whole life was limited. How could it be otherwise? But the story goes like this: READ Luke 5:12-16

Notice: “He bowed with his face to the ground, begging to be healed. “Lord,” he said, “if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean.” (v. 12b)

He took a great risk. All earthly reality said that there was no hope for healing. Would you take such a risk? Or would you withdraw and hesitate to ask for help, believing you did not deserve it or the cure was impossible?

¹ Paul Maconochie, Naturally Supernatural Workshop. See www.3dmovements.com/why-naturally-supernatural, accessed 8/8/18.

Here comes Jesus into this world. Even though he is fully human as we are, he brings with him a different reality. It is just as real as this table, even though we cannot see it.

“THE REALM OF HEAVEN”



Jesus' reality introduces a different realm where reality is not always what you physically see. Reality is revealed not from your senses but by the Holy Spirit, who is unseen. Reality is revealed in the Bible. This reality also has order and rules and laws. For instance, Paul says that *faith rests not on human wisdom but on the power of God.* (1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

Heavenly rules for the Christian always trump earthly rules. For instance the earthly rule that says *you reap what you sow* in God's realm becomes, "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) With God, mercy trumps judgment.

Here's another rule in the heavenly realm: "For God, all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26) We must study the Bible to even comprehend its heavenly rules.

The work is in both following the Word and learning to hear the Holy Spirit in order to overlay the earthly world with the heavenly world, which while both are realities, **the heavenly world trumps the reality of earth.** God does this all the time but we often do not see it. Our vision is clouded by our own sins—we are not good enough or our losses blind us, or we do not have the spiritual courage to ask.

But the man did not let those things stop him. His sin did not stop him. The hurt of isolation and aloneness from his disease did not keep him away from Jesus. The fact that his circumstance was entirely impossible did not keep him from seeing something special in Jesus. He took the risk of FAITH and he moved into the heavenly realm by asking for healing and he received an immediate reward.

I want to tell you a story about the reality of the heavenly realm. It's the story of Darlene from Michigan. We met her on our trip and she told this story to a group of people who dined together one night. She told me I could share it with you.

One night when she was a young adult, she was out with friends. It was late. They were standing on the street talking. A car came speeding down the street and it hit her, dragging her for yards, even running over her hand. She was rushed to the hospital and not expected to survive.

She had a near-death experience. She told us of being bathed in a tremendous light and feeling the most overwhelming love that she had ever felt. Everything was enveloped in love and she wanted to stay. She did not actually see Jesus but she heard his voice saying, "You must go back. It is not your time." She answered, "I don't want to go. I like it here. I don't want to live disabled."

The answer was, "That's been taken care of."

She awoke in her hospital room. She was in pain and her hip and legs were severely injured. The doctor told her she would never walk again. But she told him, "I will walk," because she knew what she had heard and she just knew Jesus was willing.

The road to recovery was long and difficult. But as soon as she could she got up and tried to walk across the room. It was extremely painful and at first impossible. But doctors were amazed at her persistence. She practiced for months walking from bed to dresser to window until she was able to walk unimpeded. Her hand in which almost all the bones were broken in the middle, recovered with no issues. It's now been over forty years. She still tells God's story for his glory.

When the leper told his story, vast crowds came to hear Jesus preach and to be healed of their diseases. But Luke notes that Jesus regularly withdrew to pray. Connection to the Father's heavenly realm was his priority.

Our loved ones may not always be healed. And, there will be the time when each one of us is called to heaven. We may continue in a disability which is not relieved. There is great complexity in this subject. My prayer is that whatever the outcome, we do not hesitate to ask for fear Jesus is not willing to heal us.

Do you have a problem that is absolutely insurmountable to you? Would you be willing to take the risk that Jesus is willing? Spend time in the wilderness and pray like Jesus, and remember that the heavenly realm for the Christian always trumps the earthly realm. That will give you the confidence to ask that hardest question, "*Lord, are you willing to help me?*" And then his answer will come, because you belong to your faithful Savior, in both life and in death. That is your greatest comfort. AMEN