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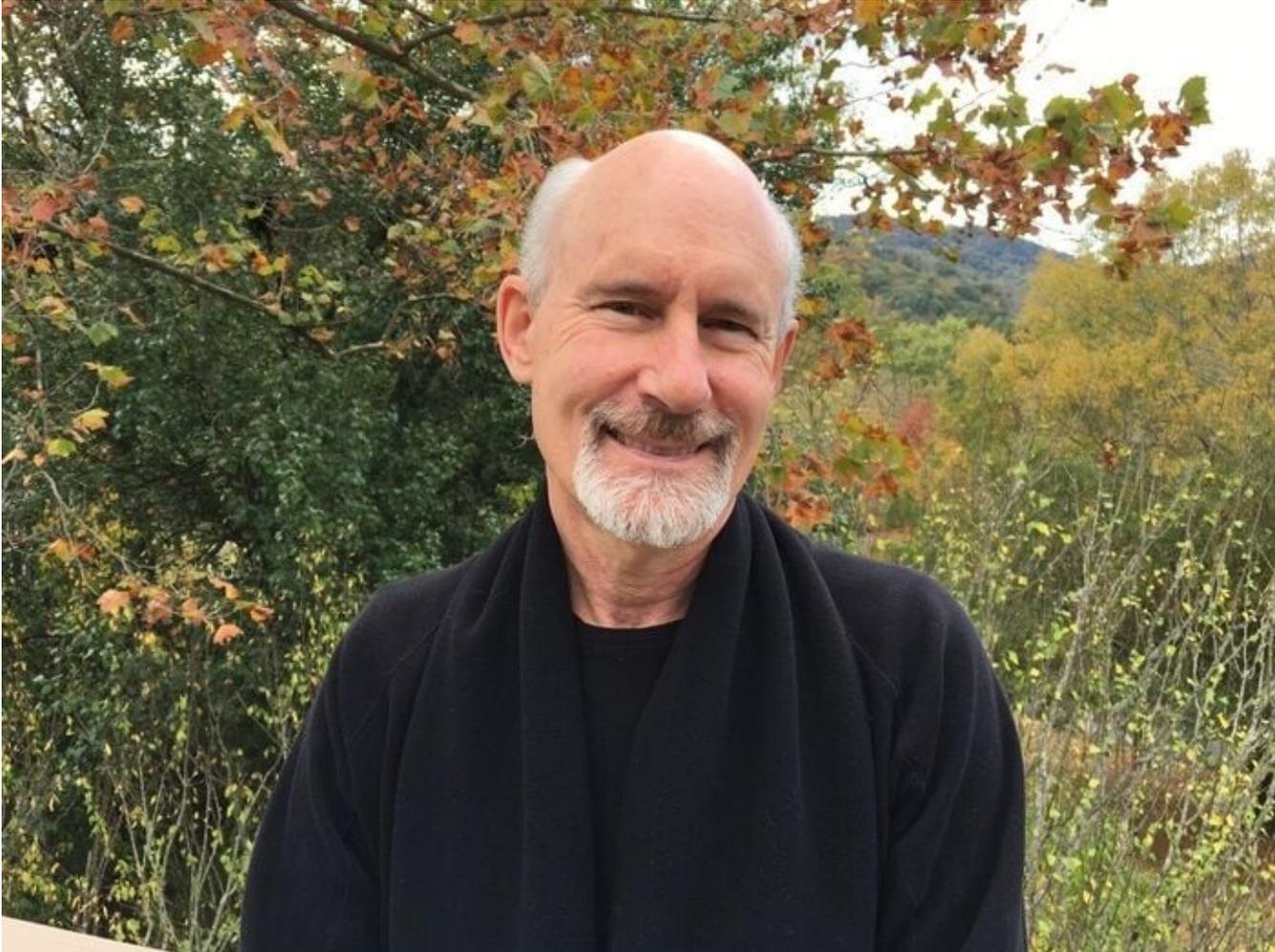
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## **Pray Tell: What Does “I’ll pray for you” mean?**

By Chris Highland  
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From childhood, I prayed for many reasons and prayed for many things. Health and wellbeing, protection from harm, forgiveness, to be saved from a situation or saved in soul. And sometimes I prayed for my prayers. “May my prayer be pleasing to You, O Lord,” “Let me pray for the right things, the right reasons.” The most repeated prayer of all: “Thy will be done.” I wanted to be assured I was praying correctly, not abusing the privilege of speaking directly to my Divine Parent who watched and listened but never spoke. It really didn’t matter what I said, what I pleaded for, the Lord’s will would be done regardless of what I wanted. “May You do exactly what You’re going to do.” Is that what the prayer is saying? If so, why pray?

I watched a video of a pastor whose church was responding to our disastrous flood. He excitedly told the camera his congregants were praying for water to distribute in the neighborhood, when “just three minutes later, a truck drove up with cases of water! A miracle! See how fast our prayers were answered? Remember how the Lord heard us.” Those of us who were living through the aftermath of the

hurricane saw tanker trucks full of water driving all over the area every day. If God already knew what people needed, why wouldn't the prayer simply be: "Lord, You know what we need. We know You will provide." Wouldn't that be enough, and actually show mature faith?

I understand the deep desire for someone to show up in a terrible situation. But I wonder if a person truly believes their prayers brought the help, even when the help was already on the way. Yes, prayer is comfort, a way to feel personally connected to a watchful Presence. Yet, cause and effect doesn't seem to apply in many cases. A truck was on the road about to arrive, but they were asking God to bring water. Again, I understand the emotion, but there's not much reason to it, or apparent reason for it. Their prayers didn't bring the water, it was already coming.

How many times have we heard someone say, "I'll pray for you"? I'm not always sure what they mean. If there is genuine concern and they believe their God can help, I smile and thank them (it's usually someone I know). Then there are those who don't really know me. I'm not sure their intent in telling me they'll be praying for me. I often wonder what they are praying. How would they know what I need? A larger question is: wouldn't God already know the issue and have decided what to do, if anything?

Much prayer seems to be calling God's attention to things, which makes you wonder why God wasn't paying attention in the first place. Is prayer just a wish list, treating God like Amazon or Santa Claus?



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As children, a sibling or classmate might call us names or tease us, and we might threaten them with: "I'm telling on you!" Sometimes "I'll pray for you" has a similar tone. "I'm going to tell Our Father about you, and He won't be pleased." Why does the Almighty listen to this person (the tattler) and act on their prayerful suggestion? Is the life of faith little more than squabbles in a schoolyard?

From personal experience I have a good idea what someone means when they say "I'm praying for you." I prayed intercessory prayers for a long time, and was regularly asked by others to pray for them. Mostly this was asking God to "be with" the person in their need, to comfort them, to bring them through with love and compassion. Now I can see what was going on? I was asking God to do all the things I should be doing.

When you think about it—and I sure hope we do—prayer raises many more questions than offers answers. Is it primarily an individual's thoughts and words between them and their deity? Is it a way of expressing concern for oneself and others, wanting to do something helpful, meaningful, that may or may not actually help? Or is it a way of avoiding "answering" someone's prayer through active presence? What is the true intention of prayer?

Next time someone says "I'll pray for you," it may be good to ask what they mean. What are they telling God about you? Is there a genuine sense of care and concern? Do they need to show that God listens to them? Or ... are they tattling?

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