

Don't Allow Narcissism to Creep Into Your Prayers

When you accept Christ into your life, you slowly come to realize that forces are now at work beyond your control.

There is a mixed emotion of fear (of losing control), relief (that your problems are now in God's hands) and curiosity (at how things will play out) that can create a hyper-introspection beyond anything we have experienced before, but could it lead to an unhealthy level of introspection and self-absorption? I've noticed creeping into many Christian's lives (including mine) a level of narcissism about prayer and God's works that has raised a few flags.

This came to my attention partly by way of my agnostic friends. Every so often one of them asks me to say a prayer for a relative who is sick. It takes a lot for them to ask this and the request is usually serious, and for some reason they think I alone have God's phone number.

I feel mixed emotions when I receive these requests. I'm sad at their pain but joyful at the same time that a piece of their armor has rusted and fallen off. When I contrast these requests with Christian prayer requests that I receive regularly it drives the point home about how self-centered we, in the Christian community, can sometimes become.

For the record, most of the Christian prayer requests I receive are serious, but I have noticed a surge in "My" prayers. Please pray for "My" health, "My" job, "My" finances and so on. I also receive specific requests such as, My wrist is swollen; Pray that my move goes smooth; Please pray—I pulled my hamstring and may not be able to play soccer, and more. There is nothing wrong with this type of prayer. The Bible says to cast all your troubles upon the Lord (Ps. 55:22,

1 Pet. 5:7), but my question is, how are we defining what we consider “troubles?”

Could we one day be entertaining prayer requests that ask for Susie’s haircut and highlights to come out perfectly, as only God can do them? Or to pray that Jenny loses these last five pounds so she can fit into her bikini before leaving on vacation? Or that the Red Sox beat the Yankees? Or that Tom Brady’s ACL surgery goes well so he can take the Patriots to the Super Bowl next year? (Sorry, I’m from Boston). You get the picture.

Let me put it another way—we can assume that no one prays 24 hours a day; therefore, it is safe to conclude that everyone prays for a finite amount of time each day. If this is true, then how much of this limited time should be focused on us and how much on others? Obviously this is a rhetorical question, as there is no mathematically correct answer.

Part of this problem is the self-absorption and narcissism of our society creeping into our lives, coupled with the fact that our country is so bountiful. Yes, even in this downturned economy most of us have more than we could ever hope for, compared with our brothers and sisters living in other countries.

The only conclusion I reached is, every so often break your prayers down. Pick a random status quo day. Observe how much time you spend thanking God, how much time you spend on personal requests and how much time you spend on broader requests that don’t immediately affect you—things like poverty, disease, war or wisdom for our government officials.

I think this exercise can reveal much about where our hearts are—and where they are heading. I know my results were a tough pill to swallow.