

Don't Underestimate the Power of 'Small' Prayers

The new film *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* celebrates TV's famous Mister Rogers by looking at how his Christian kindness impacted the life of a cynical journalist who was assigned to write about him. In one scene, Fred Rogers (played by Tom Hanks) is shown kneeling by his bed, praying with a note pad and mentioning the journalist by name.

That scene was not fiction. Roger's wife, Joanne, told Religion News Service that her Presbyterian husband—who died in 2003—got up every morning at 5:15 to pray before he went to the studio to record his legendary kids' show. She said Rogers always read his Bible and used a legal pad to write down the names of people he wanted to pray for. This was his spiritual routine for years.

In the movie, the writer, Lloyd Vogel, experiences a conversion of sorts. After meeting Rogers, he forgives his cruel father and becomes a better husband and dad to his own infant son. The message of the film is that Rogers' caring attitude—along with his simple prayers—transformed a man's life.

Can a short prayer change someone's life, even if it's just the mention of a name scribbled on a note pad?

In my early years, I was tempted to believe that prayers had to be long, drawn-out and intense in order to be effective. I put a lot of pressure on myself. I even tried a 10-day fast.

But when I look at the apostle Paul, who is surely the New Testament authority on powerful prayer, I see that he not only fasted and travailed in prayer for hours, but he also offered God many short requests. I don't know if he had a prayer list scribbled on a piece of parchment, but he knew the power of

mentioning.

He told the Ephesians: “For this reason I ... do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:15-16b, ESV). He told the Thessalonians: “We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers” (1 Thess. 1:2). And he wrote to Philemon: “I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers” (Philem. 1:4, NASB).

Short prayers are powerful. The average psalm takes only a minute or two to recite, and Psalm 117—the shortest psalm—only takes nine seconds to say. Jabez’ prayer is even shorter: “Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!” (1 Chron. 4:10a).

I’m not suggesting it’s wrong to pray for hours. But I think some Christians give up on prayer because they assume God is timing us. He’s not. He welcomes our words, even the simplest of requests. The Bible even says he hears our “cries” (see Ps. 18:6). Sometimes a prayer doesn’t have words! It can actually be an unintelligible groan or a desperate “Please, God, help me!” Or even simply, “Jesus!”

A few years ago, I started the habit of praying for certain people using a collection of digital photos stored in my smartphone. During my quiet time in the mornings, I scroll through these images and pray for my family, close friends, mentors and people I’m discipling.

Sometimes I stop and pray for these people’s specific needs. At other times I simply say, “Lord, I ask you to bless Paul, Brandon, Dante, Doyle, Samson, Felipe, Mike, Khuram and Ben. Meet their needs and cause them to grow spiritually.” Then I scroll to the next set of photos and mention those names.

For more than five years I’ve prayed simple, short prayers for my spiritual son Alex, asking God to give him and his wife a

baby. Two months ago, he announced that his wife is pregnant. For more than nine years, I prayed for Felipe to get his U.S. citizenship. That miracle is now in the works. And I prayed for my friend Dennis for at least three years that he would find a wife. He just got engaged.

Don't make prayer complicated. When the apostle Paul invited us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) he was calling us to enjoy a daily conversation with God. Prayer can be as simple as breathing. And it should become a joyful habit, not an exhausting burden. Paul also said in Philippians 4:6: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

I pray we can all learn Mister Rogers' secret. Make a list. Invite God to move in the lives of the people you love. Even small prayers, offered in sincere faith before the throne of heaven, will unleash big miracles. {eoa}