

Paralyzing Fear Yields Lasting Lesson

Tiny bare feet pounded toward me. I understood the sound of her running like a mother knows the reason for her baby's cry. She was frightened. I raised my head from where I bent over a cheese grater in one hand and chunk of cheddar in another, put both down, hastily wiped my hands on a towel in time to turn toward the little body that face-planted hard into my legs. Her arms encircled me knee-high and held on tight. The pale face buried against me was squeezed into an eye-shut grimace. Bending over, my hands under her armpits, I pulled her up into a tight embrace and waited until the howling sirens outside our apartment passed.

When my child was afraid, something in me melted. Perhaps it mirrored some of my own emotions, because I also feared. I feared not being adequate to meet the myriad of mommy demands and decisions each day brought. I was anxious about messing up. I worried about her "turning out," because in the Christian community I was a part of, turning out was the sum of parenting success. And, I was scared a siren might belong to us someday.

I carried her to the rocking chair, fixed her comfortably on my lap and let its rhythm soothe.

"Did the siren scare you, Amee?" I asked.

She pulled back to look at me and nodded, then pushed her golden head against me again.

"Pray with her," a friend had advised in a mother exchange of what-should-I-do-about-this problem. The eerie wail of an ambulance or police car whizzing by upset her little boy too.

"And so, we pray," she'd said simply. Then with a laugh, "It

hasn't helped yet, but it's a good idea."

It was a good idea.

"When you hear a siren, it means someone is hurt or sick," I said. "The siren means help is coming. But we can help too. You know what we can do? We can pray for them."

Amee's eyes moved up to mine and she smiled.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

Insignificant mommy moments can have monumental import.

Scripture tells us to pray about everything. When prayer is part of our natural communication and reactions, our children see we have a secure place to take our deepest emotions. They learn early from us about our own attitude toward prayer. What they pick up may not be exactly what we hope to communicate.

An assessment of my prayer approach can reveal what my child is absorbing.

- Does my child see me pray only when things are bad?
- Do I resort to prayer to manipulate God or get what I want?
- Do I really connect with God, or is it merely show?
- Do I truly believe He is concerned about the smallest details of my life?
- Do I release burdens or worry or try to fix things on my own?
- Are my prayers deeper than a fix-it solution?
- Do my prayers communicate submission to God's will in difficulties?
- Does the focus of my prayer center on an easier life?
- Do my prayers demonstrate dependence on God for all aspects, even things I feel I can do on my own?

▪ Do I pray more for myself or others?

My friend's wise counsel moved my daughter's focus from herself to the needs of another.

Amee folded pudgy little fingers. I folded mine over hers.

"Dear Jesus," she started, "Help somebody get better."

A few hours later, my phone rang. It was my best friend. I knew immediately something was wrong.

"Michael got pinned between two cars," she told me.

"Is he OK?"

"He's in the hospital. They want to make sure there are no internal injuries, but it looks like he will be fine."

I felt the shiver of goosebumps.

"When did it happen?" I asked.

"After lunch, about 2 p.m."

I mapped out the route in my mind from the parking lot where the accident took place to the nearest hospital. I glanced at the clock on the wall, remembering the siren. Amee's soft prayer whispered in my memory. We had prayed for Michael. He had been inside the ambulance. It was his siren we heard as he was rushed to the hospital.

Amee played at my feet. She concentrated on a pile of blocks rising before her, oblivious of the mighty armies of heaven. She had long ago forgotten the frightening noise of a siren screaming past our house. I felt awe and shame. Shame at my lack of depth in prayer. I recognized my motives to be more to change my daughter's response than in recognition of the sovereign God to whom the prayer was lifted. I felt awe at the mighty hand of God, ever ready to teach, care and love His children, both young and old.

Sometimes we feel we are teaching blindly, without seeing or knowing if our efforts produce fruit. But obedience is never inconsequential.

My little girl is grown. I'm not sure if she remembers the siren or the fear, but I haven't forgotten the powerful object lesson of a tender God in the everyday call of mommyhood.

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