

The Power of Positive Prayer

He was one of the most positive people I have ever met.” That comment says a lot about a person, for it was made by the Rev. Nicky Gumbel, the dynamic Anglican clergyman who has developed the Alpha evangelism course into one of the most effective church-based outreach programs ever devised (see).

But what does “positive” really mean? Is it just “positive thinking”—the habit of putting the best face on all circumstances? Or is it, for a Christian, something much more?

I’m convinced it is. Some Christians you meet just radiate joy and hope, often in the face of circumstances or difficulties that many of us would find daunting. Are they overlooking their problems, deluding themselves about life’s sometimes ugly realities?

No, they are not. I think what all of these Christians have found is something far more dynamic than merely thinking positively, fine though that is. It is what I would call “the power of positive prayer.” The Christians you just love to be around when the flight is cancelled or the barbecue rained out are the people whose lives are soaked in the presence of God’s promises and goodness. They are neither naive nor self-delusive about life.

They simply have decided to spend more time focusing their minds on God’s promises than on life’s problems. And it is that determination that turns their whole lives into ones of positive prayer—a prayer based not on feeling, but on a

decision of the mind.

In an earlier column I wrote about the impact upon my own life of the “praise” books by Merlin Carothers. A decorated former U.S. Army chaplain, Carothers showed how the shock of serious setbacks can be deflected immediately—and sometimes the setbacks actually reversed—by choosing to praise God amid them. Praise unleashes God’s power on our behalf.

But what I call positive prayer affects us on a daily basis even more deeply than this. Over a period of time it reshapes our entire thinking, and we find ourselves praying the way God almost certainly would want us to pray if we had the faith that He was truly going to act in our circumstances.

Does this mean that we should expect God to answer every prayer we make, instantly? Of course not. It does mean we don’t simply believe in the reality of God’s love for us and His ability to alter the entire universe, but we come to know the reality of that power as if God had actually allowed us to be the residence, in a way, of the kingdom of God itself.

Of course, that’s exactly what Jesus Himself said: “‘The kingdom of God is within you’” (Luke 17:21, NIV). We don’t “know” this in the same way that we know that it’s raining outside (because we see it), but because we have come to experience this love over and over again.

Few people have written about this principle more excitingly than the Australian clergyman Canon Jim Glennon, from Sydney. In his book *How Can I Find Healing? Guidelines for Sick and Worried People* (Bridge-Logos), Glennon tells the story of his own recovery from a paralyzing fear that would at times almost

incapacitate him.

The fear forced him to see what God's promises were in the Bible. He found, for example, 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (NKJV), and he began to repeat this verse to himself hundreds of times a day until the reality of God's Word—of God's love and power toward Jim Glennon—took root in his mind and pushed out the fear altogether.

Of course, God allows difficulties to come our way, and Glennon wryly refers to them as part of "a theology of permitted difficulties." But he also shows us that if we take care always to be right with God, especially by repenting of any bitterness or unforgiveness, we can draw in a daily and growing way on God's great power and experience the joy and peace He wants us to have.

God knows that we cannot have a problem-free life, but He has given us provision to be victorious and joyful in the midst of it. The wonderful starting point is the power of positive prayer. *

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