

Don't Limit God With Little Prayers

When I stepped into 2012, God challenged me to pray big—and to expect the unexpected.

Right before Christmas my wife and I took our youngest daughter out to dinner to celebrate her grades from her third semester in college. When we got home I sent out a tweet about the dinner, and mentioned the name of the restaurant. (Hint: It's a popular national chain that serves Italian food—and it has the best bread sticks in the world.)

I didn't think anything about the tweet. I was just sharing personal news about Charlotte's accomplishments. But the next morning I got a private message from the restaurant, thanking me for the "advertising" and informing me that they were sending me a \$100 gift card.

"Are you willing for God to overwhelmingly surprise you by doing something bigger than you ever expected? If you are, you may need to change the way you are praying."

I don't play the lottery, don't enter sweepstakes and can't think of another time when I won a monetary prize. So I was skeptical when I got the message—and wondered if it was a scam. But in a couple of days the gift card

showed up in my mailbox. And after Christmas I took my wife, our daughters and their husbands out for a free meal.

Shortly after I got the card I was jogging near my house, and I had an intriguing conversation with the Lord. It went something like this:

God: *Were you surprised when you got that gift card in the mail?*

Me: *Yes, Lord. Totally shocked.*

God: *Did you ever pray that you would win a gift card to that restaurant?*

Me: *No, Lord. Never even thought of praying about that.*

God: *Did you ever even imagine that you would be blessed like that?*

Me: *No, Lord, I promise I never, ever imagined that.*

God: *That is how I want to provide for you in 2012.*

Then my thoughts were flooded with encouraging words from Ephesians

3:20: "God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!" (The Message).

This has been the experience of men and women of faith throughout the ages. God told Abraham that he would have to count the stars and grains of sand to understand the vastness of the blessing that was headed his way. God didn't say how He would engineer the blessing, and circumstances certainly didn't look

positive. But in the end, as Abraham hoped against hope, God defied science, caused Sarah to conceive and started the Jewish nation.

Are you willing for God to overwhelmingly surprise you by doing something bigger than you ever expected? If you are, you may need to change the way you are praying.

One of my favorite authors, Henry Blackaby, put it this way: "I have found that God always has far more to give me than I can even ask or think. ... If God wants to give you more than you are asking, would you rather have what you are asking or what God wants to give?" Andrew Murray understood the same truth. He wrote: "Faith expects from God what is beyond all expectation."

I have many dreams. I want to start orphanages, establish women's shelters and advance the gospel in many parts of the world. My goals are big but my resources don't match them. And sometimes today's economy looks more barren than Sarah's womb.

But when I stepped into 2012, God challenged me to expect the unexpected and to stop limiting Him with puny prayers. He is so much bigger than what I can write down on a prayer list. If He can provide a coin from a fish's mouth, feed a multitude with a kid's lunch, cause the sun to stand still, make an axe-head float on water, turn water into wine, send fire from heaven, or win 5,000 converts with one sermon, then He can

do exceedingly beyond whatever I can ask or think.

As you ponder your goals and plans for this new year, allow God to stretch your faith and your expectations.

And then expect God to go way beyond that. Don't settle for less than God's best. Pray big. And ask your Father to surprise you.

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