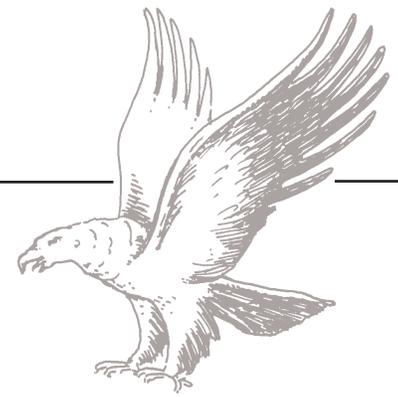


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



October 13, 2013

Pray for Strength

In our struggle to deal with the trials of this life, we often seek refuge in prayer. That's good—but are we asking for the right thing in those prayers?

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; . . . strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy” (Col. 1:9, 11).

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In a world beset with suffering and hardship, prayer is a valuable weapon for dealing with the problems that surround us. But when we pray to God in those times of hardship, what should we pray for?

Often our prayers are requests for God to *remove* the temptations and sufferings. That's a perfectly valid request. Jesus prayed, “deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13); and Paul asked the Romans to pray that he might be delivered from the hands of his enemies in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:30-31).

But if that's the extent of our requests, we may be cheating ourselves. When we study what the Bible says about the role of prayer in dealing with

hardship, we find that there are far more references to requesting, not that the problems be taken away, but that God would *give us the strength to bear them*.

In our opening text, for example, Paul's prayer for the Colossians was not that God would make their difficulties go away, but that they might be “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power.” Paul offered similar prayers for the Ephesians (Eph. 3:14-16; 6:10), the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:13), and his young friend Timothy (2 Tim. 2:1). When Paul asked God to take away his thorn in the flesh, God turned down the request, reminding Paul that “My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). The famous “faith” chapter, Hebrews 11, recounts example after example of people who had to endure terrible suffering, yet “out of weakness were made strong” (11:34).

We see the same theme throughout the Psalms, the prayer-book of the Old Testament. The authors sometimes ask God for deliverance, but more often they ask for strength to endure the trial: “Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me! *Give*

Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant” (Psa. 86:16); “In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul” (Psa. 138:3).

It would be nice if this world was a perfect place, with no sickness, no injustice, no pain, no death. But it isn't, and if we pin all our hopes on God making everything in our lives comfortable, we'll probably end up bitterly disappointed. In fact, this approach is no different than that taken by the health-and-wealth preachers who promise their followers a life of ease in exchange for their faith. That's a false promise, and we should know better.

Life is tough, and no one knows that better than God's people. But instead of pining for Utopia, we should be preparing ourselves to deal with the struggles that come our way. We should be praying for the strength we need to persevere through our hardships.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). That is how God is glorified in our lives, and that is what we should be praying for.

— David King