

# **A Look at Prayer**

Uncle Bill Warner

People the world over have their own ways of asking God for favors. Is prayer really effective, or do we just remember the times when it seemed to work, but conveniently forget the times when it didn't?

Buddhist monks in Tibet have traditionally augmented their prayers by whirling hand-held prayer wheels which send out prayers with each turn. Today, some are using computers to send out millions each hour! I wonder if God pays more attention to a billion automated prayers than to one sincere prayer of a child? In the U.S. there are prayer societies where people will pray requests sent in to them. Does this multiplication of prayers for strangers by a "human prayer machine" get Gods ear any more than a Tibetan ritual?

Prayer is what many people do on an ritual basis before dinner or at bedtime...or 5 times a day facing Mecca if you are a Muslim. Do these mean any more than a third grader reciting " I pledge a legion..." at school each day? I suspect that while many say their prayers, they are thinking about something else.

Then there are the from-the-heart situational prayers such as are said on behalf of a loved one who is suffering. A good example of this was when my wife was dying of cancer. All of us were praying for her, including her third grade students. After the situation deteriorated to the point where it was obvious God was not going to intervene, the prayers changed to "Lord, do what you think best."

Some might say perhaps she was not pious enough in her life and was being punished. Oh really? In her very religious Mennonite family, two small boys, sons of missionaries, were kidnapped and horribly murdered. How do we explain that? Was God "testing" the pious family by taking their innocent children? I have a hard time with this. Is this the way they are rewarded for a life of total devotion to God?

Will our prayers help the victims of "acts of God" like the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina? Can our prayers for the innocent victims of our man-made savage attack on the people of Iraq bring them back? Could God be testing the poor of New Orleans and the children of Baghdad? How can an all-knowing and all powerful God also be a loving God, while allowing such evil and suffering to continue? Some theologians suggest that God should not be viewed

as omni-this or omni-that, but rather a divine presence who accompanies us through the experiences of life as it unfolds.

I recently appealed for prayers for the recovery of a sweet seven-year-old girl in our Meeting who was dying of leukemia. She had literally hundreds, maybe thousands of people praying that she'd recover. She didn't. Now I hear "God has his own reasons." Well, maybe, but God hasn't yet made them known to me, or to the girl's family. Lately my prayers have been for enlightenment.