

Praying the Alphabet, Trusting God

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Dwight Moody told the story of a young boy who grew up in an English orphanage. The boy had never learned to read or write, but he could recite the letters of the alphabet. One day at Sunday School, the teacher told him that if he prayed to God in times of trouble, God would send help.

Shortly after this, the boy was apprenticed to a farmer. One day the boy was out tending sheep and was having a hard time trying to keep the flock together. Remembering what he had heard in Sunday School, the boy decided that he would give prayer a try.

A passerby saw the boy on his knees near a hedge and heard him praying, "A,B,C,D," and so on. The man asked, "Son, what are you doing?" The boy looked up and replied, "I'm praying".

"But you are reciting the alphabet," the man said, "That's not praying."

The boy replied, "I don't know how to pray, sir, but I was told that if I called upon God, He would help me. So I thought that if I just named the letters of the alphabet, God could take them and put them together into the right prayer and give me what I need."

In the midst of our problems, we often do not know how to pray or precisely what to pray for. Fortunately, we have been provided the Spirit to help us. Check out Romans 8:26: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."

As I write this, the final countdown toward war with Iraq has begun, and we are all feeling tremendous tension as we ponder the dangers facing our troops, the threat of terrorism here at home, and the long-term consequences of a preemptive strike. How do we best pray for this situation?

Regardless of where we stand on what we should do about Iraq, we're now all feeling the instability of what is happening. Our sense of well-being and personal life is being affected by terrorist threats, Code Orange alerts, and official instructions about putting duct-tape on doorways and water bottles in the bathrooms. Anxiety is up as we worry about how to protect ourselves and our loved ones in the event of an attack by a dirty bomb or a chemical or biological weapon. Our hearts are with the troops on the frontline.

So, how do we best pray for this situation? Follow the Scriptures. Turn our hearts to the Lord, and let the Holy Spirit intercede for us. The greatest need at this point is prayer. Let our Sanctuaries become houses of prayer, a place where the power and the presence of the Lord is felt in worship and prayer and congregational spirit. If you have questions or if you are unsure what to pray, take up the example of the little boy. Pray the letters of the alphabet and trust God to take them and put them together into the right prayer and give us what we need!