

Listen! Hearing That Still, Small Voice and Finding Your Own Part 4: Finding Your Power

by Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes

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Scripture: Mark 5:24-34; James 5:13-16

This morning's reflection has to do with how prayer can be used as a vehicle for healing. Healing does not always mean curing. Healing has to do with a restoring wholeness to the soul. Sometimes the body joins the soul in this wholeness, sometimes not. Therefore, healing may, or may not, include *curing*. During worship this morning, the reflection is "hands on." We're learning through directly experiencing a couple of forms of healing prayer more than talking about them. Therefore, there is no precise manuscript for this sermon. What follows are two articles I wrote for the Huffington Post in 2016 concerning prayer and healing. Much of what is written below informed the prayer experiences I offered at Sunday worship.

I. "Quantum Prayer"

(Published in the *Huffington Post*, January 12, 2016)

A pastor named William McNamara once shared a fantasy about how he would like to respond to someone who asks, "Pastor, say a little prayer for us before we begin." This is what he'd like to say:

"I will not! There are no little prayers! Prayer enters the lion's den, brings us before the holy where it is uncertain whether we will come back alive or sane, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living Lord."

As a minister myself, I sympathize with Rev. McNamara's fantasy. Yet I also think it must be acknowledged that when we pray for the health of another, for instance, the effects of these prayers may be elusive, making them seem quite "little."

Jesus taught his disciples that prayer is like a person calling to his friend over and over again in the middle of the night to get out of bed and lend him a few loaves of bread. *"I tell you," says Jesus, "even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs."* (Luke 11:5-8)

There may be no "little prayers," but apparently they need to be made repeatedly if they are to have much effect.

Years ago, a friend of mine who regularly speaks about religion around the world rejected all forms of intercessory prayer after his wife became the recipient of hundreds if not thousands of daily prayers following a terminal cancer diagnosis. The reason for his objection was not that he felt the prayers were ineffectual. Indeed, he became convinced that the prayers may have been responsible for extending his wife's life for several years beyond the original prediction. Yet it was for this very reason that he rejected prayer. "How is it fair," he asked, "that my wife's life

should be extended when someone with the same condition, but without the prayer network, would die earlier?"

It's a fair question. If God is both good and omnipotent, why would God need to be persuaded by even a single prayer to heal someone? Shouldn't God just heal them without being asked, if God has the ability?

These objections, as logical and heartfelt as they are, are based on an assumption that prayer is about *persuading* God to act, as if God, like the man in Jesus's parable, is comfortably tucked in somewhere up in heaven and can't be bothered unless given strong reason for coming down and helping us. Yet the point of Jesus's parable was not about persuasion but *persistence*.

Prayer is a lot easier to understand and, I would maintain, accept, if we ask what it is about *persistence* that makes it work, rather than persuasion. In this regard, modern science may be instructive.

Quantum physics has taught us that we are 99.9999% empty space; that what we are really seeing when we look out at the material world is massive concentrations of energy, bonded together in ways we haven't even begun to understand. One day, I predict that prayer will seem a lot less "woo woo" than it does now; that we will see prayer as more organically related to the natural world - and therefore comprehensible within a scientific framework - than many presently realize.

In the realm of quantum physics we already have been able to measure a subtle effect known as *quantum entanglement* - the phenomenon where certain objects interact and become related to each other in such a way that even when separated by large distances they continue to share certain characteristics in common, even when those characteristics change. Einstein called it "Spooky Action At A Distance." When I think of praying for someone, I imagine it as a form of quantum entanglement. When we pray for each other, we become *entangled* with them, and them with us. Perhaps we all become entangled in God as well.

My hunch is that one day we will understand intercessory prayer as a mechanism by which we subtly move energy, or change its characteristics. Because these changes are small and imperceptible to our present instruments of measurement and observation, rather than large and forceful, intercessory prayer is by definition "little prayer." And because it is "little," its effectiveness depends on persistence, not persuasion. It depends on our determination to heal, not God's.

I'm not suggesting that everyone can be healed if only enough people pray. Just as the human body responds differently to different forms of medicine depending on a number of complex factors, so it is with prayer. Different forms of prayer move energy differently, and the body responds differently depending on its current state.

Where all this theoretical rubber hits to road for me is in the situation of my eldest daughter, Arianna, who was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor known as an *astrocytoma* in August of 2008, when she was 17 years old. Arianna underwent two brain surgeries to resect as much

of the tumor as possible. During that time, Arianna and our family experienced what it is like to have thousands of people praying for us every day.

Even though I had been a minister for the better part of Arianna's life, I had been skeptical about its effectiveness. I was skeptical until our family experienced exactly what other families have consistently told me about over the course of my ministry: We experienced what it is like to be *held*. Held by an energy that clearly was not our own. Held in such a way that we could continue moving forward long after we exhausted whatever inner resources we had to do so ourselves.

While Arianna's tumor did not magically disappear as a result of prayer, the experience made us true believers in the power of "little prayers." We don't believe that people's prayers "persuaded" God to act on Arianna's behalf. Rather, those who cared about Arianna were persuaded to pray for her, and by praying persistently for her, they directed energies her way that God had been "persuaded" to make available to Creation since the very beginning.

While it is possible that those energies played a role in the success of Arianna's surgeries, and in keeping the tumor that remained dormant for the next seven years, what we are most certain of is that people's prayers got us through a terrifying and excruciatingly draining situation by upholding us when we could not hold ourselves up any longer. And they filled us with a very real and tangible sense that we weren't alone on our journey, but were being helped powerfully by those around us and by God.

I wrote about Arianna's tumor in my book, [Gifts of the Dark Wood: Seven Blessings for Soulful Skeptics \(and Other Wanderers\)](#). Then, just weeks before its publication last September, Arianna received the news that the tumor that remained in her brain had begun to grow again. Thus, in mid-February our family will journey to the Cleveland Clinic, where Arianna will undergo laser ablation therapy in an effort to remove the majority of the tumor that has grown back.

Once again, we expect that thousands will be offering prayers on her behalf. If you are one of these, we thank you in advance for your kindness. Whether you pray for Arianna in the coming weeks, or direct your prayers to someone else who could use your support, my next post will offer some guidelines for intercessory prayer. I do not claim to know exactly how prayer works, but I will offer some suggestions based on my best understanding and experience, and on the assumption that prayer moves energy very subtly, at a quantum level, entangling us with one another and with God.

II. How to Pray For a Daughter with Brain Cancer (Or Anyone Else You Care About)

(Published in the *Huffington Post*, January 20, 2016)

In my last post I promised to offer some guidelines I follow when praying for my daughter, Arianna, who was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor in 2008 and will be undergoing laser ablation therapy at the Cleveland Clinic in mid-February. These guidelines may be helpful for anyone who has the desire to pray for another but does not know quite how to go about it.

While none of us can claim to know exactly how intercessory prayer works, what follows is based on the assumption that intercessory prayer has nothing to do with persuading God to help someone in need (as if God needed persuasion to help). Rather, it is about subtly directing or changing energy that God has created as part of the natural order, entangling us with one another and with God in a beneficial way. These assumptions are based on my readings of both science and scripture (see *Quantum Prayer*, above) on my experience as both a recipient of intercessory prayer and a practitioner of prayer and meditation for 35 years. Please feel free to share your own experiences in the Comments section below and share this article with friends who could use it.

Eric Elnes's Guidelines for Intercessory Prayer

1. The first person you want to focus on is not the person you're praying for, but you.

You're trying to direct (or affect) energy that is both within you, and beyond you, on behalf of another person. Therefore you want to be in touch with your inner Self and intuitively open to the Holy Spirit's guidance and direction (by whatever name you call upon Her).

You also want to focus first on yourself because it is quite probable that prayer is capable of moving both helpful and unhelpful energy, the latter being generated by stress or anxiety you may feel over the situation you're praying about. Anger or hatred may also affect your prayers for another person. Not in strong ways, perhaps, but in ways that add up over time. I believe this is one reason why Jesus was so insistent on directing the power of love even toward our enemies, lest we inflict harm on others consciously or unconsciously (Matthew 5:43-46). It may also be why Jesus instructs his followers to make peace with their brother or sister before entering a sanctuary and approaching God's altar (Matthew 5:23-25).

There are many ways of finding that peaceful location within you where prayer becomes most productive. If you want help with this, click the link to the guided meditation I provide at the end of this article.

2. Welcome the vital energy God has created into yourself.

With respect to Arianna, I want to direct my best energies to the precise area of her brain where she needs them most. I also want to make sure that I don't pass along any anxiety I may naturally be feeling as that of Arianna's father to her. Thus, I "work" on my own brain first, only sending energy her way when I sense that my own brain cells are receiving positive benefit. My object is not to kill the cancer cells but to strengthen the healthy brain cells so that they can multiply, resist the cancer, and overcome it.

I open my own brain to God's life-bearing energy, picturing an aperture opening along the left side of my brain. I pay particular attention to the location that is analogous to where Arianna's tumor lies (i.e., about halfway between the center left and front area), though my goal is to strengthen the resistance of surrounding tissue as well. I imagine God's life-energy flowing into my brain cells, fortifying them with vitality, even growing new cells and neurons where needed.

After several minutes, I often start feeling both physical and emotional sensations. Physically, that area of my brain may start to feel tingly, or warm, or "energetic," or even "fuller." Emotionally, I will frequently experience a sense of euphoria, of grace, of joy, or of wonder.

3. Direct God's vital energy to the recipient of your prayer.

Once I begin to sense that my own brain is responding vitally to God, I start picturing Arianna in my mind. I envision the same energy that is swirling around in my brain doing the same in hers. I normally flit in and out of awareness of Arianna, concentrating on her, then on me and my brain, then back again on her.

While I cannot be sure, what I think may be happening on a quantum level is that I am entangling my brain cells with hers, at a moment when my brain is receiving and responding to God's life-energy, thus allowing her own brain cells to receive and respond to it as well. Whether or not this describes what is actually going on is not ultimately important. What is most important is that when I envision Arianna, I am in a state where I am perfectly calm, free of anxious energy, and feeling good - even a bit joyous. And I am envisioning most accurately where the energy needs to be sent.

4. Give thanks. After several minutes (sometimes much longer), I gently pull away from my thoughts about Arianna and simply direct them to God. I thank God for the privilege of praying for Arianna, and for anything else I am grateful for at the time. Then, I either close my prayer or move on to other things I feel moved to pray about.

I don't expect that my prayers will miraculously remove Arianna's tumor, though I would gladly welcome the unexpected. Nor do I expect that a single prayer following the process above will have any more than minute effects on her brain cells. But I do believe that, over time, this subtle casting of energy may strengthen the healthy cells and neurons in her brain, allowing them to resist and fight the cancer with greatest effect.

Of course, I cannot know for sure that my prayers have had any effect on Arianna, but of one thing I can be certain: *They have an effect on me.* Given the mind/body connection, it is entirely possible that praying for Arianna promotes my own brain's health and vitality. Most certainly my prayers set me in a state of peace, joy, creativity, and wonder in a situation where I might otherwise lose my nerve. In this respect, my prayers help me maintain the vow I wrote about in *Gifts of the Dark Wood* with respect to Arianna (Chapter 2: The Gift of Uncertainty): *To not worry about **anything** until it presents itself to be worried about.*

Finally, I know that I become more deeply bound up with Arianna, my family as a whole, with others who pray for her, and with our God, by praying for her. Whatever effect this form of entanglement has is ultimately in God's hands, but I trust it brings significant blessing and benefit no matter what happens ultimately to the cancer.

[Update: Arianna's surgery in Cleveland went extremely well. Most of her tumor was eliminated, with zero ongoing physical or mental deficits. As of 9/29/19, Arianna is doing extremely well, living in Juneau, Alaska. She still receives MRIs every 6 months to monitor the portion of the tumor that remains. Your continued prayers are welcomed.]