



Cracked Pots!

by Mark Brunner

Prayer Partners! (1 Corinthians 1:11)

Some of our kids were fast prayers and others more willing to take their time. Our oldest, Sarah, was one of the more deliberate prayers and others more willing to take their time. Our oldest, Sarah, was one of the more deliberate prayers. Sometimes as she prayed and paused I would insert my "Amen" in hopes that she was finished. On one such occasion I remember her frowning and, hands clasped even tighter, telling God to "ignore what Daddy was saying. He doesn't know when I'm done anyway." As I look back on that now what strikes me is not so much how cute that was but how insightful. Sarah believed that God not only heard her prayer, but mine as well and she truly believed that her prayer was affected directly by mine.

Sarah had it right. Our prayers ARE affected by others praying and it would be good to remember that often.

Here's a story: During the Korean war, one man was wounded badly on the battlefield and his buddies were in a foxhole about 50 yards away when the man was hit by sniper fire. As the fire continued, the other men discussed amongst themselves what to do. For a while no one would move. They could hear their wounded friend yelling for help. Then one of the men in the foxhole began to look intensely at his watch. He could not keep his eyes off it. All others in the foxhole noticed this, and began to ask questions. All of a sudden,

the man with the watch jumped out of the foxhole, and crawled over to his wounded buddy. He then grabbed him by the nape of the collar, and very slowly made his way back to the foxhole, all the while sniper fire whizzing around. Both amazingly did make it back to the foxhole without another bullet penetration. After the sniper fire had died down, the man who saved his wounded buddy was asked why he waited so long to crawl after his wounded friend. To which he responded: "My mom said every day at the exact same time she would be praying for me. And according to my watch, I left the foxhole exactly when she started praying." (Author unknown. If anyone has a proprietary interest in this story please authenticate and I will be happy to credit, or remove, as the circumstances dictate.)

Do you pray for others knowing they are praying for you? Do you believe that God hears those prayers and that He hears them distinctly when they are uttered simultaneously? You should. The Bible teaches that the "prayers of many" (2 Corinthians 1:11) will deliver the believer from peril. It's no wonder that Jesus said that "Except we believe like little children"(Matthew 18:3), we won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. You and I, if we are to be believers in the power of prayer, must first believe that the prayers of others for us and with us are heard; plainly and at that moment—just like Sarah. Amen!

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

Civility! (1 Corinthians 5:12)

Did you ever hear this? “Well, what’s right for you, may not be right for me. We both might be right.” I’ve heard that more often than I wish to admit. It’s a popular belief in today’s culture that right and wrong are matters of opinion. It’s called moral relativism. “If we’re both right, we’re both happy and we’re both equal. And, isn’t that what living in society is all about?” In other words, standards to live by are old fashioned. Only prudes lives by them and to insist that others live by the same standards that you do is, well, being judgmental. Right?

But how does that related to discerning right and wrong behavior as indicated by God’s Word? When it comes to knowing what’s right, is it proper for a

Christian to express this to others? Or, are we being judgmental when, moved by our faith, we tell others about how God expects them to live?

Here's a comment from Richard Mouw: At a recent gathering of seminary professors, one teacher reported that at his school the most damaging charge one student can lodge against another is that the person is being "judgmental." He found this pattern very upsetting. "You can't get a good argument going in class anymore," he said. "As soon as somebody takes a stand on any important issue, someone else says that the person is being judgmental. And that's it. End of discussion— everyone is intimidated!" Many of the other professors nodded knowingly. There seemed to be a consensus that the fear of being judgmental has taken on epidemic proportions. Is the call for civility just another way of spreading this epidemic? If so, then I'm against civility. But I really don't think that this is what being civil is all about. (Uncommon Decency, Richard J. Mouw)

Christian civility does not commit us to a perspective that everything is relative. Being civil doesn't mean that we can't criticize what goes on around us. Civility doesn't require us to approve of what other people believe and do. It's one thing to insist that other people have the right to express their convictions; it's another thing to say that they're right in doing so. To say that all beliefs and values are equal is to endorse moral relativism – a perspective that is incompatible with Christian faith. Christian civility does not mean refusing to make judgments about what is good and true. Besides, it's impossible never to judge. Even telling someone else that he is being judgmental is a rather judgmental thing to do. Nevertheless, making judgements based on God's Word is consistent with love. Sharing these with others is one way of showing that love. If we can lead others away from immoral behavior there is no greater love calling than that.

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Looking For Trouble! (1 Corinthians 10:25-27)

Worriers. They are commonly of two camps. There are those who fall into worry, compelled by events or circumstances that happen at the moment. They

lead two lives, so to speak. They seem complacent enough most days. But, when disaster raises its ugly head, they plunge headlong into the abyss of worry, content that the abyss has more to offer in the way of comfort than the mountaintop. The other camp, however, is much more practiced and far less unprepared for the inevitable disasters of life. This is the camp in which many have pitched their tents. These are those who have made an art out of worry. There need be no imminent disaster to act as catalyst, forcing us from the mountaintop. This camp is already set up in the abyss. It is much more expedient that way. There is no need to climb the mountain. The practical route is one that places the worrier in panic mode as a normal course. Enjoying life is a dream but seldom a reality.

The story was told some years ago of a pastor who found the roads blocked one Sunday morning and was forced to skate on the river to get to church, which he did. When he arrived the elders of the church were horrified that their preacher had skated on the Lord's day. After the service they held a meeting where the pastor explained that it was either skate to church or not go at all. Finally one elder asked, "Did you enjoy it?" When the preacher answered, "No," the board decided it was all right! (Today in the Word, December, 1989, p. 12.)

Believing in Christ, having a faith that is stalwart and prepared for anything that life can throw at it, becomes very difficult for those who insist on worrying about it. Worry about faith? Well, when you think of it, that is exactly what the Pharisees were all about in Jesus' day. God gave them a few simple, loving rules to follow but they weren't content with that. If it became too easy to follow God's guidance, there must be something wrong. Believing that they should always be prepared for "disaster," they came up with more rules to amplify and "increase" those God had already given them. Before long their faith was reduced to following the rules and their contentment was in the knowledge that the rules were there to follow. They lost their freedom and entrapped themselves in the abyss of legalism.

God did not give you or I faith so that we might worry about whether or not it was sufficient enough to get us into heaven. Faith is given so that we might become adept at avoiding problems and retaining the contentment that He had put into our lives as a blessing of that faith. Don't go looking for problems, you're liable to find them.

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Same Tunes, Different Music! (1 Corinthians 2:14-15)

I love good music. I can really get into a Beethoven symphony or a Mozart concerto. Listening to a piece of music like this, one that has been put together with such great craft and skill, is gratifying since there is so much to hear. Each is a work of art that has been constructed for the listener to immerse themselves into. I guess you could say that this is music that I can get into instead of it just getting into me.

Over the years I have been amazed at the number of people who don't see or hear music the same way that I do. Beethoven is overpowering, sometimes very loud and often melancholy. Mozart is just so much noise. He's all over the music scale with a beat that can get monotonous. We both hear the same tones, but we aren't hearing the same music. Sometimes it can be frustrating for me I want them so much to hear and feel what I feel. Yet, as often as I try, my overtures to the music unbeliever are most often rejected. Sometimes I wonder if it pays to keep on trying. Maybe I'm the one who doesn't "get" the music thing?

These interesting facts from author James Hewett, however, gives me so hope. He writes: Heavy hitters, the ones renown for hitting the most and longest home runs, also strike out more than other lesser famous batters. Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times, but he also hit 714 home runs. R. H. Macy, founder of Macy's department stores, failed seven times before his store in New York caught on. English novelist John Creasey got 753 rejection slips before he published 564 books. Don't worry about failure. Worry about the chances you miss when you don't even try! (James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* [Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988] p. 185)

I guess if I'm going to promote my brand of music, I need to get used to rejection more often than not; and, you know, it's really that way for the Christian on fire for God as well. More often than not, people just don't get what you are trying to tell them about Jesus Christ. The unbeliever, lost in sin,

shakes his head and walks away wondering what we see in it. Rejection, therefore, is pretty much a way of life for anyone looking to grow in grace. We need to be prepared for the ear that just doesn't hear what we hear and the heart that cannot accept what we love. But, we need to keep on trying. God's guidance will be there, even in defeat. Sometimes you have to play the same tune over and over again before someone gets it. I know. I love Beethoven.

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Cracked Pots! (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Although two wrongs may not make a right, sometimes one wrong does. I'm not saying that doing wrong is as good as doing right. However, as it's always best to do the right thing, it also good to remember that our wrongs, in the right hands, can often be remolded into something beneficial and positive.

Here's a story. A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect. The one delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, while the cracked pot arrived only half full. The cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you. I've been able to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said. The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path. As they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load. The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always

known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

God uses the "foolish things of this world to shame the wise." Isn't it good to know that even our mistakes can become useful in the divinely capable hands of our Almighty God? Perhaps if we kept this in mind, it would make coming to God and others for forgiveness, as well as offering that same forgiveness to others, a lot easier. Each of us is like that cracked pot. Our flaws are obvious and detract from what God would have us to be. Yet, like that cracked pot, God will certainly make use of the pot as well as the crack. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Simply, stand ready to confess them when you do while striving to forgive others who may have just as many "cracks" and "leaks" as you.

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