

The powers of Friendship: None is more powerful than prayer.

For the past few months, I have been talking about the Powers of Friendship. None is more powerful than prayer. Last month, Kelley Johnson provided a well-rounded overview regarding prayer, for which I am grateful.

Today I want to zero in on a certain aspect of prayer from the book of Job. The book of Job could be called the book of complaints:

Job bitterly complains about his situation:

I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. (^{NIV} Job 10:1) (See also: Job 7:13; 9:27; 21:4 and 23:2)

Job's friends continually complain about Job's complaining:

What man is like Job, who drinks scorn like water? He keeps company with evildoers; he associates with wicked men. For he says, "It profits a man nothing when he tries to please God." (Job 34:7-9)

And Job fires back at his *comfortless* friends (Who can blame him?):

***Then Job replied: "How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me."
(Job 19:1-3)***

The book of Job could be named the book of complaints if it were not for the Lord's final words to Job's critical friends:

So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer. (Job 42:8-9)

Job had complained enough about his conditions and comfortless friends. Now it was time for Job to pray for those same friends. And God answered his prayers on behalf of his friends.

Like the characters in the book of Job, my default response is to complain before God. Fortunately, He knows how to turn a person around. Several years ago, I was fostering a habit of complaining to God about the congregation God had given me to serve. Then I was leveled as if hit by a stun gun when I read the following paragraph from *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

A pastor should not complain about his congregation, certainly never to other people, but also not to God. A congregation has not been entrusted to him in order that he should become its accuser before God and men. When a person becomes alienated from a Christian community in which he has been placed and begins to raise complaints about it, he had better examine himself first to see whether the trouble is not due to his wish dream that should be shattered by God; and if this be the case, let him thank God for leading him into this predicament. But if not, let him nevertheless guard against ever becoming an accuser of the congregation before God. Let him rather accuse himself for his unbelief. Let him to pray God for an understanding of his own failure and his particular sin, and pray that he may not wrong his brethren. Let him, in the consciousness of his own guilt, make intercession for his brethren. Let him do what he is committed to do, and thank God.¹

And in his classic book *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers adds:

He reveals things in order that we may take the burden of these souls before Him and form the mind of Christ about them, as we intercede on His line, . . . May we learn to intercede so whole-heartedly that Jesus Christ will be abundantly satisfied with us as intercessors.²

The most powerful thing you and I can do for our friends is to pray for them and with them. Please pray for me as I pray for you.

Forever Friends in Christ,

Jim Anderson
Pastoral Care

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954) pp. 29-30.

² Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company) p. 91.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row 1954) 29-30.

² Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company) 91. (March 31)