

Prayer Is Important

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A few years ago I was at Upper Valley Community Church finishing preparations for the Sunday sermon when the phone rang. Since I thought it might be my wife calling I eagerly picked it up. My expectations immediately gave way to annoyance as a voice said, "Hello, I'm from the Dayton Daily News... Do you subscribe to our paper?"

Such telephone calls usually annoy me. What right do they have to come uninvited into my world, take my time, and try to make me feel guilty if I don't listen to them? Sometimes I give an answer like, "No, do you?" or "If I read your paper will it help me to live longer?"

But this time I answered something like this: "No, thank you. This is a church and I am the pastor. I subscribe to your paper at my home so there's no reason to subscribe to it here at the church as well. But I hope you have a nice day just the same."

There was a pause, and the voice said, "Pray for us."

I asked, "Are you a Christian?"

The voice said, "Yes. My name's MaryAnn. Remember to pray for me."

I spoke with MaryAnn a little longer and found out that she was calling from near Detroit, not from Dayton as I had expected. Then she said, "Whenever you pray, say a little prayer for MaryAnn."

Perhaps the natural thing to do would have been to tell her I would pray for her, wish her well, and hang up. But as Christians we are sometimes called to do what is not natural. And so instead of hanging up, I asked, "Would it be okay if I just pray with you right now?"

She said, "Yes, please do." So I prayed for her and her loved ones. I asked God to bless her in her work and to help her with any problems or difficulties she was facing. I prayed that God would give her wisdom with any decisions she needed to make.

The whole prayer lasted not more than a minute or two. Afterwards she seemed relieved, thanked me, and we hung up.

I will likely never know who MaryAnn really is or why she wanted to pray that morning. But God knows. God is not bound by our knowledge. He is not restricted by distance. Prayer can go where we cannot.

The phone will ring this week. It may be a friend who is frustrated with a teenage daughter. Or a lonely parent who lives miles away. It may be a co-worker, upset about something at work. Perhaps an acquaintance who has just been diagnosed with a serious illness. Or a relative calling to complain about someone else in the family.

We can join them in their pity party, agree that life is hopeless and unfair, and make the world a little darker. Or we can ask "Would it be okay if I pray with you right now?"

Promising someone we will pray for them is good – at least if we remember to pray. But praying with someone immediately is much better. It shows that we really believe God cares about them.