

**HELPLESS**

“**G**od, don’t take my little girl. Please don’t take her. Please, God!”

With both fists knotted and eyes blood-shot, I silently pleaded with God. I would say I prayed, except that I’m not sure such frantic fury qualifies as prayer. I managed to keep my mouth shut.

My twelve-year-old daughter lay motionless on the large hospital bed, where she had been for weeks.

“Mr. and Mrs. Alarid, your daughter has stroke-like symptoms. The left side of her body is unresponsive, and her eyelids won’t open unassisted. We’re doing everything we can for her, but even if she recovers, she may never walk again.”

My wife, Mercy, had to leave to teach a class at our local community college, and I was all alone with my daughter. I contemplated the rest of what the doctor said.

“You should know that Chloe has also sustained crippling nerve pain. We would give her pain meds, but she appears to be allergic to the only medication that could help. The best thing we can do now is to monitor her condition.”

“Jesus, please,” I muttered.

I stood still for what seemed like ages. Finally, stepping closer, I traced the soft line of my daughter’s cheek with my

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hand. Using my thumb and index finger, I pulled back the lids of her brown eyes so she could see me.

“I love you, Chloe. You’re going to make it. Jesus is going to heal you, baby,” I whispered.

Chloe’s eyes swam, searching the room but not settling on anything in particular.

“Chloe, can you hear me?”

Then, her eyes settled on me. Even as I wondered how things could get any worse, I knew that, somehow, they had.

“I... I, Chloe?” she asked.

Needles of ice sank into my heart. I stood frozen, refusing to acknowledge what I had just heard.

*She can’t remember who she is?*

I nearly screamed for the doctor, but I couldn’t. My voice trembled as I whispered again.

“Chloe, do you know who I am?”

Chloe stared into my eyes.

“You...Dada. You...you love me.”

My heart shattered, and any denial I had about Chloe’s condition was instantly overridden by my desperate need to save her.

“Someone help! Chloe doesn’t know who she is!”

Several nurses burst into the room. For the next hour, I watched things happen in a distant haze. I watched the neurologist enter the room, test Chloe, and ask me question after question. Chloe was suffering from complete amnesia, and I was the only memory she had left.

When the neurologist finally left to review her tests, I stumbled to a corner of the room and collapsed to my knees. I trembled with fear.

*When People Pray*

Like shadows on the wall, I remembered a nightmare I had years before Chloe was born. In the dream, Mercy and I had a beautiful daughter who died of a rare disease at the age of twelve. I prayed when I woke up, “God, if you’re going to give us a daughter just to take her away, I don’t want to have her.”

I battled my fear in the aftermath of the dream, killed it, and buried its carcass in the ground. But now, my fear was back with a vengeance. So, I vented my pain and anger at God. “Jesus, I told you I didn’t want to have a daughter if you were going to take her away! I told you!”

But there was no answer. As my fury mounted, I opened my mouth wide in a silent scream and broke into uncontrollable tears. I fell to my face on the floor and prayed once more.

“Jesus, please promise me that Chloe is not going to die. I don’t care how long it takes for her to recover and learn to walk again. Just don’t take my baby girl from me.”

I listened with my head on the floor and my soul broken. And I heard a voice, not a voice like thunder, but a gentle whisper in my heart.

“Start 24/7 prayer, and I’ll take care of Chloe.”

I remained still for a long time, unable to move and afraid to respond. I knew all too well what God was asking. The vision of America covered in prayer, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, had been on my heart for decades. But now I rebelled against it, feeling like God was twisting the knife already protruding from my chest.

“What?” I nearly laughed. The silence that followed was answer enough.

“No!” I bit off. But that single word didn’t seem satisfactory, so I continued.

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“Jesus, have you bothered to look down here? My daughter hasn’t been able to walk for weeks. She can’t move the left side of her body, open her eyelids, or even remember who she is. And you want me to start a prayer movement in the middle of this? No way!

“And you know what else? Look, I’m praying right now. I’ve been crying out to you all this time, praying that you would heal Chloe. And what have you done?”

I laughed bitterly.

“I’ve been praying that my daughter would get better, but instead, she’s getting worse. Don’t you realize that I’m probably the worst person on the planet right now to stand up, rally people to you, and proclaim ‘prayer works?’ No, God! Find someone else.”

As I continued to rant, God’s proposal only grew louder. I knew there was no way out—only through—but I resisted all the same. Minutes turned into hours.

I wrestled with God the whole night, and with dawn close at hand, I did the only thing I was still capable of—I surrendered.

“Jesus, please take care of Chloe. With your help, I’ll start 24/7 prayer in Albuquerque.”

But that didn’t encompass the scope of God’s request. And like a horse feels the gentle pull of its rider, my heart felt God’s stirring.

“Not only Albuquerque, Brian, but the whole state. And not only New Mexico, but all of America. And not only America. I want you to start a movement that covers every city, every state, and every nation in day and night prayer until I return.”

*Game over.*

Starting unceasing prayer in Albuquerque seemed daunting enough, but this—this was insanity. My heart was broken, my

emotions were fried, and my faith had never been weaker. I was in no condition to start anything, much less a prayer movement.

I knew Jesus was real, and I loved Him deeply. But how could I rally people across the globe to believe in the power of prayer when I was struggling to believe my prayers for my daughter would even work?

“If you help me, Father, I’ll obey you,” I prayed.

### **WHERE’S THE POWER?**

My parents taught me to believe in the power of prayer. Today, I hear the same message in churches, on the radio, in songs, in movies, on social media and blogs, and everywhere else Christians proclaim it—“There is power in prayer.”

After all, we read as much in John 14:13 when Jesus tells His disciples, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” But as I cried out to God for my daughter, I started to wonder if I had misunderstood prayer all this time. And now, four years later, I don’t just wonder—I know for sure.

#### **There is no power in prayer—not a single drop.**

*What? The author of a book on prayer and the leader of a prayer movement just said prayer is powerless?*

Yes, I did! Prayer can’t change things any more than you can drive a set of car keys.

Now, before you burn me in effigy, let me explain.

Although I no longer believe in the power of prayer, I have never believed more in the power of *Jesus* to answer the prayers of simple, ordinary people.

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Like a car key, prayer is powerless on its own. All a key does is turn the ignition. That's what gives you access to the real power source—the engine. In the same way, prayer gives you access to the presence and power of God. But don't for one second be tempted to think the power is in your prayer—the power is in Jesus.

God designed it that way so that only He can receive the glory from answered prayer. Your prayers give you access to Jesus, who is your intercessor. He is seated at the right hand of the Father and is praying for you (Romans 8:34).

***Prayer is powerless on its own, but it gives you access to Jesus, who is the power of God. Put your faith in Jesus, not in prayer.***

Put your faith in Jesus, not in prayer. Jesus is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). Jesus said when He rose from the dead in Matthew 28:18, “All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth.”

The message of faith often preached in America focuses on portions of Scripture like this one in Hebrews 11:33-35:

“Who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the raging fire, and escaped the edge of the sword; who gained strength from weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead, raised to life again.”

The implication is that if you have faith, you will always win. You will always come out on top, always succeed, and never experience loss. If only the author of the epistle to the Hebrews had stopped there, right? But the Holy Spirit inspired him to continue writing to give us a more complete picture of what faith looks like, explaining in Hebrews 11:35-40:

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“...Others were tortured and refused their release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Still others endured mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they were put to death by the sword. They went around in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, oppressed, and mistreated.

The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains and hid in caves and holes in the ground.

These were all commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised. God had planned something better for us, so that together with us they would be made perfect.”

Sometimes serving Jesus means you will be tortured, mocked, flogged, and imprisoned. Just ask believers in Iran and North Korea.

Sometimes serving Jesus means you will be stoned, sawed in half, or killed.

Sometimes serving Jesus means you will be destitute, oppressed, mistreated, or homeless.

Sometimes serving Jesus will cost you something, maybe even everything. But don't you dare feel bad for yourself. Salvation was free to you, but it wasn't free for the giver, and it wasn't cheap. Loving you cost God everything He had—it cost Him the life of Jesus, His one and only Son.

By all means, please pray. Pray anytime, everywhere, about everything. Pray always. Pray in faith, pray fervently, pray passionately. But never forget that prayer is more about the object of prayer—Jesus—than it is about the outcome of prayer. And that's why we pray: because **Jesus is worthy** (Revelation 5:8).

*Prayer is more about the object of prayer—Jesus—than it is about the outcome of prayer.*

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Prayer is all about Jesus. Although prayer is powerless, Jesus is all-powerful. There's nothing God can't do for you. When you are down to nothing, God is up to something!

That's what I would come to learn. But as I lay exhausted in the hospital, my heart was still ruled more by anguish than peace. I was scared, angry, and brokenhearted. And I didn't want to be alone. I called Morgan Jackson, the Senior Vice President of Faith Comes By Hearing. He's been one of my closest friends and mentors for the past sixteen years. And right then, I needed him more than ever. When Morgan arrived, he confiscated both my cell phones.

"I called your associate pastor. He agreed to preach tomorrow, and I told him to let people know you aren't receiving visitors today. Now, you're going to go over to that corner and take a nap on the couch. I'll take care of Chloe."

*What? Nobody puts Baby in a corner.*<sup>6</sup> "Morgan, I can't sleep when Chloe..." Morgan interrupted me before I could finish my sentence.

"Yes, you can, and you will. Your body needs rest. Go lie down right now and fall asleep. I've got Chloe. Don't worry."

*Are you kidding me? How do I not worry?*

I didn't want to concede, but Morgan was more than a friend—he was the most trusted mentor of my life. He was my Yoda, and I knew I had zero chance of changing his mind.

Skywalker yielded.

As I drifted off to sleep praying for my daughter, I remembered a time years ago when God answered the prayers of my godly mother.