

What are we praying for?

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.

Have you heard the story about the man who plotted his whole life how to take his money with him when he died? When he arrived at the gates of heaven, he was overjoyed. It worked! There were a hundred gold bars neatly stacked.

“I did it!” he rejoiced to Saint Peter, “I proved you can take it with you!”

“Congratulations,” Peter smiled gently, “but everything in heaven is free.”

The more attention we pay to money, the less of it we seem to have. If money is the goal, we may get exactly what we want. Money. And nothing else.

There is another joke harking back to the depression era. A man desperately needed a job and prayed to God for a job. He received a job. It was on the other side of town and he had to take a long bus ride to get there. But he was so grateful to be employed that on the bus ride each morning he would thank God.

But after a while, after he thanked God for the job he would ask God for a car. “If I could just have a Chevrolet, Father, I could get to work so much more easily,” he would think. Each morning he would pray to God for a Chevrolet. This went on daily for several weeks.

One morning as he prayed, the voice of God came to him. “My son, you shall have your Chevrolet,” God said, “but I had a Cadillac in mind for you.”

When we outline and tell God what we think we need, we are actually trying to take the position of God. God knows what we need before we tell him. As it says in the Scriptures, “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” (Isaiah 65:24)

God’s plan for us may be much greater than we could ever conceive. We may be visualizing money or a spouse or a job. God may have something

better for us, which we will miss entirely because we are so absorbed with our own self-thinking.

Since God is all-knowing, isn't it possible that God knows what the real need is rather than just what we think it is? The true need might be for a change in character. Such change may include reformation and regeneration. This often results in better relationships, a more satisfying job, improved economic conditions.

Perhaps the true need is for more patience, more confidence in the power of good. Perhaps we need to be more honest, be more courageous in doing what is right rather than what is convenient. Whatever the need, God knows how to fulfill it in the highest and best manner possible.

If we merely visualize what we want, we are not striving to conform to Christ. Human will is a shallow substitute for obedience to God's will. It is only through willingness to leave all for Christ, to put Christ first in our heart and desires that we find ourselves in God's plan for us.

We will not lose with God. God's plan is always the maximum of good. God is good, the source of all good. By turning to God and being willing to confirm to His will, we are giving up short-term goals for permanent gain.

Then we will not waste our lives chasing one human plan after another. Our lives will settle into steady progress governed by the higher will of God.

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