

The Hardest Aspect of Prayer Might Be Recognizing the Answer

Years ago, I had a friend who was very unhappy with her job – which she earned by taking a Civil Service test. She applied for other civil service jobs, but each time the commission claimed that she did not have the prerequisite college degree. My friend argued that although she never earned a degree, she certainly worked the required amount of years. I agreed with her that Civil Service should have considered her work history to be a college equivalent.

After agonizing about her predicament for months, she finally broke down in tears. Unable to assist her in any tangible manner, I suggested that we both pray. I explained to her that we would not pray for anything specific, but rather, for God to intervene and determine the best course of action. Distraught, she claimed that God no longer loved her. However, after some additional persuasion and encouragement, she agreed.

Afterwards, each time we ran into each other, I reminded her to keep praying. She acknowledged that she was praying, however, she was still skeptical.

A short time later, I asked her if there was any news. Shrugging her shoulders, she revealed that she was offered a job but turned it down. A neighbor – who was the director of an agency – had an unexpected job vacancy to fill. Recalling that my friend did similar work, the director emailed her, and offered her a job.

Still bitter and obsessed with her Civil Service clashes, she replied to the director that Civil Service did not believe she was qualified for the position. The director of the agency – no doubt surprised – thanked her and moved on. My friend turned down the first job offer she had in years.

My friend's reaction to the email infuriated me. I argued that she was too focused on her dispute with Civil Service, and should have at least explored the opportunity. She explained that it was not the type of job that she wanted, Civil Service would have prevented her from taking it, and it probably would not have worked out anyway. Flabbergasted by her attitude, I stormed away.

My friend's judgment was clouded by her preoccupation with the Civil Service Commission. Yet, I was so focused on her poor judgement, and her inability to move on from the past, that it took several days until I became aware of something.

We prayed for God's intervention, and suddenly an opportunity arose. My friend had known her neighbor, the director, for years, but they were certainly not friends. Yet, that director remembered my friend when a job opening appeared. The work was indeed comparable and transferable to her agency. Were our prayers answered?

That realization both surprised and elated me. It encouraged me to know that we are not entirely alone in our lives, and it gave me hope for the future. With new conviction, I conveyed my thoughts to my friend. Unfortunately, she was not impressed. She dismissed the possibility of an answered prayer with the same attitude that she dismissed her job opportunity.

Surprised by her reaction, I could only wonder what the truth was. I also wondered how often God opens opportunities for us – only we are either too stubborn or too closed-minded to recognize them.

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