

Praying for God

My children have taken up the oddest habit. In mid-sentence of prayers for all the people they love, they will abruptly turn the whole procedure on its head. Without warning, they'll offer up a prayer to God for...*God!*

"And be with God," I'll hear them say. "And Jesus," they'll throw in." "And watch over and bless them..."

It has taken me a while to process this new wrinkle in intercessory prayer. Initially, it struck me as rather quaint and more than a little bizarre. First, there is the simple illogic of it. How can you pray *for* the one you've been praying *to*? If God becomes prayer's *subject*, then who or what has become the *object*? More than once as they've prayed this prayer, I've formed a mental image of God looking up from the heavenly throne just to be sure there isn't some other being, yet one echelon higher, to whom my children's prayers for God are being directed.

Just who do my kids think they are, praying *for* God, the Source and the End of our prayers? Isn't God Transcendent Being, First Cause, Creator of everything? Isn't God omniscient? Omnipresent? All those other *omnis*? Why would God require the solemn prayers of children for God's own well-being? Why not try and teach Tiger Woods how to putt or Fred Astaire how to fox trot? Why not loan money to your bank or give your own doctor a physical examination? But my children seem untroubled by such concerns. Indeed, they pray for God without apology, as though it were the most natural prayer in

the world. And so, I've been thinking, maybe it is! Maybe I'm the one who's been missing something. Why, after all, should the one ultimately responsible for everything be alone without a prayer? Why should a relational God shun the heartfelt concerns of children? Consider how all other relationships seem to work. To be meaningful, they must be mutual. One-sided relationships, in which one party does all the giving, the caring, the indulging, can usually benefit from therapy. Why should our relationship with God be the sole exception?

Perhaps the classical Christian concept of God as aloof and unmoved has wrecked the possibility of human concern *for* God's well-being. For God to need or even notice our concern would make God open to change. But a perfect being is by definition beyond change or influence, the argument goes.

Yet, the biblical view of God seems rather congenial with the whole idea. No fewer than twenty-five times in the Psalms, Israel is instructed to "bless" God—more often than God is recorded there as blessing Israel. When the rebellious Israelites, wandering in the desert, prompt God to contemplate their destruction, Moses is on hand to reason with God: "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people...? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?'"¹ When "the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people,"² it appears to have been out of more than mere pity. Evidently, it was also because Moses cared for God's reputation among the nations that God repented of the deed.

¹ Exodus 32: 11, 12

² Exodus 32:14

My children have no interest, though, in changing God's mind. They don't worry over doctrines of God's nature and activity in the world. They only wish to let God know they care! And the more I think about it, the more I can't help but think that this is somehow a blessed thing, this presumption of theirs that God is no more indifferent to their prayers for *God* than to their prayers for anyone else. I can't prove it, but I'd like to believe these prayers of theirs are a grace, offered back to the author of grace, and that, even if they cause God an occasional look over the shoulder, they bring God some satisfaction and joy.

As to exactly what or whom my children's prayers *for God* are directed—I'll leave that up to anyone's imagination.