

March 1, 2023 – MidWeek article

Misfit Spirit by Jay Sakshita – ARE YOU THERE, GOD?

I haven't had a prayer answered in years. I think God has put me on prayer call block. It's probably my fault, though I've pestered God over the years with unreasonable requests: protect children from harm, establish peace on Earth, stop natural disasters, get rid of illegal fireworks... Maybe I should ask God for more manageable things instead: decorate celebrities with awards, help athletes win championships, bless meals... God must find my constant stream of incoming prayers annoying. Perhaps they all get tossed into the prayer junk bin.

I understand I get irritated with junk mail and robocalls, too.

Still, it pains me to think that God does not want to take my calls. To protect myself from feelings of rejection, I invent reasons why God ignores my prayers. I assure myself that God still cares about me, just in a way different than I thought God would. I tell myself that the reason God doesn't answer my prayers is because God knows what I pray for isn't important or necessary or good for me. Yes, God want to protect me from myself. I convince myself that things actually turn out for the better when my prayers aren't answered. God has other plans for me. But I can't suppress a nagging question every time this happens: If God already kows what's best for me, why even pray, then?

I've tried the other gods too, but the response rate to my prayers has been the same. There seems to be a collusion among the gods. I think I'm on the prayer blacklist.

If the gods exist, there must be good reason why they don't answer prayers. Perhaps we are only allotted a limited number of answered prayers and I have reached my lifetime quota. I've also considered the possibilities followers from different religions have suggested:

Here are three:

1. The larger picture. "How do you know the baby that passed away wouldn't have grown up to be a mass murderer or serial rapist?" I don't. But why did God allow baby Hitler and little Ted Bundy to grow up, then?
2. The ways of God are unfathomable. "We will understand at a later time why things happened the way they did." What's the point of praying now, then?
3. God is not subject to human standards. "God cannot be judged by human reasoning or by our own codes of conduct." But human standards of morality are precisely what we used to proclaim God's goodness in the first place. Perhaps God is not good then.

Maybe there are prayer battles going on – with people on opposite sides of an issue beseeching the same god for different outcomes. Those who hijacked the planes on 9-11 shouted prayers to God before committing their murderous deed, while innocent passengers also prayed to the same God during their last moments.

Maybe someone else was begging God to help save a loved one from a terminal illness at the same time I was pleading with God to help mine. I hope helped the other person.

I engaged in my share of self-blame, too. My prayers weren't earnest enough. I wasn't faithful enough. I am undeserving. I'm the problem, it's me. This desperate and depressing way of coping underscores a certain belief among the faithful. For some of us, it is better to believe in a God that doesn't care to answer our prayers than to consider the possibility that there's no God to respond to them in the first place.

So, I'll keep sending God my prayer requests in hopes of a response, though perhaps now I'll try doing so with a different caller ID.

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