"Your Wish Is My Command?"

By Tony Harriman (Communications Director at IBE)

If God were to answer my prayers just the way I wanted, what a wonderful world we all would live in. No one would ever get sick; there would be no more accidents; no more hunger; no more drought. In fact, the way the world would run would be an absolute utopia. And I dare say, if God were just a little more like me, He'd get things running smoothly in a heartbeat. All this planet-and-people-wearing-out stuff, that would stop immediately.

Many of us have, at many times, wondered why God hasn't answered our prayers in the specific way we asked. I mean, we are fully up to speed with the need of the situation; we know all the details; we've laid the dilemma out before the Lord. He'll be able to see in the twinkling of an eye that we're praying in the right way. But ... what's that ... someone else got the job? I'll have to replace the car that can't be fixed? The sickness won't go away? My loved one died? I must not have prayed hard enough. Maybe my life is too screwed up for God to answer my prayers -- maybe He doesn't even notice me.

It's hard enough down here having to fix our own gutters and broken-up cement walkways. But when our heavenly insurance policy won't pay up ... well, that's too expensive a lottery ticket to just toss away.

It seems so often that we are only too happy to have God living in some corner of our
lives, when He's watching over our affairs and loved ones. We'll pay our tithes, give our offerings, attend church and participate in lesson studies and evangelistic meetings. But let God "screw up" just once, and we're outta here. We've given too much of our lives to this movement for our efforts not to be noticed. Sickness, sadness, accident or disaster are not on my prayer list; so God, you take care of those for me, thank you very much.

Well, I hope you've managed to picture me with my tongue planted firmly in my cheek. As much as I feel it would be wise for God to see things the same way I do, I'm smart enough to know that it's probably not going to work out that way.

Can you imagine how the world would look if God were to answer every one of your prayers in just the way you requested? At first you'd start with the reasonable prayers: let the world be enlightened with glory from Your throne; clean up the hearts of human beings; fix the things that are wrong with the natural world; show us how to end pollution. You know, all the top-of-the-list sensible requests. Once we'd got all the high-stakes business taken care of, we'd start to move down the line a little: clean up my neighborhood; spruce up my house; keep the weeds out of my yard; stop the wasps from building homes under my deck and behind the window shutters. Then we'd start to get specific: keep the mosquitoes away; keep the frogs and crickets a little quieter at night; stop the neighbor playing that awful music at one in the morning.

The refinements one can make to a prayer list to be given to a Being Who can fix it just the way you like it appear to me to be endless. Fallen man has this strange frame of mind that tells him everyone will be happier with things just the way "I" like them. Our spouse will be reprogrammed to snore a little quieter; be a little more sensitive to my needs; dress a little differently; be a little taller -- shorter; style their hair in this or that particular way; weigh this much less -- or more. Our children will be so mentally and socially adjusted that they will listen only to the kind of music I enjoy; read just the kinds of books I like; drive the way I do; watch only the kind of TV I'm interested in; pick the boyfriend/girlfriend of which I approve. Before long we would stand in front of the mirror each morning and start making genetic adjustments to our own appearance: a little more hair; a little less gray; more muscle here; less fat there; legs a little longer, or shorter; this area a little bigger; that area a little smaller. And on and on and on and on.

I don't doubt for a moment that God can make our day in a thousand different ways. So why doesn't He? I have no idea. Could He be too busy with other things? Unlikely. But there is definitely some program running that won't allow things to play out just the way I think they should. My opinion on the way the earth turns doesn't appear to make the front page of the "Daily Universe." I imagine it barely gets into the Personal Column, but that's probably about as far as it goes.

Someone wrote a song once which I think was entitled "Thank God for Unanswered Prayers." The idea being played out in the song is that there was a time when I felt this was the way for things to work out; now God ... handle it ... Amen! But later on, looking at the way things likely would have turned out, the bigger blessing came from God choosing to ignore our desperate plea. I have a feeling there's an awful lot of wisdom spilling into our ears while this song is playing. Picture it: half our life spent praying for this or that; the other half being spent praying for this or that ... to be undone.

We have a mandate from Jesus to pray to the Father in His name. If there were no need of prayer, Jesus would not have counseled us to do it. Jesus prayed to the Father. He taught us how to pray. We are to pray for things we need. We should pray for each other. Pray for our leaders. And leave the results with God. We have no clue what will prosper or pick up speed; maybe it all will. Maybe none of it will bear any fruit at all. But prayers made to God seem to me to be like requests for money made to rich people: we
make the request because this person has the power to fulfill the need, and if the response should be in our favor, there is cause for rejoicing; if not ... well, we'll deal with that when we come to it.

Some years ago I found a small leather plaque at an outdoor market in England which I have kept with me along my journey. It reads like this:

"Let us then be up and doing
With a heart for any fate.
Let us learn to labour and to wait."

The humble art of agriculture has been so far removed from the mind of the average person, that we have very little patience for the natural development of just about anything. And thus we have no time, nor sense, for the things of the Spirit to work themselves out.

It perhaps is no accident that the word in the Spanish language for "hope" is the same word as "wait" -- Esperar.

I have a sense that, on the other side, when we get our fifteen minutes of "Why," we'll have opportunity to see how much more miserable we could have been if things had worked out just the way we thought they should have.

*And that's just my take on it ....*