

1. *Gertrude's* LIST

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

—Philippians 1:18-19

Somehow I had made the list, and I didn't feel privileged. The phone rang at the parsonage that morning. "Hello. Is this Mr. Broadbooks?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is Mary Ann at the blood bank, and we need you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you, Mr. Broadbooks."

"Is there some kind of emergency?"

"Yes. There is a surgery, and we need your blood type. We've learned that you're AB positive. Only four percent of the population has your type, and we need you."

"Well, you see, I have this appointment at ten o'clock and then another one at twelve, and you probably wouldn't be able to work me in between those would you? . . . Oh, you would?"

I had never given blood before, and I'm not certain how they knew my blood type. But now I was on the list, and terror seized me. You see, I'm a chicken at heart. When I arrived at the blood bank, I was whisked into the drawing room. At least, that's what I would call it. They put me on a couch that looked like a dentist's chair, which didn't allay any of my nervousness.

I was trying to appear calm and in control, but on the inside my heart rate was up, my stomach was queasy, and I was screaming, "Let me out of here!" The nurse began to search for a vein. After several pokes that missed, she made a startling announcement: "You have skinny veins, Mr. Broadbooks." On any other day, that would have been cause for celebration. For, you see, "skinny" had never been associated with anything on my body before. But I was a little too panicky to rejoice just then.

Finally she turned my case over to a big fellow named Rodney. I guess he did the skinny veins. When he finally trapped one of those little guys, you would have thought he had just won a sweepstakes. I was not impressed. He said, "There. I got it! How are you doing, Mr. Broadbooks?"

Forcing myself to sound calm, I said, "Hey, there's nothing to this, Rodney. Doing just fine." I felt as if I

would faint. I would still like to know how I made that list.

We spend our lives on lists. Some we like, and some we don't. We like Santa's list, the dean's list, and the A list. We work hard at staying off anyone's black list.

Let me tell you about my most important list. Actually, I have three. For many years, these have been vitally significant in my life. They are Gertrude's list, Margaret's list, and Carol's list. Each of these special ladies has included me on her list, and I will always be grateful. I speak of their prayer lists.

Gertrude was my college speech teacher. She was a praying woman. In fact, for three decades, if I had a serious prayer need, she would be the first person I called. I don't really know how I got on her list, but I know she regularly prayed for me. I remember one day when she told me that she had called out my name to God daily for twenty-five years. I was incredibly humbled by that. Just as Paul was thankful for the prayers of the Philippians and believed that they brought him deliverance, I, too, cherished Gertrude's prayers.

I have been on Margaret's list for more than fifty years. In fact, she prayed for me before I even got here. Mothers are like that. No matter what, through all the years, I've known she was praying. I'm fourth on her list, just after Melvin, her husband; Roy, her firstborn; and Anita, her second-born—then me. A mother's prayers are powerful.

When I married Carol more than thirty-five years ago, I finally got to the top of somebody's list. Carol's prayer list is actually a little book. It's very familiar to me, because it's always with her. It's part of her standard equipment—purse, makeup bag, book-bag, sweater, prayer list. Her prayer list is many pages long. Some of the items have been added and crossed out and added back again. She's quick to put you on the list if you ask her. I want you to know that I have seen the list, and my name appears first. That's a great source of comfort for me. I treasure her prayers. I believe, like Paul, that these prayers have brought much help and blessing to me.

As Paul wrote his letter of encouragement to the Philippi faithful, he mentions many admirable qualities found in their lives. One of the first he mentions is their prayer life. The prayers of these great laypersons had evidently made a difference in his life and the life of the Early Church.

Laypersons' prayers are no less important and effective today. You can pray for your pastor. He or she wants to be on your list. He or she needs to be on your list.

How often have you heard a sermon on prayer and you went home burdened? The pastor wanted to challenge you, but instead you were too discouraged even to try to be more effective in your prayer life. Well, just relax. This chapter on prayer will not do that to you. My prayer is that this chapter will be the most encouraging

thing you have read on prayer and that it will liberate you.

You'll never think you pray enough—just relax.

I have had the privilege of pastoring many wonderful laypersons, but I can't recall any of them ever announcing that they had reached where they wanted to be in the area of prayer. I can't imagine any of the great saints of the ages saying, "I pray enough. In fact, I may have been praying too much lately." You'll never pray as much as you think you should. I give you permission to stop feeling guilty about your prayer life. Guilt is not a very good motivator anyway.

I'm not suggesting that you cease taking responsibility for your prayer life. Perhaps you heard of the Southerner who said, "I'm not fat—I've just been over-served." We must make an honest assessment of our prayer life and take responsibility for it. But your attitude about it is very important. I asked my elderly father how he managed to make it to ninety-seven years of age. His response was illustrative of a great attitude. He said, "It's not hard—you just shoot for 100."

What's your attitude about your prayer life? I know you don't think you pray enough, but don't let that debilitate your efforts. Shoot for more prayer in your life, but refuse to put yourself under bondage. You can relax about the amount you pray because—

You already pray more than you realize—just listen. I would like to suggest that you pray more than you

think you do. So often we think that prayer is talking to God. It *is* that, of course. But it's so much more than that. Much of prayer is meditating on the Lord and spiritual concepts. Sometimes I'm moved in my spirit, and words pour from my mouth to God. But when I don't seem to have much to say, does that mean my prayer must cease? I hope not. Augustine said, "Prayer is not much speaking, but much listening."

Lloyd Ogilvie said that he once discovered he spent ninety-percent of his prayer time telling God what he needed and about ten percent of the time listening to God. His listening time usually followed his asking time. In an experiment, he started putting his listening time first and listened ninety percent of the time. Then he added about ten percent of his time in petition. He said he was amazed to discover that his prayers started to be answered more than ever. In 1 Kings 3:9 Solomon requests a listening heart. Why don't you join Solomon in that request?

Of course, there are many methods of praying that you can employ. Studdert Kennedy taught wordless prayer. With his imagination, he would place himself in a New Testament happening. For example, as he read the story of the blind beggar being healed, he would imagine himself as the beggar. He would see Jesus stopping to touch him. As he placed himself in that story, he wasn't saying anything, but he was praying. Thanksgiving and praise poured from his heart. Words were unnecessary.

Much of prayer is nonverbal. You don't have to speak to communicate. When I was a district superintendent for the Church of the Nazarene, it was required that Carol and I travel many miles. We soon discovered that we can ride mile after mile and not speak a word. That silence doesn't make us uncomfortable or nervous. The fact that we're not speaking doesn't mean that one of us is angry with the other. In fact, it means just the opposite. There's sweet communion in the quietness. Sometimes we reach for each other's hand. Sometimes I find myself looking at her out of the corner of my eye. Every once in a while when I look over at her, she's smiling at me. She may have been staring at me for a few miles and I wasn't aware. I can tell you this: we don't say much to each other when we're driving, but this is for sure—I would rather have her in the car with me than to go alone. We're communicating without words. And so it is with prayer.

My friend, you already pray more than you know. On your way to work when you were humming that chorus from the last service you were in? You were praying. When you thought about how good God has been to you? You were praying. When you were trying to decide how to handle that problem with your son? You were praying. When you were weeping with a broken heart the other night? You were not just weeping into the darkness—you were praying.

There was an old man who remained for hours at the altar of his church. He didn't move his lips, but it seemed

that he was talking to God. The pastor's curiosity got so strong that he finally asked the old man, "And what are you saying to God?"

The old fellow said, "Oh, He just looks at me, and I look at Him." That, my friend, is prayer! I can think of no better definition for prayer than that: we just look at Him, and He looks at us.

It's true that you pray more than you think you do. But that doesn't mean you can't learn to pray more effectively. You can.

There is a simple little secret to prayer—just make a list. There are many mechanics of prayer we could scrutinize and put into practice. However, I believe the best thing you can do to enhance your prayer life is the simplest thing. Just make a list. There is something about writing down your prayer needs and keeping the list in a conspicuous place that helps you pray.

Have you ever noticed that there are some things you carry with you at all times during the day? As I write this, besides the clothes I'm wearing I have quite a collection of stuff on my person—a date book, a phone, a pen, a billfold, a handkerchief, a comb, fingernail clippers, a pen knife, a cloth to clean my eyeglasses, some mints, my keys, my watch, my glasses, and my wedding ring. I expect to use all of those things at least once today, and I want them close at hand. These are familiar items in my life, and if one is missing, I don't feel fully prepared.

You have a collection of stuff on you today also. Could I add one more thing to you? I would like you to add a prayer list. Put it in your date book, your purse, your pocket, or your billfold. Put it where you'll run into it every day. Make it part of your standard operating equipment. Two things will happen: (1) you'll become accustomed to keeping track of what God is doing in your life and the lives of your loved ones and friends; and (2) you'll be automatically reminded to pray. It's as simple as making a list.

Earlier I mentioned the three lists I was on. Let me update you. Gertrude's list is gone now. She passed away a few years ago. A great sadness came over me when I heard she had died. It was a selfish sadness. I knew she would not be calling my name to God as she had done so often. My life seems greatly lessened.

Margaret's list is gone now. She's almost ninety and suffers with Alzheimer's disease. She's no longer able to write, so a list is out of the question. But I still have Carol's list. I hope to stay at the top of her list for a long time yet, God willing. But as you can see, I need some new lists. Maybe I can get on my daughter's list. Maybe my son will start a list. I need to be on some lists. Maybe I could be on yours.

Pastors need you. They need to be on your list. If you could put them on your list, they would preach better, they would pray better, they would lead better, they would *be* better.