

DOWN HOME: From ‘Please, Jesus!’ to a new morning

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Theological insights sometimes occur at the strangest moments.

I realized this truth as I shivered under the covers in our guest bedroom, debating whether I really wanted to see another sunrise.

Here’s what I learned: Any time you’re praying in the middle of the night and the operative phrase is “Take me, Jesus,” you know you’re in sad shape.

Technically, my “shape” was the fetal position. It provided an appropriate metaphor for the angst a person feels in the middle of the night when you wonder if your insides are about to explode spontaneously.

Practically, I scrunched up in that little ball trying to generate warmth from my own body parts. The knit cap, socks and piles of blankets weren’t doing the trick. And I just didn’t have the mental or emotional energy to walk down the hall and override the automatic-timing feature on our heater.

So, I did what any Christian does when freezing on the outside and boiling on the inside: I rolled up into a heat-seeking ball and prayed short, fervent prayers.

If I'd been in the frame of mind to recall Bible verses memorized in my youth, I might have remembered the last parts of Romans 8:26, "... for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." (This verse proves the Apostle Paul also got bit by a stomach bug in the middle of the night.)

Mostly, I could relate to the "groanings too deep for words" part. That night, in the guest bedroom, in a fetal position, was about the closest I've ever come to speaking in tongues. Some of my groanings were "too deep for words." But I think I kept saying, "Please, Jesus!"

Once, I said or at least thought, "Take me, Jesus." But I quickly recanted. As bad as a stomach virus feels at 2:49 in the morning, it wasn't quite enough to make me seek transport to that fair land where all the fajitas that go down stay down and Montezuma never seeks revenge.

Even during my "groanings too deep for words" phase, I had a sense things could be worse. Like the fourth grader who got sick on the bus to camp the year the air conditioning went out. Or, more specifically, like my friend Glen, who nearly died of liver failure last summer, and my sister, Martha, who needs a new kidney, and my friends David and Gary, who have battled cancer and say the middle of the night is the hardest time.

Now that I think about it, I believe the memories of Glen, Martha, David and Gary were the answers to my "Please, Jesus!" prayers. God didn't spare me the pain of a violent stomach ache in the middle of the night. But he gave me some perspective. And seeing your life from a broader scale always is a great answer to prayer.

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