

TO HIM ALONE WHO ANSWERS PRAYER

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love."

Washington Irving's timeless thoughts bestow significance on a year succinctly characterized by a single word: tears.

Grueling and punishing, these past 12 months have slowly ground down both my enthusiasm and confidence. And like bogeymen lurking in the shadows, tears have flung themselves upon me at inopportune times.

Tears when our son moved out, a dramatic severing of the bonds of childhood with our last living offspring.

Tears upon leaving my employer--and the acquaintances--of 32 years. Another long-term kinship terminated to follow a shorter path.

Tears over relocating from our home of 20 years. Apart from physical complications, tearing ourselves out of intimate, familiar surroundings repeatedly inflicted emotional trauma. For there childhoods grew up and away, there the messenger of death called for our daughter, there gentle animal companions loved us and suffered and died.

Tears when gremlins of health conspired to plague us. Tears when the winds of favorable circumstances and relationships blew contrary. Tears when wrong prevailed--without rectification. Tears when dreams died but bitter disappointment flourished.

I don't deny the power of tears. They have oft driven me to that secret place where one goes when there seems nowhere else to turn: to prayer. "When a man is at his wits' end," confides Oswald Chambers, "it is not a cowardly thing to pray...."

But though cowardly moments wilt my resolve, a Bible verse (Luke 18:1) blossoms with healing insight. "Now He [Jesus] was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart." When tears have bid heart to flee, prayer has shut the door.

For a brief interlude, tears have quitted. But knowing neither calendar nor clock, they will knock again in the night. And when they do, may their silent but compelling sincerity gain the ear of God alone who hears and answers prayer. For by our tears, He somehow waters the tiny seeds of hope growing deep within our hearts.

May that be sufficient and satisfy.

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'Tis God's desire that we should pray and not lose heart

But cry to Him continually and have a part
In giving wings unto His plans from day to day
For bringing comfort to His own without delay.

For who can move the heart of Him who has the pow'r

To intervene and stay the loss of darkest hour?
'Tis not the soul that's never sunk into despair--
But 'tis the one whose only hope is answered prayer.

He prays the best who has the most to gain or lose
Through circumstances that he might not ever choose.

And by his tears to God alone who answers prayer,
The seeds of hope within his heart are watered there.

(Based on Luke 18:1-8)