

Reflections on Egypt

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As we walked down the steps from the Air France jet liner onto the cool tarmac, there was the ominous sense that this was going to be a long two weeks.

The bright city lights shone a warm glow against the dense smog laden Cairo night sky. As the heavily armed soldiers directed us onto the bus that would bring us to our luggage and the forbidding immigration line, we tucked in tightly together and tried not to talk or draw unnecessary attention to ourselves. We were tired after almost twenty-four hours of travel and already facing a time zone crisis. Nobody wanted surprise delays in the airport. Cash and passports were collected and we waited as the line pushed closer and closer to the first of many checkpoints we would encounter during our time in Egypt. Just in time, our passports were returned with visa stamps in place and we proceeded through to the next officer. Luggage was inspected randomly. Smiles were non-existent. AK-47's were.

After what felt like an eternity but was probably only a matter of minutes, a door opens and we walk through. On the other side were familiar faces gleaming with sunshine. Friends. Christians. Smiles. Greetings were shared, with kisses from cheek to cheek, as is customary on that side of the world. Once outside the airport, it became increasingly critical that we remained together and avoided added notice. We had friends but also we have enemies. We merely didn't know who the latter was. Then we saw a familiar face beaming from beside his van. It was "Tom", as we call him (his real name is a bit more difficult to say), our driver from the last two years, and as far as we are concerned, the best one Egypt has to offer. After all, the rules of the road here are quite different than anything I have ever experienced anytime in my life. Cairo makes Tijuana look as tame as Autopia at Disneyland. For the next two weeks, our life would be in the hands of the moment-by-moment decisions that Tom, surely skillful enough to win NASCAR if he would ever be allowed into our country, would make.

In reality, our dependence would be upon God. I am telling you the truth when I say that if you didn't come to Egypt believing in the power of prayer, you will be a fervent prayer warrior once you experience what the streets of this metropolis conundrum has to offer. And that is where I want to focus this installment as I chronicle my spiritual adventure during this missionary trek: on becoming a person of prayer.

One thing that is very striking to me about my many friends that serve Christ as Africans is their strong commitment to prayer. It is as though they understand something that most Americans have forgotten: the critical element of personal communication with God. Somewhere lost in our luxury and plethora of conveniences, Americans have seemingly sidetracked from their source of greatness. I am convinced that we live in the best country in the world and the untold myriads of people on lottery lists that can only dream of coming here is proof of this. And, while there will always be those who want to bash us and others

who want to give the credit for the greatness of the USA to anyone or anything other than the glory of God, I believe that the prayer of faithful men and women has a whole lot to do with our success.

Many of these prayers are recorded in the annals of American history and in our official Congressional records. Our time was invested with Christians from throughout Egypt and refugee leaders from Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. By far, the most common request among all the people we were with was for prayer. Why prayer? Many of them are very poor. Their lives are difficult. They have experienced things that most Americans will only see in movies or on late night World Vision child sponsorship pitches. And for many of them, the closest they will get to an American lifestyle experience will be to watch Hollywood imports on television. They live in a Muslim controlled environment and shutter at the naiveté of the world regarding what the experience is like for them.

Despite their circumstance and poverty, and for many, minimal opportunities for a bright future, they seem to understand something that so many Americans would be greatly benefited to learn: only the hand of Jesus can help where it is needed most. As Americans, we are caught in the "I want more" mentality, and we tend to presume that others pray like we do: selfishly. In our pluralistic society, almost all of the religious diversity has the common element that "self" is at the center. Christianity is meant to be different. Jesus modeled for us something more than what every other religious thinker could ever be. I don't want to frustrate you but I don't want to tell you what they prayed for most of the time.

I want to encourage you to spend a bit of time pondering this. You may find that your own prayer today is heightened as a result; a little less mud and a bit more glory. If only I can find a way to bring back some of the sweet and Spirit-filled worship from the people following Christ in North Africa. As we ponder the challenges facing our country, I wonder if God's people will once again become people of prayer in America. For a long time we have been "people of plenty". What would it take for us to become "people of prayer"?

Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:30am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
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Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

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