

A Prayer for All Problems

Recently, when a problem suddenly arose in my afternoon—

And I was feeling a little pity for myself : “Why did this happened to me at an otherwise peaceful and undisturbed time—

I wrestled around inside my own head for a while.

Then I remembered,

“Scott, you need to pray the Serenity Prayer.”

And I did. Several times.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

Courage to change the things I can.

Wisdom to know the difference.

And I found a way to think.

And I thought of what to do.

And the door opened.

And even though my problem wasn't resolved right away—I felt that I was on the way.

This is why, today, I am calling the Serenity Prayer “*The Prayer for All Problems*”

Isn't it?

In a difficult meeting, you can pray the Serenity Prayer—and it will go better.

In a one on one conversation, you can pray the Serenity Prayer—and keep your internal equilibrium.

In the midst of a disagreement!

On a bad surprise phone call!
 When you're feeling very lonely!
 When you have to make a hard decision!

Pray! –The Serenity Prayer!

One line at a time!
 Things are going to turn out quite fine!

Although the Serenity Prayer is associated with Alcoholics Anonymous, it was first prayed and written during a time of war!—

In World War II, Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the leading Christian thinkers, teachers and writers of that time, wrote the prayer this way:

*God, give us grace to accept with serenity
 the things that cannot be changed,
 Courage to change the things
 which should be changed,
 and the Wisdom to distinguish
 the one from the other.*

Niebuhr's daughter, Elisabeth Sifton, an important editor and book publisher in NY for many decades, wrote about the prayer her father composed in 2004 in the story about her father— *The Serenity Prayer: Faith and Politics in Times of Peace and War*.

. “We may lose the ability to hear such a prayer.” she wrote.

In an inane, amoral, frivolous, and profit-driven world, we are urged to fill ourselves with pride and self esteem and to armor ourselves with pretensions.

Can we understand the Serenity prayer today?

To which I would add: **Can we recover our capacity to pray it?**

Because the real value of the prayer is that simply by intentionally **vocalizing it with your own voice—thinking it with your own life!**—it has the miraculous effect of bringing about the intended results.

The prayer's first word gives us the perspective we need for every problem or challenge, big or small, we face: **GOD!!**

“God—grant me the serenity.”

We start with “God”. We start by turning toward God!

We start by turning away from the anxieties, the frustrations, confusions, the inner and outer wars of this life, your life, this world—

And we turn to **THE LIVING GOD!**

THE MYSTERIOUS CREATOR!

The Higher Power!

Our Father Who Art in Heaven!

The One Whose Love is Everywhere!

The Mothering God of our beating hearts!

Now we are getting our thoughts oriented in the correct direction!

How often—instead—do we turn first toward our own inner fears?

Our sense of panic?

Frustration?

Anger?

Worry?

Or confusion?

Why not start instead by praying to God, so you have some resources available when your worries begin to build?”

When you put the word “God” ahead of the words “*What’s going to happen to me?*” or “*What’s going to happen to him or her?*”, you will begin to find calmness within.

You begin to find answers, even if it takes time—and trial and error.

You begin to trust in God in all your difficulties.

Here is the positive, healing attitude you need in order to take on whatever problems and difficulties you face.

Now comes the key 2nd sentence: “to accept the things I cannot change”.

Let’s think about what some of those things are:

- Events that have already occurred! Can’t change them!
- Prospects so far in the future that they cannot be now influenced!
- Another person’s attitudes!—can’t change them!
- Remember how the comedienne Lily Tomlin applied this line in the prayer: *‘Forgiveness* , she said, *“means giving up all hope of a better past.”*
- Things you cannot change!

Instead—Why not Let Go and Let God!

Why not pray to God: “I will let go of the steering wheel and let you drive my life.”

In the vocabulary of Psalm 23 spirituality: **YOU LET GO AND LET GOD LEAD YOU BESIDE INNER STILL WATERS!**

And what's more, by doing this: you not only regain some inner calm and peace, but you also conserve your energies for the things which you can—in fact—change.

This brings us to the next key to praying and understanding this prayer.

That is, you pray to God grant you the “courage to change the things I can.”

We just considered a few key things we cannot change!

What are some of the things we can change?

A couple of summers here, we had a computer games league for children and youth. One of the games we played was Oregon Trail. At different places on the trail, you had to make a decision whether to go a longer way to a fort to buy supplies, or, if you felt you had sufficient supplies, you took a shorter route.

And then at the very end, you had to float down the Columbia River on a raft. But everywhere in the river, rocks would suddenly appear, or big tree limbs, and you had to quickly shift your raft's direction to avoid them.

Otherwise, after a totally successful trip, you could crash into them and sink right before you reached Oregon. Yikes!

So in life—you can change direction!

You can gather the courage to change direction you are going right now!

You can change your thinking!

You can choose to think in a different way about a situation, a circumstance, a person.

I was looking for a book once on a large shelf. I absolutely could not find it. Yet I knew it was there. So I started at a different end of the shelf and moved my eyes down the shelf from a different viewpoint. Sure enough, I saw it this time.

You can look at this from a different angle! A different perspective!

The truth is that things that are most like to fall within the realm of possible change—**are within yourself.**

That's where the courage comes in!
 Gathering the courage to change—your own attitudes!
 Or to change what you want!

Or it might mean that you need to change your role—in the same situation or with the same people.

Change how you react and respond to a particular situation or person!

In other words, re-orient your inner compass—

And then when you are re-oriented, become resolute in the actions you need to take!

“God, grant me the courage to change the things I can.”

Finally, we ask God for the wisdom to know the difference.

That means asking for the wisdom to know the difference between the things we cannot change and the things we can change.

Yet how often we confuse the two, and as a result the ill considered actions we take or words we speak only make matters worse.

Someone once said: “There is no situation too difficult that it cannot be bettered and no unhappiness so great that it cannot be lessened.”

Similarly, there is no situation so bad that it cannot be made worse by unwise words and deeds!

Making mountains out of molehills and not taking the time to discern the great troubles from the small—the bigger problems from the lesser!

And things outside our realm of power from those inner things which we—with God’s help—can do something about.

In closing, remember the incident when the disciples were trying to heal a boy whose father was in a panic over seizures the boy was having.

The disciples tried everything they could imagine to help the boy, but it was all to no avail. Finally the father cried out to Christ to help.

And Christ began to pray for the boy, whereupon the seizures stopped and the boy was well. The disciples could hardly believe what they had seen and questioned Jesus, “Why could not we cast it out?” they asked, referring to the cause of the seizures which, in those days was believed to be a demon.

“This kind can come out only through prayer.” Jesus answered.

So it is with many of the troubles and trials and difficulties we face in our lives. They’ll come out through the wisdom and power of the Serenity Prayer:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

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