

Answer Your Own Prayer, Then Give God the Glory

By Daryl Wingerd



King David was in trouble. For four years his own son, Absalom, had been secretly gathering a powerful following for himself among the men of Israel by turning their loyalties away from the true king and deceitfully undermining David's authority. As the story is summarized in 2 Samuel 15:6, "So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel."

Lying to his father about his reasons for going to the city of Hebron, Absalom secretly summoned his forces to join him there. When the trumpets blew, the men of Israel shouted "Absalom is king at Hebron!" (15:10). This was the way it was often done in those days. There were no elections every four years, and heirs to the throne did not always wait until the sitting king died before asserting their own rule. Furthermore, kingdoms established in this way usually meant the removal—through murder—of the existing king and any competing heirs. Absalom likely knew that he was not the son chosen to reign anyway. The Lord had promised David, and David had sworn to Bathsheba, that Solomon would succeed him as king of Israel (cf. 1 Chr. 2:9-10; 1 Kings 1:30). The only way Absalom could have the kingdom he coveted was through treason, insurrection, and murder.

When David heard the shocking news of the events at Hebron, he knew he had been caught unprepared and would have to flee Jerusalem for his life. All who would remain loyal to him would also have to flee. Death by the swords of Absalom's men was their only other option. So hurriedly, they fled (cf. 2 Samuel 15:13-29).

As David fled, going up the Mount of Olives, he was given another bit of bad news. "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom" (2 Sam. 15:31). Ahithophel was David's trusted counselor—so trusted that "the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom" (2 Sam. 16:23). Ahithophel joining with Absalom was bad news indeed! So David prayed, "O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (15:31). This one-sentence prayer is, I believe, what David describes in Psalm 3:4 when he writes, "I cried aloud to the Lord." The superscript of Psalm 3 says, "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son."

So David prayed desperately to God, but then he took action to bring about the answer to his own prayer. While on the Mount of Olives, he met his loyal friend, Hushai the Archite. Very little is known about Hushai aside from one sentence in 1 Chronicles 27:33—"Ahithophel was the king's counselor, and Hushai was the king's friend." Hushai was also weeping and mourning and wanting to flee with David. Instead, David assigned him to return, to feign loyalty to Absalom, and then to provide Absalom with bad counsel (from a military standpoint)—counsel that David hoped would "defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel" (2 Sam. 15:34). So Hushai returned to Jerusalem and convinced Absalom that he was with him (2 Sam. 16:16-19).

Ahithophel then gave his military counsel to Absalom: Let me take 12,000 men to pursue David. We will kill only him, allowing all of his loyal followers to return and be part of the new kingdom without penalty. This advice "seemed right in the eyes of Absalom and all the elders of Israel" (2 Sam. 17:4). Remember here that "the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom" (2 Sam. 16:23). But amazingly, after hearing Ahithophel's counsel, Absalom then asked for Hushai's counsel! Hushai counseled Absalom to send all the men of Israel to pursue David's battle-tested forces with the goal of wiping them all out. Hushai knew this was not good counsel from a military standpoint, but remember the mission David had sent him on—after praying to the Lord to "turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." Even more amazingly, "Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel'" (2 Sam. 17:14a). In the ensuing battle, Absalom's forces were wiped out, Absalom himself was killed, and David's kingdom was saved (2 Sam. 18).

Was David wrong to ask God to save him, but then to immediately take action designed to save himself? Was this evidence of distrust on David's part? Absolutely not. As we are told in 2 Samuel 17:14b, "the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom." In the Lord's providence, David's prayer worked hand-in-hand with David's actions to bring about the Lord's deliverance!

Are you sure you're not missing out on part of the way the Lord will answer your prayers? God certainly can answer prayers while we simply wait for him to act. Sometimes that is our only option. But perhaps there are more times in your life when his answers will come through decisive actions you should be taking. If so, give God the glory, not yourself, when your actions result in answered prayer. As David said in Psalm 3:4, "I cried out to the Lord, and He answered me from his holy hill." "Salvation belongs to the Lord" (Ps. 3:8).

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