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The Serenity Prayer (Part 2 of 3): Finding the Courage to Change through Prayer *A Commentary by Jason Curry*



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The Serenity Prayer is petitionary prayer because the author, Reinhold Niebuhr, is asking God to do something in his life. He says: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." I'm sure that Reverend Niebuhr knew many of biblical passages that encouraged him to have faith in God. However, his Serenity Prayer serves as a reminder that knowledge of God is not enough for the Christian. One must also have a living and vibrant relationship with God in order to bring about a positive change in life. In the second part of his Serenity Prayer, Reverend Niebuhr asks God to for the courage to change the things that he can. By praying to God, he seems to instinctively know that is only through the unmistakable power and abiding presence of God that he will have the courage to change the things he can. Reverend

Niebuhr's prayer to God is profound inasmuch as he is essential saying: "I will not have the courage to change the things I can, without you, O Lord, in my life."

The opposite of courage is fear, and unfortunately, sometime fear places us within its grasp. Some of us have been negatively impacted by the fear of success (e.g., being reluctant to succeed because success brings a new and unfamiliar world), while others have negatively impacted by the fear of failure (e.g., thinking that we are going to fail even before we try a new thing.) Because fear is an emotion, thinking about it will not help it to go away. Through the Serenity Prayer, Niebuhr reminds us that the power to overcome fear and the courage to change the things we can is ultimately found in our relationship with God as expressed and revealed through prayer. Yes, fear is a human emotion, but is should have little room in the

life of a Christian. In fact, 2 Timothy 1:7 reminds us that "God has not given us a spirit of fear..." Our understanding of fear should be like that of the writer of the book of Proverbs who said: "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding (Proverbs 9:10)." The Serenity Prayer tells us that through the ritual of prayer you and I may avoid the pitfalls of the fear of success and the paralyzing nature of fear of failure in order to find courage to change the things that we can (e.g., our thoughts and our actions). Faith and fear cannot occupy the same space, so let us continue to strengthen our relationship with God through prayer.