

Asking for Help

August 2005

We have recently had some encouraging public appeals for help at Embury Hills. One came from a young brother whose marriage is unraveling; another from a member whose sister is bearing a child out of wedlock and is thinking deeply about the condition of her soul. The situations themselves are tragic, but those in need are asking for help.

This is good.

People tend to suffer in silence and isolation for many reasons, chief among which is pride. If the situation is of one's own making, an appeal for help will expose the blunder to others. Some may also be frozen by the adage, "You make your own bed; now lie in it." The affected one feels he *deserves* to suffer after a foolish or selfish choice. If no one is at fault, pride worries that others will criticize us for being unable to cope on our own. Worst of all is the assumption that no one really cares, and bonds of brotherhood are neglected by our own self-pity and insecurity.

Such pride can be the mindset of a whole nation, as demonstrated by the *Kursk* submarine disaster five years ago. The Russians stubbornly refused to ask for help from the West until it was too late, and 118 sailors died at the bottom of the Barents Sea. But the Russians seem to have learned their lesson: when a smaller sub became entangled in fishing nets last week, the crew of seven was rescued by the British after Russia issued an international call for help.

One of the most astounding features of Jesus' life is His unabashed dependence upon His Father. Jesus was strong, but He always attributed His strength to the Father. Jesus never suffered from His own mistakes, but when needy He coveted the encouragement and support of His Father. He said that certain demons were only cast out by prayer and fasting, by close communion with the Father (Mk 9:29).

When challenged with raising a man dead for four days, He sought God and publicly thanked Him for His response (Jn 11:41-42). In the excruciating hours leading to Jesus' arrest and trial, He poured His heart out to His Father with a variety of appeals (Jn 17; Mt 26:36-46). This not the picture of a man who is concerned with protecting His image as self-sufficient Savior and omnipotent King. This is a man intent on *ONE* thing: accomplishing God's will in a given situation.

The raw, unvarnished truth is: this world is over our heads. Certain forces – time and chance, deliberately inflicted evil, accidents, our own irresponsibility, the uncertainty of the future, the effort to provide for our needs, our ignorance, lusts that run counter to our self-professed faith in Christ – combine to overwhelm us. The notion that we can carefully craft a life devoid of trouble by our own wisdom and ingenuity is a mirage. Sooner or later, the distressing truth will crash down upon us: we're not, as Simon and Garfunkel once sang, a rock or an island, standing alone and in need of nothing or no one else. (This song was from the perspective of the self-sufficient one who was vainly trying to convince others [actually himself] that he was happy in his solitary world.)

If you are struggling with life, floundering in your faith, it is your responsibility to seek help ("*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders*" – Jas 5:14). Lay aside your pride, call for help, and be prepared for an outpouring of sympathy and counsel. This does not have to be done in a public forum. I know of two brothers who are leaning on each other to increase their diligence in prayer. If we have blundered, the second mistake – not calling for help – is greater than the first. You are not alone. We are a family. Those truly spiritual are looking for occasions to help. No one is an island. Don't suffer in silence. Ask for help.