

Can we pray about sexual harassment?

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.

I was 21. He was a senior supervisor in the engineering department. I was responsible for gathering information for the marketing department. He disseminated data for several projects. I was naive. He was not.

At some point it dawned on me that he had crossed the line. He was not being friendly. He was coming on to me. It seemed unbelievable. He had teenage children and a lovely wife. Surely such nonsense would cease, right?

Wrong. He became increasingly aggressive. The last time I was in his office, he overtly propositioned me and threatened professional retribution. I left his office frightened, angry and really confused.

I'd been praying. I prayed to see myself as innocent and not the victim of anyone else's aggression. I prayed that the harassment would stop. It didn't.

Did this mean God was not listening or answering my prayers? When prayers are not answered immediately, perhaps it is because there is something for us to learn about God and our relationship to Him. As the Bible says, "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you." (James 4:8) We should never become discouraged in prayer, but more diligent and willing to listen.

So, I continued listening for God's guidance. But then there was an incident at a golf outing. The supervisor made several comments which seemed harmless, but given recent events were not. I snapped. In one furiously angry sentence, I attacked him verbally, and walked off. I felt self-satisfied. My golf partner was stunned. Once home, I realized fighting fire with fire only resulted in a lot of burns.

That weekend I really prayed. The angel message that finally came to me was I had to overcome my fear. My angry reaction was the result of feeling intimidated.

It is understanding something of the power of God that overcomes fear. As it says in Isaiah 41:10 “Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

James 4:7 strengthened my conviction. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

This man was not the devil. The aggressive and immoral intentions were the “devil” which also translates “accuser, slanderer” from the original Greek. These devilish impulses would victimize this husband and father as much as it would me.

I stopped thinking about him, what he had done, said, etc. I started thinking more about God, His all-presence and power.

The example of Christ Jesus came to mind. Jesus was persecuted beyond anything in my experience. But he remained unafraid and told others to be unafraid. It was Jesus’ certainty of the infinite power of God which enabled him to face persecution with calm assurance. As I realized God reigned supreme in my life too, fear left.

On Monday a remarkable circumstance occurred. The general manager met me in the hall for the first and only time. He asked me two non-accusatory questions and discerned the entire situation. The harassment was stopped immediately and permanently.

If we pray and our prayers are not immediately answered, don’t be discouraged. Perhaps the lesson is to first overcome fear by understanding more about the power of God. Then we are ready to receive God’s answer to our prayers.

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