

Does Prayer Change Things?

Dear Mike:

July 31, 2007

Tonight I have experienced a most dramatic personal answer to prayer and thought I should stay up and type this for your encouragement. It will also be a written memorial of God's faithfulness and power.

Over 30 years ago I campaigned for a Russian Baptist dissident called Georgi Vins while at college in the Midlands of England. He was probably the most famous imprisoned Christian in the Soviet Union at that time and was held by the feared KGB. I led a campaign at my secular college alerting students to his plight and that of his family as he was incarcerated for being a leader of the unregistered church. Posters were made so students would know the severity of his situation and hopefully sign a petition that would be sent to the Russian embassy in London seeking his release. The student population in England in the 70's was greatly influenced by Marxism and it was not long before the posters were ripped down. While this was discouraging I understood that in a secular worldly environment this had to be expected. What was incredibly discouraging was the response of some Christians who refused to sign the petition for fear that their names would be recorded by the Russians. I was able to submit relatively few signatures in the effort to gain this faithful brothers release and felt very disheartened by my measly efforts. Several years later I was sitting in a packed auditorium in the Adirondack mountains listening to a frail old lady share about her life in the Soviet Union and her husband Peter who died serving the Savior in the Siberian wilderness many years earlier. The name of this lady was Lydia Vins the mother of Georgi on whose behalf I had campaigned years earlier. On the far side of that auditorium sat this woman's son, Georgi himself together with his beautiful daughter. The Lord had marvelously brought about his freedom and he had been able to come to America. After the meeting I was able to shake his hand and tell him that some Christians in England had prayed on his behalf and worked for his release for which he expressed his gratitude. God taught me through that experience that He can take our most feeble effort and use it and encourage us in ways we could never expect. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think on another continent I would meet this man for whom I had prayed and tried to do a small part years before.

I was reminded of these events as I was riding my bike on the Prairie Path late one evening about a week ago. About two years ago I read a front page report in the Chicago Tribune about 3 young children who had suffered through the most horrible atrocities imaginable in the country of Liberia. There was a boy called *Abed* (*names have been changed*) forced to be a ruthless killer. A baby called *Melsa* who had her arm blown off by a grenade and a young girl called *Sarah* who witnessed the death of her parents as her home suffered a direct hit as she was leaving to buy food for the family. After that she was forced as a young teen to live like a slave seeking to earn enough to simply survive. The Tribune report tore at me and I thought I can simply commit to faithfully pray. For two years I have attempted to pray for these 3 youngsters each week on the basis of that report asking the Lord that in Sarah's life He would bring her out of virtual slavery, provide a home where she is loved and cared for and provide her an education and give her a hope and a bright future. As I rode my bike that evening I questioned, will God pay attention to this pathetic prayer for this

precious girl in another part of the world? I would never know until glory if my prayer would have any effect and what if any thing had happened to Sarah. Suddenly into my mind came the thought of Georgi, we just never know how God in his sovereignty can reveal his working in the most amazing of ways.

Tonight I went to our local library here in *Brookfield* with *Peter* (*my son*) to obtain library cards for both of us. While waiting for the cards to be processed I noticed a copy of today's Chicago Tribune

lying on a table and decided to take a quick peek while the librarian fulfilled my request. I cannot recall the last time I read the Tribune as most of my news I obtain from the internet and the paper we receive at work is the Herald. An article on the front page caught my eye, two young black girls are shown bouncing on a trampoline and the caption reads "Adjusting to a life of hope". The picture is taken in a back yard in *North Carolina* and the subtitle reads "An orphan of war copes with new strains, joys in America". I wondered to myself if by chance this girl comes from Liberia and indeed the second paragraph states "the teenager (15) from Liberia". I think, this girl seems to be the same age as Sarah. The third paragraph gives her name as *Sarah Williams*. This is incredible, I think, this may just be the very same girl for whom I have been praying and thinking I would never know about till glory. Page 10 gives the full text of the story and it is confirmed **this is** the very same girl. The events of her life jive exactly with the facts I recall and then it is fully confirmed by the words "watch the Tribune's original 2005 report about Sarah's plight in Liberia at chicagotribune.com/sarahliberia". The article details how God has moved in ways beyond comprehension. A widow and mother of three, *Ruth Williams* read the same article in 2005 and incredibly pursued Sarah's adoption which happened in late 2006. The story details the difficulties Sarah encountered since her parents' death but states Sarah is deeply "religious". Sarah currently reads at the fourth grade level but is attending school at *New Testament Christian*, a small academically respected school in *NC*. A small group of teachers has volunteered to work on Sarah's basics through the summer and she is now being tutored three times a week. Sarah wants to read and write so that she can someday attend college. Sarah still mourns her parents killed in battles in Liberia and her siblings felled by a mortar blast in 2003. Sarah now hugs her new mother *Ruth Williams* with a little girl passion and enjoys her new sister *Emily* an adopted 4 year old from *EL Salvador*. As Sarah sometimes wrestles with acceptance the words of her mother in the last paragraph are a reflection of our Lord's love for us. "Sarah, you and I are still learning each other, you are new and it will take time. But I will never love Emily more than you. You aren't going anywhere. You are both my daughters."

And so I ask, did my feeble prayer play any part in this wonderful story, I fear to say, but this I know that tonight God in His sovereignty has poured out his love on this young life and informed me of such.

How amazing are the deeds of the Lord! All who delight in him should ponder them. Everything he does reveals his glory and majesty. His righteousness never fails. Psalm 111:2,3

Your brother,

Mark