

Pray What? – November 16, 2002

The headline shouting from the rack by the check-out counter rudely interrupted my thoughts the way a car salesman does when he approaches you on the lot. It spoke loudly and quickly, as though the size and boldness of its type would somehow make what it had to say more plausible. "BIBLE PRAYERS TO FLUSH BODY FAT" it hollered, and then paused, hoping that it had stunned me by its approach and made me curious by its message.

It was half right. I was curious, so I bought a copy and took it home to read where there was less chance that intelligent people might see me.

The star burst at the end of the headline told me that I could "eat all you want and still lose 10, 20, 30 pounds or more," and the line at the bottom of the cover promised "a slim you for summer - GUARANTEED!" Inside, past an article about parents who committed suicide because their daughter got an 'F', another about a half man, half frog found in the Amazon jungle, and a third about a man robbing women of their toenail clippings, I found the cover article, titled, "HOLY BIBLE DIET MELTS FLAB AWAY!"

The truly amazing part was that the article went on to describe a plausible way to combine the use of scripture and prayer to affect one's attitude and practice regarding diet. The promise that one could eat all one wanted of whatever he liked was based on the premise that Bible study and prayer will change a person's wants, thereby resulting in weight loss. Change the mind, the body follows.

The strange thing was the suggested prayers. They amounted to nothing more than talking to oneself. For instance, Wednesday's prayer said "My mind, eyes, nose, and mouth know my needs. I never overeat." In the end, the article was an interesting combination of spiritual fact and fiction blended together in such a way as to make it difficult to tell them apart.

What do you pray and how do you pray it? How often do you pray and what are the results? The Bible says a great many things about prayer, but all too often prayer is something we know a lot about and even do with some regularity while the connection between our prayers and our experience remains uncertain and ambiguous. And, as importantly, when truth and error are mixed together in such a subtle blend that even the most spiritually discerning are challenged by the concoction, how do you separate them, holding fast to that which is good?

Prepare now for your response or you may just end up buying a spiritual lemon and losing your way. Imagine the headlines then.