

I've only been there in movies and the evening news, but this is how I imagine it might have been. An open space surrounded by trees, the cracking and rattling of gunfire. Explosions, cursing, cries for help, The beat, beat beating of helicopter rotors, the scrambling, dragging the wounded, the climbing aboard, the lifting above the trees, the fading of the sounds of battle, weariness and relief, mixed and mingled with anger and sorrow and fear and faith.

For so many it was a time of prayer like no other. Through the long night of waiting for the battle, the night of reliving the hell just escaped, prayers were prayed. Promises were made. And God was nearer and farer than he would ever again be.

✓ The tumor is malignant. We will be running some tests to see if it has spread.

Alone he kneeled at the altar and prayed as he never before had. Begging, pleading, knowing it was out of his hands, he said, "God, please help. Heal."

✓ She heard him come in. His voice was raised, a bad sign. She heard the shouting start once again, the swearing. And as she laid in bed she prayed, "Jesus, please make them stop fighting, don't let my daddy hurt my mommy, Please Jesus.

Prayers, real prayers.

If you've ever prayed one then you know how it was off in the far country when the money ran out, and drought came, and the younger son was hungry. He was desperate, hungry enough to eat the garbage thrown to the pigs. Gladly Jesus said, but they wouldn't even give him that.

Desperation sent him home, not love for the father, not sorrow but hunger was allowing him to shed his pride. ^{for food} He'd be a servant for food.

I wonder if the father mistook his intention. Did the father think this son was coming home because he missed father and brother? Is that why the father rushed out to greet him, kissed him, put a robe on him and a ring on his finger and slaughter the finest calf and started the feast?

The older brother when he heard what was going on was angry. Because he pleaded when the bullets were flying, or cancer was a shadow over the one he loved, or she begged for the safety of her mother, what does that mean? When his belly is full, will he not forget you once more, Father? Will he yawn in his prayers when the danger is past? Will she forget to pray at all then the morning has come?

Father, you are a fool, celebrating as if someone has changed, but no one has.

Tax collectors came to Jesus, and sinners came to Jesus, and the deaf begged him for hearing and the blind for sight, and lepers for cleansing. They brought their hungers and their thirsts and Jesus satisfied them and feasted with them. And the religious leaders complained.

They can't stay on welfare forever Jesus. Make them get a job. Make them show that they've really had a change of heart. Wait for the celebration until they have proved that they have changed. See what they do when the battle is over. If they pray just as intensely, then celebrate, the lost has been found. If he can cry in thanks for every day that the cancer is held at bay, then a celebration is in order. If she will remember to speak to you every day ^{after} ~~late~~ her father is drinking no more, then kill the fatted calf. Just ^{hold off} wait ^{first} for the party to see if they are deserving.

But Jesus could not wait. ^{just like that Father, in the possible he explains as out to include,} Wherever he went, he passed out healing and forgiving and feasting.

This parable of the prodigal son has an ending. One day the Father came to town. All his younger sons greeted him with joy. The time of

unlimited feasting is here, they said. Hosanna, hosanna in the highest
they cried, took branches and covered the road before him. Hosanna.

And all the older sons met together to plan to stop the old man from squandering what was left of the family fortune.

Then the day came. ~~Younger sons, and~~ ^{The} older sons put the father on trial. younger sons said, "We're not hungry any more, why bother with the old man. And Older Sons said, "Too much celebrating." Time for us to take over.

So the older sons and the younger sons and all the daughters too took Jesus and crucified him. This was their word of thanks, "Crucify him."

I thought I'd be different if only God would answer my prayer. ~~He~~ ^{God} answered, but I was the same. ~~He~~ ^{God} greeted me by putting shoes on my feet, and dressing me in the finest robe, and killing the fatted calf, but I was the same. Still I loved me more than I loved ~~him~~. ^{God} Still fear and hunger were more powerful in me than ~~his~~ ^{his} love.

~~He~~ ^{He} thought, if only I can get home from Vietnam, I'll never be the same, but he was. ~~He~~ ^{He} thought if only the cancer is held at bay, I'll be different, more holy, but he was not. ~~She~~ ^{She} thought if only Daddy would stop drinking everything will be perfect, but it was not.

The father ^{is the parent} was a fool, pouring out love and pouring out love and getting nothing in return.

But Paul tells us this foolishness of God is wiser than men and this weakness of God is stronger than men.

Jesus will keep rushing right out and put fine robes on you and celebrate your return. The body and blood of the finest lamb he offers regularly at this altar, his greatest feast.

Maybe none of his love and sacrifice will change you and I, but he's hoping they will. He's hoping that someday, even this day that we'll come home not because of an empty stomach, but because of an empty heart. He's

hoping our hunger will not be for safety, but for his loving presence.
He's hoping that the healing we will want with all our being will be a
healing of our sinful spirits with his Holy Spirit. He watches and waits
for your every return, hoping, hoping, hoping. He wants his child to come
home, for good.