

# Heaven's Help Desk

We live in a fast-paced, global society in which, when assistance is needed, help desks and outsourcing exist in abundance. So the idea that heaven, too, makes use of help desks and outsourcing is an attractive notion. And if indeed true, in no other endeavor would such assistance be more vital than during an engagement of prayer.

Interestingly, some Christian communities teach what might be called the promise of "Heaven's Help Desk and Divine Outsourcing." The basic premise of this teaching is, whenever a child of God prays, the saints who have died and gone on before gather to listen to those prayers. Accordingly, not only do the righteous dead listen to the prayers of the living saints, but when additional power is needed, they join in the prayer chain on behalf of the living, a sort of celestial help desk.

In many settings, proponents of the idea cite Hebrews 12:1 as biblical authority to this "help desk" theology: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

It is believed by some that these witnesses are the souls of departed saints, assigned by God to watch over, listen to, and assist in taking petitions from the living to the throne room of God. The attempted use of this passage to prove the reality of the teaching is curious, given that a careful reading of the text reveals no mention of prayer; no reference to the dead; and not a single suggestion that the dead help the living by praying on their behalf. Although numerous commentators and theologians have attempted to assign this cloud of witnesses the role of watching over the lives we live and assisting us in the prayers we pray, M. R. Vincent points out that the word translated witnesses "does not mean spectators, but those who have borne witness to the truth."<sup>1</sup> K. S. Wuest reminds us that these witnesses are they who kept the faith, even though at times it meant dying for the faith. Additionally, Wuest offers that the word witnesses "does not include in its meaning, the idea of a person looking at something."<sup>2</sup>

The preceding chapter informs our understanding of the opening scenes of Hebrews 12. Hebrews 11, called the faith chapter, is where the Bible introduces the heroes of the faith, opening with: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Then the Bible offers a partial listing of those, who by faith, had lived successful, victorious lives of obedience to God: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses. These servants of God, and many more, lived lives that had borne witness to the truth of a life lived by faith in God.

Hebrews 12 is merely a continuation of the previous chapter. There is no mystery regarding the great cloud of witnesses we find in its opening scenes. These are not the disembodied souls of the saints, diligently standing watch over believers, even praying on their behalf. The witnesses of that great cloud are the heroes of the faith from Hebrews 11. And they are witnesses, not in the sense of watching to see how succeeding generations of believers would live their lives, but in the sense that their lives offer testimony to the awesomeness of God's grace. Their victorious lives are abundant and living proof of the sufficiency of God's grace.

Besides, there's no need for this cloud of witnesses to serve as either help

desk or outsourced personnel coming to the aid of believers in their prayer lives. God has already made such help available to those who seek Him. In Romans 8:26 we read: "For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Jesus knew we would need help along the way, so in John 14:16 He shared: "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper." Last, Paul offers his counsel to believers in Ephesians 6:18: "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit."

For the saints of God, who live by faith and maintain a serious connection with God through prayer, there is no need of assistance from any help desks or outsourced personnel. Those who live by faith in Christ Jesus and want a relationship through a meaningful and powerful prayer life have no need for third-party involvement. Because we have the Holy Spirit, we have a direct connection with God. No need for a help desk. No need for outsourcing. We can go straight to the source of blessings and healings, mercy and grace, in Jesus' name.