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## Useful?

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Useful?

What is the use of praying? How effective are prayers on behalf of others? To answer such questions, we might as well ask another: Of what use is it to love anyone, including ones' self, or even God? Whatever answers might occur to us will likely be incapable of proof but we might hold them with strong convictions.

If we cannot prove that we love anyone or anyone loves us, we are yet capable of unequivocal affirmation that we do love and are loved. We have become convinced based primarily on our experience, rather than on anything that we have learned through study or being told what to believe. If we have any doubts, we can experiment with trying out an opposing perspective, and paying close attention to the results in our minds and hearts: "I am not loved and I love no one." While such words might be an appropriate expression of how badly we could feel in a particularly painful situation, it is not a statement that honestly describes our orientation in life. We do love, and we are loved, however imperfectly or partially that might seem to be.

Because we care about people, we think of them, and we want for them what we desire for ourselves in life: happiness or fulfillment of our purpose; food, clothing and shelter, peace, justice and a sense of self-worth, to name only a few. Our desires become expressed in words and deeds, as well as in attitudes and habits of thought. Though we might have some awareness of the number of times we visited someone in a hospital, we do not really give a thought to measuring the time, effort, thought and care that, over time, we exercise in ever more natural and spontaneous ways. Nor do we attempt to measure the value or usefulness of caring for others, as if calling a friend who has suffered a loss would be worth 10 points, and advocating for better treatment of homeless persons would count for even more. Love, in all the myriad of ways we express it, cannot be measured in either quantity or in quality.

In our love for others we sometimes enlist friends or associates, or seek assistance from those who have either the requisite skills or a suitable responsibility. In an emergency, we might call 911; when a family member or a friend is due for a birthday, we might arrange a party. And we always have the option of praying for them. To pray for another is an expression of love in which we ask God to care with us about the person or persons we have in mind. At the same time, we ourselves benefit from praying, for whenever we pray, we participate in a movement of the Spirit of Love that is always present within us. All prayer is in some manner an action of "us," we and God, in which we grow a bit closer together just as any two persons who

are intent on the welfare of a third person become a team in their common desires and actions.

Prayer is as practical and useful as are all manifestations of love. We have nothing to lose by praying, and lots to gain.