

A Life Given to Prayer

Setting Your Sights on the Eternal Purposes of God

By Sammy Tippit



Years ago as I was traveling in a communist country in Eastern Europe, I met an elderly man who had spent several years in prison for his faith. After being released from prison, his life was continually in danger because of his ministry. Although he constantly faced the threat of death, his life remained pure and loyal to Jesus.

He was a man who understood the nature of prayer. When he went to prison, he knew that although his sons were top students in their schools, they would not be allowed to study in universities. Upon graduation from high school, his oldest son went to work in a factory.

His father prayed from his prison cell. One day the head of the communist party in the factory said to his son, "You have potential. You would be of more benefit to our nation if you studied in the university. I am going to recommend that you be allowed to study there."

The son not only studied in a university, but he studied in

one of the outstanding universities in the world. He became one of the leading scholars in that nation and a committed Christian. Through the years that father prayed every one of his sons into the university.

I wondered how this man's prayers could change the decisions of government leaders. He said with tears running down his face, "Many people come to my country and want to make a big fire for God. I do not want to make a big fire for God. I want to be consumed by God's fire until I am ashes. When I am ashes, then I will see the glory of God."

I wanted to say that I understood. But I knew that the man understood the holiness of God in a way that I did not. He experienced a depth in his prayer life that I desired. My encounter with this godly man opened my eyes to a tremendous truth about prayer: Holiness of heart and power in prayer are inseparable.

A life that prays is a life that is wholly yielded to the will of God. It is a life that has power and authority in prayer.

True Prayer Produces Holiness of Heart

True prayer will always produce holy living. And holy living produces powerful praying. One might wonder which comes first—holiness of heart or power in prayer. I believe that the answer is simple: neither and both.

Powerful praying and holiness of heart are not achieved by human efforts. They transpire when one encounters a holy God. Study the great men of faith. They became great only by the sovereign grace of God. God sought them, and when they encountered His holiness they were never the same.

Moses was such a man. He was not seeking God while he was shepherding his flock on Mount Horeb. But God was seeking

Moses. Moses saw an ordinary bush made extraordinary by the fire of God. When God had the attention of Moses, He called him by name. God told Moses to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. When we encounter a holy God we must bow before Him. His fire will consume the sin that stains our hearts and separates us from Him. Our hearts will no longer belong to the world; they will belong to God. It is impossible to hold onto a holy God with one hand and the world with the other. When we let go of the world and cling to God with both hands, we will not only be on holy ground, but we will be on praying ground.

Moses' life was never the same after his encounter with God. His heart was set apart for God's divine purpose. He became known as the friend of God. Exodus 33:11 says, "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend."

A friend of God will have the imprint of holiness on his heart and the tool of prayer in his hand. He will live every day with a separated and seeking heart.

True Prayer Pursues the Will of God

Prayer was a priority in the lives of many Romanian Christians during the communist era. Many of them learned to pray with their whole hearts. I have met young men and women who diligently searched Scripture in order to understand God fully. I also learned never to ask them what verse of Scripture they were memorizing; it was more appropriate to ask what chapter or what book of the Bible they were memorizing.

A young Romanian singing group traveled with me as I preached in evangelistic campaigns. In order to be a part of the singing group, the singers had to memorize 1 John, James, and 1 Peter. When they sang, they would quote a chapter of Scripture between songs. They would continue in this manner throughout their musical program.

The most powerful, praying Christians I have met were some of those Christians in Romania. They understood the nature and the character of God because they filled their minds with Scripture.

It was inspiring to go to a prayer meeting in Romania. Not only did many pray with an understanding of the Word of God, but many were free to pray with their emotions. They wept when they prayed for non-Christians. They rejoiced when they thanked God for the good things He had done.

But there was one outstanding characteristic of those Christians that challenged my prayer life. They prayed with a heart that was set on doing the will of God. Although the will of God often brought suffering and persecution into their lives, they prayed with a will that was bent toward God. They learned to search for God with their whole hearts.

Most Christians in the Western world pray with only part of their hearts. Although many have a good knowledge of the Bible and the attributes of God, they pray with only their minds. We must learn to weep as Jesus wept over a lost humanity. We must learn to hurt as Jesus hurts for the non-Christian world. We must not fear praying with our emotions.

I am not referring to emotionalism; I am referring to praying with the passion of Christ. It is biblical to weep for souls. Perhaps we have lost our ability to weep for the lost. Perhaps our hearts have been far from the heart of God.

On the other hand, there are Christians who pray only with their emotions. Their prayers are rooted in experience and feelings. Many love to have a mystic feeling but have little understanding of the attributes and nature of God. Christians must learn to pray according to sound biblical principles. Experience and emotion will always come under the searchlight of God's Word. They must live up to the truth. However, there is one element of prayer that has been lost by many Christians

today: the will.

Perhaps the deepest and most powerful moment in the prayer life of Jesus took place on the Mount of Olives. Jesus was about to face death. He knew He would have to face the sins of people from every generation. Under those circumstances He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39).

The man who is broken and bent in his will becomes mighty with God. The man who searches for God with his whole heart (mind, will, and emotions) will find God. And the man who finds God also finds a keen sense of God's purpose. That person will be on a mission from God. That person's life will move people because it has been transformed.

True Prayer Embraces Suffering

To pray with a will surrendered to God is to risk our lives for God. Too many in this generation seek comfortableness. Too many use prayer as an escape from what is difficult.

Often prayer and suffering go hand in hand. Suffering ushers us into a new realm of dependence upon God. In our sufferings we experience His sufficiency.

Prayer can accomplish four major tasks in suffering. First, prayer delivers us from that which we suffer. God will, on occasion, work a mighty victory in our lives. We find freedom from our suffering by the power of God obtained in prayer. Second, prayer delivers the grace of God to us in our suffering. That grace enables us to endure the suffering. Third, prayer delivers us into the hands of God's comfort. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). Finally, prayer delivers the character

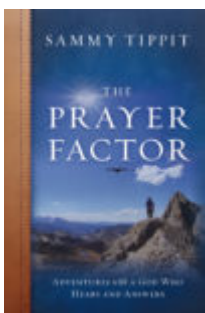
of God into our lives when we suffer.

Our problems need to be dealt with in the light of God's eternal purpose. When Jesus prayed in the Garden, He was not looking for a temporary reprieve from His pending problem. He prayed for God's eternal purpose and will. That kind of prayer is powerful. E.M. Bounds said, "Prayer is no little thing. It does not concern the petty interests of one person. The littlest prayer broadens out by the will of God till it touches all worlds, conserves all interests, and enhances man's greatest wealth, and God's greatest good."¹

True prayer, then, is submission to the will of God. One cannot effectively enter into the secret chamber of prayer with any strings attached to his own will. The true man or woman of prayer will enter that chamber with the words of Jesus, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39).

Comfort is not the issue to the person of prayer. The man or woman of prayer has set his or her sights on the eternal purpose of God. That life will be a holy life. It will be a life given to prayer.

¹ E.M. Bounds, *The Reality of Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 13 (p. 64).



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