

# Prayer - Asking Aright

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the necessity of sincere and purposeful prayer that seeks to glorify God above personal desires.*

**Duration:** 37:36

**Scripture:** Isaiah 6:1

**Topics:** "Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of restoring the glory of God in the church. He criticizes the current state of the church, describing it as having a cheap and shallow understanding of God. The speaker calls for a return to reverence, worship, and deep presence in the church, as well as a restoration of the New Testament pattern. He warns against imitating worldly and backslidden churches and urges repentance and a renewed focus on God's glory. The speaker also highlights the need for a generation of young people to experience the true presence of God and calls for a transformation in the Christian and missionary alliance to reflect a more spiritual and authentic Christianity.

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## Transcript

This morning I want to talk on prayer. I have three texts. I've been using three texts since I've been here.

It's not a habit, it just happened that way. I never allow myself to get into numbers, but they have three texts. One is 516 of James, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

That's a positive statement. And here's a negative statement. In the fourth chapter of James, we have not because he asked not, for he asked and received not.

You ask amiss that you may consume it upon your lust. Then in Luke 18, another may not always to pray and to negative and not to think. Molinus, the great Spanish martyr and mystic, said, Prayer is an ascent or elevation of the mind to God.

And God is above all. Therefore the soul cannot see him, nor converse with him, and she sees herself above all creatures. And we'll begin there.

And then notice one of them says that prayer is a potent thing. It availeth much. And this is taught in both the Old and the New Testament, and demonstrated also both in the Old and in the New Testament.

The second text says that even though prayer is a potent thing, yet sometimes we pray and do not have the cause either. We have failed to ask, but we ask selfishly to consume it on our lusts. But the third text says that nevertheless we are always to pray and not let any stand in the way.

Now, there's a lot of prayer going on these days. I suppose there's not in evangelical circles, and outside too, than for a long, long time. God's on everything these days, and he's being circularized and pressured to do a lot of things he's not going to do.

Let's save our time, go for a walk. God is being pressured by every person, and to get him over on the side of a selfish project, God's prayer has become a lobby. We're lobbying instead of praying.

He's being pressured to bless projects that may be unscriptural and perhaps even injurious. And he is being asked to help carry on projects that may have no higher motive than to relieve the man who is doing the praying from the necessity of living. Or he may be praying in order that he might be an opportunity to travel at other people's expense, not by bus either, or freighter, but by super constellation.

Such men call prayer meetings by radio and letter, and even tonight have all-night prayer meetings. After all, that's a small price to pay for getting such power as God has over on your side if you want something done. But the simple fact is, God never responds to any such prayers, any more than on the Mount of Carmel.

He just lets people blow off steam all night long, rub their sleepy eyes, and go. Now, there are in prayer certain personal interests which never ought to be brought at all. These we should talk over with God in privacy.

Often they are not even to be shared. They just embarrass people or waste other people's time. I was in a prayer meeting once when I was a young pastor, and the leader of the prayer said, request for prayer for Mrs. So-and-so.

Our sister has it, and she wants prayer. So they solemnly got down on their knees, never cracked a smile, nobody burst in. While they prayed for that woman's twitching eyelids, I just recommend she rub it.

That's what I do. Just rub it and it will quit. Those things are personal, and we ought not to bother the corporate body with such trifles.

A kind of prayer we call corporate prayer. It is the praying of the people of God. And according to the scriptures, this is most potent prayer for where two or three are gathered.

You are familiar with the text. If we are going to pray successfully in our corporate prayer meeting, we must pray in harmony with the will of God and in harmony with the work he has set us to do. We must have an aim in our prayers, and not just meet and scatter our prayers, but have an aim, something we are aiming at.

And that aim must be God's. There are two objectives that I want to talk about today, and some of you will be surprised that I don't mince. There are two objectives which ought to be on everybody's mind first, in the order I give them to you.

And they ought to be there as targets that we connect. They ought to be there as mountains to attack with our bulldozers of prayer. These are, and I think I can say this without qualification or any marginal

annotation to apologize for, I think I can say this with qualification, that these two things are the most important things in the world now.

The first one is always of vital importance, and this happens to be of vital importance now. At some other time it might not be. One is.

And these are the two that ought to excite our prayer in private. And every time the corporate body meets, we ought to inform ourselves. We ought to get instructed.

And then we ought to pray with a purpose and in intensity and repetition and yearning and discipline and self-sacrifice. And the prayer is, as the General uses every kind of ammunition he has, first what this country needs, what the Church needs is a resolution of the Most High God. Now hear me, I'm not just making up a sermon here to preach to you.

This can be checked and tested, and this can be proved. That what we need, and we need anything else, is a restoration of the vision of the Most High God. The honor of God has been lost to men, and the God of today is a weakling.

He's a little, cheap, palsy God. He's the man upstairs. He's the fellow that will help you when you're in difficulty and not when you're not.

We've reduced the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I saw a little fellow down by the monkey. He was keeping time with one of the legs of the monkey.

I said, Brother, I don't think there was any. I don't think there was any jet burn, but he was keeping time with the music. Well, we have a stuffed God now in evangelical circles.

And that can be appealed to by anybody at any time. The clown on the radio will break into his fun and say, Now have I seen a half-converted cowboy dressed like an idiot? He will say after he's twanged out some sexy numbers, you'll say it's a holy number. And these things are holy numbers.

God is approached by everybody, because that kind of God, you see, can be approached by anybody. God can be. And we've lost the glory and the honor of God.

There was a day when men believed in the sovereignty of God. The Calvinists believed in the sovereignty of God, and the Arminians believed in the sovereignty of God stronger yet than the Calvinists. And the great God of the Bible is the God into whose presence you go with fear.

You cannot come dashing in, in your tennis outfit, and go into God and then rush out again. Over in the city of Chicago there was a meeting. Did I tell this the other day? I don't know whether I did or not.

If I did, I didn't hear it. It was a meeting of the Christian Businessmen's Committee. Now, this is not true of all of the Christian businessmen or their committees.

I work a lot. But this particular convention was being held there, and one of the big shots of the Christian Businessmen's Committee came dashing in one time and got to the platform. And he said, I've just been in a meeting.

And God said, and there was a fine-looking, fine-old, gray-haired New England man down there. He got up and said, Mr. Chairman. The Chairman said, All right, what do you have to say? He said, I came all the

way from New England to Chicago to meet God.

I thought when I got here that there would be a sense of the presence of God on our convention. I thought that we went and worshiped full. But do I have to listen to stuff like this? He said, Here is a man who is just dealing with God.

I don't remember what all else he said, but I was on his side, and the poor Chairman didn't know how to get control of that. But the brother was perfectly right. The man who goes into a huddle with God isn't going into the huddle with the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the mighty Jehovah.

The nearest Isaiah ever got into a huddle with God was when he lifted up, and Isaiah cried out, O God, O God, I'm an unclean man. And when Daniel started to huddle, he fell down stoned, and the Lord had to raise him up. When John saw him, he fell flat on his face.

And every time they heard of God in that sense, they always went flat down and said, I am dust and ashes, I am unfit, I am unworthy of my name. But that's the God we want back, brethren. We want God back.

And you say, Well, in the Alliances, didn't you have that kind of God? Well, we have him, but we don't have him. A fellow was out my way, and he came out this way somewhere, not this district, Brother Joe, Brother McGarvey, but in some other districts. He said he went to a little Alliance, and the leader got up and illy prepared, I presume, and he hadn't even looked at the title of the song.

And he said, All right, we'll begin this, I am on the rocks, hallelujah. And there are a good many of us on the rocks, because with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ isn't here. Our God is a cheap, hand-made composite of various theological and choruses and ideas and stories we heard evangelists tell.

The return of the glory of God again, and the returning of the glory of God to the Church is the primary imperative, absolutely necessary. It is even more important than the salvation of souls. But God has so ordered it that when his glory returns, more souls will be converted as a result.

You don't have to take your choice, it isn't an either-or, it's a both-and. And the trying to get souls saved at the glory of God is to cheat God of his glory and not get souls saved anyhow. We just make cross-lights who aren't anything else.

Now the first prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, the first corporate prayer, begins, Our Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Jesus said, in other words, the hallowing of the name is more important than anything else. Therefore always see to it that you pray first that the glory of God be hallowed.

Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. God first, my brethren. We're humanists to a great degree now.

Evangelicalism has backslidden until it's humanism with a biblical veneer. But we want not humanism, we want Christianity of Bible kind. And Christianity never begins with man.

Christianity begins with God, then looks around for man. But humanism begins with man, and then after what? And we have gotten into that place. We begin with man, and it's what man thinks and what man

says, and what we want to do for man.

But the glory of God is first. Hallowed be thy name. And I pray more for this than I pray for this.

That the glory of God might be revealed again to this generation, so that the presence of God will be so humiliating to us, so humbling, so wonderful, so glorious, that it'll count. And that all of our thought-up jokes will go down the drain, and that all of our self-confidential disciples will stand or kneel or fall down in the presence of this holy God and cry, Holy, holy Lord God Almighty. Now, remember, you can have all your plans you want with the help of all of the advertisers, and you can get the help of all modern mechanics, and when it's all done, you'll fall short unless first, God is glorified in the Church.

Second, second, only second to this, but second to it, that the Church should be delivered from her Babylonian captivity. The Evangelical Church today, the Holy and the Apostle Church, the Fundamentalists and the Alliance, that takes us all in if it doesn't add your bunch. We're all in Babylonian captivity.

Israel in Babylon did not cease to be God's people, but they were God's will. They were not in the Holy Land, they were somewhere else. And while God kept them and finally restored them, they didn't sing the Lord's song in the far-off land, and they weren't where they should be.

And the Church of Christ, the done-again Church, is in Babylonian captivity. We are among the people that speak another language, learning their ways, we are giving up to their mores and their moral codes, and we're in desperate need of a restoration, the disgraceful fornication of the Church with the world. Until this is accomplished, until there has been a reformation, a restoration that has restored the Church back to her place, back to the Holy Land, back where the Shekinah glory is, back to New Testament standards, evangelism, however it may be promoted, can only revert to more children in Babylon.

And remember that until we've had a reformation, a restoration, back in the land and the glory of God is shining once more in awesome splendor over us, everybody that's born again and all evangelism with all its success is only producing more Jews in Babylon, more Christians that are not where they should be. And remember, and y'all get killed for this, but I reckon you'll only die once, until we get restored and the Church gets restored, even our missions won't be successful. Because all we'll be doing will be transplanting a scrub Christianity on a foreign shore.

Remember, missionaries, that you can never produce anything better than you are yourself. The Bible will bring forth after its time. And send a missionary over there with a cheap concept of God and his head filled with jiggling choruses, and that's the kind of Christianity he'll produce over there.

So all he'll do will be transplanting an effete, degenerate Christianity on a foreign shore. So more than we need more, we need a reformation of the whole Church of Christ in America. And when that comes, then we'll get more missionaries.

Quality will be higher, and the result will be that they will produce a higher type of Christian. This sounds strange, I never heard of it. Aren't all Christians alike? No, not all Christians alike.

Some bring forth thirty-fold, some a hundred, and some shine like the stars in heaven, some big, some little, and some you have to take a telescope to see. And Paul Carno and others of you are spiritual, and the writer to the Hebrews said that some of you are so near spiritual growth that you need again somebody to teach you the first principles. So my brethren, it can be a very high type of Christianity, it can

be moderate and mediocre, it can be very low.

And the kind of Christianity that we have in our Bible schools, Christian colleges, Christian magazines, Bible conferences, and camp meetings, is a degenerate form of Christianity. It isn't a high, holy, spirit-filled, fire-baptized, God-conscious, gracious, love-enamored thing that our fathers knew, that we knew, even fifty years ago, that the Reliance knew at first. And until we have a reformation, remember that all of our books and our magazines are but the working of bacteria in a decaying church.

That's all. The Reliance witness alone is as spiritual and as good as the people that produce it. And since we belong, the editor and all of us together, are part and parcel of a second-rate, degenerate Christianity.

The magazine is second-rate, and it is second-rate. If we could all of us get back to God, if we could be rich again, if we could cease to be influenced by the radio and television and the newspapers and magazine and time and sports and all the rest, and could become New Testament in the right sense of the word, then you people would be up, and I'd be up, and our churches would be up, and our magazine would be up, and our missionaries would be up, and we'd make converts up in that atmosphere. You know, some babies are born, and when they're born, you have to put them in a, what do they call it, incubator, and give them oxygen to keep them going.

Others are bounced into the world with a howl and a protest and pound, and from that minute on, they're in charge of things. Well, now, I believe Christians, I believe it be like that. Some Christians barely squeak through.

When my brother was born, he was premature, and when he was born, he couldn't hold his, his head just wouldn't stay on. They had to put him on a pillow, carry him around for a long time on a pillow. My wife had seven, and outside of one, who was just a little weak, the six of them were born the size and full of life, and they've been ever since.

You can be born in the kingdom of God, either an incubator baby, or you can be born a bouncing, howling baby saying, Abba, Father, before you get your teeth. And that's the kind we ought to have, and worry about, that the glory of God might be revealed again, that we'd quit joking about God, thinking about God in an unworthy manner, that we would elevate God in our thoughts, and that when we speak of God, it would be, and that God should become all in all, and then that his church should be restored again to New Testament pattern. What we need to pray about, brethren.

I wonder if I've preached my time out. I don't know. No, not quite.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about how we don't get a prayer's answer. Some of us are praying like this, and some of you are, and you will be, and more will be, I suppose, after this morning, and you go and do what the preachers tell you to do, but you know there's a serpent in the garden, and it's the serpent of self, and it twines itself about the most beautiful trees, and it's there to poison your prayers, destroys your prayers. You have not because you ask to miss, that you might consume it upon your lips.

Now, let me tell you this, my brethren. It's possible to want the glory of God to be revealed, and to pray that the glory of God might be revealed, but at the same time to want to be the one he uses to reveal it. See what I mean? It's possible for me to go to my knees and say, Oh God, let thy glory be revealed to men, to seek and hope that I'll be the one he uses to reveal that glory.

Well, you know what I'm asking for? I'm asking for a cut of the glory of God, and I'll never get my prayer answer. It's perfectly possible to want the church to be restored from her Babylon, but yet want to be the one that leads her back. And if you pray like that, you might just as well not pray.

It's possible to want Jerusalem to be built, but to want to be Nehemiah. It's possible to want the prophets of Baal to be defeated, but we have a yearning to be Elijah, and to stand up there and call fire down. We want a reformation, but we want to be Luther, and to stand where I stand so help me God.

We want the army of the Lord to win, but we'd kind of like to be a commissioned officer, so that when we can ride at the head of the parade. We want our church to triumph over her foes, but we'd kind of like to be around there working so that when it triumphs, everybody will say we had a part in it. We want our Sunday school to grow, but we also would like to be known as that great Sunday school man.

Under his superintendency, it went from 25 to 39. And now, my brethren, we must elevate our hearts and pray. And here's the way we've got to pray.

O God, honor thyself, but do it through me, or do it without me. Do it apart from me. We've got to pray like that, otherwise we're praying selfishly.

If God we want to be, want to see restored, then you don't care whether you have any part in it or not. If God wants to restore the glory of God, you've got to pray just as hard and just as seriously as if he was going to use the Alliance. Some of you will never get over that.

There'll be a heart attack all over the ground, but it'll be all right. You'll get over it. If you pray, O God, glorify thyself through the Alliance, you might just as well recite Mary's Little Lamb backwards, because God won't hear that prayer.

You also are willing that every group should share with it, and if God wants to start somewhere else, he can start. Some of you nice people may have to find you out yet. When revival comes to your town, it may start through some fellow backwards, and you don't believe it, and you think that he's not nearly as spiritual as you, because he plans his service and you just bumble for the best.

And you call that spirituality. That isn't spirituality, it's laziness. That's all.

The fellow who doesn't plan his sermon and says he's trusting in the Holy Ghost, he's a liar and the truth isn't in him, or else he's too dumb to know what he's saying. The fact that these unplanned services, I preached in one of the largest churches on the North American continent, and I'm going to let you guess, and if you come to me and ask, I won't tell you, but it is one of the largest and best-known fundamentalist churches on the continent. I preached morning and evening there one time.

I've preached there a number of times, but this particular time I was there, it was my first time. What the morning service was, it was a glorified street meeting, just that. There were about 3,500 people present, but it was a glorified meeting, and I've never respected that church since.

My brethren, just coming unprepared, hoping for the best, getting up after the long fishing trip, and you're in Simonizing your car, not preparing, and think about it, that's not spirituality, that's shameful laziness. Irreverence. Cursed is the work of God carelessly, says the Holy Ghost.

Anyway, you've got to pray for revival and then be satisfied to have God as your priest or a Lutheran pastor. You've got to pray for revival and then be willing that they'd skip you if it's worth it, because it's the only way you can be saved from selfishness. You ask and you receive not, because you ask a moment upon your lust.

I remember the evangelist, he was coming to a certain church, and the pastor said, the revival has broken out, and he wired back, hold it till I arrive. Funny, but it's a long way from being funny, it's tragic. The glory of the evangelist was more than the glory of God.

The evangelist probably gets souls converted. You say, but let him alone, brother, he gets souls converted. Yes, he gets incubator babies born in Babylon.

If he was God, he'd get nine pound babies born, he didn't have to put an incubator, and they'd be back in the land where they belong. Let's get away from this idea that the thing's all right because somebody got converted. Perfectly possible for a Jew to be born in Babylon, who was? Well, you've got to be willing to pray, oh God, answer with me or apart from me, but answer God.

Glorify thyself in our midst. Send out missionaries, Lord, but two more from another church, and you do for mine, I am satisfied. Send revival, Lord, but if you want to bless the branch across the city first, all right, you got to do that.

And maybe God delights to honor somebody else. Maybe God delights to honor another church first, and you'll catch the spillover. You've got to be willing to pray, oh the walls of Babylon, by whomsoever thou wilt rebuild the walls of Babylon.

Let me lay a brick if you please God, but if you don't, then I'll stand on the side and rejoice while the wall is being built. Oh God, restore thy church to the land. But oh God, if you use me, all right, but if you don't want to use me, then I'll be joyous and I'll rejoice to see the church restored.

Oh God, bless thyself in our midst, and if you want to use me, all right, but if not, I'll back the man I'll just use, I'll love him, I'll pray for him, and I'll work behind the scenes, and I'll do my dead level best unseen, we've got to pray like that. Now I want to ask you, can you pray, oh God, at any cost, revive our church, but oh God, at any cost to me, if I have to get kicked out, revive thy church, oh God. It's an awful thought, brethren, that there are churches waiting around for some people to die so they can go forward.

That's an awful thought. And some of you old deacons, if you pray and really, something could happen, I don't know what, but maybe you might move to another town. We've got to pray, oh God, bless this church at any cost.

As soon as you put a price tag on, God won't hear you. So God bless our church, at any cost, honor thyself in our midst, at any cost, restore our church to the power of the New Testament principles. And then you've got to be satisfied for God to use somebody else to do it.

Amen? I haven't had five amens all morning, but it's been just as true, shouting amen. So what are we going to do? Remember what he said. He said, prayers are potent, but sometimes we pray selfishly and don't get the answer.

But nevertheless, devil in the flesh, we ought to pray and not think. Correct our faults, get straightened out, pray and not think. So my friends, I've given you my spiritual philosophy.



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