

# Pray, Then Preach

by Sammy Tippit

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*Sammy Tippit emphasizes the vital role of prayer in preaching and the need for preachers to cultivate a deep relationship with God to effectively communicate His message.*

**Scripture:** Colossians 2:18

**Topics:** "Spiritual Rewards", "False Teachers"

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## Description

The preacher delves into the concept of being defrauded of spiritual rewards, likening it to an umpire disqualifying an athlete from a prize. Paul warns against false teachers who could lead believers astray, causing them to lose their heavenly rewards while not losing their salvation. The sermon emphasizes the importance of not allowing others to deceive or disqualify believers from their spiritual blessings by promoting false humility and teachings about angels.

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## Transcript

The great need of the hour is that pulpits throughout this land might be filled with humble, holy, praying men.

Excitement filled the air as tens of thousands of people filed into the stadium to hear the world's best-known evangelist. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I thought, This guy must be a great orator. I had been trained in public speaking, and just two years earlier, I had been named "Most Outstanding Youth Speaker in North America." Now, as a new Christian, I was anxious to hear and watch the techniques of "the world's greatest evangelist."

The tall, thin evangelist began to speak to the crowd of 60,000-plus at the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. My reaction? I thought he was above average as a speaker--nothing special. So why had all of these people come to hear him? It baffled me. As he drew his message to a close, I knew what was about to transpire. I had come to Christ just a few months earlier through the ministry of an evangelist. This speaker was going to ask people to come to the front and pray with him.

As Billy Graham began his "invitation," I commenced pray-ing. I'm ashamed to tell you what I prayed. "Oh, God," I said to the Lord, "I pray that Mr. Graham won't feel too bad if only a few people trust Christ to forgive them and change their lives." I was stunned when the stadium began to shake as thousands moved toward the front of the platform. I'd never seen anything like it. Especially not for the caliber of speaker that I considered Billy Graham to be.

Now I'm really ashamed to admit what I thought next. What crossed my mind was this: If this is what happens when he speaks, what's going to happen when I speak?

As a matter of fact, it wasn't long afterward that I had the opportunity to preach at an evangelistic meeting. I spent hours preparing my message. I had a catchy introduction, sound reasoning in the body of my message, and a dramatic conclusion. I lifted my voice when needed and lowered it at just the right moment. I used gestures in a timely fashion. I then came to the conclusion of my message and said, "If you want to know Christ, I want you to get up out of your seat and join me at the front of the platform." Do you know what happened? You guessed it. Nothing!

It took years before I would understand that the secret to Dr. Graham's preaching was not in his oratory skills but rather in his prayer disciplines. I later met a man who had served as chairman of a Billy Graham crusade. I asked him what it was like working with Dr. Graham. He responded by telling me a story. "Dr. Graham once called me," he explained. "Dr. Graham said, 'I have three questions for you. First, have you been praying? Second, have you been praying? And third, have you been praying?'" Prayer, not eloquence of oratory, was his secret. It can be yours and mine too.

### The Preacher and Prayer

The great need of the hour is that pulpits throughout this land might be filled with humble, holy, praying men. A prayerless pulpit produces a powerless people. Powerless to overcome troubling sins. Powerless to change the culture. Powerless to give witness of their great Savior. And a powerless pew produces a cynical public. The church then becomes the object of disdain, because to a great extent it has lost its authenticity.

In the book of Acts, it is said that people recognized that those proclaiming the Gospel were "un-learned and ignorant men," and "they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). To-day, I'm afraid people can easily observe that we have very intelligent and educated preachers but that few of them have been with Jesus. And we wonder why revival tarries.

Recently, a pastor confided to me, "I preach about prayer. But the truth is that it's been a long time since I've had any real quality time in prayer." I don't believe that his situation is unique. We talk a lot about prayer but pray little. We read books on prayer but do nothing about what we read. We say that prayer is a necessity for victorious Christian living but have scheduled God out of our inner life. We proclaim that prayer should be the priority of the church but never weep because of our empty prayer meetings.

Prayer was never intended to be a vehicle by which the preacher attempts to manipulate God to bless his message, ministry, and church. Prayer, above all else, is intimacy with God. It's being "with Jesus." I wonder what would happen if we preachers ceased asking our wives after the Sunday worship service, "How did I do?" and started asking, "Did the people sense I had been with Jesus?"

Prayer must not be just an addendum to the life of the preacher. It must become the driving force behind the preacher and his message. It is the platform from which he proclaims the Word of God. Prayer must be the foundation of his strategy for ministry and the stage from which he sounds forth his trumpet.

Prayer was the common de-nominator of Christ's mighty men of old. The church was born in a prayer meeting. Peter's first sermon was delivered at the end of that prayer meeting, and 3,000 were saved. Paul's apostolic ministry began as a result of a prayer meeting. Prayer thrust the preaching of those

first-century apostles into hearts of people throughout the Roman Empire. They prayed and God moved.

We would all like to preach to the multitudes as the great 18th-century evangelist George Whitefield did, but we must also remember that he would often spend entire nights crying out to God for souls. Many today would like to build a great church like Charles Spurgeon did, but we must not forget that he had men below the platform who were praying for him while he preached.

Missionaries would like to reap the harvest of David Brainerd, but they must keep in mind that he often prayed so long that the snow melted beneath him. Revival speakers would like to see the results of Charles Finney, who lit the fires of revival everywhere he traveled, but we need to recall that a man named Nash traveled with him and stayed in a private room to pray the entire time Finney preached.

We've produced many entertaining preachers today, but the grave need of the hour is not for performers or orators. We desperately need leaders who have been "with Jesus." Entertainers will amuse the masses, and orators will impress the influential, but praying preachers will open the heavens. They may not receive the applause of men, but they will one day wear the crown of rejoicing. It is the man of prayer who will know the manifest glory of God. He will hold the key to revival in the church and the nation.

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#### Seven Steps to Preaching from a Platform of Prayer

Over the last three decades of preaching, I have attempted to build my life and ministry upon the truth of Jeremiah, "Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jer. 33:3). The following are some suggestions that I believe will be helpful to preaching from the platform of prayer.

1. Start the day with God. Seek His face before you see anyone else's face. This step is critical. There will never be the power to persuade men of the message if we have not been consistently in the presence of the Master.
2. Seek brief breaks with God all through the day. Occasionally, I will tell my staff that I am going out for a coffee break. I will get something to drink, find a place of solitude, and spend 15 minutes with God. Other times I add 15 minutes into my exercise routine; however, the only exercises that I actually do in that 15 minutes are "knee exercises."

It is important to power off your cell phone or pager during those times. You would not dare keep them on if you were meeting with the president of the country. Give the Creator of the universe your undivided attention and devotion.

3. Find a prayer partner--someone you can be honest with. Share your heart with that person and pray with him. It may be some-one outside your congregation. But in any case, find someone with whom you can be transparent. Remember that genuine prayer requires candid confession.
4. Meet with a group of praying men immediately before you preach. You are going into battle for the souls of men. Don't attempt it without soldiers covering you in prayer. I'm not talking about having a "word of prayer" before you preach, but rather "a season of prayer."

5. Train a team of intercessors to pray for you while you preach. I first experienced this principle in Romania during the days of communist domination. When I preached in the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Oradea, one of the leaders came to me at the close of the service and reported that he had been in a room with 100 men praying for me while I was preaching. There were also 100 women who had been praying for me.

I preached in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during 1999. God moved mightily. But the secret to the move of God could have been seen under the stadium, where 800 men prayed while I preached.

6. Develop a network of intercessors who will lift you before the throne of grace. We have made a commitment in our ministry to aggressively seek intercessors for our work. To date, we have developed an e-mail intercessory prayer list of over 700 people who pray for me when I preach. A couple of days before I preach, I send them information concerning the preaching opportunity and ways in which they can pray. I then immediately report to them how God answered their prayers. We have seen an incredible difference in the presence and power of God in our meetings since that time.

7. Take private prayer retreats. I like to take at least three or four short "prayer vacations" each year. These are times in which I take one to three days to get away from everyone and meet with God. I bring my life, family, ministry, and future and lay it all out before the Lord. I give God the freedom to change anything He wants to change. These are times of refreshing for me. Out of these, I find direction. But most of all, I am empowered for the task that He has given me.

Prayer refreshes the weary soldier and renews the faint of heart. Burnout disappears when we wait upon the Lord. Fresh wind blows across the humble heart, and the flame is fanned, when God's man seeks His face. Pray--then preach!

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