
PRAYER

COMMUNING WITH GOD IN EVERYTHING—
COLLECTED INSIGHTS FROM

A. W. TOZER

COMPILED BY W. L. SEAVER

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Preface, Commentary, and Questions
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*To my beautiful wife, Barbara,
and to my family and friends,
who were truly my prayer partners
from the inception to the completion of this work,
and to my God, who divinely enabled me to pen this work.*

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Introduction

A JOURNEY AWAITS

With fear and trembling, I approached this task of compiling Tozer's words on prayer and praying. I tried to avoid it, but the Spirit kept drawing me back to the riches of the topic for myself and others. While I did complete one of the first courses on prayer taught at a seminary over thirty years ago, the biggest plus of that experience was the opportunity to read a lot of books on prayer by Andrew Murray, E. M. Bounds, Ole Hallesby, D. L. Moody, Watchman Nee, Leonard Ravenhill, and others. In the years to follow there were successes and failures in my prayer life, but I know that the priority of prayer and the Word of God (Acts 6:4) should still hold today for all saints.

When one peruses the writings of Tozer on prayer, one does not find how-to manuals on prayer or exposition of famous prayers of the saints in the Bible from Abraham to David to Daniel and to the minor prophets, nor from Stephen outside

Jerusalem to Paul in Rome. The reason for these omissions may be found in Tozer's words in his book, *The Counselor*:

Do you recall that in the times of prayer recorded in the Gospels the only one who could stay awake was Jesus? Others tried to pray, but they came to Him and said, "Teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

Some of the churches now advertise courses on how to pray. How ridiculous! That is like giving a course on how to fall in love. When the Holy Spirit comes He takes the things of God and translates them into language our hearts can understand. Even if we do not know the will of God, the Holy Spirit does know, and He prays "with groaning which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26). These disciples were praying people—in the book of Acts you will find them in prayer meetings. But before that, they would fall asleep. The difference was by the Spirit—now they had great delight in prayer.¹

With that being said, it is fairly evident that Tozer dealt with the believer's daily relationship with the Lord and how that produced effective prayer.

For instance, such thoughts about the Christian's daily walk with the Lord and effective prayer come from studying Abraham's prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah where Lot was living, as recorded in Genesis 18:22–33:

Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord.

INTRODUCTION: A JOURNEY AWAITS

Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" So the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account." And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes." Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it on account of the forty." Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty." Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten." As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the Lord departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

I have studied this passage numerous times, and it is rich in principles on prayer. Later Abraham will be called a friend of God because of these events in Genesis 18 (Isa. 41:8; James 2:23). True friends don't hide revelations or issues from each other. God didn't hide from Abraham what He was going to do with Sodom and Gomorrah (see Gen. 18:17). As a result of God not hiding the truth, Abraham lingered before the Lord and prayed with much boldness, perseverance, and humility for he knew God to be merciful and just.

His first petition was for God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if there were fifty righteous people within the city, and his last one (five petitions later) was for God to spare the city if there were ten righteous. What is extremely interesting, there was an 80 percent change in the original petition from fifty righteous men to ten. Or another way to look at it was that there was an average of a 25 percent change in each petition from the previous petition. This snapshot of Abraham's prayer life reveals the spiritual journey that awaits those who linger before the Lord God as Abraham did.

A spiritual journey awaits us as God reshapes our petitions, molds us more into the image of His Son, and brings closure to the matter prayed about in such a way that His holiness, His mercy, His love, and His glory are ever magnified. If our everyday lives are filled with the barrenness of busyness and no serious urgency to pray, then we miss the wonderful journey of being conformed to the image of Christ and knowing our God more intimately.

This is the journey that Tozer addresses in his works and that we have tried to capture. But that journey begins with the choic-

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es we make! I pray that you may be very teachable in this journey and that your understanding of who God is may be greatly expanded. Blessings to you as a fellow sojourner!

Finally, the first twenty-two chapters of this book focus on Tozer's writings from sixteen books that deal with some aspect of prayer. The next three chapters are snippets from some sermons that deal with prayer and related topics. The last three chapters are excerpts from two major sermons that Tozer gave on prayer. To help us reflect and respond, each chapter concludes with a response section, "To Answer and Apply," which includes questions and action steps. In addition, chapters one through twenty-five have a transition section, "Exploring with Tozer" that amplifies on Tozer's thoughts on the specific prayer topic. We have omitted the "Exploring with Tozer" section in Tozer's lengthier final prayer sermons.

The book can be used by the individual for personal reflection, by a small group for discussion, or as a monthly devotional on prayer. If you are using this book for devotional time on prayer, the twenty-two writings, three snippets, and three excerpts from Tozer's Sunday sermons will take you through twenty-eight days. The author and compiler of this material encourages the reader to go back to two of the most convicting chapters to finish the month's readings. However, it is very possible that the reader will spend two days on a chapter because of the richness of applications in that chapter that are pertinent to his/her situation.

May God incline your heart to pray more effectively and more pointedly in the days to come!

W. L. SEAVER

THE WHOLE LIFE MUST PRAY

Prayer at its best is the expression of the total life. Certainly there have been and will continue to be instances when an isolated prayer may be answered even when the one uttering it may not have been living an exemplary Christian life. But we assume that most of those who read this page are not satisfied to get a prayer through occasionally; they want to know a more satisfying prayer life, one that elevates and purifies every act of body and mind and integrates the entire personality into a single spiritual unit. Such prayer can only be the result of a life lived in the Spirit.

All things else being equal, our prayers are only as powerful as our lives. In the long pull we pray only as well as we live. Some prayers are like a fire escape, used only in times of critical emergency—never very enjoyable, but used as a way of terrified escape from disaster. They do not represent the regular life of the

one who offers them; rather they are the unusual and uncommon acts of the spiritual amateur.

William Law somewhere pleads for Christians to live lives that accord with their prayers, and one of our well-known hymns asks that God help us “to live more nearly as we pray.” Most of us in moments of stress have wished that we had lived so that prayer would not be so unnatural to us and have regretted that we had not cultivated prayer to the point where it would be as easy and as natural as breathing.

We do not want to leave the impression that prayer in times of sudden crisis is not a good and right thing. It most certainly is, and God is said to be a “very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1); but no instructed Christian wants to live his whole life on an emergency level. As we go on into God we shall see the excellency of the life of constant communion where all thoughts and acts are prayers, and the entire life becomes one holy sacrifice of praise and worship.

To pray effectively it is required of us that there be no un-blessed areas in our lives, nor parts of the mind or soul that are not inhabited by the Spirit, no impure desires allowed to live within us, no disparity between our prayers and our conduct.

All this may appear to be placing the standard too high to be reached by men and women under the sun. But it is not so. If Christ is the kind of Savior He claims to be He should be able to save His people from the bondage of sin. This is not to support the man-made doctrine of “sinless perfection”; it is rather to declare the God-inspired doctrine that it is possible to “walk in the Spirit” and so “not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” It is to say that God has made provision in the cross of Christ for His children

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to be delivered from the galling yoke of sin: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11).

Undoubtedly the redemption in Christ Jesus has sufficient moral power to enable us to live in a state of purity and love where our whole life will be a prayer. Individual acts of prayer that spring out of that kind of total living will have about them a wondrous power not known to the careless or the worldly Christian.

From *The Root of the Righteous*
(1955; repr., Chicago: Moody, 2015)

EXPLORING WITH TOZER

Tozer’s opening comment that “prayer at its best is the expression of the total life” is both a simple and complex truth. It is simple to the believer who is in constant communion with the Father where all his thoughts and acts are prayers. His entire life is one holy sacrifice of praise and worship. This individual is not necessarily a prayer warrior as others would classify him; but a saint desirous of moment by moment fellowship with the Lord, of impacting his world for Christ not only by his righteous actions but also his prayers, and of leaving the fragrance of Christ among believers and nonbelievers. This believer understands that God “always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14–15).

The truth that “prayer at its best is the total expression of the total life” is complex to the believer who is not in constant communion with the Father, who has conformed much to the world, and who sees prayer only as a fire escape in difficult times or in critical emergencies. This believer tends to call on God only when he cannot work out a solution to a difficult situation, that is, he has no other option. To this believer, prayer is a duty and burdensome. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). When the whole life prays, there is no burden or legalistic bondage with prayer. The other issue that adds to the complexity of this truth on the total life is the inability of this believer to discern or connect the dots on unanswered prayer, sin, and their walk in Christ. Prayer seems to be a mystery to this believer, a random process that doesn’t make sense. However, in actuality, God is trying to grasp the attention of this believer by unanswered prayers or few prayers being answered to make him realize that God desires his submission to Him in all under the power of the Holy Spirit, his resistance to the devil, and his drawing near to God (and God will draw near to him) (James 4:7–8). If this believer responds to God’s wooing, he will begin to realize that a holy life is the fertile soil for prayer that changes the world around them. To not respond to God’s gentle and loving promptings forces God the Father to discipline us in many ways inclusive of our prayers that we might share His holiness (Heb. 12:10). Thus, the journey is more painful and complex!

THE WHOLE LIFE MUST PRAY

REFLECT AND APPLY

1. “All things being equal, our prayers are only as powerful as our lives.” How does one assess our life in Christ? Do we start with prayer? Put another way, are my prayers filled with emergency prayers or much prayer throughout my day? Do we examine our priorities of seeking first the kingdom of God? This honest assessment will take some time alone and may require some input from a spiritual mentor or two.
2. How does one cultivate a prayer life so that prayer becomes as natural as breathing? Should we read more books on prayer? Talk about prayer more? Pray more? Study James 4:7-8; 1 Peter 5:6-10; and 2 Kings 22:18-20.
3. What were the circumstances of your last emergency prayer? What was the answer? How was your prayer life affected after that—did it become a digression, a return to the status quo, or serve as a progression? Write down your impressions of the aftereffects from your last answered emergency prayer.
4. Was there a time in your life where you prayed more or saw more answered prayer? Reflect on what your walk in Christ was like at that time. On the other hand, can you identify some times in your life where your walk in Christ was more holy but answered prayer was less? What is the possible reason for this?