

“Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep” Mom’s and Dad’s Bedtime Prayer

It goes something like this, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. God bless Mommy, Daddy, Mark, Brett and Granny. Amen.” Simple.

I recited that prayer thousands of times as kid. It comes to my memory today as clearly as it did those many thousands of times. It’s wonderfully simple and joyously profound. Its words shaped and softly molded my tender soul as an infant and then as a child. It drew a soft blanket of warmth over my bed every night, and it calmed my heart when life turned dark. That simple prayer became a marvelous conduit of connection, creating a place each night where I could connect with God in days that sometimes seemed completely full of Him, and in other days that seemed entirely void of Him. Its words were an anchor of iron proportions dropped into seas churning and calm, restful and tumultuous. Their simplicity held me fast and their depth held me strong. I am warmed when I recite them even today. At times, I have found myself as an adult reciting their simple words in the middle of my most complex times. There is something timeless about them.

But they were never prayed alone. On the edge of my twin bed sat Mom, Dad or sometimes both of them. The words of this simple prayer were recited in unison, creating a corporate simplicity that lent even greater power to them. There’s something incalculably rich when others join us in engaging the infinite. Something about joining another in prayer accelerates our humanity to peaks and points that we don’t even understand. All we know is that it’s powerful, it exceeds words to encapsulate it and it sets us in places that we’re supposed to live in but rarely visit. “Now I lay me down to sleep . . . “ prayed with Mom and Dad ushered me in to heavenly places and introduced me to vast spaces far beyond my simple bedroom, and far beyond my life.

The Acid Test

Samuel Chadwick said that "Prayer is the acid test of devotion." It is the indication of how devoted we are to God. Over any and all things, it is the gauge of our love for Him and our commitment to Him. That’s so because it’s the daily enterprise of putting all of our interests, all of our desires, all of our agendas, all of our goals, all of the things that incessantly clamor for our attention, and all other loves behind us in order to focus exclusively and selflessly upon God. Pray is an intentional action of the abandonment of self in favor of the focus and worship of God. That is the acid test.

But the acid test of our relationship with others is partnering with them in prayer. It’s joining others in prayer as a means of bringing them before God, and them only. It’s not about us or any thin shade of us. Our needs and our agendas are rendered entirely invisible and wholly absent, wiped off the slate of prayer. It’s where we utterly relinquish our agendas, completely write off any potential gains and stand solely in the stead of another. Prayer is about partnering with others and bringing their needs before God without a shred of consideration for ourselves. It’s making us entirely invisible so that another is rendered more visible than a single soul can be alone. It’s pristine selflessness.

The acid test is setting the self selflessly aside and praying not to bring one’s own needs before God, or to bring oneself before God, or to seek some blessing large or small. Martin Luther wrote, "Our prayer must not be self-centered. It must arise not only because

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we feel our own need as a burden we must lay upon God, but also because we are so bound up in love for our fellow men that we feel their need as acutely as our own.” Genuine prayer is about bringing someone else and their needs before God with nothing of ourselves clouding or polluting or contaminating that action. It’s keeping oneself entirely out of the equation in every way, shape and form. It’s perfecting invisibility out of our perfect love for another. That kind of prayer is something of humanity made divine.

In commenting on the state of prayer today, Evan Roberts wrote, “Prayer is buried, and lost, and Heaven weeps.” However, when we partner in this manner with others, prayer is living in a way that nothing else lives. It is anything but lost. Rather it guides us when we are lost. And heaven does not weep, but it shouts with a joy that thunders down the corridors of heaven and reverberates out into the infinite stretches of the cosmos itself. Selfless prayer on the behalf of others upends mountains, transforms the landscape of lives despite how barren, and brings light to places where light is entirely unknown.

Mom and Dad’s Prayers

“Now I lay me down to sleep . . . “ it’s difficult to even begin to fathom what that simple prayer uttered every night with Mom and Dad did for me. These two adults set their lives entirely aside, sat on the bedside of a heavy-eyed child and spoke those words into his life. They put their own scars aside. They forfeited their own struggles and ignored the uncertainty that often dogged their steps and haunted their days. They held the hand of this tired child and prayed everything for him and nothing for themselves. They faced adversity that I couldn’t comprehend until I faced them in my own life. They scaled mountainous obstacles that I had no idea existed for them. They often peered into uncertain futures and prepared to put themselves to bed only to face challenges the next day that I never saw. Yet, in that simple bedroom their prayer was for only for me. I am amazed and humbled.

Prayer in a World of Selfishness

The first question is “are we going to pray?” Anything we think about prayer is entirely meaningless unless we pray. We can think about prayer, dissect it, read about it, theologize about it, create creative structures to do it, take polls as to its effectiveness and contemplate it from a million different angles. But it’s doing it that unleashes its power. No power comes from the study of it, but great power comes from the execution of it.

The second question is “who are we praying for?” The question might be better framed, “what’s our agenda for prayer?” We are commanded to pray for ourselves, and that is both good and fitting. But if prayer ends there it never really began. It’s sitting on the bedside of a world that’s hurting and lost, taking it by the hand and praying for it clear of our own agendas. That world comes in the form of people, spouses, children, neighbors and total strangers. It has the face of organizations, governments, societal issues and societal woes. It has the voice of crying children, weeping adults and tearful marriages. A world in need of selfless prayer is all around us. Will you pray? Will you pray with no attention toward self. “Now I lay me down to sleep . . .” Pray it.