

Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel shares a story of what happened to a young man in a concentration camp. When Wiesel arrived there, he was about to give up. He then saw an older man run toward the fence but before he reached the fence he was shot dead by a Nazi guard. Wiesel thought to himself that he would do the same thing. If he tried to run away and got shot then his misery would end at that moment. But as Wiesel pondered this action, another man grabbed him by the shoulders and said to him, "Wait a minute! Don't do that."

Wiesel responded, "Well, why shouldn't I?" (Don't you know what they are going to do to us?)

And then the man said, "You need to wait and see how this thing is going to end."

In reflecting on this story, author Frank Thomas says that there were three types of people with different perspectives in that concentration camp. The first perspective is the unrealistic optimist. The unrealistic optimist says, "We are going to be delivered on Hanukkah." Hanukkah comes and they are not delivered. The unrealistic optimist then says, "We are going to be delivered in the Jewish New Year." The Jewish New Year comes and they are not delivered. So the unrealistic optimist dies of a broken heart.

Another perspective in that concentration camp is the cynic. The cynic says, "We are never going to be delivered!" The cynic gives up before God actually shows. They say, "There is no God. Nothing is going to happen. We are going to stay in this concentration camp!" And so the cynic gives up, refusing to engage evil.

But there is one other type of perspective in the concentration camp. The third perspective is the faithful realist. The faithful realists share their faith in a different way. In the barracks of the concentration camp they say, "Well, I don't know when we will be delivered, but I do know we serve a God who will deliver us somehow." Or, in the words of the African American saying, "God might not show up when you want God to, but God is always right on time!"

Pastor Otis Moss tells the story of watching the film called, *The Guns of Navarone*, with Gregory Peck. Moss was a child and he was watching the movie with his mother and father and none of them had ever seen the movie before. The movie moved toward the end and it looked like Gregory Peck was going to die. Moss looked over at his mother and she was nervous with the suspense of the film, pacing the floor.

Moss says that he was a nervous boy, biting his nails. He knew Gregory Peck was going to die and it was getting near the end of the film. But even though Moss and his mother were nervous wrecks his father was just sitting there, cool, calm, and collected. Moss couldn't understand it and he thought, "Mom is upset, I'm upset, and Dad is all cool, calm, and collected!"

The film continued but then his mother said, "I can't take it anymore," and left the room. Moss was sitting there, nervous, wondering if Gregory Peck was going to get out of this situation but his father just sat there, cool, calm and collected.

Finally Moss asked his Dad, "Pop, why is it that Mom left the room because she is so nervous about this and how is it that I'm so nervous because of the suspense of the film, and here you are cool, calm, collected?" Moss' father looked at him, smiled, and simply said this: "Son, I read the book! I know how this thing is going to end."

Today we are being invited into a time of deep prayer. And we have two Scriptures which are all about prayer. In the first Scripture, the one read by Jennifer, we read about the moment when Solomon was ready to dedicate the Temple. Solomon's father, King David, had wanted to build the great Temple as a visible sign of God reuniting Israel.

But when he prayed for God to let him build the Temple, David heard God say to him that it was not the right time. So the Temple was never built during David's lifetime. After David's death when Solomon took over as king, he too prayed to God. Solomon did not pray for great wealth or for great conquests.

Solomon prayed for great wisdom. Solomon heard God say to him to build the great Temple. So Solomon led the people to build the great Temple.

It took many years to build that Temple. Solomon made sure that the Temple was built with the best of engineering knowledge so that it would last for a long time. But good building practices were not the only thing that Solomon made sure of. Solomon wanted to make sure that the Temple was a place where people encountered God.

And so before anyone could use the Temple, they had to dedicate the Temple. Solomon gathered all the people together to lift up their prayers. Solomon prayed that this Temple would be a place that would remind the people of the presence of God and Solomon prayed that the Temple would be a place where people would truly encounter God.

The second Scripture we read is what we commonly call the Lord's Prayer. It was delivered as part of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount." In these words, Jesus says do not be like the hypocrites in your prayers. The word hypocrite is referring to the way actors would act. They would wear masks in front of their faces to cover who they really were. Jesus says don't pray as someone who is trying to cover up who you are. He says to pray and to be totally honest with God about who you are and what you are dealing with in your life. Don't put on a false face.

In a little while, we are going to be invited to spend some real deep and passionate prayer with God. Going back to the example I shared at the beginning of this sermon, some of us fall into the trap of praying as unrealistic optimists and some of us fall into the trap of praying as cynics. The unrealistic optimists pray to God and say, "I don't need to do anything because God will do it all. God will do whatever God is going to do and I know exactly when God will do this." Unfortunately, many unrealistic optimists find themselves saddened because God doesn't work the way we want God to work and when we want God to work.

Others of us pray as the cynics. We pray but we don't really expect anything of significance to happen. We pray but we have really kind of given up.

But today I invite us all to pray as faithful realists. Faithful realists who believe that God will answer prayer in God's time. Realists who don't need to see certain things happen. Faithful realists keep praying even if they don't see anything happen. Faithful realists hang in there in their relationship with God because we want to see what happens in the end.

I can't believe I am going to do this but I am going to use the National Champion USC baseball team as my concluding example. That team faced lots of injuries this year and saw their best players miss lots of games. But their coach, Ray Tanner, told them, Jackie Bradley, Jr. is injured? Just keep winning. Another player breaks his wrist? Just keep winning. In a hitting slump? Just keep winning.

This can be great advice for our prayer life as well. Life going down the tubes? Just keep praying. Not seeing anything happen that is good in your life? Just keep praying. Mad at something and you can't seem to forgive someone in your life? Just keep praying. No matter what we are dealing with, just keep praying.

This weekend is a loud weekend. Lots of booms around us. In the midst of all of the booms, we are gathered here this morning. What we offer to the greatest nation in the world during this weekend of loud celebrations is some time for simple and quiet prayer. Amen.

-Moss, Otis III, 30 Good Minutes, http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/moss_4711.htm (I changed the word "optimist" to "unrealistic optimist" and "realist" to "faithful realist")

-Text: 2 Chronicles 6: 18-21; Matthew 6: 5-15

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