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## You're Never Fully Dressed Without A Prayer

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### Hebrews 5:7

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear.

**M**ost of you have heard Little Orphan Annie sing it - *"You're never fully dressed without a smile!"*

A smile is important, but you know there are times when you've got to wear more than a smile.

If you're headed off to church to marry the girl you love, you need to wear a smile, and a suit and tie.

If you're going down to the YMCA to swim some laps, you better wear a swim suit in addition to that grin on your face.

If you're driving down to the Arena to cheer on the Sabres, you might paint your face black and red; but you better put on a sweat shirt and some pants, too.

If you're boarding a plane to fly off to sunny Florida, it would be a good idea to cover your pasty white winter face with some sun screen before you de-plane.

Little Orphan Annie wants you always to wear a smile, but before you can pick out what else you're going to need to be wearing, you need to know where you're going.

That's one of the things the Bible tells us about Jesus, he always knew where he was going.

When he was a boy, and his parents were going back to Nazareth, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, talking with the priests. He knew his ultimate destination was going to be about doing God's business.

Immediately after he was baptized by John in the River Jordan, Jesus headed off to spend forty days and forty nights in the wilderness alone. He knew he had to face the devil's temptations head-on before he could go on with the rest of his life.

With his disciples in tow, at the height of his popularity with the people, Jesus headed off toward Jerusalem, because he knew that was where his destiny lay.

The last time he sat down at table and broke bread with his friends, they expected a celebration; but Jesus spoke about death, because he knew where he was going.

Jesus always knew where he was going, and he knew how to dress.

Every day, in every place and circumstance, Jesus was always dressed appropriately. Little Orphan Annie and I would like to think that Jesus always wore a smile, too. But the Bible tells me that in every place and time, for Jesus, the most important apparel he wore was apparent to everybody. Jesus always wrapped himself in prayer!

Although Little Orphan Annie sweetly sings that you're never fully dressed without a smile, Jesus' experience tells you that you're never fully the best you can be without a prayer.

When you read the Gospel stories, you learn that Jesus always made time for prayer, no matter where he was:

sometimes in a synagogue,  
 sometimes in the company of his disciples,  
 sometimes along the side of the road,  
 sometimes on the side of a hill or over the side of a boat,  
 and sometimes when he was alone -

Jesus always took time to pray.

No matter what he was doing, or where he was going, Jesus always found time for prayer.

If you were to write a Broadway musical about the life of Jesus, you would be right on if you penned a song in which he sang, *"You're never fully dressed without a prayer!"*

When his disciples turned to him, asking him how to pray; he answered them, saying, *“Pray like this... Our Father who art in heaven...”*

Jesus found his strength in prayer.

He connected with God in prayer.

He understood God’s will for his life in prayer.

He wore prayer the way we wear a comfortable pair of slippers. The time he felt most at home was the time he spent in prayer.

So think for a minute about that night when Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane. The writer of Hebrews put it this way, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death...”

In the Garden, Jesus clothed himself with prayer. Jesus was grieved and agitated, so he covered himself with prayer. Jesus knew where he was going to go in the next few hours. He knew he was going to die the next day. He knew all the suffering he was going to have to endure, and the only way he was ever going to endure it was by wrapping himself in prayer.

He knew the treachery that would bring the soldiers to arrest him. He knew his disciples would abandoned him. He knew the absolute pain and public shame he would have to suffer.

He knew the people would believe the lies told about him. He knew he would be humiliated at the public trials. He knew his right-hand man, Peter, would deny knowing him.

He knew his message of love would be defeated, and that the crowd that used to cheer him would turn on him, calling out for Barabbas to be saved.

He knew how he would have to struggle, laboring under the weight of that awkward, heavy cross as he marched onward toward Golgotha.

He knew the agony that would rip through his body as the nails would be driven into this hands and feet, and the unquenchable thirst that would scream out from his soul, and the searing fire that would slice into him as the spear was thrust in his side.

He knew what was coming on his next tomorrow. He knew it. He didn’t like it. He didn’t want to go through it.

So to get from here - where he was in the Garden - over to there - after the resurrection when people would finally start to understand - he

knew he was going to have to walk down into that deep valley where he would feel all the betrayal, all the pain, all the apparent failure, and all the finality of death.

And he knew that the only way to get from here to there, was to build a bridge.

So he built a bridge through prayer, a bridge that would get him from here, on earth, to there, with his Father in heaven.

The author of Hebrews calls Jesus a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. [Hebrews 5:5-6, 10]

I didn't know what that meant. So, I looked it up. Melchizedek was a king of pre-Israelite Jerusalem, way back in ancient times, back before Abraham had been chosen by God. This king Melchizedek blessed Abraham in the name of the one, true God. [Genesis 14]

As the Israelite faith grew in the next couple of thousand years, Melchizedek came to stand for the ideal king and the ideal priest all wrapped up in one - the kingly messiah who would establish righteousness and peace on earth, and mediate between his people and God.

That's the kind of messiah the people of Israel were looking for. That's the kind of messiah they wanted Jesus to be.

But the author of Hebrews wrote that Jesus is more than that kind of messiah -

more than the most powerful king of this earth,  
more than the best, most learned high priest,  
more than the long-awaited messiah of the Jewish faith.

Hebrews asserts that Jesus is much more than that! Jesus is the Christ, the only Son of the living God - the only one who can build a bridge for all of us to get from our sin-filled lives here on earth to being in the presence of God in his heavens.

If you want to get real theological about it, you can say that Jesus is the one, true high priest.

When the scriptures were written in ancient Latin, the Latin word they used for "priest" is *pontifex*. That Latin word that was used to translate the Hebrew and Greek work for "priest" has a very specific and quite literal meaning. *Pontifex* means, quite literally, a "bridge builder."

Think what that means: a priest is supposed to be a bridge builder, a builder of bridges that helps men and women find God.

Jesus Christ, who is the perfect, high priest, built a bridge between this life and life with God.

I think Jesus wants you to build your own bridge that will get you from this life here, right where you are - over to there, where your ultimate life with God will be.

And I think Jesus expects you to build your bridge the same way he built his bridge - through regular, enthusiastic, expectant, hopeful, personal prayer.

That night in the Garden, Jesus built a bridge that successfully spanned the gulf between where he was - there in the Garden, filled with uncertainty and doubt - over to the place where he was going to end up, as the fully recognized Son of God, the Savior of mankind.

If you're going to be a successful bridge builder, you need to study the construction of the prayers Jesus prayed. The most important thing to learn about Jesus' prayers is that they were never about getting his way. His prayers always were about learning the will of God, and then being strengthened to go out and do the will of God.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed: "*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*" [Matthew 26:39] You see, he didn't want to go down into that valley. But, his prayer didn't end there; he built a bridge when continued on, saying: "*nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*" He knew it wasn't what he wanted that counted. He prayed three times that night in the garden, and he ended all three of his prayers with the same words, "*Thy will be done.*"

Jesus knew he had to get his life in line with the will of God. If it was God's will for Jesus to suffer and die for the sins of the world, then so be it. Jesus knew he couldn't change God's plan.

Jesus knew he couldn't escape God.

Neither can you!

When God wanted to create a world, he stepped out into space and willed the world into being. "Let there be light," he said, and there was light.

When God desired to free his people from slavery in Egypt, he stepped right into history, picked out Moses, who told that old Pharaoh, "Let my people go."

When God decided the world needed a savior to bring it back to where it should be, he picked out a young girl, sent her to a manger in Bethlehem, and there, the Son of God was born.

And a little later on, when God decreed that Jesus had to die to save sinners just like you and me, Jesus submitted himself to God's will - and it was done.

Take that message home with you: it's not your will that counts; it's God's will. If you really want to be a Christian, you better get your life in tune with God's will for you. And in order to do that, you've got to build a bridge that'll get you from here where you are over to there where you want to be.

Jesus knew if he was ever going to get anywhere with his life and his death, he had to be in sync with his Heavenly Father. So Jesus prayed his way into the future. He prayed often enough and hard enough to build the bridge he needed to get him from the Garden - over that dark valley where Golgotha was - over to his glorious resurrection.

And Jesus knew he couldn't do any of it without prayer.

Do you think you are any different? Do you think you're better than Jesus? Do you really think you can get along without regular prayer?

How are you going to get from here, where you are right now, over to there where you want to end up? How are you going to make that trip? How are you going to find your way into the future? How are you going to do it?

Especially -

- if today doesn't look all that good to you,

- and you're afraid tomorrow won't be any better.

Do you have some valleys of disappointment and grief, some valleys of fear and anger, some valleys of darkness and loneliness looming on your horizon? Do you need some help to build a bridge to get you to the other side?

Are you concerned about your health, and not only the quantity but also the quality of your tomorrows? Does aging have a grip on you? Is there a medical prognosis that casts a shadow over you?

Do you have financial struggles? Are you anxious about paying your bills and saving for tomorrow?

Have your relationships brought you heartache? Have people disappointed you and hurt you? Are your loved ones drifting away from your influence and control?

Has work lost its meaning? Does your job mean nothing to you? Are you wondering what you're going to do with your life that's going to bring you some meaning and fulfillment?

If you're anything like me and most of the other people on this earth - you need some help building a bridge that's going to get you from here, this unfulfilled and un-satisfying place where you are right now - over to there, to that place off in the future where life is going to be better.

Jesus says you're never going to be the person you want to be, or the person you need to be, or the person you hope to be - without a prayer!

Face it: life isn't easy. You're all wrestling with real situations. You all have problems and concerns. You all are hurting, at least a little. You all have been disappointed, at least a once or twice. You all find yourself worrying, at least about something.

None of you know what tomorrow is going to bring.

And when it all seems too much, when the night is at its darkest, when you're really lost and alone - you, too, retreat to your own private garden. And when you're there, Jesus wants you to spend a few intense moments in prayer - asking God to take care of you and your loved ones, asking God to spare you some pain, to take away some hurt, to avoid some disaster.

Then, you've got to open yourself up to accepting God's will.

When you do that, your bridge toward tomorrow will be there.

Learn from the way Jesus prayed. He can teach you how to get from here to there. He can show you how to pray your way into the future. He can help you place your life in God's hands.

Prayer is built on the idea that God has a plan for you, that he has a will for your life, that he has a destiny laid out for you. And it is prayer that helps you see the plan, and understand God's will, and reach that destination.

There is no garden so isolated,  
no closet so private,  
no thought so wicked

that God's presence cannot find you when you pray.

There is no valley so deep,  
 no bedroom so dark,  
 no face so tear-stained  
 that God cannot comfort you when you pray.

There is no life so stained,  
 no sin so evil,  
 no mistake so big  
 that God cannot forgive you when you pray.

There is no yesterday so wasted,  
 no burden so crushing,  
 no future so impossible  
 that God cannot build a bridge to a better  
 tomorrow when you pray.

Where do you want to go? How do you want to spend the rest of your days? Where do you want to end up at the end of your life?

Prayer is what keeps you connected with God. Prayer is what clothes you in God's will for your life. Prayer is the very best way you can get from here where you are right now over to there in glory.

If you don't remember anything else from this sermon, remember this: no matter what else you're doing,  
 or where else you're going,  
 or what else you're wearing -  
 you're never fully dressed without a prayer!