

that since I was a Hollywood director I didn't know the difference between a hymn book and a Bible. And I have to admit, it did strike me that I had the perfect chance to steal Mrs. Carter's Bible. If anyone stopped me, I'd just say, "She gave it to me." It was worn with use, marked with joy and tears. Imagine what it would bring on e-bay.

To prepare myself, I've studied the speeches of those who have preceded me in this position in past years. The causes they've advocated from this podium are vital, and I have no way to compete with their accomplishments or their eloquence. So this morning I'd like to do something that as nearly as I can tell is unprecedented for a keynote address at the National Prayer Breakfast. I'd like to speak about . . . prayer. I'm not a philosopher. I'm not a preacher. I'm a storyteller. Like Jesus. As nearly as I can tell, that is my only similarity to Him. Actually there is one other: I too have cried out, "My God, why have you forsaken me."

I've lived a life of tremendous privilege. I grew up just down the road from here, in Lynchburg, Virginia. Virginians are a righteous and sober people, too proud to tell a lie. But I was born in Tennessee. My father was born in Lizard Lick, Tennessee. The men in my father's family are Alton, Elton, Dalton, Lymon, Gleaman, Herman, Thurman and Clyde. They called Clyde, Pete. Nobody knew why.

When I was a child I suffered from attacks of asthma so severe that I couldn't breathe at all, and I had the real sense that if I panicked I would die. Grandmother would hold me in her lap all night long, and she would sing to me, and tell me stories from her childhood, and from the Bible. And she would look into my eyes, and she would smile. And I don't look at blue eyes to this day without seeing hers.

And as I grew older, I found her looking at me in a different way—quietly, distantly, and so I asked her, "Grandmother, why are you looking at me that way?" And she answered, "You remind me of Rufe." Rufe was her husband—my grandfather—who had died before I was born. Of course, I became hungry to learn about him, so I asked my father to tell me what he was like, and he told me this story.

During the Great Depression my grandfather, who was a farmer, decided to open a country store to feed his family. There was no wood to be had and no money to buy any, but he found a wrecked riverboat on the shore of the Tennessee River, and he salvaged that wood to build his store. But he needed cash to buy the stock to sell, and there was one place in town that paid cash for labor, and that was the plant where they froze huge blocks of ice, and men would pick them up with tongs and sling them up onto wagons so they could sell them to farmers whose homes had no electricity. My grandfather was the only white man who did that job; all the rest were what they then called "colored" men.

So his first day on the job, the supervisor, another white man, approached my grandfather and told him, "Listen, I just want you to know, all I got on this crew besides you is a bunch of . . . Colored men, and I cuss at 'em to make 'em work. So if I forget myself and I call you an S.O.B., don't pay me no mind, I don't mean nothin' by it, that's just the way I am." And my grandfather looked at the supervisor and said, "I understand completely. And I just want you to know that if you do forget yourself, and you call me an S.O.B., and I hit you in the face with a claw hammer, don't pay me no mind, I don't mean nothin' by it, that's just the way I am."

And in that one story I understood exactly who my grandfather was, and exactly who I

wanted to be. And I understood the power of a story.

My father, and mother, worked extremely hard so that I could go to school. He was a salesman who loved his customers, and he rose in his company, with promotion after promotion . . . until one day the family-owned company he had worked for twenty years was sold to a professional investment group who knew nothing about the business itself but who believed it would prosper if they fired all the old guys and hired cheaper younger guys. My father was one of the old guys. He was 38. I've always wondered if my father lived his life hungry for the father he'd never had; his own father had died before he was born—the grandfather he'd told me about was my mother's father, not his. He had never been fired from anything. The strongest and best man I ever knew, and he had a complete breakdown.

While he was in the hospital, my sister and I were farmed out to relatives. For awhile, we lived in a house that had no indoor plumbing. When I told my father about that he said, "Well . . . rich people have a canopy over their beds—and we've got a can of pee under ours." And that's when I knew my daddy would be all right.

The last sale he had made for his old company was for 90,000 dollars—in 1961. The first sale he made when he started his next job was for 90 cents. Working one hundred hours a week, he clawed his way back to success. God Bless America. And God bless my Daddy. He told me that I could go to college anywhere—something he and my mother had never gotten a chance to do. I chose the most expensive place possible—and he was so proud. But when I graduated, I didn't want to be a doctor or a lawyer, I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to tell the kind of stories that would let a young man know who his ancestors were, and who he might be. The kind of story that might keep a child alive through a long night.

#### 59TH NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST—PART III

#### HON. PAUL C. BROWN

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 29, 2011

Mr. BROWN.

My first job was in Nashville at a theme park, managing a live show that featured barnyard animals playing musical instruments. I'm not making this up. I had a piano playing pig, named Pigarace. I had a duck that played the drum named Bert Bachquack. You can imagine how proud my parents were.

I had my embarrassments and my setbacks, but I kept writing. I moved to Los Angeles. I got an opportunity in television. I married. We had two beautiful sons. I had purpose in my life, and I worked like I'd seen my father work, with pride and with passion. I'd won a multi-year contract with a thriving company. I bought an old home and remodeled it; I was promoted to producer. Except for an occasional mishap with my tie, life was sweet.

Then the Writer's Guild went out on strike, which caused the company I worked for to void its contract with me. The strike went on forever, and when it was over the company was barely there anymore. I was out of work, my savings were gone. No one would return my phone calls—I'm sure that's never happened where you work.

I kept trying, of course. I was always good at trying. But one day I was sitting at my

desk and I was staring at nothing, my stomach in a knot, my hands trembling, and I realized I was breaking down, as my father had. I feared I had failed my father, and my mother and my grandmother. And my greatest fear was that I would fail my sons. I was afraid they would see me come apart, as I had seen my father come apart, and it would be something they could never forget.

I got down on my knees; I had nowhere else to go. And I prayed a simple prayer. I said "Lord, all I care about right now are those boys. And maybe they don't need to grow up in a house with a tennis court and a swimming pool. Maybe they need a little house with one bathroom, or no bathrooms at all. Maybe they need to see what a man does when he gets knocked down, the way my father showed me. But I pray, if I go down, let me go down not on my knees, but with my flag flying."

And I got up and I began to write the words that led to "Braveheart."

Great writers like Robert Frost and Jane Austin have said that an ending that does not surprise the writer won't surprise the reader. When I wrote about William Wallace standing on a battle field ready to die for what he believed, I felt it and when I came to the end I wept.

Was that moment of prayer the single determining factor in the arc of my whole life? Of course not. My teacher and mentor in college, the great Thomas Langford, of Duke University, once told us in class that no decision in our lives stands alone; the trajectory of all other decisions we've ever made points our direction for the future.

Our lives are unfolding stories, they are moving pictures. If we took a freeze frame of Golgotha, on the day that Jesus was crucified, and showed that picture to anyone unfamiliar with the story and asked them to judge who the victor was in that scene, they'd be unlikely to say: "The one hanging on the cross in the middle."

It was from that cross that Jesus cried, "My God! Why have you forsaken me?"

That cry does not amaze me. What does amaze me is that while one of the two thieves hanging on either said of Jesus mocked Him, the other acknowledged the justice of his fate and asked Jesus for help; and Jesus, in the agonies of crucifixion, told him, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." That does more than amaze me. It makes me believe that any power that could enable Jesus to say that, then, could do anything.

And it seems to me that Jesus' response is the answer to every prayer that thief never prayed. If God is God, then God knows our prayers whether we pray them or not.

So why pray the prayers? To me, it's not because God needs to know my prayers, but because I do.

Prayer sifts us like sand. Take any moment of our lives; take this one. Here, in a room resonant with power. Did we come this morning because we want to feel a closeness to power? Do we come before God because what we truly want is to use the ultimate power we imagine God has? Or do we fall to our knees to admit the truth of our weakness—and stand again, in the strength of that truth?

Jesus said the truth will set us free, and He said the truth is: God is love.

It seems to me that the prayer that comes from Love is the prayer that goes to God.

My father once told me a story of a man drowning in the ocean. He cried out, "Oh God! If you save me, I will spend the rest of my life in serving You!" A few moments later a boat appeared and he was pulled from the water, and on the way back to shore the man lifted his eyes to heaven and said, "Of course You do understand that I meant 'in

an advisory capacity.” But life does not give us the option of Advisory Capacity.

Tolstoy wrote in *War and Peace* that in a battle, one man throwing down his weapon and running away can panic a whole army, and in a panic, one man lifting up the flag and running back toward the enemy can rally a whole army, and no one but God knows what will happen, and when.

What if prayer is the way to glimpse God’s true intentions—the divine purpose for each of us? I’m no theologian. I’m not looking for logic; I’m only trying to find an understanding for my experience that prayer matters. Does it change the mind of God? I don’t know. I can only tell you that it changes me.

When I was a boy we sang a hymn called “Footsteps of Jesus.” Not everyone grew up as I did. I’m sometimes described as a rarity, a filmmaker who might speak freely about prayer. But really I’m not so unusual. All of us dreamers in Hollywood are keenly aware of the falseness of fame, the fleeting nature of beauty, the illusions of power. And when I pray with or for my friends, my first concern is not whether they follow the footsteps of Jesus, but whether I do.

If I’ve led you to believe my life is any example of righteousness, then maybe you’re not familiar with the Tennessee talent for stretching the truth. And even if I could have stolen Mrs. Carter’s Bible, I couldn’t have kept it. You might own the pages but you don’t own the Bible until you’ve lived it.

Some of you here lead nations. Some of you here lead the world. All of us here have one heart inside us, and it is in that one heart where the whole battle is fought.

There are as many ways to approach the great questions of life as there are people on the earth. But every one of us must stand alone before all that made us, and all that we have been, and that we might be. And dying in your bed, many years from now, would you not trade all the days from that day to this for one chance, just one chance, to open your heart before God Almighty, and to tell Him, “I will lose my life, and I will find it by loving in all the ways You lead my heart to love.”

You have a prayer, pray it. Amen.

Congressman Miller: Thank you, Randall. Thank you for inspiring all of us. And now it is my honor to introduce my President, our President, the President of the United States of America. We have an expression in Florida that you can walk shoulder to shoulder with someone even if you don’t see eye to eye. That’s the prayerful spirit in which we gather today. It is the genius of our founders that we have one President at a time and it is the higher genius of the Scriptures that we are to pray for our leaders that we may all lead quiet and peaceable lives. Mr. President, first we thank you for your attendance and the strong support that you have given this event and all of the activities that surround it. I speak for all members of Congress here and for millions across our country and around the world, we pray for you each day as you lead our country. Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States, Barack Obama.

President Barack Obama: Thank you so much. To the co-chairs, Jeff and Ann; to all the members of Congress who are here, the distinguished guests who have traveled so far to be here this morning; to Randall for your wonderful stories and powerful prayer; to all who are here providing testimony, thank you so much for having me and Michelle here. We are blessed to be here.

I want to begin by just saying a word to Mark Kelly, who’s here. We have been praying for Mark’s wife, Gabby Giffords, for many days now. But I want Gabby and Mark and their entire family to know that we are with them for the long haul, and God is with them for the long haul.

And even as we pray for Gabby in the aftermath of a tragedy here at home, we’re also mindful of the violence that we’re now seeing in the Middle East, and we pray that this violence in Egypt will end and that the rights and aspirations of the Egyptian people will be realized and that a better day will dawn over Egypt and throughout the world.

For almost 60 years going back to President Eisenhower, this gathering has been attended by our President. It’s a tradition that I’m proud to uphold, not only as a fellow believer but as an elected leader whose entry into public service was actually through the church. This may come as a surprise, for as some of you know, I did not come from a particularly religious family. My father, who I barely knew—I only met once for a month in my entire life—was said to be a non-believer throughout his life.

My mother, whose parents were Baptist and Methodist, grew up with a certain skepticism about organized religion, and she usually only took me to church on Easter and Christmas—sometimes. And yet my mother was also one of the most spiritual people that I ever knew. She was somebody who was instinctively guided by the Golden Rule and who nagged me constantly about the home-spun values of her Kansas upbringing, values like honesty and hard work and kindness and fair play.

And it’s because of her that I came to understand the equal worth of all men and all women, and the imperatives of an ethical life and the necessity to act on your beliefs. And it’s because of her example and guidance that despite the absence of a formal religious upbringing my earliest inspirations for a life of service ended up being the faith leaders of the civil rights movement.

There was, of course, Martin Luther King and the Baptist leaders, the ways in which they helped those who had been subjugated to make a way out of no where, and transform a nation through the force of love. There are also Catholic leaders like Father Theodore Hesburgh and Jewish leaders like Rabi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Muslim leaders and Hindu leaders. Their call to fix what was broken in our world, a call routed in faith, is what led me just a few years out of college to sign up as a community organizer for a group of churches on the Southside of Chicago. And it was through that experience working with pastors and laypeople trying to heal the wounds of hurting neighborhoods that I came to know Jesus Christ for myself and embrace Him as my Lord the Savior.

Now, that was over 20 years ago. And like all of us, my faith journey has had its twists and turns. It hasn’t always been a straight line. I have thanked God for the joys of parenthood and Michelle’s willingness to put up with me. In the wake of failures and disappointments, I have questioned what God had in store for me and have been reminded that God’s plans for us may not always match our own short-sided desires. And let me tell you, these past two years, they have deepened my faith. The presidency has a funny way of making a person feel the need to pray. Abe Lincoln said, as many of you know, “I have been driven to my knees many times by the overwhelming conviction that I have no place else to go.”

Fortunately, I’m not alone in my prayers. My pastor friends like Joel Hunter and T.D. Jakes come over to the Oval Office every once in a while to pray with me and to pray for the nation. The chapel at Camp David has provided consistent respite for fellowship. The director of our Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnership’s office, Joshua DuBois, a young minister himself, starts my morning off with meditations from Scripture.

Most of all, I’ve got friends around the country—some who I know, some who I don’t

know—but I know there are friends who are out there praying for me. One of them is an old friend named Kaye Wilson. In our family we call her Mama Kaye. And she happens to be Malia and Sasha’s Godmother. And she has organized prayer circles for me all around the country. She started small with her own Bible study group, but once I started running for President, and she heard what they were saying about me on cable, she felt the need to pray harder. By the time I was elected President, she said, “I just couldn’t keep up on my own. I was having to pray eight, nine times a day just for you.” So she enlisted help from around the country.

It’s also comforting to know that people are praying for you who don’t always agree with you. Tom Coburn, for example, is here. He is not only a dear friend but also a brother in Christ. We came into the Senate at the same time. Even though we are on opposite sides of a whole bunch of issues, part of what has bound us together is a shared faith, a recognition that we pray to and serve the same God. And I keep praying that God will show him the light and he will vote with me once in a while. It’s going to happen, Tom. A ray of light is going to beam down.

My Christian faith then has been a sustaining force for me over these last few years. All the more so, when Michelle and I hear our faith questioned from time to time, we are reminded that ultimately what matters is not what other people say about us but whether we’re being true to our conscience and true to our God. “Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”

As I travel across the country folks often ask me—what is it that I pray for? And like most of you, my prayers sometimes are general: “Lord, give me the strength to meet the challenges of my office.” Sometimes they’re specific: “Lord, give me patience as I watch Malia go to her first dance where there will be boys. Lord, have that skirt get longer as she travels to that dance.”

But while I petition God for a whole range of things, there are a few common themes that do occur. The first category of prayer comes out of the urgency of the Old Testament prophets and the Gospel itself. I pray for my ability to help those who are struggling. Christian tradition teaches that one day the world will be turned right side up and everything will return as it should be. But until that day, we’re called to work on behalf of a God that shows justice and mercy and compassion to the most vulnerable.

#### 59TH NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST—PART IV

**HON. MIKE MCINTYRE**

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, July 29, 2011*

**Mr. MCINTYRE.**

We’ve seen a lot of hardship these past two years. Not a day passes when I don’t get a letter from somebody or meet someone who is out of work, or has lost their home or are without health care. The story Randall told about his father—that’s a story that a whole lot of Americans have gone through over these past couple of years.

Sometimes I can’t help right away. Sometimes what I can do to try to improve the economy or to curb foreclosures or to help deal with the health care system—sometimes it seems so distant and so remote, so profoundly inadequate to the enormity of the need. And it is my faith, then, that Biblical injunction to serve the least of these, that