

THE CHRISTIAN WHO PRAYS

- A. Prayer is a true indicator of spiritual health.

- B. Many of us “know ourselves” only by comparing ourselves to others.

- C. But prayer reveals more about us than all our other activities combined.

The story is told of a soldier who was caught attempting to sneak back into his camp one night. When taken before the commanding officer the soldier explained that he went into the nearby woods to be alone in prayer. The officer immediately commanded the soldier to pray audibly in his presence. The soldier hesitated but was again ordered to pray. So he knelt in the officer's presence & prayed. At the conclusion of the prayer, the officer ordered the soldier to be released, saying, “Any man who can pray like that, must be spending a lot of his time praying.”

D. Jesus told of a case where prayer revealed the heart. **Luke 18:9-14**

1. One man *said* his prayer
2. The other prayed
3. One trusted in his righteousness
4. The other trusted in God's mercy
5. One boasted of his works
6. The other was overwhelmed at the very thought of speaking to God
7. One was rejected
8. The other accepted by God

a. In the lives of these two men, prayer was the searchlight that revealed their respective characters.

[With these thoughts in mind, I want us to consider for a few minutes “the Christian who prays”.]

I. POSSESSES GREAT FAITH IN GOD

A. Only out of trust in God & His power to answer prayer, should a Child of God ever pray.

1. Hannah prayed fervently for a son, & while she did, she made a covenant with God.

1 Sam 1:10-11 – “O LORD of hosts, *if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant* & remember me, & not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, *then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life*, & no razor shall come upon his head.”

B. Have you ever made such a commitment in prayer?

1. Did you keep your promise?
 - a. Many times, we expect God to uphold His end of a prayer, while we falter on our end—because, after all, “we are only human”.

C. Hannah kept her covenant even though it meant giving up her child shortly after he was born.

1 Sam 1:27-28 – For this child I prayed, & *the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. 28 Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD*; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.” So they worshiped the LORD there.

[Hannah’s great faith in God was manifested not only by her prayer (**1 Sam 2:1-10**), but also by fulfilling her agreement with God.]

II. SHOWS LOYALTY TO GOD

A. Once, after Samuel grew into his role as a judge & prophet, the Ark of the Covenant fell into the hands of the Philistines.

1. For twenty years, “All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord” (**1 Sam 7:2**).
2. So the people came to Samuel for help, & he agreed to help under certain conditions.

1 Sam 7:3 – Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods & the Ashtoreths from among you, & **prepare your hearts for the LORD**, & serve Him only; & He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.”

3. It is no wonder that God had forsaken them — they were disloyal to Him.

[Once again, as you look at your heart, is total allegiance to God given there? If so, then you will be praying to Him loyally.]

III. SHOWS RESPECT FOR GOD

- A. The Pharisee’s prayer was ineffective because he had little respect for God.

Luke 18:11 – “(He) stood & prayed thus with himself, ‘**God, I thank You that I am not like other men.**’”

1. He began his prayer with words intended to bring honor to himself.

- B. Jesus taught His disciples to begin their prayers with words that honor God as Father.

Matt 6:9 – “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, **Hallowed be Your name.**

[No matter what the occasion of our prayers, may we not forget to show our respect to God by addressing Him as a FATHER who is HOLY.]

IV. WILL NOT ALLOW INTERFERENCES

- A. Daniel faced a test of his faithfulness to pray to God, when some of his peers obtained a decree from the king that for thirty days no petitions or prayers would be offered to any god or man except the king. Those who violated the decree were to be thrown into a den of lions (**Daniel 6**).

[What minor incidental matters do we allow to deter us from praying to our Father regularly?]

V. SHOWS SELF DISCIPLINE

A. In Gethsemane, before His death, Jesus urged His disciples to pray.

Luke 22:40 – When He came to the place, He said to them, ***“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”***

1. He withdrew, prayed in agony; angels ministered, sweat was as blood.

Luke 22:45-46 – When He rose up from prayer, & had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. 46 Then He said to them, ***“Why do you sleep? Rise & pray, lest you enter into temptation.”***

2. Their lack of discipline in prayer led them into temptation, denial & forsaking the Lord.
3. Prayer requires discipline, & becomes our defense against the invasion of sin.

B. One of the reasons Jesus possessed the highest degree of self-discipline was that He would often pray all night long (Lk 6:12).

1. He deliberately pulled Himself away from the crowds to talk with His Father (Mk 1:35).
2. Prayer was so much a part of His life, & accounted for so much of His time, that His disciples sensed its importance & requested of Him, “Lord teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1).

[Are we as self-disciplined in the matter of prayer? Is it as important to us as other areas of our lives?]

VI. MUST BE FAITHFUL TO GOD

A. Hezekiah, King of Judah, prayed for his life while suffering a terminal illness.

1. God answered his prayer, sending Isaiah the message that the King would live 15 years.

2 Chron 32:25 – But *Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor shown him, for his heart was lifted up*; therefore wrath was looming over him & over Judah & Jerusalem.

B. Faithfulness to God requires us to pray faithfully; Jesus gave a parable that men should always pray & not give up hope (**Lk 18:1-8**).

1. In the parable, a widow continually petitions an unrighteous judge to settle her case.

2. The judge did so, but only because she constantly came before him.

a. Jesus made two points in vss. 7-8:
God will respond to the prayers of the faithful who faithfully pray to Him.

Luke 18:7-8 – And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day & night to Him, though He bears long with them? **8** I tell you that *He will avenge them speedily*. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, *will He really find faith on the earth?*

C. This faithfulness to God requires us to be unselfish in our prayers (**Matt 5:44-45; 1 Tim 2:1-4**).

Matt 5:44-45 – But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, & *pray for those who spitefully use you & persecute you*, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil & on the good, & sends rain on the just & on the unjust.

1 Tim 2:1-5 – Therefore I exhort first of all that *supplications, prayers, intercessions, & giving of thanks be made for all men*, ²for kings & all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet & peaceable life in all godliness & reverence. ³For this is good & acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all men to be saved & to come to the knowledge of the truth.

[Prayer is too powerful a benefit for selfish & inconsistent people to be allowed to use it. God will not allow it!]

VII. MUST WATCH FOR ANSWERS

A. Jesus told the disciples to “*watch & pray*” (**Matt 26:41; cf. 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10; Jas 1:5-6**).

[It is hypocritical to watch & not pray, but it is presumptuous on our part to pray & not watch.]

VIII. WANTS ONLY WHAT GOD WILL GIVE

- A. There is no working around the will of God to get what we want in life.
1. Oh, we may get what we want, but it may not be the will of God.
 2. Our prayers should be always be uttered in the spirit of Christ Jesus who said, *“Oh My Father...not as I will, but as You will...For Thine is the kingdom & the power & the glory forever. Amen”* (Matt 26:39; 6:13).

[No matter how satisfying something may seem to us, we should have no desire for it, if it is not the will of God.]

In a North Carolina cotton mill there is a sign on the all walls that reads: “If your threads get tangled send for the foreman.”

A new worker didn't follow the instructions & ended up with a tangled mess of thread.

He finally sent for the foreman who said, “You have been trying to do this by yourself, haven't you? Why didn't you send for me like the sign says?”

The new worker replied, “I was trying to do my best.”

To which the foreman responded, “Remember, from now on, that doing your best is sending for me.”

CLOSING

- A. In closing, the final & most vital point relating to prayer is that it before we can use this blessing, God must truly be our Father—through our obedience to the gospel of His Son.
1. Our Father invites (Isa 55; Matt 11:28-30; Rev 22:17).