

29. The elements of our prayer

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One of the most common topics of Christian books is about prayer. We don't have to wonder why so many books are written about prayer. Obviously people want to know how to pray right that God may hear them and answer them. More times than not, people approach this subject as if they want to find out some sort of special secrets of God's favorite things so that they can push those right buttons and God has to answer their desires. It sounds ridiculous.

But in a way that is somewhat true. There are a few elements in prayers that we must include. Otherwise, it is not a prayer, but it is just a mumbling that never reaches God.

The required elements are: persistence, humility, complete trust in God, exclusive devotion to Him, believing the power of God, obedience, self sacrifice and expectation from our great God. I got these elements out of this chapter 18. Some people may think that it is not about the prayer, rather it is about how we approach God. But I believe that prayer is not only limited by what we ask for, but our communion and relationship with Him.

A. PRAYER WITH PERSISTENCE

Luke 18:1-8 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" 6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and 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?"

During the time of Jesus, women, especially widows, didn't have a whole lot of rights or privileges to get their ways or to be treated correctly. This woman in chapter 18 didn't have a friend to help her case to be heard by the judge. All she could do was walk around outside the tent where the judge held court and made a nuisance as she shouted at the judge.

The Greek for "troubles me" is literally "give me a black eye." The judge finally granted her request, not out of a sense of fairness or compassion, but for self-preservation.

Does this mean that if we continuously pray and nag at God, He would grant our prayer wishes just to shut us up? No way. God is not like this ungodly judge by any means.

Prayer is not a one-hundred-yard dash – one fast and flashy effort. Rather, Christ shows that it's a marathon of continuous and steady petitions. In fact, He invites us to bother Him with our requests. Jesus tells us to keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking in Matthew 7. And apostle Paul put it, to "pray without ceasing" in 1 Thess. 5.

You may wonder, "Do I have to pray non-stop 24/7? Close my eyes and get on my knees all day?" Of course not. It means to make prayer as natural to us as our regular breathing. Unless we are sick, we rarely think about our breathing. If we have to remember to breathe, we would be all dead long ago, because we would forget. We just do it. Likewise with prayer, it should be the natural habit of our lives, the "atmosphere" in which we constantly live. Besides, our persistent prayers demonstrate faith in Him. That is what our God is really after.

B. PRAYER WITH HUMILITY

Luke 18:9-14 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Did you notice whom the Pharisee prayed to? To himself – he was praying out loud with flawless, eloquent and flowery phrases so that any one can hear. He didn't care whether God heard him or not. He was really enjoying hearing his own voice. This man's heart was bloated with pride. And it naturally follows that the more impressed we are with ourselves, the more judgmental we are of others. Actually, he was so full of himself that he didn't have room for God in his heart either.

However, the tax collector displayed a complete opposite attitude. He was broken in spirit and he couldn't even say a long prayer like this pompous Pharisee. But he was the one who received the riches of God's grace in spite of his spiritual poverty.

It is a lot easier to reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a spiritually bankrupted person who knows he is a sinner than a snobby religious person who thinks that he has God in his pocket.

God would not listen to any one of us who is not humble. If we are filled with pride about who we are or what we can do, God would say to us, "Enjoy yourself since you don't need Me." I want God to hear me. I'd rather humble myself before He humbles me. That is when He breaks me to teach me. Living for God's approval is better than living for man's applause.

1 Peter 5:5b God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.

C. PRAYER WITH COMPLETE TRUST IN JESUS

Luke 18:15-17 Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 17 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

It was customary for mothers to bring their year-old babies to a distinguished rabbi to be blessed. But the disciples decide that Jesus had more important things to do than being bothered by these moms with their children.

Jesus wants us to be childlike but not childish. An unspoiled child illustrates humility, faith and dependence. A child has a sense of wonder that makes life exciting. The only way to enter God's kingdom is to become like a child and be born again with a complete trust in Him.

D. PRAYER WITH AN EXCLUSIVE DEVOTION TO HIM

Luke 18:18-23 Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. 20 You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" 21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." 22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 23 But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

According to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, this ruler was young and rich. Some of you single ladies are thinking, "Is he tall and dark and handsome and single?" I don't know, but he is very dead so he is not available for you.

"Good teacher" was not a title the Jewish people commonly used to call other Rabbis in Jesus' day. They insisted that only God can be called 'good'. Here Jesus was not denying being the deity, but if this young ruler really believe Jesus was good then he had to confess that Jesus was God. Jesus wanted him to understand that.

Jesus quickly quoted the second portion of the Ten Commandments which handles interpersonal relationship. He didn't quote these as means of salvation, because obedience to the law does not save us. He held the Law before the young man as a mirror to reveal his sins.

Jesus wanted this young man to admit that he was a sinner and desperately needs God more than his wealth, because his money was his god. Nobody is saved by giving all his wealth to the poor, but nobody can be saved when he will not repent of his sins and turn away from them. This young man was possessed by the love of money and he would not let go.

E. PRAYER WITH THE FAITH IN GOD'S POWER

Luke 18:24-30 And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" 27 But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." 28 Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You." 29 So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."

The disciples were shocked when Jesus announced that it was difficult for rich people to be saved. They were Jews and the Jews believed that riches were a mark of God's blessing.

It is not possessing money that keeps people out of heaven, but it is being possessed by money and trusting it that makes salvation difficult for the wealthy. Wealth gives people a false sense of success and security, and when people are satisfied with themselves, they feel no need for God.

Peter was still not convinced by what Jesus said. He wanted to know what is in it for him since this rich ruler was not allowed to be in heaven.

Jesus comforted him by telling him that what is impossible to men is possible with God. This promise of God does not only apply to our salvation, but also it applies to anything we think impossible. As long as it is in God's will, He will make it happen according to His time.

F. PRAYER WITH OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE

Luke 18:31-34 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. 33 They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." 34 But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.

This is Jesus' third direct prediction of His passion and resurrection, not to mention His many hints about it. The disciples didn't get it because they were so wrapped up with the idea of a conquering king, not the king who was about to be crucified and buried in a tomb.

Jesus was telling them about complete obedience to the Father and self-sacrifice for heaven in spite of what was about to happen. Obedience and self-sacrifice are not something we pick up from our parents or friends. They only can be taught by the Holy Spirit.

G. PRAYER WITH EXPECTATION

Luke 18:35-43 Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. 36 And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. 37 So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. 38 And he cried out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 39 Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 40 So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, 41 saying, "What do you want Me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." 42 Then Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." 43 And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

The fact that he addressed Him as "Son of David," a messianic title, indicates that this Jewish beggar knew that Jesus could give sight to the blind. Even though he was blind, he could see what the rich young ruler could not. Jesus responded to his faith and healed him. He went from darkness to light, from begging to following Jesus and from crying to praising the Lord.

The beggar expected a great healing from the great Messiah. He had nothing under his name to claim and he openly admitted his needs.

H. APPLICATIONS

1) We need to come to the Lord with persistence in our prayer.

Even though our Lord knows our thoughts before we even ask Him, He wants us to ask Him and depend on Him.

2) We need to come to the Lord with humility in our prayer.

Our God despises our pride which had caused mankind to fall into sin.

3) We need to come to the Lord with complete trust in our prayer.

We can trust our God completely. We are the ones who make the matter complicated for no good reason.

4) We need to come to the Lord with an exclusive devotion to Him in our prayer.

The Lord will not share our hearts with anyone else including even ourselves.

5) We need to come to the Lord with faith in His power in our prayer.

Nothing is impossible with our Lord. Let's trust Him. Remember, fear is the first evidence of our unbelief.

6) We need to come to the Lord with obedience and self-sacrifice in our prayer.

If we don't have hearts to obey what God is going to tell us as the answers of our prayers, there is absolutely no reason why we should pray. It is a waste of time.

7) We need to come to the Lord with an expectation in our prayer.

We can expect great things from our great God.