



Prayer & Our Faithfulness

January 28, 2007

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6

We have a lot of expectations of God when we pray. We talked last week about how we expect Him to be faithful. But what does God expect of us? Does He want anything from us? Does He expect anything from us? This week we will look at God's expectation of us in our prayers.

God Expects Persistence

Luke 18:1-8

Why does it say Jesus told his disciples this parable (18:1)?

- To show that they should never give up praying.
- To teach them persistence in their prayers.

What did the widow ask for?

- Justice
- She did not ask for a bunch of possession or physical health

Why did the judge finally grant her request?

- She was persistent and would not leave him alone.

What is the difference between the judge in the story and God?

- The judge did not care about her but God does.

If the judge did not care about the widow and still answered her requests, how likely is God to answer the prayers of those He loves?

- Even more likely

What does this parable teach us about the importance of our faithfulness in prayer?

- Keep talking to God even if you don't get a quick answer.
- It may take years for God's answer to be obvious.
- Persistence in prayer is an act of faith. To give up quickly shows our faith is shallow.

When was a time in your life you felt you should stop praying about something but continued anyway?

How did God respond to your persistence?

God hears our prayers. Even when it doesn't seem like He is listening, He is. When He seems slow to answer it may be because he is trying to teach us a

God Expects Humility

lesson in faith or maybe our prayers are not lining up with His will. We need to persistently pray that the will of God be done “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Luke 18:9-14

If people saw a Pharisee and a tax collector praying, who would they have expected God to hear? Why?

- They would expect for God to hear the Pharisee, because they were religious and seemingly righteous while tax collectors were not liked and seen as criminals.

What was the difference between their prayers in the following areas?

- Focus?
Pharisee—focused on himself
Tax collector—focused on God.
- Humility?
Pharisee—proud of himself
Tax collector—was humble
- Deeds?
Pharisee—On what he had done with no need for God
Tax collector—On what he had done with an absolute need for God

Why did God justify the tax collector rather than the Pharisee?

- Because the tax collector was honestly humble about what he had done and about what he needed from God—forgiveness.
- The Pharisee was prideful about what he could do for God. He was showy.

Why is it important that our prayers are more focused on God than on self?

- Because God is more important/greater than we are.
- God is the focus of our lives and should be of our prayers.

God Expects Honesty

What role did honesty have in the tax collector's prayer?

- He was honest with God about his sin. He didn't sugarcoat it. He didn't skip over it or hide it. He brought it up. He put himself in a vulnerable position by exposing his sins to God. The tax collector focused on God's righteousness. The Pharisee focused on his own self-righteousness. He didn't mention any of his personal failings or his faults. He didn't bother being honest with God about the messy areas of his life. God justified the tax collector even though he wasn't perfect.

How does that encourage us to honestly bring God our broken lives and expose the messy areas of our lives to God?

In what way was the tax collector more faithful to God than the Pharisee?

- The tax collector still relied on God for mercy and forgiveness.
- The Pharisee relied on himself and not on God.

God Expects Our Hearts

The bottom line is God wants our hearts. He wants to hear from us. He wants us to be fully devoted to Him and to reach out to Him in prayer. Like any good relationship, our relationship with God is marked with communication. Prayer is an important part of that communication as we pour out our hearts to God. We often mistake prayer for a time of making requests. Prayer is so much more than that. Making prayer a time to ask God for everything that is on our minds shortchanges prayer and robs it of its original intention—building a bond between us and God. When the focus of our prayers become self rather than God we miss what prayer is all about. When our prayer become more about what we want than what God wants, we shortchange God’s plans and replace them with our own.

You don’t have to be perfect to pray. You just have to have faith that God will listen and start from there. The tax collector wasn’t perfect. He knew and God knew it. The important thing was that he had faith that God could still have mercy on him.

Application

How is prayer like a thermometer of our relationship with God?

- The quality of our talks with Him may directly reflect how close we are to Him.

How can we be more honest with God about what is in our hearts during our prayers than we currently are?

- Spending more time in confession.
- Being more aware of our own shortcomings.

What are some barriers to having an honest prayer life and how can we prevent them from hindering our prayers?

- Being tired
- Being distracted
- Avoiding God

Sometimes our prayer becomes routine. We find ourselves saying the same thing each time without really thinking about what it means. We want our prayers to have the depth and richness of a real conversation because we are talking to God. *How can praying a “routine” prayer become a barrier to God?*

Put it Into Practice

Commit to pray each day this week at an “unusual time.” If you normally pray at bedtime and meals, take time each day to pray for God at a time that you would not normally pray (for example, when you wake up or when you get home).