

## Being Called into His Presence

Luke 18:1-6

Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567)

If you got invited to meet and have exclusive access for a day to an influential evangelist like Rick Warren, James Dobson, Franklin Graham, Bill Hybels, J. D. Jakes, Joyce Meyer or J.I. Packer; would you accept the invite? Since it would be an honor to “pick” the brains of some of the most influential Christian leaders of our time, we would likely say “YES” with great joy in our hearts! And yet when God, who is infinitely more powerful, influential, knowledgeable, holy, and wiser than all of humanity combined; we rarely spend any time talking to Him. He who is indivisibly present always, knows your heart and future far better than you do, is always willing to not only give advice but also the power to accomplish His will! And yet if we are honest with ourselves we often see prayer as either an annoying interruption to our busy lives, the means to manipulate God into giving us our “wants” or the means to bail us out of the depths of despair! This sermon is going to focus on the benefits of prayer and the fact that God is willing and able to help us navigate life far better than we can!

### Benefits of Prayer

While listing all the benefits of prayer goes beyond the scope of this sermon, I would like to mention a just few of them starting with the most important benefit: a closer walk with God! Since



prayer flies in the face of the self-reliant, independent attitude<sup>1</sup> of today’s lukewarm Christians by challenging the thought that each person is the master of their own destiny;<sup>2</sup> prayer has become alien and misunderstood by many. Prayer is not the vehicle in which one gets to treat God like a “genie” in the bottle, rub and get everything one desires. Nor is prayer to be done to merely “check off” an item on your spiritual to do list! Prayer is the central avenue in which God chooses to transform and deepen our relationship with Him!<sup>3</sup> Prayer is to be a time in which “substantial soul-searching conversations”<sup>4</sup> happen that not only helps one identify and

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* (IVP Books: 2008), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Shmuel Trigano, “*The Paradigm of the Human and Modernity*,” *Diogenes* 49, no. 49 (March 2002): 57.

<sup>3</sup> Foster, Richard J. 1998. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hybels, 17.

confess the planks in one's own eye (Matthew 7:5) but also a time of having God renew one's mind (Romans 12:1-2) by His love, power and word! It is through prayer that the anxieties of this world are drowned in the peace of God that transcends all understanding (Philippians 4:6-7)!

While the central focus of prayer is to deepen one's relationship with God, the by-product of prayer is experiencing the power of God. In response to having seen and heard the cries (prayers) of His people (Exodus 3:7), God demonstrated His power over their slave master, Pharaoh, by performing the Ten Plagues of Egypt. After Hezekiah prayed for deliverance from the Assyrian army that vastly



outnumbered them, God demonstrated His power by sending an angel of the Lord to put to death 185,000 Assyrian warriors (2 Kings 19:14-35)! When faced with a hostile king and 450 prophets of Baal, Elijah prayed, and God demonstrated His power by burning up the wood, stones, soil and water of his sacrifice (1 Kings 18:38). While facing execution the next day at the hands of King Herod, people prayed for Peter, and God demonstrated His power by sending an angel to free him from Herod's heavily fortified prison without anyone noticing (Acts 12:1-18). And even though Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days, after Jesus prayed to God the Father Lazarus came back to life (John 11:38-44)!



For the most part however, God does not answer prayers that are not given!<sup>5</sup> Those who receive healing of physical and psychological problems, the removal of marital obstructions, the meeting of financial needs, the wisdom, courage and ability to persevere through the most difficult of life circumstances; are for the most part the ones who pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Matthew 7:7).<sup>6</sup> For example, when the Amalekites threatened to wipe out Israel through war, Moses got on the top of a hill overlooking the battlefield and whenever his hands were raised in prayer the Israelites started to win the war but as soon as his

hands fell the Amalekites started to win (Exodus 17:8-15). In contrast, God rarely demonstrates His power through “pocket stuffers” who refuse to pray because they feel they are in control. Such people tend to go through life “feeling overwhelmed, overrun, beaten down and pushed around”<sup>7</sup> by life

<sup>5</sup> The Holy Spirit intercedes for us through wordless groans (Romans 8:26-27) which God always hears and answers!

<sup>6</sup> Bill Hybels, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Hybels, 20.

circumstances that happen beyond their control. God chooses to demonstrate His power through people like Moses because they see God as the source of life and are willing to give Him the glory for the great things He has done (Matthew 5:16)!

## God is Willing

One of the biggest obstacles that keeps people from praying is the mistaken belief that God is not willing to answer and perform miracles for ME! While it is easy to believe that God demonstrated His power through those of great faith (Hebrews 12:1) like Abraham, Moses,



Elijah, Mary, Ruth, Peter, James and John; it is often much more difficult to believe that God will do a miracle through a babe (1 Corinthians 3:1-5; 1 Peter 2:2) who merely eats, sleeps and poops (by this I mean sin) in God's kingdom! This is faulty thinking of course for it neglects the fact that God often chooses the weak (how these men started out), lowly and despised to shame the strong so that no one can boast that their righteousness, holiness and redemption comes from anyone else but Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). While cherishing sin in one's heart often leads to God not hearing one's voice (Psalms 66:18), this is certainly

not true for prayers of confession (1 John 1:9)! Also, the Spirit of God who helps us in our weakness intercedes on our behalf; asks and receives what we need in accordance with His will (Romans 8:26-27)! If it was just the sinless who received answers to prayers, then no one

created by God would ever hear from Him, which we know is certainly not true!



Let's look at the Parable of the Unjust Judge in Luke 18:4-6. We are told in the parable that a widow suffered injustice at the hands of an adversary. Since she had "no education, no job, no money, no property, no status and no power,"<sup>8</sup> she had no way of getting justice on her own. So, she took the matter to a secular administrative officer,<sup>9</sup> a

<sup>8</sup> Bill Hybels, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, "[Luke](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 1000.

Gentile judge.<sup>10</sup> Since this judge had no fear of God or what people thought, he refused to grant the widow justice. So, she decided to return again and again to ask this judge to deal with this matter. Time and time again he refused until one day he got tired of being bothered and somewhat concerned for his reputation, so he granted the widow justice. Jesus concluded this parable by promising that God will one day bring justice to all his chosen ones who cry out to Him. He will not put off their requests forever, justice will come quickly! The parable ends with a warning that Jesus expects His chosen ones to be found faithful when He returns!

Another obstacle that keeps people from praying is the mistaken belief that God is indifferent to our problems and must be “pestered” to get Him to change our circumstances. Are we not somewhat like the widow in this story? Many of the circumstances in life that we face



are unjust, a by-product of either chance (Ecclesiastes 9:11) or the hand of a perpetrator so powerful he/she seems untouchable! When this happens do we not respond like the widow and in desperation feel we must “pester” God repeatedly until He relents and grants us our requests? While this fits well with Jesus’ words “always pray and not give up,” we are not to see our persistence as “pestering” but asking God to fulfill His promise to give good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28). We are not abandoned and forgotten like the widow but are Ambassador’s of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), children of God (John 1:12) asking the master to not give us a

stone (Matthew 7:9) but a mere crumb from His table (Matthew 15:27)! If an evil judge yielded to the poor widow’s request for justice how much more will He whose justice is without blemish (Psalms 7:11) grant any request made in accordance with His will (1 John 5:14)?<sup>11</sup> Be assured God patiently listens to His elect and will act when it is most beneficial for His children!<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Craig A. Evans, [Luke](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 269.

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson, [“The Gospels and Acts,”](#) in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 2115.

<sup>12</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, [“Luke,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 1000.

## God is Able

If you could ask God for a miracle and you knew with 100 % certainty that He would grant your heart's desire, would you make the request?<sup>13</sup> We certainly would but only if we knew the answer would come immediately! Since we live in a consumer-based society we are used to getting our requests filled quickly and efficiently. When we pray day in and day out and



do not receive an answer from God our patience runs out and we falsely conclude either that God is not listening, unwilling or unable to meet our request. We would rather live with the most difficult of tribulations in life than to “continue to pray ineffectually!”<sup>14</sup> Even though one reads about God parting the Red Sea, tearing down the walls of Jericho, stopping time (Joshua 10:12) and turning a shy person like Moses into a bold leader in the Old Testament; and read about Christ walking on water, commanding storms to cease, raising the dead, and changing a Pharisee like Paul into a great evangelist in the

New Testament; does not mean that one believes that God still acts today! Since God does not change overtime (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), He still performs miracles but only for those who pray in His will and have the patience to wait for their appointed time! Let me conclude by asking a simple but profound question: **do you believe in the power of prayer enough to patiently wait for an answer?**

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<sup>13</sup> Bill Hybels, 35.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.