

**Introduction:**

When I talk about praying warriors or plugged-in saints, what images come to your mind? Perhaps one of our greatest struggles with prayer is our perception of the Bible's plugged-in saints. We have a tendency to look on their rosy side and forget the realities of their personalities. Then, believing we are not remotely like the men and women of whom we read in the Bible, we hold back on prayer, wanting to wait until we are more worthy to pray.

If that is true, and I believe it is for many, we need to see what a real plugged-in saint is. No doubt we could take a look at Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Peter or Paul but our views of these men are already so grand we feel that we could never be what they were. Instead, let's look at another plugged-in saint, one we might be tempted to overlook. **Luke 18:10-14** tells us about a plugged-in tax-collector. This tax collector prayed and he moved God. Jesus tells us this man went away justified. Here was a man who not only prayed, but connected to God. When he plugged in, he was empowered with forgiveness and justification. Take a look at this saint, because this saint can be us.

**Discussion:**

- I. What the plugged-in saint is not.
  - A. *The plugged-in saint is not perfect.* The confession of this tax-collector is astounding. His very brief prayer was an exclamation of his imperfection. "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" We must not refrain from prayer just because we have sinned. Do you remember **Romans 3:23**? "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." With the exception of Jesus, all our heroes were sinners. None of them were perfect. Yet they connected to God. They prayed and God moved mountains for them. Do not wait until you are sinless to pray, it will never happen.
  - B. *The plugged-in saint is not a religious scholar.* The Pharisee was probably a religious scholar. He had devoted his life to the exact knowledge of the law. Yet notice what it did for him. He became puffed up with arrogance. We should not be surprised. Paul told us knowledge produces arrogance (**I Corinthians 8:1**)? Do not misunderstand. We are to add knowledge to our faith and virtue (**II Peter 1:5**). We will be destroyed if we lack knowledge (**Hosea 4:6**). However, we must not be so enamored with knowledge that we believe we have arrived because we know things others do not. Nor must we believe we are not God's servants who can pray to Him until we have attained a specific level of knowledge. Certainly, the plugged-in saint studies and learns God's word, growing in knowledge, but he is never so self-centered as to believe he is special for his knowledge or that he must wait to call on the Lord until he is special enough through his knowledge.
  - C. *The plugged-in saint is not some kind of supersaint.* Like the issue of knowledge or scholarship, this idea of trying to be a super-Christian focuses far too much on ourselves; this keeps us from focusing on God. We either believe we can pray because we are so much better than everyone else or we believe we cannot pray because we are so much worse than others. Either end of this spectrum hinders real prayer. Was the tax collector a supersaint? Clearly not. He struggled with sin. He was no more righteous than you and I. He did not have his whole life under control. He lived in the real world and dealt with real challenges that overcame him at times. He knew the only way to overcome was to connect with God. Therefore, he prayed. The Bible goes to great lengths to let us know that our heroes were not supersaints. **James 5:17** says Elijah was just like us. In **Acts 14:15**, we witness Barnabas and Saul asserting they are just like us. Over and again, the Bible demonstrates the weaknesses of the men whose stories we admire. Noah got drunk. Abraham lied. Moses struck the rock. David committed sexual immorality. Peter denied Jesus. Paul had been a persecutor. Praying Christians are not special saints. Rather, we have become saints and therefore God grants us the special privilege of prayer.

II. What the plugged-in saint is.

- A. *The plugged-in saint is humble.* The tax collector would not even look up to heaven. He beat his breast as he begged forgiveness. In contrast to the Pharisee, the humility of the tax collector is palpable. Pay careful attention to this. Regrettably, too many Christians get fowled up in prayer because they have some concept of entitlement. "I got baptized," they think to themselves, "Therefore, I have the right to prayer. I have a right to my requests. I have a right to be heard and answered." Few of us would actually say those words, but do our actions betray us? When we do not get what we ask, do we get upset with God? When we think prayer is not working, do we quit praying? Notice that the tax collector asked for mercy—unmerited favor. He knew he did not deserve his request. He knew he did not deserve to even ask. Yet he knew God would let him ask and ask he did—humbly. Paul warns us in **Romans 12:3** not to think too highly of ourselves. As we come into God's presence, this warning is especially true. We must never enter God's presence as though we deserve to enter. Do not be confused, we may be confident that we are allowed to pray because Jesus died for us (**Hebrews 10:19**). However, that prayer is a privilege, not a right or entitlement and every request is a request for grace and mercy. Therefore we must humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God (**I Peter 5:6-7**).
- B. *The plugged-in saint is penitent.* The plugged-in saint is not perfect, but he is penitent. The tax collector new he had sinned. Clearly he had recognized sin for what it was and what it had done to him. It had separated him from God (**Isaiah 59:1-2**). He had repented, that is he had thought through his actions again and decided to change them. Therefore he humbly came into the presence of God to confess his sin and seek forgiveness. Do not for a minute believe we are allowed to hang on to our sins but then come into the presence of God in prayer, just because nobody is perfect. **Psalms 66:18** is clear, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." If you have not repented and become a child of God, God does not hear your prayers. If you have become a child of God, but you are now hanging on to some sin, trying to serve two masters, God will not hear your cries either. You must turn from your sin because of godly sorrow (**II Corinthians 7:10**). This is the point of **I Timothy 2:8**, "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands..." We argue so much about whether or not we are allowed to raise our hands in worship that we have missed the point. Certainly, the Bible demonstrates that a scriptural prayer stance (not an outburst of emotion) is to lift our hands to God as though opening ourselves up to Him. But when we lift our hands they had better be holy hands. We must not think we can hang on to sin with our hands all day long and then lift our hands up to God in prayer at night. The plugged-in saint, is not perfect, but he is penitent, confessing and forsaking his sin (**Proverbs 28:13**).
- C. *The plugged-in saint is normal.* This may sound odd, but we simply need to notice that the praying Christian is normal. Not normal in the sense of conforming to the norms of society or the world. I have no doubt the world would consider the plugged-in saint odd. However, look at the normalcy of this prayer in **Luke 18**. He had a secular job. He was an average child of God. He was not spectacular in any sense of the word. No one would look up to him as some special case. In fact, some might even look down on him because he was so "not special." But here he is, praying and being empowered by God's grace. I want you to see this, because I want you to see that you can be a praying Christian. You can be a plugged-in saint.

III. What the plugged-in saint does.

- A. *The plugged-in saint trusts God.* Jesus told this parable, according to **vs. 9**, because he was talking to "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." Notice in whom the Pharisee put all his trust—himself. He did all these good works. He was better than everyone else. Not only could he trust Himself, but really God should put all His trust in the Pharisee too. But the tax collector had none of this arrogance. He trusted God. His faith was in God. Not only did he believe in God, but he believed God. He knew the promise of God, which we read moments ago in **Proverbs 28:13**. He knew he was a sinner and needed forgiveness. He trusted that God would do what He said if he would simply confess and forsake his sin. So he did. This is the beginning point for real prayer. Do you trust God? Do you trust God's power, that He can do exceedingly abundantly beyond all we ask or think (**Ephesians 3:20**)? Do you trust God's

word, that He will do what He has said (e.g. **James 1:5-8**)? Do you trust God's love, that He will give us good gifts (**Matthew 7:7-11**)? The plugged-in saint trusts God.

- B. *The plugged-in saint prays.* We do need to state the obvious. Satan has a way of letting us deceive ourselves such that everyone else around us can see the truth, but we miss it. How justified would this tax collector have been if he had just walked around realizing his guilt? He would never have been justified. The promise is that those who confess their sins will be forgiven (**I John 1:9**). Prayer is not some nice activity that God hopes we get around to whenever we get a chance. Prayer is essential. God said in **I Thessalonians 5:17** that we must "pray without ceasing." You may attend every assembly of the church. You may give all kinds of money to the Lord's work. You may work to be better than everybody else. If you stop short of real prayer, you are no better off than the Pharisee in our story. Without true, humble, penitent prayer, you are not connected to God.
- C. *The plugged-in saint impacts God.* Here is the really amazing part about all of this. When normal Christians humble themselves before God, trusting Him and penitently praying to Him, we can impact His action. We have already admitted it. God owed nothing to this tax collector. The tax collector could have felt guilty all day long, but he would not have been justified. The tax collector could have gone to the school of the Pharisee and learned to be better than everyone else, but God would not forgive him. God was not planning to forgive this tax collector and it just happened to coincide with the man's prayer. The man prayed and based on his prayer, God acted. The man went away justified. The tax collector asked that his mountain of sin be uprooted and cast into the sea and God did it. Wow! God allows our prayers to impact Him. I know that I am not mature enough spiritually, and probably never will be, to completely grasp how this works. However, **I John 5:14-15** says, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we have asked of Him." As much as it may just blow our minds, God has said if we are plugged-in to Him, submitting to His will in our actions and in our prayers that He will be moved by our prayers and will do what we ask, not because our prayers force Him to, but because He loves us.

### **Conclusion:**

How amazing is that? Do not miss out on the blessings God has to offer His praying children. I want you to notice a very simple passage. **Matthew 7:11** says, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" Notice what it does not say. It does not say God gives good things to those who want it. It does not say God gives good things to those who need it. It does say He gives good things to those who ask. How many of God's gifts go unopened because His children do not ask? Plug in, connect with God, become a praying Christian.