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The Man Who Prays

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Do you really want a true indicator of your real self? Have you ever engaged in an activity that opened up the actual elements of your being and exposed them to your personal glare? Many of us are adept at either ignoring or never knowing ourselves!

Now I ask these questions, in order to say this, prayer reveals as much about a man as all the other activities of his life. 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 by the sentry that arrested him, 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 officer hesitated but was again ordered to pray. Whereupon he kneeled in the officer's presence and prayed. At the conclusion of the prayer the officer ordered the sentry to release the soldier, saying, "Any man who can pray like that must be spending a lot of his time in private, personal prayer."

There is an interesting story told by Jesus that highlights this point. He tells of two men who went into the temple at Jerusalem to pray. The story occurs in Luke 18: 9-14. Listen to it remembering that I've suggested that prayer tells a man more about himself than all the other activities in life. "And he spake also this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinner. I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).

One man, the Pharisee, said his prayer; the other, the publican, prayed. One trusted in himself and his righteousness; the other depended on God. The Pharisee prided himself in his works; the publican was overwhelmed with the opportunity to talk with God. One was rejected: the other accepted by God. In these two lives the same searchlight of prayer revealed their respective strengths and weaknesses. With these thoughts in mind, I want us to consider for a few minutes "the man who prays."

"The man who prays" possesses great faith in God. Only out of strong belief in God and His power to answer does one pray. Hannah, a famous Old Testament woman, prayed fervently for a son. In the midst of her prayer effort she made a covenant with God. "O Jehovah of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thy handmaid, but wilt give unto thy handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto Jehovah all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head" (I Samuel 1:11).

Most of us have, at one time or another, made similar commitments, but how few of us have felt the responsibility to remain faithful to such prayer covenants? Hannah was blessed with a child in answer to such praying. She called him Samuel because, in her words, "I have asked him of Jehovah" (I Samuel 1:20). Hannah's prayer life was such that she not only remembered her covenant with God but she kept it even at the price most mothers never pay, giving him unto the training and service of God. Standing before God with her young son, she prayed, "For this child I prayed: and Jehovah hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have granted him to Jehovah; as long as he liveth he is granted to Jehovah" (I Samuel
say to the very individual whose edict had sent him there, was no obstacle to this godly man's prayer life. Only a "O Word! " And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, will allow nothing to interfere with his regular, sustained chamber toward Jerusalem); and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9). "The man who prays" begins and ends, yea, loses himself, in God-directed petition and thought. The spiritual discipline of prayer also calls for fasting. The Christians in Antioch of Syria fasted and prayed when sending Paul on his great evangelistic trips (Acts 13:1-3). When Paul organized new churches created by the reception of the Gospel in individual lives, he did so ordaining elders in every church with prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23). Jesus was quick to observe in the Sermon on the Mount that many in His day fasted for selfish and hypocritical purposes only. Fast for your own spiritual discipline, Jesus instructed His disciples (Matthew 6:16-18).

Prayer requires a spiritual discipline that will prepare one for long periods in communion with the Father. One of the secrets to our Lord's unexcelled self-control can be found in His many all-night prayer vigils (Luke 6:12). He deliberately pulled Himself away from the crowds to talk with His Father (Mark 1:35). Prayer was so much a part of His life, accounted for so much of His time, that His disciples sensed its importance seeing what prayer did for Jesus and requested of Him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).
didn't," said the foreman. "Remember that doing your best is sending for me." Our Father invites, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, . . . Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:1, 6).

Prayer requires a Father-child relationship. Jesus teaches us to say, "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). As the human father gives "good gifts" to his children, so God treats us as His children (Matthew 7:11, 12).

Christ came to give us the right of adoption into God's family, to help us become what we could not otherwise be, the sons of God. "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4, 5). John exclaims, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are" (I John 3:1).

Christ is the key to, and the assurance of, our relationship to God as son to Father. The New Testament explains how Christ becomes my personal acquaintance, and thus introduces me to His Father as a new son. "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26, 27). With Christ as our Savior and Advocate we have "boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19). Our prayers travel along "the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Hebrews 10:20). With Christ as our "high priest" we thus "draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22).

As God's obedient children we "hold fast the confession of our hope" in Christ believing that God is faithful to His promise of answered prayer. Will you today become "a man who prays"?

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**John Allen Chalk**

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He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full-time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1962.