

Plugged In: High Voltage Prayer (Part 3)

Introduction:

When I talk about plugged-in saints, what images come to your mind? Perhaps one of our greatest struggles is our perception of the Bible's plugged-in saints. We tend to look on their rosy side and forget reality. Then, believing we cannot be like them, we hold back on prayer, waiting until we are more worthy. We need to see what a real plugged-in saint is. Let's look at a plugged-in saint 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 connected to God. When he did, he was empowered with forgiveness and justification. Take a look at this saint, because this 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. Yet they connected to God.
 - B. *The plugged-in saint is not a religious scholar.* The Pharisee was a religious scholar, devoting his life to exact knowledge of the law. Yet, he became puffed up. We are not surprised. Paul told us knowledge produces arrogance (**I Corinthians 8:1**)? Yes, we are to add knowledge to our faith and virtue (**II Peter 1:5**). Yes, we will be destroyed if we lack knowledge (**Hosea 4:6**). However, we must not be so enamored with knowledge that we believe our knowledge makes us special enough to pray. Certainly, the plugged-in saint learns God's word, 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 on ourselves, keeping us from focusing on God. We either believe we can pray because we are better than others or we believe we cannot pray because we are worse. Either thought hinders prayer. The tax collector was no supersaint. He struggled with sin and was no more righteous than you and me. He lived in the real world and dealt with real challenges that overcame him at times. The only way to overcome was to connect with God. Therefore, he prayed. The Bible goes to great lengths to tell us our heroes were not supersaints. **James 5:17** says Elijah was just like us. **Acts 14:15** declares Barnabas and Paul 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. Regrettably, too many Christians get fowled up in prayer because they feel entitled. "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 the tax collector asked for mercy—unmerited favor. He knew he did not deserve his request 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. Yes, we may be confident in prayer because Jesus died for us (**Hebrews 10:19**). However, 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 knew he had sinned. He knew sin 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 God's presence confessing his sin and seeking forgiveness. Do not believe we are allowed to hang on to our sins but then come into the presence of God. **Psalm 66:18** is clear, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." You must turn from your sin because of godly sorrow (**II Corinthians 7:10**). 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.* I know this is repetitive. But sometimes we need to repeat the points with which we struggle the most. The plugged-in saint was not normal in the sense of conforming to the norms of the world. The world would consider the plugged-in saint odd. However, look at the normalcy of the tax collector in **Luke 18**. He had a secular job. He was an average child of God. He was not spectacular. 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 there he was, 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**, to "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." Notice in whom the Pharisee put his trust—himself. He did good works. He was better than others. Not only could he trust Himself, God should too. The tax collector had none of this arrogance. He trusted God. Not only did he believe in God, he believed God. He knew God's promise in **Proverbs 28:13**. He trusted God would do what He said if he would 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 all (**Ephesians 3:20**)? Do you trust God's word, that He will do what He said (e.g. **James 1:5-8**)? Do you trust God's love, that He will give good gifts (**Matthew 7:7-11**)? The plugged-in saint trusts God.
- B. *The plugged-in saint prays.* We need to state the obvious. How justified would this tax collector have been if he had just walked around realizing his guilt? 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 we must pray without ceasing in **I Thessalonians 5:17**. You may attend every assembly of the church. You may give all kinds of money. You may work to be better than everybody else. If you stop short of prayer, you cannot connect to God.
- C. *The plugged-in saint impacts God.* Here is the amazing part about all of this. When normal Christians penitently humble themselves before God, trusting Him, praying to Him, we impact His action. 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 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 I am not mature enough spiritually, and probably never will be, to completely grasp how this works. However, **I John 5:14-15** says, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from 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, He will be moved by our prayers, not because our prayers force Him, but because He loves us.

IV. Practical help for plugging-in.

- A. *Schedule your praying.* In **Daniel 6:10**, Daniel prayed three times a day as was his habit. As busy a man as he must have been, he had a habit of prayer. Few of us have trouble getting our meals in each day. Few of us have trouble getting to work or school. We schedule these things and then work the rest of our schedule around them. We need to do the same with prayer. Start small. Don't think you must start with three hours of prayer per day. Further, start with what fits. If you are not a morning person, don't plan to get up 30 minutes early, find another time that fits in you. You may not schedule a specific hour but a more general time. You may set aside 15 minutes of your lunch break, whether it takes place at noon or 2:30, you know you will pray on your lunch break. You may commit to praying during your commute to and from work. Whatever you do, schedule it. Make it an appointment you keep with God every day.
- B. *Have a place for prayer.* In **Daniel 6:10-11**, Daniel's co-workers knew where he would pray. He apparently prayed those three times in the same spot every day. I think of Peter who went on his roof to pray in **Acts**

10:9. This may seem odd, but I guarantee you if you designate a place of prayer it will prompt you to pray more. It doesn't have to be some wonderful spot out in a forest that makes you feel close to God. It can be in your closet, at your desk, kneeling beside your bed. I will advise you not to make your spot laying in bed or sitting in your easy chair. My spot is my shower. I know it sounds odd, but I can't get in the shower without thinking about praying. Obviously, you should pray anywhere and everywhere. I am not saying reserve prayer only for your spot. I don't think Daniel did that. I am sure he prayed in other places when the need arose, but when it came time for his special time of prayer, he had a spot for it.

- C. *Pray out loud.* Do you remember in **I Samuel 1:12-13** how Eli thought Hannah was drunk because she was mouthing her words but not saying anything. It was common to pray out loud. Yes, you can speak to God in your heart. But praying out loud is beneficial. It helps keep me on task. Often, when I am praying in my heart, my heart begins to wander; it is hard to distinguish between my thoughts and my prayer. Sometimes I completely stop praying because my mind has wandered. Praying out loud helps me distinguish between my thoughts and my prayers. It helps me realize I have stopped praying and started wandering. It keeps me focused. Try it and see if it doesn't help. It will be weird at first, but I am positive it will help your prayer life.
- D. *Journal your praying.* I used to simply say make lists and keep notes. But, it has really helped me to take that a step further. Often, in addition to making lists and taking notes about granted requests, I actually write my prayers out. I don't do this every day, but when I do journal my praying, it is amazingly helpful. The greatest help that comes from it is going back later to read the prayers and see how God has worked through them.
- E. *Plan your prayers.* When I think about praying, I get overwhelmed. I have friends and family to pray for, special requests in the bulletin, members of the congregation, elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, congregations... After a few minutes, I get overwhelmed and want to put it off until I have more time. The problem is I never have time. Instead of feeling the need to pray for everything every time, plan out your prayers. Make a schedule. You might pray for your family on Monday, the congregation on Tuesday, churches you know about on Wednesday, etc. Someone will say, "But that means I won't be praying for everything everyday." That is true. But you will be praying for everything. The way I see it, when I was trying to pray for everything every time, I was never praying. I think I am doing better now. What do you think?

Conclusion:

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 what is good 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.