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SERMON TITLE: The Results of Constant, Thankful Prayers
SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4:4-8
DATE: September 30, 2018
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Why Pray? Series. Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10a

Q's fall. The days of 100 degrees are finally gone. The nights are getting longer. More importantly, it's high school football season. Nothing is more fun than going to a game, cheering, and hearing the band play!

Well, there's one thing better—WINNING!

We all want to applaud as our children and grandchildren try their hand at sports or music or drama and we like to see them succeed.

What if we thought of prayer in this light? Winning prayers. What if we thought of the hope of VICTORY? What would that look like?

After all, Jesus has more resources than any of us. God has more answers than we know are even possible. The Holy Spirit is at work day and night. The Bible says over and over to PRAY. The Bible shows a listening God, looking for those who would depend on Him and answers their prayers. Paul knew the victory, and perhaps he is trying to get us to shift our attitude. Let's read it:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things" (Ph. 4:4-8).

You rejoice at the opportunity. You rejoice at the good. There's no time for confrontation or chaos or yelling at each other in frustration or hatred or discord or disunity or desperation. No!

For the Christian, our study of prayer culminates in these words:

rejoice, gentleness, thanksgiving, peace that transcends all understanding; things true, noble, righteous, pure, lovely, admirable, and excellent.

This is the result; this is the success; this is the win of someone who prays.

Hannah won. She wrote a victory prayer. The bottom line of her prayer is that the one who bows the knee before God and submits to God; the one willing to seek God about your difficult circumstance—that is the WINNER.

If you were read that passage in Philippians again, which words stand out to you? Let's hear them again:

Rejoice, gentleness, thanksgiving, peace that transcends all understanding; filling your thoughts with things true, noble, righteous, pure, lovely, admirable, and excellent.

Which area are you growing in? They are valuable personal assets—victorious results of prayer. **They come as a result of close, personal connection with God.** They are what you gain when you make it your goal to be near God.

Are you giving that connection with God priority? It will produce results.

These qualities are for everyone. Men, they will give you strength, grounding, and a good reputation as a leader who cares. They will make you a good leader in your family and at work, and with others you influence. Women, these qualities are what it takes to be a good wife, mother, aunt, employee, leader—you all get the picture. If you are a youth or child, you can learn to live out these values too, and you will shine at whatever you try.

Rejoice means "express joy" in the Lord at all times. Paul repeats it. You don't rejoice only when things are going as you wish. It's not based in circumstances at all. It's based in presence. It is also based in the future.

Hannah was living defeated by circumstances. But when she turned to the Lord and prayed and received an answer, she realized the power of God was real. Her joy was based on that. Later, she loaned back to God the very son God gave her in answer to her prayers. That's remarkable. But she learned that if God was so near to hear her and help her the first time, God would continue to hear her and help her. She gained a win-win, whether she kept Samuel with her, or gave him back to God—God was at work in her, and that was pure joy.

Do you think, *God won't help me because of my health, my age, my status?* I'm too young or too old, too poor or too

messed up? It is independent of that. You rejoice because you are HIS, and you are not bound by circumstances, even terrible ones.

Rejoicing is the Christian's distinguishing mark.

Here's the next mark of a Christian:

Let your **gentleness** be known. Gentleness is not necessarily applauded in this culture but it was greatly valued in history. Gentleness is a moral characteristic. Another word for it is *graciousness*. Gentleness is described as being "balanced, intelligent and a model of decency rather than licentious." Gentleness expresses fairness. In terms of justice, it is not exercising the letter of the law to the extent that injustice results. Gentle people are not strident but also not spineless.

Jesus exemplified this characteristic. So it makes sense that Paul then says, "**Jesus is near.**"

Hannah's problem depressed her for years. Everyone noticed. She was so uneasy she could not be around people or even eat. But then she turned to the Lord. She found God was near.

When we pray, we find that God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit are near. They have not left us to attend to other business—*could you get back to me tomorrow at 2:00? I'm busy ruling the world at the moment.* No, even though there is not a big "shout out" by Jesus to draw attention to himself, you can have the expectation that the Lord attends to your prayer and is going to vindicate you.

Hannah said, "I was down; God brought me up." "My opponent was up; God brought her down." That may not sound nice, but her opponent was harassing her. When you lean on God, you have the advantage of the field. **God vindicates the one who depends on God.** It brings God glory.

Are you lobbying God about your problem?

Philippians 4:6 says:

"Stop worrying about anything. Instead, in every circumstance by prayer and entreaty with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God."¹

Basically, Paul says: **Stop with the worrying.** Replace it with lobbying God. You can think of it as going to Washington and lobbying your congressmen for a particular action. Only, don't waste your time on them. Paul says, LOBBY GOD! Make your requests known and you will win!

Jesus taught us to lobby, or petition, in the Lord's Prayer. In fact, most of the prayer is a petition to God to take care of all kinds of concerns.

We petition:

- ~ for God's kingdom to come on earth,
- ~ for daily food,
- ~ for forgiveness
- ~ to not be led into temptation
- ~ to be delivered from evil

And so in that, the greatest prayer on earth, we are given liberty to petition God for everything we need.

Pray with **thanksgiving**. When you are anxious, you show that you carry the burdens. When you pray, you literally place the burden on God. So be thankful because God is near; be thankful that God hears you, and thankfully cast all your burdens onto God's shoulders. *Your* prayer is heard. Knowing that, we honor God with gratitude.

How does appreciation work in your closest relationships? Don't you appreciate thankful people? So does God!

One way to express thanks to God is to always pray, "God, whatever will glorify your name." It's a simple prayer to an extraordinary God, so ask for extraordinary things—for health, for clear mental health, for healing, for the church's needs, for growth, for the Word to spread, for our local and national leaders, for your family members to be saved or go deeper in the Lord—that all answers glorify God's name.

You will win with God if you are thankful. You will gain the **peace that passes understanding** which will stand around you as a Sentinel. It's like the Celtic benediction:

"God be with you to strengthen you, about you to keep you, above you to protect you, beneath you to uphold you, before you to direct you, behind you to keep you moving forward, and round about you to defend you."

Let's honor God with honorable prayers. As you win in prayer this week, keep these things in mind:

"whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things."

Why pray? To win! To gain the VICTORY!

AMEN

¹ Translation by Peter T. O'Brien