

## Devotion for June 6, 2018

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Take a moment to think about your prayer life. Is it good? Is it vibrant? Do you pray at regular times? Do you pray when the need arises? Do you pray long prayers or short prayers? Are you good at one type of praying or well-rounded in all kinds of praying? Chances are, however much you pray, you would agree that there is plenty of room for growth in your prayer life. Let's do that.

Recorded in Matthew chapter 15 is the prayer of a Canaanite woman to Jesus. It's a little different since she was able to speak to Jesus visibly in-the-flesh on earth, but any Christian's prayer is no less real or heard by Jesus himself. It's a prayer that went differently than a person might expect. When the woman asked Jesus to heal her daughter from demon possession, Jesus ignored her. She kept on asking, but Jesus didn't respond. Eventually Jesus' disciples were annoyed by the woman continuing to make so much noise that they asked Jesus to send her away.

Finally Jesus broke his silence, and in a brief conversation told that woman, "You don't deserve my help." Ouch! That sounds awfully harsh, but it's true, that's what God's law is like. Sometimes it is portrayed that anyone and everyone has access to God, no matter their beliefs. That's not true. All sinful people (which is all people) are cut off from God because of sin (Isaiah 59:2), as if sin is a giant wall between a person and God that prevents communication. That wall is only knocked down and obliterated through faith in Jesus, who removes sin. Only a Christian (someone who believes in Jesus) is able to access God through a prayer. Just being able to pray depends entirely on God's grace, not on something that is our right. The Canaanite woman understood that. She also understood that asking God for blessings is also based entirely on God's grace.

Grace means "undeserved love." Sinners don't deserve anything good from God—we disobeyed him! But God sent Jesus to take away sin. God listens to and hears the prayers of Christians for Jesus' sake. God wants us to pray to him. God wants us to ask for blessings. In fact, we can even hold God to his promises—like God's promise to help us in times of trouble (Psalm 51:5), to be with us always (Matthew 28:20), and to save us from sin (John 3:16) purely through faith in Jesus as our Savior. When Jesus told that woman she didn't deserve his help, she wasn't stopped, because she knew all that about grace. It didn't matter that she didn't deserve Jesus' help, because she was appealing to his grace—trusting that her Savior would love her and bless her even though she didn't deserve it. You get to pray with the same boldness and confidence, trusting that Jesus has saved you and that he is ready, willing, and eager to hear your prayers.