

# church of Christ at Greenwood

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September 15, 2024

## ***The Problem of Heartless Prayer***

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“May He grant you according to your heart’s desire, and fulfill all your purpose” (Psalm 20:4).

DAVID WISHED FOR US A SIGNIFICANT BLESSING FROM GOD WHEN HE SIMPLY SAID, “MAY HE GRANT YOU ACCORDING TO YOUR HEART’S DESIRE.” We must learn to look deeply into our own hearts and be careful about our desires, for God is quite likely to grant us our “heart’s desire.” Ultimately, that is the only thing He will grant. In the long run, that which we receive from God will turn out to be the thing we’ve most honestly and deeply wanted, not the various things we’ve pretended to want. Our Creator is not to be manipulated by whims and impulses and superficial requests. Rather, He acts on the basis of what He sees when He looks into the very depths of our true will.

If we are sometimes disappointed in the results of prayer, the explanation is often that God has yielded to the course we’re actually demanding to follow, rather than give us what we’re “praying for.” We pray, for example, for spiritual strength and don’t seem to receive it. Does God know that, despite our request, we’re not willing to make the sacrifices that real strength would require, and that we’re only praying for a little “character” to be conveniently tacked on to our unchanged lifestyle? If so, God is not in the business of granting such wishes. Because He loves us, He will probably leave us in the school of selfish hard knocks awhile longer, until we learn to truly desire something better. In the end, there will be only two classes of people, as C. S. Lewis remarked: those who have said to God, “Your will be done,” and those to whom God will say, “Your will be done.” Even now, there are only these two classes of people. Whatever comes from our praying, the results will reflect this reality.

This, I believe, is the principal reason God desires us to pray persistently, continuing to make our requests even when it seems He is not listening (Luke 18:1-8). The point is not that God has to be begged to be good to us. It’s that He desires us to learn for ourselves, perhaps through a long agony of prayer, what it is that we really want. He waits for us to want with our hearts what we have prayed for with our lips.

“When you pray, rather let your heart be without words than your words without heart” (John Bunyan).