

“ Practical Christianity”

I Thess 5: 16-22 Pt 2

“pray without ceasing”

God's will, for us, is that we rejoice, we pray and we give thanks, and through those things, He affects his sovereign purpose. Well, we talked about the first and the third, and tonight, just some practical insight into the second. The Apostle Paul, in the simple, specific command, calls on us to do something constantly, incessantly, as a way of life, just as he did with rejoicing and giving thanks.

Even though we know God has a plan and that's why we can rejoice, we know God is working that plan. That's why we can give thanks in everything. Even though we know that, consistent, persistent prayer is a command. It flows from our dependence and our need.

In fact, I guess you could say prayer is like breathing. It is a spiritual routine for all times, as we inhale and exhale in the atmosphere of God's presence.

Regarding Pray I often think of 2 passages

Luke 11

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, *that* one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

² So He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.

Your will be done
On earth as *it is* in heaven.

³ Give us day by day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,
For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.”

Parable of the Persistent Friend

⁵ And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶ for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷ and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? ⁸ I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

⁹ “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

¹¹ If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him

Luke 18

1. Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, ² saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. ³ Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ ⁴ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, ⁵ yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’”

⁶ Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. ⁷ And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? ⁸ I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.

In the following passages related to praying without ceasing, notice the repetitive use of the **present imperative** and the **present tense**.

Seek (Qal imperative) the LORD and His strength; **Seek** (Qal imperative) His face continually. ([1Chronicles 16:11](#))

Ask (present imperative = commands continual asking), and it shall be given to you; **seek** (present imperative = commands continual seeking), and you shall find; **knock** (present imperative = commands continual knocking), and it shall be opened to you.

Keep watching (present imperative = commands continual attention to) and **praying** (present imperative = command to continue in an attitude of prayer), that you may not enter into

temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. ([Matthew 26:41](#))

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to **pray** (present tense = continually, as the habit of their life) and not to lose heart ([Luke 18:1](#))

But **keep on the alert** (present imperative = commands continual attention) at all times, **praying** (present tense = continually, as the habit of their life) in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man. ([Luke 21:36](#))

rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, **devoted to** (imperative sense, present tense - always be prayerful) prayer (See **note** [Romans 12:12](#))

With all prayer and petition **pray** (present tense = continually, as the habit of their life) at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints (See **note** [Ephesians 6:18](#))

Devote (present imperative = commands continual attention to) yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving (see **note** [Colossians 4:2](#))

Therefore I want the men in every place to **pray** (present tense = continually, as the habit of their life), lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. (1 Timothy 2:8)

The end of all things is at hand; therefore, **be of sound judgment** and **sober spirit** (both verbs aorist imperative = do this now! don't delay!) for the purpose of prayer. (see note 1 [Peter 4:7](#))

Pray without ceasing - Out of approximately **667** recorded prayers in the Bible, there are about **454** recorded answers. This should encourage and motivate us to **pray without ceasing!**

Spurgeon introduces his sermon on this verse by setting the context...

THE position of our text is very suggestive. Observe what it follows. It comes immediately after the precept, "Rejoice evermore;" as if that command had somewhat staggered the reader, and made him ask "How can I always rejoice?" and, therefore, the apostle appended as answer, "Always pray." The more praying the more rejoicing. Prayer gives a channel to the pent-up sorrows of the soul, they flow away, and in their stead streams of sacred delight pour into the heart. At the same time the more rejoicing the more praying; when the heart is in a quiet condition, and full of joy in the Lord, then also will it be sure to draw nigh unto the Lord in worship. Holy joy and prayer act and react upon each other.

Observe, however, what immediately follows the text: "In everything give thanks." When joy and prayer are married their first born child is gratitude. When we joy in God for what we have, and believingly pray to him for more, then our souls thank him both in the enjoyment of what we have, and in the prospect of what is yet to come. Those three texts are three companion pictures, representing the life of a true Christian, the central sketch is the connecting link between those on either side. These three precepts are an ornament of grace to every believer's neck, wear them every one of you, for glory and for beauty; "Rejoice evermore;" "Pray without ceasing;" "in everything give thanks."

W A Criswell quoted the following prayer from a source unknown...

**When you are weary in body and soul
Cumbered with many a care
When work is claiming its strength-taking toll
Make it a matter of prayer.**

**And when you're discouraged, distraught or dismayed
Sinking almost in despair
Remember there's One who will come to your aid,
If you'll make it a matter of prayer.**

**And when you are lost in this world's tangled maze
When life seems a hopeless affair
Direction will come for all of your ways
If you'll make it a matter of prayer.**

Pray (**proseúchomai** related to the noun **proseuche** from **pros** = toward or immediately before + **euchomai** = to pray or vow) is the more general or comprehensive covering all form of reverent approach to God, especially the offering of prayer. It is used only of praying to God.

The prefix **pros** conveys the sense of being immediately before Him and hence the ideas of adoration, devotion, and worship. The basic idea is to bring something, and in prayer this pertains to bringing up prayer requests. In early Greek culture an offering was brought with a prayer that it be accepted. Later the idea was changed slightly, so that the thing brought to God was a prayer. In later Greek, prayers appealed to God for His presence.

Hiebert adds that **proseuchomai**...

The term suggests the reverential attitude of the one praying rather than the length of the prayers being offered. The readers are being called to maintain such a reverential approach to God as a continuing practice. (Ibid)

Pray in this passage is a **present imperative** which is a command to make this our habitual practice, our lifestyle and not just we feel like it! Furthermore, Paul is not giving us a suggestion but a command and this calls for a conscious choice on each believer's part to obey, which in turn means we have to work at it, learn it, cultivate the habit, all the while keeping in mind that we can only obey in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit must teach us and lead us even as we seek to obey this command.

Without ceasing (89) (**adialeiptos** from **a** = negative + **dialeipô** = leave off, cease, leave an interval whether of space or time) means uninterruptedly, without intermission, constantly, incessantly, unceasingly, always, unintermittently, continually, without omission or without ceasing.

There are 4 uses of **adialeiptos** in the NT - [Ro 1:9](#); [1Th 1:2](#); [2:13](#); [5:17](#)

Rom 1: 9

⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,

I Thess 1:2

² We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,

I Thess 2:13

¹³ For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us,

Unceasing prayer refers more to prayer as an *attitude* and not just an *activity*, and thus serves as a good reflection of our level of communion ("high, medium, low") with our Father. **Unceasing prayer** speaks more of a reverential attitude of the one praying than of the length of the prayers.

Unceasing prayer is not restricted to a set time, place or position of one's body. The believer is not in a right place with God's Spirit if he cannot pray anytime, anywhere. In short, Paul's injunction means that we are to be constantly conscious of our dependence upon the Spirit. It refers, however, to the attitude of prayer, or reverence before God. The Christian's life of righteousness and his approach to relationships and responsibilities should be such that he maintains a constant attitude of being in God's presence. Such a person will pray often and about many things, including requests, praise, and thanksgiving.

Spurgeon once quipped...

As you are tempted without ceasing, so pray without ceasing (**Ed note**: !!!) (Cp note [Hebrews 2:18](#) where tempting is in the [present tense](#) indicating we are continually being tempted).

The Christian needs . . .

mercy to pardon him,
 grace to purify him,
 balm to heal him,
 divine favor to comfort him,
 power to support him,
 wisdom to counsel him,
 goodness to satisfy him.

Our daily weaknesses, our daily wants, our daily fears, our daily dangers, our daily temptations, etc., call for our daily prayers.

Prayer is the regal gate by which the Lord enters into the heart, comforting, quieting, strengthening, quickening, and raising of it. By it,

faith is increased,
 hope strengthened,
 the spirit exhilarated,
 the heart pacified,
 the conscience purified,
 temptations vanquished,
 corruptions weakened,
 the affections inflamed,
 the will more renewed, and
 the whole man more advantaged.

Fausset writes that...

The Greek is, "Pray without intermission"; without allowing prayerless gaps to intervene between the times of prayer. (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary)

Jesus Who was without sin prayed constantly and so how much more ought we, who are sinners, to be faithful in prayer! He who had all power in heaven and earth considered adequate times of prayer as essential as His public service. So He often withdrew and prayed and He is our example.

E. M. Bounds said that...

The little estimate we put on prayer is evident from the little time we give to it. (Power Through Prayer)

MacArthur has several comments on prayer without ceasing writing that...

In any posture, in any attire, at any time, in any place, and under any circumstance prayer is appropriate. Prayer is to be a total way of life, an open and constant communion with God (MacArthur, J: Matthew 1-7 Chicago: Moody Press or Logos)

Such unceasing or recurring prayer demands first of all an attitude of God-consciousness. That does not mean to be constantly in the act of verbal prayer, but to view everything in life in relation to God. For example, if we meet someone, we immediately consider where they stand with God. If we hear of something bad happening, we react by praying for God to act in the situation because we know He cares. If we hear of something good that has happened, we respond with immediate praise to God for it because we know He is glorified. When Paul looked around his world, everything he saw prompted him to prayer in some way. When he thought of or heard about one of his beloved churches, it moved him toward communion with God.

A second aspect of unceasing prayer is people-consciousness. We cannot effectively pray for people unless we are aware of their needs. Paul exhorted the Colossians to keep alert in prayer ([Col 4:2-note](#)), while to the Ephesians he wrote, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints" ([Ep 6:18-note](#)).

The two elements of praying without ceasing came together in Paul's prayer life. His love for God led him to seek unbroken communion with Him. His love for people drove him to unceasing prayer on their behalf. The prayers of Paul recorded in his letters are a precious legacy. They reveal his heart and are models for us to emulate. This text records the first of those prayers. (MacArthur, J. Colossians. Chicago: Moody Press or Logos)

John Wesley once declared

I have resolved to devote an hour each morning, noon, and evening to prayer -- no pretense, no excuse whatsoever.

Martin Luther source declares...

How glibly we talk of praying without ceasing! Yet we are quite apt to quit, if our prayer remained unanswered but one week or month! We assume that by a stroke of His arm or an action of His will, God will give us what we ask. It never seems to dawn on us, that He is the Master of nature, as of grace, and that, sometimes He chooses one way, and sometimes another in which to do His work. It takes years, sometimes, to answer a prayer and when it is answered, and we look backward we can see that it did. But God knows all the time, and it is His will that we pray, and pray, and still pray, and so come to know, indeed and of a truth, what it is to pray without ceasing.

Spurgeon wrote...

Never give up praying, even when Satan suggests that prayer is in vain. Pray in his teeth. "Pray without ceasing" ([1Th 5:17](#)). If the heavens are brass and your prayer only echoes above your head, pray on! If month after month your prayer appears to have miscarried, if you have had no answer, continue to draw close to the Lord. Do not abandon the mercy seat for any reason. If it is a good thing that you have been asking for, and if you are sure that it is according to the divine will, wait, tarry, pray, weep, plead, wrestle, and agonize until you get what you are praying for.

If your heart is cold, do not wait until your heart warms. Pray your soul into heat with the help of the ever-blessed Holy Spirit, who helps in our weakness, who makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered ([Ro 8:26-note](#)).

Never cease prayer for any reason. If the philosopher tells you that every event is fixed and that prayer cannot possibly change anything, go on praying. If you cannot reply to every difficulty that man suggests, resolve to be obedient to the divine will. "Pray without ceasing." Never, never, never renounce the habit of prayer or your confidence in its power.

I am often asked, "If you believe God works all things according to the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:11) and that his knowledge of all things past, present, and future is infallible, then what is the point of praying that anything happen?" Usually this question is asked in relation to human decision: "If God has predestined some to be his sons and chosen them before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4,5), then what's the point in praying for anyone's conversion?"

The implicit argument here is that if prayer is to be possible at all man must have the power of self-determination. That is, all man's decisions

must ultimately belong to himself, not God. For otherwise he is determined by God and all his decisions are really fixed in God's eternal counsel. Let's examine the reasonableness of this argument by reflecting on the example cited above.

God Decides Who Will Be Saved

1. "Why pray for anyone's conversion if God has chosen before the foundation of the world who will be his sons?" A person in need of conversion is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1); he is "enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:17; John 8:34); "the god of this world has blinded his mind that he might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians. 4:4); his heart is hardened against God (Ephesians 4:18) so that he is hostile to God and in rebellion against God's will (Romans 8:7).

Now I would like to turn the question back to my questioner: If you insist that this man must have the power of ultimate self-determination, what is the point of praying for him? What do you want God to do for him? You can't ask that God overcome the man's rebellion, for rebellion is precisely what the man is now choosing, so that would mean God overcame his choice and took away his power of self-determination. But how can God save this man unless he act so as to change the man's heart from hard hostility to tender trust?

Will you pray that God enlighten his mind so that he truly see the beauty of Christ and believe? If you pray this, you are in effect asking God no longer to leave the determination of the man's will in his own power. You are asking God to do something within the man's mind (or heart) so that he will surely see and believe. That is, you are conceding that the ultimate determination of the man's decision to trust Christ is God's, not merely his.

God's Sovereignty Enables Prayer

What I am saying is that it is not the doctrine of God's sovereignty which thwarts prayer for the conversion of sinners. On the contrary, it is the unbiblical notion of self-determination which would consistently put an end to all prayers for the lost. Prayer is a request that God do something.

But the only thing God can do to save a lost sinner is to overcome his resistance to God. If you insist that he retain his self-determination, then you are insisting that he remain without Christ. For "no one can come to Christ unless it is given him from the Father" (John 6:65, 44).

Only the person who rejects human self-determination can consistently pray for God to save the lost. My prayer for unbelievers is that God will do for them what he did for Lydia: He opened her heart so that she gave heed to what Paul said (Acts 16:14). I will pray that God, who once said, "Let there be light!", will by that same creative power "shine in their hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). I will pray that he will "take out their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). I will pray that they be born not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God (John 1:13). And with all my praying I will try to "be kind and to teach and correct with gentleness and patience, if perhaps God may grant them repentance and freedom from Satan's snare" (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

In short, I do not ask God to sit back and wait for my neighbor to decide to change. I do not suggest to God that he keep his distance lest his beauty become irresistible and violate my neighbor's power of self-determination. No! I pray that he ravish my unbelieving neighbor with his beauty, that he unshackle the enslaved will, that he make the dead alive and that he suffer no resistance to stop him lest my neighbor perish.

The Relationship between Prayer and Evangelism

2. If someone now says, "O.K., granted that a person's conversion is ultimately determined by God' I still don't see the point of your

prayer. If God chose before the foundation of the world who would be converted, what function does your prayer have?" My answer is that it has a function like that of preaching: How shall the lost believe in whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach unless they are sent (Romans 10:14f.)? Belief in Christ is a gift of God (John 6:65; 2 Timothy 2:25; Ephesians 2:8), but

God has ordained that the means by which men believe on Jesus is through the preaching of men.

It is simply naive to say that if no one spread the gospel, all those predestined to be sons of God (Ephesians 1:5) would be converted anyway. The reason this is naive is because it overlooks the fact that the preaching of the gospel is just as predestined as is the believing of the gospel: Paul was set apart for his preaching ministry before he was born (Galatians 1:15), as was Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5). Therefore, to ask, "If we don't evangelize, will the elect be saved?" is like asking, "If there is no predestination, will the predestined be saved?" God knows those who are his and he will raise up messengers to win them. If someone refuses to be a part of that plan, because he dislikes the idea of being tampered with before he was born, then he will be the loser, not God and not the elect. "You will certainly carry out God's purpose however you act but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John." (Problem of Pain chapter 7, Anthology, p 910, cf. p 80)

God Uses Means

a little boy was praying, and he said, "God bless mommy and God bless daddy and God bless my friends and God,I want a new bicycle." And his mother said, "Why are you yelling? God isn't deaf?" And he said, "I know, but grandma's in the next room, and she's hard of hearing."

Prayer is like preaching in that it is a human act also. It is a human act that God has ordained and which he delights in because it reflects the dependence of his creatures upon him. He has promised to respond to prayer, and his response is just as contingent upon our prayer as our prayer is in accordance with his will. "And this is the confidence which we have before him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14). When we don't know how to pray according to God's will but desire it earnestly, "the Spirit of God intercedes for us according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27).

In other words, just as God will see to it that his Word is proclaimed as a means to saving the elect, so he will see to it that all those prayers are prayed which he has promised to respond to. I think Paul's words in Romans 15:18 would apply equally well to his preaching and his praying ministry: "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles." Even our prayers are a gift from the one who "works in us that which is pleasing in his sight" (Hebrews 13:21). Oh, how grateful we should be that he has chosen us to be employed in this high service! How eager we should be to spend much time in prayer!

John Piper