

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

We Just Must Pray!

by J. Wayne Kilpatrick

“PRAYING always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

An understanding of this verse will cause every Christian to say, “I must pray. I must put all my energy and heart into prayer. Whatever else I do, I must pray.” The RSV puts it even stronger: “With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” Note the “alls”: “all prayer and supplication,” “all seasons,” “all perseverance,” “all the saints.” Note the strong words: “prayer,” “supplication,” “perseverance.”

The expression “watching thereunto” literally means “being sleepless thereunto.” Paul realized the natural slothfulness of man, and especially his natural slothfulness in prayer. How seldom do we diligently pray! How often do we get right up to the verge of a great blessing in prayer and get drowsy, let go, and quit. I wish the words “being sleepless thereunto” would burn in our hearts.

But why is this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer needful?

I. THE REASONS FOR PRAYING

We should pray because there is a devil. He is cunning, mighty, and ever plotting our down-

fall! If we relax in prayer, he is most apt to get us. Look at the context of Ephesians 6. Verse 12 tells us who the enemy is. Verse 13 tells us how to prepare for battle with the enemy. Paul brings all to a climax in verse 18 by telling us to add constant, persistent, untiring, sleepless prayer in the Holy Spirit.

We must pray because prayer is God’s appointed way for us to receive blessings. James declared, “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2). Many Christians are asking, “Why do I make so little progress in my Christian life?” Many gospel ministers are asking, “Why is it I see so little fruit from my labors?” Many elders are asking, “Why are the members not more involved in the work of the church?” Many Sunday school teachers are asking, “Why are my students not growing spiritually?” To everyone of these statements God says, “It is because of a neglect of prayer. You have not because you ask not.”

We must pray because the greatest Christians of the first century regarded prayer as the most important business of their lives. It is evident from what Paul wrote to churches and individuals that much of his time, strength, and thought were given to prayer.

I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you (Romans 1:9; NIV).

[I] do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers (Ephesians 1:16).

We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Colossians 1:9).

As we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face and may complete what is lacking in your faith (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

. . . I constantly remember you in my prayers (2 Timothy 1:3).

All the great men of God outside the Bible have been men of prayer.

We should pray because prayer occupied a very prominent place and played a very important part in the earthly life of our Lord. Mark wrote, "And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there." (Mark 1:35). The preceding day had been a very busy and exciting one, but Jesus shortened the hours of needed sleep that He might arise early and give Himself to needed prayer. Is sleep more important to you than prayer? Luke wrote, "And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). The words *pray* and *prayer* are used at least twenty-five times in connection with our Lord in the brief record of His life in the Four Gospels. His praying is also mentioned in places where the words are not used. Evidently, prayer took much of the time and strength of Jesus. A man or woman who does not spend much time in prayer cannot properly be called a follower of Jesus Christ.

We must pray because Jesus is still praying for us. Christ's ministry did not close with His death. The writer to the Hebrews said, "Hence also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). In Romans 8:34 we read, "Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" You and I can have a part in this ministry of intercession. Even one who is shut-in because of illness can have part in it. A busy mother can mingle prayers for the saints, the minister, the unsaved, missionaries, even as she carries out her role as a wife and

mother. The busy business executive can have part in it, praying as he hurries from duty to duty. Of course, we must, if we would maintain the spirit of constant prayer, take time—plenty of it—to shut ourselves up in the secret place alone with God for nothing but prayer.

We must pray because prayer is the means that God has appointed for our receiving mercy and obtaining grace to help in time of need. We are told, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). This verse makes it plain that God has appointed a way by which we shall seek and obtain mercy and grace. That way is prayer—bold, confident, outspoken approach to the throne of grace, the most holy place of God's presence, where our sympathizing High Priest, Jesus Christ, has entered in our behalf (vv. 14, 15). Mercy is what we need, grace is what we must have, or all our effort and life will end in complete failure. Prayer is the way to receive these blessings. Infinite grace is at our disposal when we pray. Who does not feel that he needs more grace? Ask for it (Luke 11:1-13). What little streams of mercy and grace most of us know, when we might know rivers overflowing their banks.

We must pray because prayer in the name of Jesus is the way the Lord has appointed for His disciples to obtain fullness of joy. Jesus said, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be filled" (John 16:24). "Made full" is the way the RSV reads. Who is there that does not wish his joy filled full? The way to get it filled full is by praying in the name of Jesus. We have all known people whose joy is filled full; indeed, it is just running over, shining from their eyes, bubbling out of their very lips, and running off their fingertips when they shake hands with you. Coming into contact with them is like coming into contact with an electrical machine charged with gladness. People of that sort are always people who spend much time in prayer. Why is it that prayer in the name of Christ brings such fullness of joy? We get what we ask. Praying also makes God real. No greater joy exists on earth or in heaven than communion with God. Prayer in the name of Jesus brings us into communion with Him. David said, "In thy presence is fullness of joy" (Psalms 16:11). Oh,

the unutterable joy of those moments when in our prayers we really press into the presence of God! Does someone say, "I have never known any such joy as that in prayer"? You are probably not taking enough time in prayer. You are not really giving yourself up to prayer in the time which you do take.

We should pray because prayer is God's appointed way for us to have freedom from anxiety and obtain the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7). This is a life that is open to every Christian. Just keep in constant touch with God, and when trouble or vexation, great or small, comes up, speak to Him about it, never forgetting to return thanks for what He has already done. Some of us let the hurry of our lives crowd out prayer. What a waste of time, energy, and nerve force is caused by worry! One night of prayer will save us from many nights of insomnia. Time spent in prayer is not wasted, but time invested at big interest.

We should pray because prayer is the way to escape many of the sins of our day. The traps of life are avoided by prayer. Prayer also prepares us for the coming of the Lord.

II. THE RESULTS OF PRAYING

Prayer promotes our spiritual growth as almost nothing else. Bible study and prayer go hand in hand. When you spend much time in prayer you become like the one you are talking to. Prayer is the way a Christian obtains the forgiveness of sins. David said, "Wash me from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalms 51:2). Peter said, "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:22). In answer to prayer I get wisdom (James 1:5). Prayer brings power into our work. It avails for the conversion of others. It brings blessings to the church. The devil hates the church and seeks in every way to block its progress by false doctrine, division, and inward corruption of life. But prayer will help to overcome all of these designs of the devil. Many times when all seemed hopeless with the church, men and women have knelt to pray, and God has heard and blessed.

CONCLUSION

With prayer accomplishing all these wonderful blessings, do you not see that you just must pray? God is listening for the voice of prayer! Will He hear it from you? Will He hear it from the church as a body?

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Illustrations

Thanksgiving and Prayer

A missionary was greatly discouraged. He knew that his work was not progressing as it should. One day, while visiting another missionary, he saw a motto card on the wall: Try Thanksgiving! It was an arrow to his soul. He suddenly realized that this element had been largely missing from his prayers.

The Meaning of Petition

The word *petition* is derived from the Greek word meaning "to beg, to lack." It can be used of both God and man. It refers here to petition for one's personal needs. The picture behind the word is that of a beggar sitting at the side of the road, begging the help of the king as he passes by. It expresses destitution and inadequacy; inability to meet one's own needs, and total dependence on another. It is need expressed in a cry.

Prayer Is Impressive

Years ago when Mr. Khrushchev was a guest of honor of the chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, the university was warned that prayer at the table might offend the Russian guest. The chancellor let it be known that grace was said at the university's tables and even though it might offend the guest, he preferred not to offend God. All the while Dr. Scarfe, minister of a Pittsburgh church was saying the grace, Khrushchev's interpreter was whispering every translated word into the Russian leader's ear. At the conclusion of the prayer Mr. Khrushchev thanked Dr. Scarfe for his words. Mrs. Khrushchev said after the luncheon that she would appreciate a copy of that prayer so that she might take it home to Russia with her. Instead of being offensive, prayer was impressive.

Louis H. Evans, Sr.,
Can You Really Talk to God?

Say a Prayer

One of the lifeboats from the already sunken ship was crammed with frightened passengers, fearful of being swamped. One of them said to the first mate in command of the lifeboat, "You are first in command here, and it's your duty to care for the spiritual life and safety of the passengers. Say a prayer, man. Say a prayer!" Bewildered, the mate, unused to praying or any religious exercise, blurted out, "God, you know I've never talked to you before, but I promise you this: get us out of this mess, and I'll never bother you again!"

Prayer Means Action

A family was destitute so the church came together to pray. A farm boy came with a wagon of groceries. He said, "I brung Pa's prayers."

Charles Bee Hodge, Jr.,
My God and Prayer