

35. Praying always in the Spirit

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The story is told of a small town in which there was not even one liquor store. Eventually, however, a nightclub was built right on Main Street. Members of one of the churches in the area were so disturbed that they conducted several all night prayer meetings, and asked the Lord to burn down that den of iniquity.

Lightning struck the nightclub a short time later, and it was completely destroyed by fire. The owner, knowing how the church people had prayed, sued them for the damages. His attorney claimed that their prayers had caused the loss. The congregation, on the other hand, hired a lawyer and fought the charges that they had nothing to do with fire.

After much deliberation the judge declared, "It's the opinion of the court that wherever the guilt may lie, the nightclub keeper is the one who really believes in prayer while the church members do not!"

If I want to make Christians squirm from the pulpit, all I have to do is question people's prayer life. We all know that our prayer life is a lot to be desired. Can we agree on that? I would be the first one to agree that I need to pray to the Lord more fervently. I don't care about the length of my prayers. My most fervent prayer can be very short.

Prayer is the most ancient, most universal, and most intense expression of the religious instinct. Even the followers of cults and occults pray. They might even do it more fervently than we would.

The idea of prayer is speaking, pleading, and requesting human's supplications to divine being. If you are a born-again Christian, you are praying to the Lord God Himself who made the entire universe with a few sentences of His Word. But if you are not a born-again Christian, your prayer is not accepted by the Lord in spite of what you'd like to believe. Does He know what you are praying, absolutely! But He doesn't listen to you, because you are not His child.

We now are at the last portion of the Book of Ephesians. We've certainly covered a lot of ground in this letter from apostle Paul to the believers of the Ephesian church, haven't we? Apostle Paul has taken us from the "heavenly places" in chapter 1 to earth's spiritual battleground in chapter 6.

In between, the apostle has shown us how the Lord lavished His love and grace on us in redemption; how He took the alienated and made them cherished members of His own family; how He turned our scarring divisions into His healing unity; how He rescued us from the pit of deception and placed us on the pinnacle of truth; how He led us out of darkness to walk in His radiant light. Oh, we've learned so much.

Since apostle taught us the secret of the spiritual warfare weapons to the believers of Christ, he takes us one step further with a challenge to pray always with perseverance in the Spirit.

A. PRAYING ALWAYS IN THE SPIRIT

Ephesians 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

1) Praying always

What does this verse mean? Are we ought to pray non- stop 24/7? No, that is not what Paul meant. Jesus didn't teach us to ramble something all the time.

Matthew 6:7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

This verse and 1 Thessalonians 5:17's "Pray without ceasing" say to us, "Always be in communion with the Lord. A Christian must "pray always" because he is always subject to temptations and attacks of satan and his cohort demons. A surprise attack from them has caught off guard countless believers who forgot to "pray without ceasing."

Please don't give me that lame excuse – "I don't have time to pray." I tell you this: WE DO HAVE TIME TO PRAY far more than we realize. We give more time for the things that we'd like to do, don't we? So when we say, "I don't have time to pray," it only tells ourselves and the demons who want to hurt us that we are not in contact with our God. Listen, we need prayer to the Lord the most when we have the least time to pray.

God hears our prayers wherever we offer them. Consider some of the places that people of the Bible prayed: Jonah prayed from the stomach of a big fish. Daniel prayed in a den of lions. David prayed in a cave and also in the wilderness. And Peter prayed both on the water and in it after he sank. Wherever you are, God hear your prayer. Also, any position is acceptable for prayer: you can pray kneeling, standing, sitting, lying down, or even driving, but always keep your eyes open, of course.

The key is that we should pray frequently. We should pray when we wake up; we should pray throughout the day. We should pray before we go to sleep. Not always begging for what we want, but acknowledging who our God is and giving thanks for all the things He has done for us. That is His will for us.

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Prayer can be continuous. Let me give you an example:

1 Kings 18:15 Then Elijah said, "As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today."

Elijah was seeking an audience with the wicked King Ahab. Elijah was aware of the fact that wherever he went, he stood in the presence of God.

We, too, are never alone. Wherever we go, God is with us. We can commune with Him and fellowship with Him and pray to Him and hear from Him. That is the idea of continuous prayer: being in fellowship and communion with God.

If you want to grow spiritually, then make prayer a vital and regular part of your life.

2) With all prayer

The apostle said, "with all prayer," what does it mean? There is more than one kind of praying: prayer, supplication, intercession, and thanksgiving. Any believer who

prays only to ask for things is missing out on blessings that come with intercessions and giving of thanks. In fact, thanksgiving is a great prayer weapon for defeating satan. "Praise changes things" as much as "prayer changes things." While we praise the Lord for His goodness, love for us, and faithfulness, satan's deceptions and temptations melt away. Intercession for others can bring victory to our own lives.

Some Bible commentators believe that prayer is another piece of our spiritual armor, which is possible; but certainly it's one of the ways we stand firm in the protection God has provided for us. We can even think of prayer as the way we put our armor on.

3) No age limit

Please notice that Paul didn't set any age limit on who could wield our spiritual weaponry in prayer. Little children can intercede for others, taking their tender hearts to God, and so can men and women in their eighties, nineties, and even hundreds! There is no physical handicap limitation. As long as you have a thinking mind, you can pray to the Lord. All of us are a vital part of Christ's body; no one is unimportant or unneeded. Prayer is something all of us can do to help each other.

I love praying with kids. They do their kid things that are so cute. Sometimes their prayers are heartfelt and so sincere, while at other times, they will be cheating or not praying at all.

When my wife Karen brings a lunch to our grandson Micah, all three of us gather together and pray. While I lead a really short prayer for a meal, Micah already goes to town with his mac and cheese. He holds his fork in one hand and shovels mac and cheese into his mouth with the other. At the end of the prayer, I said to him, "Say, 'Thank You, Jesus.'" With a mouthful of mac and cheese, he yells, "Thank You, Jesus." Does he understand who Jesus is? No, not yet, but he will someday soon.

4) To our God only

When you pray, please do not be concerned about what others might think about your prayers. You are speaking to the Lord who already knows everything about you. You are not going to impress Him by using Bible college professor's fancy dancy verbiage. Just be yourself and be honest and pour your heart to Him. That's all.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Then why pray? The value of prayer is that it keeps us in touch with God. Prayer should be thought of as a relationship between a father and child. We may think that God should give us everything that we need and want, for every situation, all at once. But if God were to give us all of His glorious gifts in one lump sum, there would be the danger of enjoying the gifts and forgetting the Giver.

God gives us what we need as we need it. This also keeps us dependent on Him.

B. PAUL'S PRAYER REQUESTS

Ephesians 6:19-20 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Oh yes, even apostle Paul gets discouraged and intimidated. He was beaten, stoned, and became a regular jail bird. He'd been in the joint so long, he and the praetori-

um guards were on first name basis. He also knew that someday emperor Nero's executioner would come by to chop off his head with an ax. But he didn't want to live in fear.

Instead, as he stood before the most powerful leaders of their world, Paul wanted to keep Christ preeminent and make His message known. He was, in effect, promoting the sovereignty of God's kingdom to the heathen leaders who could flip down their thumbs and execute him. So he asked the Ephesians to help shore up his courage to represent the true King as he should.

All of us, no matter what kind of situation we may be in, need the courage to stand by Christ and keep telling the truth. Souls are at stake – even if they are the souls of our enemies. And what we have to look forward to in heaven far outweighs the hurts this world can inflict.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

If you tend to be a fearful person, make Paul's prayer your own. And remember what Moses told the Israelites as they prepared to take the Promised Land for God:

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

C. FAREWELL

Ephesians 6:21-24 But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; 22 whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts. 23 Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

This great man of God who wrote 13 Books out of 27 NT Books, could be too busy for little and not-so-important people. Not only did he diligently convey Christ's Gospel to people in widespread regions, but he also kept in touch with those he'd ministered to over the years. His relationships weren't merely mentoring ones; he had dear friends on whom he relied for both encouragement and help. And Tychicus was such a friend.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Instead of trying to twist God's arm with your prayer, put yourself in His hands.

Prayer to the Lord is God's way of sharing His journey with us. Can God do everything without us? You think? Yes, thousands of times yes. Could He have His angels do whatever we are supposed to do without making horrible messes all the time like we do? Again, yes, yes, yes. But our Lord wants us to share His journey, His time, His effort by including us.

2) Our highest privilege is to talk to God; our highest duty is to listen to Him.

To be successful as a Christian, you must have a deep prayer life.

3) We need prayer the most when we have the least time to pray .
Prayer is the bridge between panic and peace.

4) If you want to grow spiritually, then make prayer a vital and regular part of your life.