Pray Always
1 Thessalonians 5:17
January 27, 2002

1. **SERMON NOTES**

   When we overemphasize God's response (or seeming silence) to our petitions we're missing the point of prayer. — Lonni Collins Pratt

   **A. The Context of Prayer**
   1. coupled with “pray” are ________ and ________
   2. they are held together as each is to be done ___________
   3. and each of these is an aspect of the ________ of ________

   **B. Prayer is work**
   1. because it requires intense __________
   2. because we are following God’s ________ or commands
   3. because it bears with it a ______________
   4. because it comes with an expected ____________

   **C. Prayer as an athletic endeavour**
   1. needs ___________ to “keep us in condition”
   2. needs ________ to become a habit
   3. needs __________ to pay the price required
   4. a. that may disrupt our _________________
   b. success measured not in words but in the _____________

   **D. Prayer as a pleasure !**
   1. since it is a time of ____________, of talking with the Father
   2. since it is a time of ____________ or Fellowship with our Lord
   3. since it is a time of ___________ God in His love and His majesty

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**E. Some Practical Aspects of Prayer that I can Learn are**

1. __________
2. __________
3. __________
4. from the model of Abraham (Genesis 18:23–32)
5. from the model of Moses (Exodus 32:9–14)
6. from the model of Nehemiah (1:4, 2:4, 4:4–5, 4:9, 5:19)
7. from the model of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 14:23, 15:36, 26:26; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:15-16, 6:12, 9:18, 22:4; John 17)

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**Scriptures referenced in this message:**
Prayer is not easy but requires effort: Colossians 4:12, Ephesians 6:18; The reward of prayer: John 16:24; Christian life as a race: 1 Corinthians 9:24; Discipleship (and prayer) may disrupt our lives: Matthew 10:24-42, Micah 7:6; Dedication to the habit of prayer: Romans 12:1, 12; Pleasure in talking with God: Luke 24:32; Pleasure of communion with God: Psalm 42:1–5; Prayer an opportunity to cast off our cares: 1 Peter 5:6–7; An example of the most important prayer, repentance: Luke 18:10-14
A number of ministers were assembled for the discussion of difficult questions; and, among others, it was asked, how the command to “pray without ceasing” could be complied with. Various suppositions were started; and at length one of the number was appointed to write an essay upon it, to be read at the next meeting; ... which being overheard by a female servant, she exclaimed,

“What! a whole month waiting to tell the meaning of that text? It is one of the easiest and best texts in the Bible.”

“Well, well!” said an old minister; “Mary, what can you say about it? Let us know how you understand it. Can you pray all the time?”

“Oh yes, sir!”

“What! when you have so many things to do?”

“Why, sir, the more I have to do, the more I can pray.”

“Indeed! Well, Mary, do let us know how it is; for most people think otherwise.”

“Well, sir,” said the girl, “when I first open my eyes in the morning, I pray, ‘Lord open the eyes of my understanding;’ and, while I am dressing, I pray that I may be clothed with the robe of righteousness; and, when I have washed me, I ask for the washing of regeneration; and, as I begin to work, I pray that I may have strength equal to my day; when I begin to kindle up the fire, I pray that God’s work may revive in my soul; and, as I sweep out the house, I pray that my heart may be cleansed from all its impurities; and, while preparing and partaking of breakfast, I desire to be fed with the hidden manna and sincere milk of the Word; and, as I am busy with the little children, I look up to God as my Father and pray for the spirit of adoption, that I may be His child: and so on all day. Everything I do furnishes me with a thought for prayer.”

“Enough, enough!” cried the old divine: “these things are revealed to babes, and often hid from the wise and prudent. Go on, Mary,” said he; “pray without ceasing; and as for us, my brethren, let us bless the Lord for this exposition, and remember that He has said, ‘The meek will He guide in judgment.’ ”

After this little event, the essay was not considered necessary.
In like fashion, we probably now don’t really need to have a sermon this morning ... however, we are!

B. This command the second of a three-diamond cluster in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: **Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**

1. **Rejoice** — last Sunday
2. Pray
   a. today, the FEBCC day of fasting and prayer
   b. I won’t be talking about fasting today
   c. prayer a complex enough subject in itself
      (A) won’t exhaust the subject in one sermon
      (B) looked in Thomson Chain references
         (1) General Reference to
         (2) Enjoined
         (3) Answered
         (4) Answer Promised
         (5) Unanswered
         (6) Heard
         (7) & so on for about 65 facets of prayer
      (C) won’t exhaust the need while we live
3. **Thank** — next Sunday, our communion message
4. these three being coupled together by
   a. the idea of **constancy** in their use
   b. their being the **will of God** in the Christian’s life

C. **Prayer is work**
1. expressed in other terms ... prayer is not easy
   a. *Colossians 4:12 NAS*: Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bond-slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always labouring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.
   b. *Ephesians 6:18 WEY*: Pray with unceasing prayer and **entreaty** [supplication] on every fitting occasion
in the Spirit, and be always on the alert to seize opportunities for doing so, with unwearied persistence and entreaty on behalf of all God’s people,
c. the Bible gives the example of God the Son in Gethsemane as how children of God need to strive in prayer “unto blood” against sin
d. so in the Bible, we hear connected with prayer, such words as supplication and fervent to indicate the intense effort required in prayer — it’s not easy

2. like work in that it is following God’s orders
   a. in work: not always things we want to do
   b. putting in our honest eight hours labour
   c. but we do this because it is part of the job
   d. so, with prayer, we do it because it is part of the work that God has given us
      (A) doesn’t sound very spiritual!!
      (B) but that is the nature of practical Christianity

3. like work there it bears with it a responsibility
   a. in your – so-called – “secular” work
      (A) when there is a special need
      (B) step up, go beyond our job description
      (C) why? – so we do not let down our boss, fellow-workers, customers
   b. our Christian responsibilities
      (A) concern, love, helping, ministry
      (B) will often drive us to our knees

4. like wages for work there is recompense expected
   a. we may like our job, but would we do it if there were no pay-cheque!
   b. God has rewards those faithful in this matter
   c. John 16:24 NIV: Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.
D. **Prayer as an athletic endeavour**

1. Paul uses the athletic figure to portray the Christian life (as a race, a contest, a boxer training)
   a. 1 Corinthians 9:24 PHIL: Do you remember how, on a racing-track, every competitor runs, but only one wins the prize? Well, you ought to run with your minds fixed on winning the prize!

2. Prayer requires *exercise* to keep us in condition
   a. runners “hit the wall” – mine used to be at 50 yards – with metrification it’s down to 5 metres
      (A) takes mental strength to press beyond this
      (B) have to subserve the body to the will
      (C) but only after one gets into condition
   b. prayer, if “always”, goes to the end of the run
      (A) past where the mind wanders
      (B) past where the body complains
      (C) past the loss of interest
      (D) past the wall, so ...

3. Prayer requires *practice* to become a habit
   a. we have various people running past our house
      (A) the PT class from the high school nearby
         (1) some at front, pressing the pace
         (2) some straggling along at the end
      (B) some joggers
         (1) get a “high” from running
         (2) overall feeling of good health
      (C) I trust that the analogies to prayer are self-explanatory: if you don’t feel spiritually fit, then do some spiritual jogging in prayer
   b. can form good, as well as bad, habits
   c. Coleridge: Pray always, says the Apostle; that is, have the habit of prayer, turning your thoughts into acts by connecting them with the idea of the redeeming God.
4. Prayer requires dedication to meet its price
   a. example: may disrupt our comfortable life
      (A) well-known that professional athletes don’t have stable marriages and family lives due to the dedication required by the profession
      (B) Jesus in that passage on discipleship in Matthew 10:24–42, quoting from Micah 7:6: Matthew 10:35-36 NIV: For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’
   b. success not the words but in the performance
      (A) Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer. Pray often; for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan. - John Bunyan
      (B) it doesn’t take Satan’s personal intervention to keep us from prayer ... our old nature is quite capable of that without any help at all
   c. Romans 12
      (A) a callow youth of 18, first preached from this 45 years ago, service led by “Young People”
      (B) Romans 12:1, 12 PHIL: With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. ... Base your happiness on your hope in Christ. When trials come endure them patiently; steadfastly maintain the habit of prayer.
      (C) AV in verse 12 has “instant in prayer” – urgent, pressing, without delay – Greek: to give constant attention, persevere
      (D) that is what dedication involves

E. Prayer as a pleasure!
   1. John 16:24 NIV: Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

   2. a time of communication – of conversing with God
      a. David Winter in "Christian Classics in Modern English: Brother Lawrence's Practicing the Presence of God" 5
From the time when God became real to me, I knew that communicating with him – two way communication – was the most important thing in the world. To communicate with everyone else and be deaf and dumb to God is to turn our priorities upside down, isn't it?

b. the experience of the disciples on Emmaus Rd

(A) Luke 24:32 AV “... Did not our heart burn within us? ...”

3. a time of communion – spending time with God
   a. David’s psalms of fellowship with God
      (A) Psalm 42:1-5 AV: As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.
   b. in the midst of a day of toil, we need to have times of resting in Christ – “Jesus, I am resting, ...”
   c. N. Hale: — {source unknown}

      Father, Thy presence ever near
      Help us to feel, and know
      That we may find Thy sweet peace here
      And walk with Christ below.

4. a time of enjoying God in His love, in His majesty
   a. of high honour before His throne
   b. of leaving, for a moment, a difficult world
      (A) some would label this escapism ...
      (B) but no: Barbara Cornet Ryberg: — {source unknown}

      Some tell us that prayer is all in the mind,
      That the only result is the solace we find;
      That God does not answer, nor hear when we call:
We commune with our own hearts in prayers; that is all!
But we who have knelt with our burden and care,
And have made all our problems a matter of prayer,
Have seen God reach down from His heaven above,
Move mountains, touch hearts, in His infinite love;
We know that God works in a wonderful way
On behalf of His children who trust Him and pray

5. a time of casting off cares
   a. 1 Peter 5:6-7 WEY: Humble yourselves therefore beneath the mighty hand of God, so that at the right
time He may set you on high. Throw the whole of your anxiety upon Him, because He Himself cares
for you.

F. Prayer ... some practical aspects
   1. this scripture does not mean that we have to sit all day with folded hands and closed eyes in an attitude
   of formal prayer. It has reference rather to our whole attitude in life. It means keeping our lines
   constantly in touch with Heaven. It is to recognize that all of life is sacred and that we must live in an
   atmosphere that is charged with the spirit of devotion and prayer. It means to be conscious at all times
   of God’s presence and power and to silently commune with Him. —{Anonymous source unknown}

2. The secret of prayer is prayer in secret. —{Anonymous, source unknown}

3. get started ... keep going
   a. our orchard
      (A) used to have 15–20 trees, each yielding a bushel or two of apples a year
      (B) were girdled by field mice, and lost them all within a few years
      (C) every year, think about replanting it
         (1) but, need to spray them
         (2) and, will I be alive to see it through?
         (3) so I put off getting new trees and planting
b. with similar excuses, we put off praying or we don’t carry it through once started
   (A) “I’m not seeing any result”
   (B) “I’ve prayed for that already”
   (C) when should continue in trust
4. Some Biblical models of prayer (see notes handed out for some references on these)
   a. Abraham (Gn 18:23-32)
   b. Moses (Ex 32:9-14)
   c. Nehemiah (Ne 1:4, 2:4, 4:4-5, 4:9, 5:19)
   d. the Lord, Jesus Christ (Mt 14:23, 15:36, 26:26, Mk 1:35, Lk 5:15-16, 6:12, 9:18, 22:41-42)

G. **Finally — God Answers Prayer**
   1. the most important prayer is the first one that God hears — as told by Jesus in the parable in
      a. Luke 18:10-14 NAS:  Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer.  The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.
      b. when you have uttered this prayer in like manner then you will know the power and joy of obeying this command “Pray always – without ceasing”
   2. so that each of may pray in confidence to the God Who hears and Who answers prayer
Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV American Standard Version of 1901
AV Authorized (King James) Version
NAS New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
RSV Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Holwick” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

Discipleship Journal, #79, Jan. 1, 1994, Holwick Illustration #3873

Biblical Museum (1872) Volume IV, page 307

Source, Expositor’s Greek Testament, under this verse

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