

Pray Without Ceasing – Part 1

The Power Of Prayer

Prayer Situations

1. After the death of a loved one.
2. Just after losing your job.
3. After scoring the winning touchdown.
4. When you don't get the job you wanted.
5. When you learn that you will never be able to have a child naturally.
6. After winning the Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes.

What might prevent you from coming to God in prayer in these situations and what might encourage you to pray?

Things That Get In The Way Of Prayer

What do you think are some of the most common barriers that keep people from praying more often, confidently and fervently?

Look up the following Bible verses and summarize the barriers to prayer.

Genesis 3:1-10

Job 9:1-20

Proverbs 1:28-33

Hebrews 12:18-21

Continue with Hebrews 12:22-24. How do these verses begin to reveal the solution to the problem?

In the meaning of the 3rd Article of the Creed Luther said, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." What does this tell us about our problem with prayer?

Crossing Over To Prayer

Story of Traffic....

We cannot cross over the barriers between us and God by ourselves. Crossing over in the area of prayer is no more possible for us than crossing over from sin to holiness, from death to life, or from condemnation to salvation.

How do the following Bible verses tell us "crossing over" takes place?

John 3:3-7

Romans 5:1-2

Boldness and confidence in prayer is a product of a renewed relationship with God. Consider Luther's explanation to the introduction to the Lord's Prayer, "With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." How does this help us to pray?

Look up the following Bible verses and note how they assure us that God is our Father who can be approached in prayer.

1 John 3:1

Romans 8:14-16

Galatians 4:4-7

Our Source Of Power In Prayer

Because of our standing in Christ as forgiven children of God we have the right and privilege of approaching God in prayer as our loving Father. But what about those times when we don't feel forgiven or feel like praying? What if our hearts have been overwhelmed, our minds just don't work, or our mouths cannot form the words we know we should say? What if we cannot even seem to know what we should be praying in the situation we are facing?

Read Romans 8:26-34 for the answer.

Who prays and pleads for us?

What are some of the weaknesses we have that hinder our prayer life with which the Holy Spirit can help us?

What are some examples of times when we want to pray, need to pray, and know we should pray, but cannot "find the words"?

What comfort are we given in verses 26-27?

How might the promise in verse 28 encourage us to pray in every circumstance?

Plugged In To The Power

Owners manuals offer as a first solution to trouble-shooting: "Check to see that the power cord is plugged in." Even though we know where the power is we often remain powerless. We lack power, not because it is unavailable to us, but because we fail to remain "plugged in." In his book God's Transforming Power Lloyd John Ogilvie writes:

Prayer starts with God. It is His idea. The desire to pray is the result of God's greater desire to talk with us. He has something to say when we feel the urge to pray. He is the initiator. The keen desire to begin and end the day with prolonged prayer is His gift. The sense of need to pray for challenges and opportunities through the day is because He has wisdom and insight He wants to impart. When we face crises and suddenly feel the urge to pray for strength, that feeling is a response to the Lord's invasion of our minds, which triggers the thought of needing help, which is congealed into the desire to pray. He, not us, was the author of the longing for His help.

Discuss Ogilvie's statement...

Read 1 John 5:14-15. How can this verse help you pray with greater confidence?

Trusting God's Answer

Prayer Answered According To Our Will

A father hold's in his arms his dear child who had fallen through the ice and was rescued and says excitedly, "Our prayers were answered!" What did the father actually mean by that statement? What does that often used statement imply?

The Big Question

"Why doesn't God answer my prayers?"

Consider a time when you may have felt abandoned or bewildered by God, as if He were not answering your prayer, and check the items below that describe what it was like.

God doesn't care about me/my problem.

God can't do what I asked Him to.

God is punishing me for something.

Is God really there at all?

I didn't pray hard enough or long enough

Other:

Father Knows Best

Our struggles with God's answers (or apparent lack of them) to our prayers are real and difficult. The Lord knows our weaknesses and is patient and forgiving. As the Psalmist points out, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him; for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust." (Ps. 103:13-14)

These struggles can be minimized by learning and taking to heart these scriptural principles regarding prayer:

God wants us to **know** that He will answer every believing prayer.

God wants us to **accept** the answer that He gives to our prayer.

God wants us to **trust** that the answer He gives is the very best answer we could receive.

What do the following Bible verses tell us about God answering prayer?

Isaiah 55:6-7

Isaiah 65:24

Luke 11:9-10

What is God's response to each of the following requests?

Exodus 33:12-23

2 Chronicles 1:7-13

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Imagine that your son or daughter has come to you with a request. Are you obligated to give a particular answer? If not, what will guide your response to your child?

In what ways might your responses as a parent reflect God's responses to His children?

In what ways might your responses be different from God's responses? (Nt. Matthew 7:9-11)

Two Examples Of God's Answers

Example 1 – A King who prayed

1. Read 2 Kings 20:1-6. What was Hezekiah's request? Is this a common request for people in his condition?
2. After the miracle the Lord granted to Hezekiah, how did things turn out for him? Was his response to God a faithful one or not? (See 2 Kings 20:19)
3. Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, was born during the extra 15 years of life God granted Hezekiah. What kind of king was Manasseh? (See 2 Kings 21:11-16)
4. Why do you think the Lord answered Hezekiah's prayer the way He did? What does God's acting for Hezekiah

show us about God and what He is like?

Example 2 – A Son who prayed

1. Read Hebrews 5:7-10 and compare it to Matthew 26:36-46. How does the writer of Hebrews describe Jesus' prayer activity? Why were His prayers heard by the Father?
2. What was the Father's answer to Jesus? Why did the Father answer this way?
3. What does this prayer and answer relationship between God and His Son teach us?

What God Wants

God wants us to come to Him in prayer with nothing but His promises in mind, knowing, accepting and trusting in what He generously and graciously gives us.

Read Colossians 3:17.

1. We are instructed to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Why are our prayers to be prayed through Him, also?
2. Why can we give thanks to the Father through Jesus every time we pray, even before we know what God's answer will be?
3. How can this help us be more comfortable and confident in prayer?

Pray Without Ceasing – Part 2

Praying with One Will

A House Divided Will Not Stand (Nt. Matthew 12:22-28)

What accusations were the Pharisees leveling against Jesus?

How did Jesus respond to their accusation?

What does this teach us regarding a battle of wills [good and evil] in prayer?

An Undivided Heart

We cannot continually be fighting against God's will and at the same time pray, "Thy will be done." Ideally we need to approach God's Throne of Grace with an undivided heart.

When our wills and God's will are in conflict we need to know that God always has in mind what is good for us. How do the following verses help you understand this?

Psalm 51:10-12, 15

Jeremiah 24:7

Jeremiah 32:39

Ezekiel 11:19

Romans 12:1-2

How do the following verses tell us God gives us an undivided heart?

Galatians 3:26-27

2 Corinthians 5:17

Romans 6:4

The undivided heart grows in love, devotion, and loyalty toward God. But it does not stop with God and us. We are recreated to live in unity with God's people. What images of unity between God and His people are given in the following verses?

John 15:5, 12-16

Ephesians 1:20-23

1 Peter 2:4-10

With One Voice

Praying according to God's will is powerful as the two wills are made one. What two spirits cry out in prayer, practically as one voice according to Romans 8:26-27?

With Christ praying for us and the Spirit praying with us (even shaping our prayers and expressing what we can't) what encouragement do we have to pray?

Read 1 John 2:1-2

What is one need we have that Jesus brings to His Father's throne?

What is Jesus asking on our behalf?

What do we know will be the Father's reply?

Thy Will Be Done

The pivotal question: Is prayer a way for us to get what we want, or a means for God to lead us to desire what He gives?

Which of the following is communicated by Psalm 37:4?

If we show love toward God, He will give us anything we want.

If we are delighted by God and His gifts, He will change our hearts and give us new desires – we will want Him and what He wants.

Which of these attitudes about prayer are reflected in much of modern American religion?

What was Paul praying for that would help his readers in the following verses?

Colossians 1:9

Ephesians 1:17-18

Read John 15:7 and compare it to the following statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

The child learns to speak because his father speaks to him. He learns the speech of his father. So we learn to speak to God because God has spoken to us and speaks to us... Repeating God's own words after Him, we begin to pray to Him.

According to this verse and the words of Bonhoeffer how can you strengthen your life of prayer?

How are many who do not worship regularly or give attention to reading, hearing and applying God's Word, yet still claim a faith relationship by saying, "I still pray..." even more spiritually deficient than they imagine?

A Pattern For Prayer

Consider the Lord's Prayer as the best pattern for God-pleasing prayer. How many petitions deal with furthering God's will? How many deal with material needs? How many deal with our spiritual needs?

What can we learn from this?

Pray In Reverse

Our prayers often become self-centered as we ask only from our viewpoint. (Nt. James 4:3)

We should practice praying "in reverse," that is praying with God's prayer list. If God were praying for you [remembering that both the Son and the Holy Spirit do intercede for you constantly] what things would He be asking?

Let this, what God has revealed regarding what He wants for you, guide your prayer life.

Your Prayers Matter

Your Father Wants to Hear from You

Imagine you are a young person going away to college. Your father drives you to school, far from home, and helps you get settled in your dorm room. As he leaves he gives you a big hug. Then he says, "I love you. Your mother and I want to help you all we can to do your best, and to be happy here at college. Whatever happens, we will still love you. Be sure to call us next Saturday.

Now what if during the first week at school you skip your classes, waste all the money your father gave you, and get into trouble with the campus police because of a party that got out of control. Would the words, "Be sure to call us next Saturday" sound like good news or bad news, a command or an invitation?

Now what if that first week went differently? You attended classes, used your time and money wisely, and only had minor problems. How would your father's words sound, and would they seem like a command or invitation?

Look up the following verses and label them as a "command" or "invitation" to prayer.

Psalm 50:15

Psalm 62:8

Isaiah 30:19

Philippians 4:6-7

1 Timothy 2:1-4

James 5:16

What Can We Tell Him?

Some people wonder what the purpose of prayer is if God already knows ahead of time the content of our prayer and what we need. Our purpose is not to "inform" God. He is all-knowing. We can spare Him the details, unless we just like to repeat them. A good guide for prayer is **ACTS** which stands for **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, **S**upplication.

Adoration: Praising God for who He is a prevalent part of many of the psalms. Consider the following examples:

Psalm 42:1-2; Psalm 46:1-3; Psalm 47:1-2; Psalm 48:1; Revelation 4:8

Confession: In the early church worshipers would not think of coming before God's presence without first confessing their sins, and only when they had received absolution would they enter the church, singing an entrance hymn of praise [Introit]. Sin as a barrier must be removed through forgiveness in Christ. Read the following verses that show us why confession is such an important part of our prayer life:

Psalm 51:3-4, 9-12; James 4:1-3; 1 John 1:8-10; Luke 18:10-14

Thanksgiving: Praising and thanking God for what He has done, is doing, and will do for us. Consider and discuss the following verses:

Psalm 136; Philippians 1:3-6; Philippians 2:5-11

Supplication: When Jesus taught us to pray for our "daily bread" He was showing us that we are welcome to ask our Father for anything we need. Read the following verses and see if they offer tips on how you might formulate your prayers of supplication.

Luke 18:1-5; Matthew 7:7-11

Pray Constantly and Confidently because the prayers of the saints are powerful and effective.