

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Pray Without Ceasing 1 Thessalonians 5:17**

When we come to Jesus and receive Him as our Lord and Savior we, by the grace of God, enter into a personal relationship with God. How close of a relationship do we have with God? **1 John 3:1** tells us “**See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.**” We are the “**children of God.**” And as the children of God we have the opportunity to enter into the presence of God and talk with Him at any time. We do not have to make an appointment.

What a wonderful privilege that has been granted us in Christ. But I am sorry to say that for the most part the Church of Jesus Christ fails to fully appreciate the blessings of this wonderful privilege. If we are going to grow up into the fullness of the blessing of this privilege of access we must take certain important steps of understanding. The very first step of understanding is seeking to be obedient to the command of **1 Thess. 5:17.**

#### WE ARE TO PRAY UNCEASINGLY

Let us read **1 Thess. 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.”** The word translated “without ceasing” (ADIALEIPTOS) certainly does not demand that we engage constantly in the act of uttering prayers without interruption. In fact the same word is used in **1 Thess. 2:13** where it says, “**and for this reason we also constantly (unceasingly) thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.**” Paul and his companions though saying that they were constantly thanking God for them did not mean to imply that they were constantly engaged in the act of uttering prayers of thanksgiving for them. The practical demands of life would certainly make that totally impossible. And neither does Paul expect us to think that the command in **1 Thess. 5:17** would mean that either.

“Praying without ceasing” does not mean that we are to be constantly engaging ourselves in the act of praying without interruption. But rather Paul is calling the Thessalonian believers as well as ourselves to pray as a way of life.

When we are yielded to the Lord and rightly relating to His Spirit then our prayers should be very much like a ball that is being held under water by circumstances. And when the circumstances of our lives change in such a way to permit a prayer or prayers to surface that it will in fact do that.

If you are here and you say a prayer in the morning and then may even say another prayer at night, and feel that this adequately fulfills the thrust of this passage you are sorely wrong. Perhaps to help you get a better feel for what I am saying perhaps you need to think of the ball as being much larger than a little ball submerged with a finger in a glass and think of the ball as being a very large beach ball. Have you ever tried to keep a large highly inflated beach ball under the water? It is on top of the water much more than it is ever submerged under the water.

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Prayer should not just be a morning and evening ritual. Paul is saying that prayer is to be a constant way of life. Our thoughts throughout the day should be like a trigger to launch prayers. And that is what I pointed out to you in **1 Thess. 3:6-10**, **“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, (7) for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; (8) for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. (9) For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, (10) as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?”** The desire that Paul and His companions had to see the Thessalonians acted like a trigger to cause prayer to be expressed.

If our thoughts generally speaking are not triggering various forms of prayer, whether they are prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving or supplication then we are falling short of the standard. We are not praying unceasingly. We have sinned.

But we are not finished yet. We need to continue on. What is another important step that we must take in our prayer life if we are going to experience the full blessing of it?

### WE ARE TO PERSIST IN PRAYER

It is very easy to become weary in praying. It is not an easy undertaking especially when we are praying for a certain thing which is very important to us but it appears to us after praying for a long time that the answer is no. Certainly the Apostle Paul and His companions could have become discouraged because of their inability to once again visit Thessalonica. Remember how Paul in **1 Thess. 2:18** said, **“For we wanted to come to you - I, Paul, more than once - and yet Satan thwarted us.”** But even though Paul could have easily said, “I guess God does not want me to go to Thessalonica,” and ceased to pray that certainly this was not the case at all. Paul continued in prayer. Paul persisted in prayer. As long as it was a burden on Paul’s heart to pray he was determined to keep praying and this is what we must learn to do. And this is what God expects us to do. And this is clearly communicated to us in the form of two very interesting parables. These parables are particularly interesting because in contrast to other parables that Jesus gave these parables which typically make comparisons with God or His kingdom, these parables relate truth about God by making a contrast with Him. From these two parables we learn something about God by considering an illustration of someone totally and utterly unlike God.

The first parable is found in **Luke 11** the parable of the “reluctant friend.” This parable was given by Jesus in the context of prayer. The disciples had said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” He responds with what is commonly referred to as the “Lord’s prayer.” In this model prayer He communicated with His disciples the general content of a prayer. But then beginning in **V. 5** He goes on to illustrate for his disciples the importance of persistence in praying. Let us read **“And He said to them, “Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to Him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; (6) for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him;”**

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**(7) and from inside he shall answer and say, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ (8) I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.** Jesus is sharing this parable with His disciples and with us to illustrate the importance of persistence. But even beyond the emphasis on persistence we must also see the contrast that is being made. If this “reluctant friend” would respond to the persistent pleadings of the man who had the need **HOW MUCH MORE WOULD THIS BE TRUE OF GOD. PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING MOVES THE HAND OF GOD. HE HAS PURPOSED THIS SO.**

The second parable is found in **Luke 18** and is commonly referred to as the parable of the “unrighteous judge.” Again Jesus is once again instructing His disciples on prayer. And this is what he said, **‘Now he was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, (2) saying “there was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. (3) And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Give me legal protection from my opponent. (4) And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, (5) yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.” (6) And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; (7) now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night?’** And of course the answer to that question is “certainly.”

Not only are we to be praying about things as a way of life allowing our thoughts to trigger our prayers, but we must appreciate the importance of persisting in our prayers as long as we have the thoughts.

Some people have thought that Jesus teaching on persistence in prayer contradicts what Jesus said in **Matt. 6:7** when he said **“And when you are praying do not use meaningless repetition.....”** We must be very clear to point out that Christ is not condemning repetition in praying. He is condemning meaningless repetition in praying. Repetition becomes meaningless when the words are not connected to a heartfelt desire. If our prayers are simply empty ritual, heartless babble, that flows only from our mouths then our prayers have become meaningless repetition. The man who came to his friend's house certainly did not fall into this category, he meant what he was asking for every time that he was asking it.

If we are going to experience the fullness of the blessings that are associated with prayer we must understand that we are to pray without ceasing, we are to persist in prayer, and lastly we are to pray submissively.

### WE ARE TO PRAY SUBMISSIVELY

When Jesus would give a certain promise related to prayer he would make it conditional. And the condition each time in its ultimate sense is based on submission to the will of God.

First we see Christ making answered prayer conditional on faith. We see that in two distinct instances.

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The first instance was when a distraught father brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples for healing, but they failed to help the boy in Matt. 17:20-21. They prayed for the boy to no avail. Why? Jesus told them in **V. 20**, because of the “littleness of their faith.”

The second instance was that of the withered fig tree which we find recorded for us in **Mt. 21:18-21** and also **Mark 11:23-24**. In **V. 20** the disciples asked the question, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” And in **V. 21** Jesus gave the answer. “Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it shall happen.”

But faith in what? Some people believe that it is a faith in the request but this is not correct, rather it is faith in God. If we are going to ask in faith we must believe that the request that we are making are in fact what? The will of God. Why? Because our faith is in God not in our request. And if we are in fact believing that what we are asking is the will of God and we are asking for it we are in effect doing what? Submitting ourselves to it.

He also made answered prayer conditional on “abiding.” In **John 15:7** Jesus said, “**If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.**” What does it mean to abide? “Abide” carries the meaning of “remain.” Considering the immediate context we would have to conclude that abiding in Jesus would mean that we remain in vital contact with Him. To put it very simply, abiding in Christ is, in reality, practicing the words of the old hymn “trust and obey.” “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” An obvious implication is submission to Christ and His words. It would be impossible for a believer to say on the one hand they are abiding in Christ and at the same time want anything else but that Christ’s will would be performed.

Jesus also made answered prayer conditional on “asking in His name.” In **John 14:13** Jesus said , “**And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**” Praying in Jesus' name is not ending your prayers with a fixed phrase, “this we ask in Jesus name.” Christ’s name from a Jewish mendacity would mean Christ Himself. We are to be praying even as Christ would pray. Again the obvious implication as we look at this condition is one of submission.

No human will was ever intended to stifle or frustrate God’s holy will. The old adage “prayer changes things” is certainly true in a very legitimate sense. However, it certainly does not mean that prayer changes God or His will!! The truth of Scripture is that God is ever using all things (including prayer) to transform us so that we are increasingly realizing in His will the great possible joy in human life.

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### CONCLUSION

Paul is finishing out this great epistle and he is reminding us of some very basic truths related to holy living. In V. 17 Paul addresses our responsibility to pray and I have taken the liberty to expand upon this verse to help us to see how we might experience the fullness of blessing that can be ours in prayer.

We need to pray without ceasing.....

We need to pray persistently .....

We need to pray submissively .....