Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Pray Without Ceasing . . . Really?
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5
Code: BQ011212

Pray without ceasing; (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Joyful believers will also be prayerful believers. Those who live their Christian lives in joyful dependency on God will continually recognize their own insufficiency and therefore constantly be in an attitude of prayer. Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians to **pray without ceasing** is thus a divine mandate to all believers. **Pray** is from *proseuchomai,* the most common New Testament word for prayer (e.g., Matt. 6:5–6; Mark 11:24; Luke 5:16; 11:1–2; Acts 10:9; Rom. 8:26; 1 Cor. 14:13–15; Eph. 6:18; Col. 1:9; 2 Thess. 3:1; James 5:13–14, 16). It encompasses all the aspects of prayer: submission, confession, petition, intercession, praise, and thanksgiving. **Without ceasing** means "constant" and defines prayer not as some perpetual activity of kneeling and interceding but as a way of life marked by a continual attitude of prayer.

The New Testament emphasis on the importance of prayer cannot be overstated. Already in 1 Thessalonians, Paul had written, "As we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face" (3:10). Many of Paul's other epistles also indicate the importance of prayer (Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 7:5; Eph. 6:18–19; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; 2 Thess. 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:8).

The strong scriptural emphasis on prayer suggests a substantial list of motivations for Christians to **pray without ceasing.** First of all—and the highest of all motives for believers—is their desire to glorify the Lord. Jesus taught the disciples in His model prayer, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' " (Matt. 6:9–10; cf. Dan. 9:4–19). Second, the desire for fellowship with God motivates believers to pray: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. 42:1–2; cf. 27:1, 4; 63:1–2; 84:1–2). Jesus said believers' prayers would be answered in order that "the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13; cf. v. 14).

Third, believers will pray for God to meet their needs: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11; cf. Luke 11:9–13; 1 John 5:14–15). Fourth, Christians will pray persistently for God's wisdom as they live in the midst of a sinful world: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5; cf. Matt. 6:13; 1 Cor. 10:13). Fifth, the desire for deliverance from trouble motivates prayer. Jonah is a vivid example of such motivation: "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, 'I

called out of my distress to the Lord, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice' " (Jonah 2:1–2; cf. Ps. 20:1).

Sixth, all Christians desire relief from fear and worry. Paul encouraged the Philippians: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6–7; cf. Ps. 4:1). A seventh motive is gratitude for past blessings, as the psalmist prayed:

O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us the work that You did in their days, in the days of old. You with Your own hand drove out the nations; then You planted them; You afflicted the peoples, then You spread them abroad. For by their own sword they did not possess the land, and their own arm did not save them, but Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, for You favored them. You are my King, O God. (Ps. 44:1–4*a*; cf. Phil. 1:3–5)

Eighth, believers pray to be freed from the guilt of sin. David expressed this when he wrote, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; and You forgave the guilt of my sin" (Ps. 32:5; cf. Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:9). Ninth, believers' concern for salvation of the lost causes them to pray. Paul captured this motivation in his words to Timothy:

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:1–4; cf. Matt. 9:37–38; Rom. 10:1)

Finally, and certainly as important as any of the motivations for Christians to **pray without ceasing,** is their desire for spiritual growth—for themselves and for fellow believers. Paul's petition to the Lord for the Ephesians is a model in this regard:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:14–21; cf. 1:15–19; Col. 1:9–12)

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