Praying Unceasingly
1 Thessalonians 5:17
52-28

Our text this morning is one verse, chapter 5 and verse 17. First Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.” The apostle Paul, in this simple and specific command, calls on Christians to pray, basically, as a way of life. I used to say praying is like breathing, it’s just normal, it’s just natural, it’s just living for us. We inhale, we exhale, the atmosphere of the presence and the power of God. And while that is true, it is also true that we, who are dependent on God, and who – if genuinely Christians – do commune with God, do not pray as unceasingly as we ought to pray. We are guilty, I think, of spiritually holding our breath. While we would assume that the pressure of the very environment of God’s presence would force us to pray, even as air pressure forces us to breathe, that’s not necessarily the case. And we as Christians restrict our intake, the very presence of God, due to our own sinfulness. And so comes the injunction of the apostle Paul to pray without ceasing, to pray at all times. Continual, persistent, incessant prayer is an essential part of Christian living, and it flows out of dependence on God.

I want us to understand this principle of praying without ceasing, and while just reading it gives you certain clear understanding, there is much more to enhance the significance of that statement found in Scripture, and I want to see if I can’t give you some of the riches of what the Word has to say. A good starting point is to look at two parables that our Lord gave. In fact, among the many parables of our Lord, these two stand out as unique. They are unique for a very simple and interesting reason. All other parables relate to God by comparison. All other parables relate to God by comparison. In some way, they are like God, they are like God’s Kingdom, they are like the way God operates. These two parables relate to God by contrast. They are not like God. They’re the only two parables Jesus ever gave that relate to God in a contrasting way. These two parables show us illustrations of someone who is utterly unlike God, and in so doing make a very, very strong point about this matter of persistent praying without ceasing.

Let’s turn to these two parables. The first one we find is in Luke chapter 11. It is called the parable of the reluctant friend, Luke chapter 11. Our Lord gave it in a context of prayer. In fact, the disciples had come to Him, and they said, Luke 11:1, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples.” And Jesus responded to them with the very familiar words, “When you pray say, Father, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us; and lead us not in to temptation” – the familiar Lord’s prayer or disciple’s prayer.

So in verses 2 to 4, Jesus taught them what to say. He taught them, basically, the content of prayer. When you pray, you are to honor God and hallow His name. You are to pray for those things that relate to His Kingdom. You are to seek the daily provision that He alone gives. You are to confess your sins and seek His forgiveness. And you are to ask for His wisdom, so as not to be led into temptation. Those are the component parts of prayer, that’s how to pray, what to say when you pray.

But beyond that, “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, for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.” 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.”’” You have to remember that in those days, when it was cold, the whole family got in the same bed for the sake of warmth, and they were all tucked in and warm. And it was midnight, and this was not a time to get out of bed and get some bread for your friend.

Verse 8, “‘I tell you,’ Jesus said, ‘even though he will not get up and give his friend anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.’” In other words, what he wouldn’t do for friendship, he’ll do for sleep, because the guy won’t go away until he gets his bread. So Jesus is saying here is a man whose friendship will not allow him to make this gesture of sacrifice, so the man just keep irritating him until he finally has no choice. This, our Lord is saying, should instruct us about the benefits of persistence. But the point He is really making here is that when you consider how unlike the reluctant friend God is, the parable becomes all the more striking.

If a reluctant friend will do something for you because you’re persistent, imagine what a God who is not reluctant will do if you’re persistent. That’s the contrast. And Jesus goes on to talk about a father who is asked by his son, verse 11, for a fish; he won’t give him a snake, will he, instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? In other words, an earthly father is not going to give something that will harm his child. An earthly father will hear the cry of his child. Then in verse 13, “If you then, being evil” – that’s the point – “know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father” – implied, who is not evil – “give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.”

God is so different, but God responds to persistence. If an unfaithful friend, a reluctant friend, an unsympathetic friend, a friend who lacks compassion, a friend who has no mercy and feels no grace, will, because of your persistent asking, respond, what do you think a God who is loving, gracious, merciful, compassionate, and tender-hearted will do if you’re persistent? Praying without ceasing moves the hand of God. So first He told them what to say and then Jesus said, “Now I want to remind you to keep saying it, to say it with persistence, because God, who is good, will hear and respond.”

In Luke 18, there is another parable that follows the same contrastive style. In verse 1 of Luke 18, Jesus again has been teaching about prayer, and He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray, and not lose heart. If you don’t get an immediate answer, if things aren’t exactly the way you want them to be, if things don’t turn around as quickly as you might have planned, don’t lose heart; you need to continue to pray. You need to pray at all times, incessantly, continually, without ceasing. And then to illustrate this, He says, “There was in a certain city a judge who didn’t fear God and didn’t respect man.” Now, you’ll have to figure out for yourself how he got to be a judge, but he did. “And there was a widow in that city” – at least in this story – “and she kept coming to him” – this judge – “repeatedly saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’” Apparently, someone was doing everything possible to take away her meager substance in life, and she was pleading for justice at the court of this judge. “And for a while”, verse 4 says, “he was unwilling. But afterward he said to himself, “Even though I do not fear God, nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear

me out.'" "This woman is a pain. What I will not do for love of God, and will I not do for love of humanity, I will do for peace of mind." He's saying, "I can't take this constant badgering."

And then verse 6, "And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge said. Now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will he delay long over them? I tell you, He will bring about justice for them speedily.'" You see, God is different than an unjust judge, God is different than a reluctant friend, but if a reluctant friend and an unjust judge will do what is asked because of the continual pleading, then certainly a compassionate, loving, gracious, kind, tender-hearted God will do more. That's His point.

And so Jesus is saying, in effect, "Pray, pray like this. Pray persistently, pray consistently, pray at all times, don't give up, don't lose heart, keep knocking, keep asking, keep seeking, and good, compassionate, faithful, loving, gracious, merciful Jehovah, your God, will hear and answer."

Now, some have imagined that such parables are contradictory to other things that Jesus taught. For example, back in Matthew chapter 6, He said something. It may on the surface appear contradictory, and needs to be understood. In Matthew 6 verse 7, Jesus said, "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the heathen do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words; therefore, do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

You say, "Now isn't this contradictory? Isn't He saying don't be repetitious in your praying?" No, He is saying don't be meaninglessly repetitious – that's the key word. What do you mean meaningless repetition? Well, the kind of prayers that the pagans pray. They suppose they will be heard for their many words. In other words, it isn't that the deity cares about their heart, it isn't that the god understands the compassion, the passion, the pain, the longing, the desire of the heart, it is that there is some formula, some religious ritual, some ceremony, some mantra, some chant, some something or other, some sequence of beads, some repetitious formula that's going to somehow make that god do something that he otherwise wouldn't do. Jesus was simply saying to them, "Don't pray in that way." He is not forbidding meaningful repetition. He is not forbidding the pleading of the heart. What He is forbidding is empty ritual, heartless babble that flows only from the mouth, and assumes that God will be responding because of the words rather than the heart.

So when Paul says, "Pray without ceasing," he's not in disagreement with Jesus. He is simply supporting the principle taught in Luke 11 and Luke 18 that prayer is to be incessant. We are not heard simply for our many words, but we are heard for the cry of our heart. The man who came to his friend's house and needed bread did not pray a formula ritual prayer, he pleaded for something he needed. The widow who came to the judge did not offer to the judge some mantra or some chant or some recitation of ritual prayer. The woman gave the cry of her heart for protection from one who had the power to do that. And such heart-crying, repetitious prayer is that which moves the heart of a compassionate, loving God.

In fact, we can even start to understand praying without ceasing by looking at the life of our Lord Himself, since He did that. He was obviously in constant communion with the Father. And we see Him in Scripture rising up early to pray. We see Him spending all night in prayer. It must have been an unending and non-stop communion between Himself and the Father. Hebrews tells us that He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears. That is a fascinating insight. There was an intensity in the prayers of Jesus that is utterly unique, that is utterly amazing. When He prayed, on a number of occasions, there was a great agonizing. And we can assume that, even

though the Scripture does not chronicle for us all the details of all of His praying, that it had much of the same kind of intensity as those prayers that we do see and have revealed to us in the text. When the Bible tells us that He went in to the Mount of Olives and prayed all night, there was no doubt an intensity in that kind of praying that we know very little about, if anything.

The one great classic illustration we have of the intensity of His praying comes in the garden prior to His death, where we see Him praying there in sweat, in an agony of blood. He is kneeling down and praying, Luke writes in chapter 22, saying, “Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done.” And Luke writes, “And being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground.”

There is an agonizing, intense kind of experience here that causes the Lord Jesus Christ to sweat, and then to begin to bleed, in that very environment of prayer. That strikes me. It also strikes me that in Matthew chapter 26, verses 38 to 46, it tells us that Jesus repeated the process of His pleading in the garden for three consecutive times. This was a prolonged prayer experience. In fact, we know well that it was prolonged so long that the disciples fell asleep on several occasions. And so in this prolonged agony of prayer, we get an insight into the life of our Lord Jesus Christ which is quite unique.

Let me tell you what I mean by that. The Lord Jesus Christ wrought many mighty works when He was on earth. In none of them is there any apparent expenditure of energy. Though the Scripture says virtue went out of Him, there is nothing that He does in all of the holy Scriptures in terms of the record of the New Testament which would indicate that there was any agonizing in the process of performing that miracle, whether it would be giving sight to the blind, or hearing to the deaf, or speech to the dumb, or giving health to the sick body, or giving walking capability to a lame person. Or whether it was raising someone from the dead, or whether it was feeding 5,000 men, plus women, plus children, 20,000 people by the seaside, or whether it was calming a storm, or whether it was walking on water. It didn’t matter what it was – there is no record that there was any apparent expenditure of energy, any toil, any sweat, any drops of blood, in some kind of agonizing to make that thing happen. There seem to have been no weariness involved, no toil involved, no strain involved, no travail involved, until it came to prayer. And when He prayed there was an agony, there was a wrenching of His heart, His very being, that showed up in His physical body. He prayed in an agony unto blood, a level of intensity that certainly speaks of the persistence that Jesus indicated in Luke 11 and 18, and what Paul had in mind when he said, “Pray without ceasing.”

The early church was marked by this kind of continual, passionate, unceasing prayer from the very start. Even before the day of Pentecost in Acts 1:14, all the believers were one, it says; one mind, and continually devoting themselves to prayer. Incessant prayer, constant prayer, persistent prayer marked the early church. When the apostles were structuring the church so that all the ministry could be accomplished, they themselves said, “We can’t do all of these routine things, but we will devote ourselves to prayer. We will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.” In Acts chapter 12, again we see the early church. Peter was kept in prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church of God. Fervent prayer, incessant prayer, persistent prayer, marked the early church.

When you come into the epistles, whether you’re reading Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, whether you’re reading 1 Thessalonians, you hear Paul exhorting believers to prayer. In fact, perhaps as significantly as any of those epistles is Ephesians in marking out the importance of

prayer. He says in Ephesians 6:18, “With all prayer and petition, pray at all times.” It’s the same idea. Pray at all times. In the very epistle we’re currently studying, 1 Thessalonians 3, verse 10, he gives his own example: “We night and day keep praying most earnestly” – just a way of life, incessant, unending, ceaseless prayer.

Colossians – I love the testimony of “Epaphras, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers” – a man of prayer. And in chapter 4 verse 2 of Colossians, he says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.” Unceasing, prevailing, persistent, insistent, incessant prayer is so essential.

Maybe Coleridge was right when he said, “Prayer is the highest energy of which the human heart is capable, and the Christian’s greatest achievement on earth.” But I fear that if we conceive of prayer as some high-energy, noble, glorious achievement, we’ll isolate it to a few grand moments in life. It is that, but it is also an incessant kind of communion that should make up the very fabric of our everyday existence. It does involve intensity; that is the essence of prayer. God is found, you’ll remember, by those who seek Him with all their heart. Wrestling in prayer prevails with God. “The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much,” said James.

So while there are those great, noble moments of energized, energetic, agonizing prayer, prayer also for us is a very, very evident daily way of life. Sometimes it just gets more intense than others. Pray without ceasing, then, is the mandate of God to us. The word “pray” here is just the general word, *proseuchomai*, the most common New Testament word for pray. It could be praise, it could be thanks, it could be confession, it could be petition, it could be intercession, it could be submission. It’s just “pray” in general. “Without ceasing” is a word that basically means recurring. It doesn’t mean non-stop talking, it means recurring prayer. As I said, just a way of life; we’re to be continually in prayer, continually in an attitude of prayer.

You’re probably like I am. I rarely ever fall asleep at night other than in the middle of a prayer. I rarely ever wake up in the morning other than praying. It’s so much the fabric of my life to be in an open state of communion with God, sometimes more intense than others, but always conscious of His presence, that I find myself going to sleep in the middle of my prayers, and waking back up in the middle of them again. Scripture gives example of people who pray in the morning, people who pray at noon, people who pray at night, people who pray seven times a day, people who pray at midnight, people who pray all night, people who pray before dawn, people who pray for days, people who pray for weeks, some who prayed long, some prayed short, some prayed kneeling, some prayed standing, some prayed lying on a bed, some prayed lying face down on the ground, some prayed hands up, some prayed hands down, some prayed hands out, some prayed face down, some prayed face up, etc., etc. Every way, everywhere, prayer; pray unceasingly.

Now, if you’ll look at our text again, you see this is kind of a companion to verse 16. Verse 16 says, “Rejoice always.” Verse 17 says, “Pray always.” Really, they’re partners in spiritual life, and they have a beautiful balance. The believer all through his Christian life feels his insufficiency, so he lives in total dependence on God. As long as you feel your insufficiency, and you feel your dependence, you’re going to pray without ceasing. At the same time, while feeling insufficient and dependent, you also know that you are the beneficiary of stupendous blessing from God. So on the one hand, you are praying in dependency; on the other hand, you are rejoicing in the reception of the multifold blessing of God. So we rejoice always, because God is pouring out blessing in answer to our unceasing prayer.

If I as a Christian live in a perpetual state of personal insufficiency, a perpetual state of recognizing my dependency on God, if I live continually thankful for everything He does for me, continually repentant over my sin, continually expressing my love for others, that is going to flow in unspoken prayer to God, and it's also going to cause God to open the sluice gates of blessing, which will result in my joyful response. And so we are not just to rejoice always, but we are to take the path to that rejoicing, which is the path of unceasing prayer, which results in blessing, which results in joy.

Now, how does this verse 17 fit in to the whole context here? Paul, as he closes this letter to the Thessalonian church, wants to help them set their church on the right course for the future. It's a good church, a great church, a noble church, a spiritual church. But he wants to remind them about how to grow into a healthy, mature flock. It's a young church, a baby church, only a few months old, and he's got a growth plan for them. In verses 12 and 13, growing a healthy flock involved the right relationship between the shepherds and the sheep, and the sheep and the shepherds. In verses 14 and 15, growing a healthy flock demanded the right relationship between the sheep and the sheep. And here in verse 16 through verse 22, a healthy flock demands a right relationship between the sheep and the Great Shepherd.

So the church is made up of those relationships – leadership to people, people to leadership, people to people, people to God – and no church can rise higher than the spiritual life of its own people. So your relationship to the Great Shepherd is crucial. And the first thing you need to do is to be rejoicing always, and the second thing, to be praying to Him always. That's how you keep that relationship what it ought to be, and that's essential for a growing church, for a healthy church. If we are to be a healthy church, we must be praying unceasingly, we must be tapping the divine resource, we must be knocking on the door, seeking the loaves of bread. We must be bowing the knee at the foot of divine justice, pleading for our case to be resolved with equity and justice. We must be going before God on behalf of ourselves and others, praying without ceasing, for therein do we release the greatness of the power and blessing of God.

Now, there's nothing more really to be said about the verse. You understand what it means. But I want to go behind it a little bit, and I want to give you a little list of things that I'm going to call motives to prayer, because I know something is true about your life, because it's true about my life. No matter how much I pray, I always feel like I don't pray enough. Do you feel that way? I have a sort of a continual state of guilt about a lack of prayerfulness.

It doesn't matter how much I pray, I always feel like I haven't prayed enough. And that is partly due to the fact that I haven't prayed enough, and partly due to the fact that I'm in a position to be inundated with so many prayer requests that it's impossible for me as a human being to even attempt to keep up with all of them – which makes my burden heavier. I have to go back, then, and ask myself if I'm really motivated to pray when I don't pray as I ought. And I want to help you to get a grip on some motives for prayer. I want to give you ten of them, just a little grocery list here, ten motives for prayer that I believe produce an unceasing prayer life.

Number one is a desire for the Lord's glory – a desire for the Lord's glory. Prayer, Jesus said, should start this way, "Our Father who art in heaven" – what – "hallowed by Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done." Now, what you're praying when you pray there is that God would be glorified, that God's purposes would be accomplished, that God's name would be exalted, that God's will would be done. That's what you're praying. You're not praying for yourself, you're praying for Him. When

Daniel set out to pray in chapter 9 of Daniel, that great model prayer of the Old Testament, it was the longing for God's glory that made him pray. He prayed that God would forgive the people; that God would forgive their sin; and he prayed that God would accomplish his promise. God had said, "I'm going to keep you in captivity only so many years, and then I'm going to free you."

And he was reading Jeremiah – Daniel was – and he found that, and he said, "God, I want You to do that. I want Your kingdom to come, if You will, Your will to be done, Your promise to be fulfilled. And I want You to forgive Your people. I want You to do it," he says in verse 19, "for Your own sake, O my God, because Your city, and Your people are called by Your name." And what he's saying is, "God, if You do this, it'll enhance Your reputation. It'll exalt Your name. It'll glorify You. Do it for Your sake." And I believe that that may be the supreme motive of all motive in prayer, is a desire for the Lord's glory, and when you pray that Jesus be lifted up, and that God be exalted and glorified, you're doing it because that's a burden on your heart, because you care. You're like David, who said, "Zeal for Your house has eaten me up. The reproaches that are falling on You are hurting me." And he cried out for the Lord to be lifted up. Yes, the first motive for prayer is a desire for the Lord's glory. When your heart longs that God be glorified you're going to find yourself praying to that end. You're going to find yourself in an unceasing cry to God, "Be exalted, be glorified, be lifted up, accomplish Your purpose, build Your kingdom, do Your will."

Secondly, a second motive to prayer is a desire for fellowship with God – a desire for fellowship with God. The psalmist so beautifully gave words to this truth in Psalm 42, verse 1: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God; my soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night." Now, there is a longing for God. There is a heart crying out for fellowship, the feeling of being estranged from God, the feeling of being cut off, the feeling of loneliness that reaches out and says, "God, I want Your fellowship, I want Your company, I want Your presence."

Psalm 63, more magnificent words: "O God, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly. My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have beheld Thee in the sanctuary, to see Thy power and Thy glory." I just want to see You, I just want to be with You, I just want to experience Your wonder. In Psalm 84, the first two verses there again: "How lovely are Thy dwelling places, O Lord of hosts. My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord, my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. How blessed are those who dwell in Thy house" – the longing to be in the presence of God. And maybe most magnificently of all, Psalm 27 – just listen to these wonderful words. "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life. Whom shall I dread? One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple." I just want to be where He is. Do you have that? You have that longing for fellowship, sweet communion?

There's a third prompter to prayer, to incessant and unceasing prayer, and that's a desire for needs to be met – a desire for needs to be met. Not only ours, but those around us. "Give us this day our daily bread," Jesus taught us to say in Matthew 6:11. It is right to pray that our needs would be met. It is right to ask God for the basic things of life. That's a prompter to prayer. Few of us, however, are prompted in that way because we have so much – so much. But there are across this world many folks who pray to God regularly just for their daily needs to be met. We don't understand that in this affluent culture, but it is the way of life for many of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In fact, we have a dear brother who has come from Africa. Sam and his wife Nora were in our church for six years, maybe, before they went back to minister in Africa. He has come from Africa because he cannot feed his family. It is not like it is here around the world, because he cannot get medicine for his diabetes. We live in a world, we live in an environment where asking God for our daily needs is pretty foreign. But we should not be so foolish as to assume that because God has graciously provided our daily needs without asking, should we become indifferent to Him, they might not be taken away from us.

Fourth motive for persistent prayer is a desire for wisdom – a desire for wisdom. James put it this way: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and holds back nothing." If you are under the illusion that you don't need the wisdom of God, you are really deceived, are you not? When Jesus taught us to pray, He said this: "Pray like this. Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." I really do believe that that is a prayer for spiritual discernment; that is a prayer for spiritual wisdom. "Lord, please by Your Spirit give me the ability to discern when I am facing a temptation. Give me the wisdom to discern when I am being led in to something that is evil." We need to be incessantly praying that. We need to be praying all the days of our lives, "Lord, please deliver me from temptation and do not lead me in an evil way. Give me the wisdom, and the discernment, and the insight, and the scriptural sensitivity, and the leading of the Spirit of God so as not to allow me to fall into Satan's traps, and the traps of the flesh, and the world." What prompts prayer – incessant prayer? A desire for the glory of God, a desire for fellowship with Him, a desire for needs to be met, and a desire for wisdom in walking through the mind field that is this world.

Number five: prayer is prompted by a desire for deliverance from trouble – a desire for deliverance from trouble. There are so many texts in the Psalms that speak of this. Let me sum them up in one that says it all, Psalm 20 verse 1: "May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble." And surely He will; surely He will. When we come to those times of great distress, they tend to prompt our unceasing prayer, don't they? And the greater the trouble, and the greater the distress that we have found ourselves in, very often it's because we failed to ask for wisdom, and so we fell in the trap in our ignorance, and now we need to be delivered from it, and there is no human way out. We cry out to God for deliverance.

It's reminiscent of Jonah, who, by the way, had a very specific prayer life. He found himself in the belly of a great fish, and it says in Jonah 2:1, "Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish." And I'll tell you what, he didn't pray for all the missionaries first. He said, "Get me out," in so many words. And the Lord did it, the Lord delivered him. He said, "I called out of my distress to the Lord – to the Lord, and Thou hast brought me up from the pit, O Lord my God." He said, "I was down there and I remembered the Lord, and I cried out and He delivered me." We come to God in those times of tremendous trouble, pressure, stress, pain, affliction, and we need His deliverance. That prompts our unceasing prayer.

Six: a desire for relief from fear and worry – a desire for relief from fear and worry. That will make us pray, if we are wise and spiritually minded. In Philippians chapter 4 – we need so often to be reminded of this – it says, "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 shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." When you're in fear, and anxiety, and worry, you are in distress, you are in depression, what should you do? Very simply, stop being anxious, and go to prayer, and pray with a thankful heart, and the peace of God, which surpasses all human comprehension, will protect your heart and mind.

What does that mean? Guard it from anxiety, guard it from depression, distress, fear, worry. If you want a humanly comprehensible solution, go to a person. If you want a humanly incomprehensible solution, go to God. In the time of fear, in the time of worry, in the time of anxiety, in the time of emotional distress and pain, the formula is simple: just go to the Lord in persistent, continual, unceasing prayer with thanksgiving, and the peace of God promised will guard your heart and mind. Why do people go to other sources than that? When you want that relief from fear and worry, our God has promised it is yours through prayer. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 4, "Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness; Thou hast relieved me in my distress, be gracious to me and hear my prayer." You did it in the past, would you please relieve me again?

Number seven: another motive to prayer is the desire to offer thanks for past blessing – a desire to offer thanks for past blessing. If you have a thankful heart, if you're a thankful person, and if you remember all that God has done in all His goodness, it will make you pray, if for no other reason than just to say thanks. In Psalm 44, we read, the psalmist says, "O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us the work that Thou didst in their days in the days of old. Thou with Thine own hand didst drive out the nations, then Thou didst plant them, then Thou didst afflict the peoples, then Thou didst spread them abroad, for by their own sword they did not possess the land and their own arm did not save them, but Thy right hand and Thine arm and the light of Thy presence, for Thou didst favor them. Thou art my King, O God."

That's just praise, and that's not praise for anything God had done for him, that's praise for what God had done for others in the past. Learning to be thankful to God for all that He has done throughout redemptive history, having a grateful heart on behalf of all the good things God has done, not just for you. The apostle Paul writes the Philippians, and he says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. My prayer is always offered with joy in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." I just can't help but pray all the time, thanking God for what He's doing in your life, and what He has done and is doing. If you really are grateful to God for all that He has done, it's going to prompt you to pray a prayer of thanksgiving.

Number eight: here is a very important motive to prayer, and that is a desire to be freed from the guilt of sin – a desire to be freed from the guilt of sin. That classic penitential psalm, Psalm 32, speaks to this. And I'm only giving you select Scriptures out of many that could be used in these points, but listen to Psalm 32 and hear this. Starting in verse 3, just to give you the flow, "When I kept silent about my sin," David says, "my body wasted away." I had psychosomatic illness as a result of guilt. "I was groaning all day long. Day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality, my life juices were drained away as with the fever heat of summer." I was a mess, I was a mess. The life juices have to do with the blood flow system, saliva system, the nervous system, which is conducted by fluid. All my life juices were dried up, saliva was dried up, the flow of blood wasn't right; therefore, I had physiological problems. My nervous system was haywire. I was a wreck. I had a fever. I was moaning.

In verse 5 he says, "Then I acknowledged my sin to Thee, my iniquity I didn't hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the Lord,' and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin." I confessed, and You forgave. Then back to the beginning of the Psalm. He says this, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. How blessed is the man to whom the Lord doesn't impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." The deceit is over, you're not covering the sin, you've opened it up, you've confessed it; and now you're forgiven, and now you're blessed. Yes,

prayer – incessant, unceasing, penitential confession – is prompted by a desire to be freed from the guilt of sin.

Number nine: another motive to prayer is a desire for the salvation of the lost – a desire for the salvation of the lost. You will be moved to persistent prayer when you're compassionately concerned about lost people. They're all around us; they're all around us. And if you care about their salvation, there will be an almost unceasing commitment to pray, as they cross your path and your mind. Listen to Romans 10:1: "Brethren," says Paul, "my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." Paul says, "I'm praying for their salvation. I cannot see unsaved people and not pray for their salvation." Timothy, in 1 Timothy chapter 2, is told by Paul that God will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. And then he says, "Now I want men to lift up holy hands, praying always." And what are they praying for? The salvation of the lost people for whom God has provided a salvation. A desire for the salvation of the lost prompts prayer; if you don't pray unceasingly, then something is wrong with your compassion for the lost.

And number ten: incessant, ceaseless prayer is prompted by a desire for the spiritual growth of believers – a desire for the spiritual growth of believers. In Ephesians, for example, chapter 1 verse 15, Paul says to the Ephesians, verse 15, "For this reason I, too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you while making mention of you in my prayers." Now, what are you praying for, Paul? "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."

I'm praying for you. Well, what are you praying for? Your wisdom, your knowledge, your enlightenment, your hope; I'm praying for the power of God to be released in your life. I'm praying for your spiritual growth. In chapter 3 verse 14, he says, "I bow my knees before the Father and I'm praying for you." What are you praying? Verse 16, "That He would grant you according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner man." I'm praying for spiritual power. Verse 17, "I'm praying that Christ may settle down in your hearts, and that you would be rooted and grounded in love, and that you would understand that love that surpasses knowledge" – verse 19 – "and that you would be filled with the fullness of God." And verse 20, "That you would do exceedingly, abundantly above all you can ask or think." I'm praying for your spiritual growth.

We have a lot to pray for, don't we? What moves you to pray? When you desire the Lord's glory, when you desire fellowship with Him, when you desire needs be met by the one who alone has the resources, when you desire wisdom and discernment, when you desire deliverance from the troubles of life, when you desire relief from fear, and anxiety, and worry, when you desire to offer thanks for all His past and present blessings, when you desire to be freed from guilt and sin, when you desire the salvation of others, and when you desire the development and growth of the believers. There should be in your life enough reminders of these things to keep you praying all the time, right? So do a little spiritual inventory. If you're not praying without ceasing, it's because something is wrong at the desire level; something is wrong in the underlying motivational level. How do you prompt that?

From my own life years of experience, I can only tell you that my prayer life is prompted by the Word of God. It is my time in the discipline of the Word of God, and the study of the Word of God, that prompts my prayer life. Oh, there are other times when the Spirit of God moves upon me as I'm living

in obedience to the Lord that I'm prompted to pray, of course. But if I want to develop a real longing for God to be glorified, then I find that that longing is developed out of a study of His Word. As I see His Word unfold, and His marvelous plan, I'm like Daniel; once I read what God has planned for His own future glory, then the longing begins to rise in my heart that He be glorified. It is like John, who at the end of the book of Revelation has just told all the glories that are going to come to Christ, and he can't help but cry out, "O Lord, come quickly – and it's not for my sake, it's for Yours."

So as I gaze at the glorious plan of God outlined in the Word of God, I become consumed with His Kingdom and His glory that prompts me to pray to that end. As I study the Word of God, and in it I fellowship with God as He reveals Himself in the Word, as I learn more about His person, and His character, and the majesty of who He is, I have a greater desire to fellowship with Him. As I study my Bible, and find all His promises, and all the things He longs to do for His children, and how He will meet all of our needs, and how He will provide everything, I am therefore prompted to pray to that end.

And as I read the Scripture, and study it, and find His majesty revealed in His wisdom, His amazing discernment, His perfect understanding of everything, it causes me to long for that same wisdom to be my wisdom, so that I can work my way through this difficult world. As I read the Scripture, and see the chronicle of the times He has delivered His people, over, and over, and over, and the promises that He has given that He will always do the same for His people, it prompts me to pray for deliverance from the troubles of my own life, and the lives of those around me. And when I look at the Scripture, and find how many of His special beloved servants were delivered from fear, and worry, and anxiety, how many of them sang hymns in jail, and how many of them could stand on the edge of a fiery furnace and praise the God who had allowed them to come there, because they so completely trusted Him, it allows me to be relieved from my own fear, of my own worry; as I realize that I can cast all my care on Him, knowing He perfectly cares for me, I am delivered from anxiety.

As I study my Bible also, and find the record of all His past blessings, and His past deeds, and the glories of all of redemptive history, and all that He has done to bring redemptive history to where it is now that I might experience the glories of the gospel of Christ, and the blessings of His indwelling Spirit, and the treasure of His Word, it causes me to offer thanks for His blessings. And as I look at the Scripture, and I see the perfect forgiveness provided in Jesus Christ, the majesty of the plan of atonement, and how it was worked out by grace through faith in my own life, and how that I have access to complete forgiveness and cleansing every moment of my life, it leads me to confess my sins. And as I see the tears of God in Jeremiah 13, and the tears of Jesus in Matthew's gospel chapter 23, tears that are shed for those that refuse salvation and refuse the goodness of God, it makes me desire the salvation of the lost, even as God does. And as I see the longing, revealed in Scripture, of God's heart for His people to grow spiritually, that continual call from the beginning of the Scripture to the end to His people to live in obedience and holiness, it reminds me to pray for the spiritual growth of believers.

So, if I want to have a persistent, consistent prayer life, I'm going to have to have certain desires in my heart that generate that, that motivate that. Those desires become in my life the fruit of my faithful and intent study of God's Word, which reveals these things to me in fresh, new ways every time I study it, and therefore prompts my own prayer life. Rarely do I ever come out of a study time in the Word of God without a new kind of commitment to pray, in one dimension or another, more faithfully than I have. "Pray without ceasing," Paul said. And saying it, he said much. It is to be our way of life. Let's bow together in prayer.

We thank You, Father, for the promise of 1 John 3:22, that whatever we ask we receive from You, because we keep Your commandments and do the things that are pleasing in Your sight. So we know our prayers are effective and powerful; and that if we pray out of the context of keeping Your commandments and doing what is pleasing, You're going to hear, and You're going to answer our prayers. And as You do that, we're going to be blessed, and then You're going to receive all the glory. We know that's the plan. To that end we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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