

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



The Priority of Prayer

KEY PASSAGE: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 32:8 | Luke 18:1-7 | John 14:6
Acts 6:4 | Romans 12:12 | 1 Corinthians 10:13 | Philippians 4:19 | Colossians 4:2 | 1 John 1:9

SUMMARY

Prayer is one of the most important activities in our lives because we're actually talking to the sovereign God of the universe who has all power and knowledge.

He understands how we feel, knows what we think, and has the power to intervene in every area of life. Yet despite the Lord's willingness to listen and answer our requests, we are not always faithful in prayer. When times are good, we may forget to pray. Or maybe we doubt that God will answer. But the biggest hindrance to prayer is sin. If we're unwilling to acknowledge our sins and ask for the Lord's forgiveness, we'll have no desire to talk to a holy God.

SERMON POINTS

When the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica who were suffering under Roman domination, he told them, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). In other words, prayer should be a priority in our daily lives.

What does it mean to pray without ceasing?

Paul was not saying that we should continually mumble prayers every minute of the day. "Without ceasing" means a continuous recurrence. Prayer isn't constant, but it recurs frequently throughout the day. Unceasing prayer is a way of life, not an occasional occurrence prompted by trouble or a quick addition at the end of the day. God wants us to focus our attention on Him consistently.

For instance, in the morning we could ask the Lord for guidance, strength, and wisdom for the day ahead.

Then as our children go off to school, we might pray for the Lord's protection. Or perhaps on the way to work, we talk to Him about the challenges we'll face and thank Him for a safe trip. Throughout the rest of the day, we make requests, seek His direction, and give Him thanks until we finally climb into bed.

God is ready and willing to listen and answer our prayers.

We can't say anything to the Lord that He doesn't already know. He's not sitting in heaven being secretive about His will for our lives or reluctant to answer our prayers. God proved His love for us by giving His Son as a sacrifice for our salvation, and He continues to demonstrate His love by being interested in every facet of our lives.

In Luke 18:1-7, Jesus taught a parable about a judge and a persistent widow, which reminds us that God always hears our prayers and provides for our needs. If we are His children, we don't have to beg Him to listen to us, nor do we need to feel unworthy. We don't deserve His mercy, grace, and love, but He freely gives it because of our relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

There is a difference between true and false prayer.

True prayer requires a relationship with God. However, those who have rejected Jesus have no basis for approaching the Lord in prayer because access to Him is only possible through His Son (John 14:6). Therefore, God does not answer their false prayers. No one can bypass Christ and expect that the Lord will grant their requests. However, there is one prayer He always answers. When someone is willing to humble himself, confess his sins, and receive Jesus

as his personal Savior, the Lord will forgive him and welcome him into the family of God.

False prayer is all about self and is based on what we think we deserve. Many times it's a monologue focused on what we want from God. But true prayer comes from a sense of humility, realizing that we are accepted on the basis of the Lord's mercy, not by our conduct. It's a dialogue with God because we are not just interested in giving Him our list of requests, but we want to hear from Him.

True prayer is a way to grow in our relationship with the Lord. All relationships require two-way communication. Instead of just speaking our prayer requests, we must also listen to the Lord. Since His Word is the primary way He speaks to us, our prayer times should include Bible reading. When the Lord has an answer for us from His Word, it's amazing how He can take us to the exact Scripture passages we desperately need. However, if we pray yet fail to listen, we'll miss the blessing of hearing from Him and will be no better off than before.

Devote yourself to prayer.

Scripture repeatedly tells us to devote ourselves to prayer (Col. 4:2). Devotion requires that we not only set aside uninterrupted time for prayer, but that we also think seriously about what we're asking. We must give God the time and attention He deserves in order to have a growing relationship with Him.

Prayer is our most profitable activity.

The time we spend with the Lord affects our lives in a variety of ways.

- It's the method God uses to meet our needs (Phil. 4:19).
- He comforts us in our times of trial and heartache by assuring us of His presence with us and His willingness to help us.
- Prayer is a channel through which we build an intimate relationship with God and sense His unconditional love for us.

- The Lord strengthens us in times of temptation as we believe His promises and seek His help (1 Cor. 10:13).
- God is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness as we confess our sins to Him in prayer (1 John 1:9).
- Prayer is our source of guidance as we seek the Lord's direction and listen for His instructions (Ps. 32:8).
- God helps us understand His Word as we read and ask Him to speak to our hearts.
- Prayer is a shield that protects us from anxiety and worries when we remember that He has full control and provides the grace we need in every situation.
- Through prayer, the Lord gives us courage and confidence to face challenges, and reminds us that He puts sovereign limitations on the burdens we carry.
- Prayer brings God's emotional and physical healing as well as guidance when we're confused about the hurts we experience.
- We receive the Holy Spirit's power, which strengthens us to face difficult situations.
- Prayer can impact other people anywhere in the world because it creates a holy triangle between us, God, and whomever we pray for.

RESPONSE

- To determine if prayer is a priority, ask yourself: How often do I pray? What prompts or hinders me? How can I make prayer a daily lifestyle?
- How confident are you that the Lord will answer your requests? What does God's Word say about His faithfulness in answering prayer?
- What do you think would happen if instead of bemoaning your inadequacies, you thanked the Lord for them?

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