

**Date: July 29, 2018**

**Title: A Methodist prays without ceasing**

**Scripture Reading: James 5:13-20**

James concludes his letter to tell us that prayer must be a way of life, just as he makes it abundantly clear that we should be doers of the word not merely listeners of the word. Prayer is vocal, but it must also come with action. It must be the way we live our daily lives.

The New Testament is filled with references to the importance of prayer. It is clear that Jesus was a man of great prayer; it was the center of his life. Many times Jesus wandered off by himself to an isolated spot to pray to the Father, sometimes spending the whole evening in prayer. Jesus encouraged his friends to pray. Besides being a man of prayer, Jesus also instructed his followers on how to pray. He taught his disciples that prayer was a private matter; it was not to be used to make others think you are important. Jesus then went on to tell his friends that the volume and complexity of words was not important, rather a simpler approach is best. Then he taught them the Lord's Prayer, which for many, if not all of us, was the first prayer we ever learned.

Our church has been spending the time talking about the characters of a Methodist. We have noted some of them already: A Methodist loves God. A Methodist rejoices in the Lord. A Methodist gives thanks. Today we add the 4th character which is "A Methodist prays without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17 "Pray without ceasing."<sup>1</sup> In Thessalonians 5, verses 16, 17 and 18, it tells us that we are to rejoice always and pray constantly and give thanks in all circumstances.<sup>2</sup> The heart of Paul's teaching that I would like to emphasize this morning and at the center of it is "pray without ceasing."

I want to make two observations about what John Wesley thoughts were on prayer. First of all, John Wesley believed that prayer is the path through which God comes to us through Christ and offers God's character upon us.<sup>3</sup> You heard many times that communication is the key for any relationship. Relationship usually starts at a surface level. You don't know another person's thoughts and cannot read their minds. One can read body languages but you don't know what they're thinking. Over time though, we communicate with each other and learn to trust each other and build a deeper relationship with each other until we find ourselves at a deep level of intimacy. For those who have someone like that in your life, you know that that's the person who can finish your synopses; they know what you are thinking. They know what you are going to say before you even say it. They

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Harper's Five Marks of a Methodist: The Fruit of a Living Faith. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, ESV

<sup>3</sup> From John Wesley's Sermon, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection

think like you do. John Wesley said that is what prayers are like. When we communicate well with God, we get on God's frequency. God's spirit comes upon our spirit and we learn to trust God with our lives. That trust leads us to a deep level of intimacy with God to the point that we know God's thoughts.<sup>4</sup> We speak God's words and we do what God would have us to do because we begin to think as God would want us to think. We begin to take on the character of Jesus Christ through prayer. Prayer is the pathway that Christ's Spirit comes into our lives. I have a simple example that I want to share this morning on how this works. On special occasions in the Wu family, we will have a cook out. My husband fires up the grill. My mom will create Kimchi pancake and Korean steak will be taken out from the refrigerator to grill. The steak will be soaked and marinated in special sauce overnight. My mom has a special recipe containing herbs, spices and various sauces she puts together and marinates the steak for 24 hours. When the steak is fully marinated, it looks different than it initially looked. It is tenderer. It is tastier. It is more enjoyable. The same thing happens to us in prayer. When we pray regularly to God, God's Holy Spirit comes upon us. It acts like a marinated sauce. It begins to transform us from the inside out. Our hearts become tender. We become kinder, more loving, and more patient and more at peace and more filled with joy because God changes us from inside out. Now how does that work? I don't have a clue! I can't explain to you how prayer works. I just know that as Wesley told us that it's the pathway through which Christ, the Holy Spirit comes upon us and transforms us from the inside out and works through us and somehow transforms this world in which we live. I don't know how it works but what it does that it helps us to understand that in the midst of all of our struggles and in the midst of your anxiety, we somehow understand we are not alone. We sense the presence of Holy Spirit in us and the Holy Spirit gives us the peace. So Wesley commands to us in "prayer." It's the pathway for the Holy Spirit to reach our hearts.

The second observation I want to make is that Wesley encourages Methodists to pray constantly.<sup>5</sup> Wesley himself constantly prayed. He prayed using the liturgical prayers and non-liturgical prayers. He prayed silently. He prayed out loud. He prayed alone and he prayed with other people. He prayed without ceasing. I know when I say liturgical prayers maybe some of you may have questions. Aren't liturgical prayers those that are written down? Aren't prayers that we read? Aren't prayers that are someone else's prayer? Aren't those prayers inauthentic? Shouldn't we be praying from our Spirit? Let me say this morning that liturgical prayers are good words. When it is sometimes difficult for us to focus, a liturgical prayer can center us and move us in Christ's presence. A liturgical prayer is the Lord's Prayer: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us

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<sup>4</sup> John Wesley. "The Character of a Methodist." <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/The-Wesleys-and-Their-Times/The-Character-of-a-Methodist>

<sup>5</sup> Steve Harper's Five Marks of a Methodist: The Fruit of a Living Faith. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015.

not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.<sup>6</sup> It's the liturgical prayer that we are to pray. Most liturgical prayers are based on the scripture. One that I like to use that I repeat to myself again and again is Psalm 121:1-2: I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.<sup>7</sup> Repeat that verse over and over and over, and I promise you that you will sense the presence of God in your life. It will deepen your prayer life. We all make mistakes. We all do things that we wish that we haven't done. We make many mistakes. But, when we make mistakes, offer a prayer to God: Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner.<sup>8</sup> Those 12 words are liturgical prayers. And it's the way of keeping us in tunes with the mistakes we make, and seeking ways to be forgiven and be forgiving. Prayers are the way that we allow Christ Spirit to live in our spirit and create the character of Christians in us.

Let me ask you. Do you have this type of prayer life where you communicate with God and constantly pray? When I started out as a Christian, I don't think that I really knew what the prayer was. I met someone who was very helpful and offered me an acronym as a model of prayer. The acronym was "PRAY".<sup>9</sup> You can also find this useful acronym in everywhere. "P" stands for Praise. Start out praising God for the blessings of our lives. "R" stands for Repentance. Repent of your sins and ask for forgiveness. "A" stands for asking for other people such as intercessory prayers for others who are in need. Finally, "Y" stands for Yourself. Pray for yourself. That is the model that I used throughout the years and helped me in my time of prayer. You may find another model or other way that is helpful for you to grow in prayer. My question again is do you have a prayer life where you communicate with God and constantly pray? We live in a very stressful world. They are lots of pressures internally and externally in our lives. So how do we find relief from the pressures? How do we find the direction for our lives? The answer is a prayer life where we communicate with God and constantly pray.

This morning I want us to talk with God. I want us to talk with our Lord. I want us to pray. So what I would like to do is guide our time of prayer for just few moments here. I'd like you to change your posture. If you are able, please bow your head and close your eyes and maybe hold hands with someone next to you. That might help you to sense God's presence in a more powerful way. Breathe Deep. Breathe in the Holy Spirit. Begin by praising God for the many blessings in our lives. Praise God for the gift of life that you enjoy. Praise God for your family and friends. Praise God for our church where we worship and serve. Now repent of your sins. Ask God to forgive you the thoughts, words and the behaviors that you shouldn't have done. Ask God to forgive you for things you

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<sup>6</sup> Lord's Prayer, KJV: Matthew 6:9-13

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 121:1-2, ESV

<sup>8</sup> The Jesus Prayer, OrthodoxWiki. 2010-04-21. Retrieved 2010-07-03

<sup>9</sup> Christian Acronym - PRAY

shouldn't have done. Pray for other people. Pray for those who are sick, those who are hungry, and those who are alone. Pray for those who are grieving their loss of their loved ones. Pray for those who are struggling. Pray for people you work with and people in your family. Pray for the person on your left. Pray for the person on your right. After this service, encourage them. We all need it. Now pray for yourself, for your own needs. God knows what you need. May the Lord hear you and be near to you and give you courage for living in today's society. Now let me offer you the prayer for us all that John Wesley gave to the early Methodists: The Wesley Covenant Prayer - I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wesley's Covenant Prayer, UHM 607