

Frequency of Prayer – 1Thessalonians 5:16-22

INTRODUCTION

Hindrances to Prayer –

- Do Not regard Iniquity – Psalm 66:18;
- Do Not pray against God's Revealed Will – Deuteronomy 3:21-29;
- Prayer as an Excuse not to Sanctify – Joshua 7:1-13;
- Praying Amiss – James 4:1-3;

The Lord's Prayer – Matthew 6:9-15

- God's Glory;
- God's Will;
- By Faith;
- Forgive as we have been forgiven;
- Deliverance from temptation;
- God's glory.

There is only one frequency in prayer. It is clearly stated by God in **1 Thessalonians 5:17**, "Pray without ceasing." It simply means to pray non-stop. The child of God must never stop communing with his heavenly Father from the moment he wakes up. He stops praying when he goes to sleep and continues the moment he wakes up. He stops when his service on earth is done.

Why does our heavenly Father want all His children who serve Him on earth to pray non-stop? The following are three reasons why all His children must pray without ceasing.

I. Witness in Earthen Vessel – Romans 7:19-23

Serving God as a Christian on this earth is the best life a person could ever experience and wish for. However, as we serve God in this earthen vessel we will struggle with the weaknesses that come with it.

2 Corinthians 5:1-4, "For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. **2** For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: **3** If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. **4** For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." We long for that day when we will be given the glorified body, a building of God eternal in the heavens. This earthen vessel came out of the ground and will depend on the things that come out of the ground to keep him alive. Food and water are the basic necessities of life. This means that all believers are not immune to temptations. Satan and the world will use this dependence to tempt and seduce God's children into sinning. No matter how mature the believer is, he is not able to live a sinless life as he serves God in this earthen vessel. He will succumb to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

2 Corinthians 4:3-7, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: **4** In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. **5** For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. **6** For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of

the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. **7** But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

God knows that. He warns us of this struggle to prepare us when we face temptations as we serve. The desire is for a sinless life as we serve. The reality is not sinless. This means that the born again believer will struggle against sin. Whenever he sins, he should repent and make right his relationship with God to regain his holy witness for Christ. There must be no finger pointing. There should be a true inward sense of shame and pain for succumbing to sin. He hates it whenever he falls. He knows that he has shamed Christ by defiling His holy Name. The only way to restore the holy image of Christ in his life is to repent with all his heart and beg God for forgiveness. This is how God describes it for us in **Romans 7:19-23**, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. **20** Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. **21** I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. **22** For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: **23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

The book of Romans describes the constant struggle of the child of God as he serves and witnesses for Christ. Positionally, the child of God is always perfect and right with God because of the finished work of Christ on Calvary when He died for him (cf. Rom 6). That is why he cannot ever lose his salvation (cf. Rom 8:37-39). The sinful nature in the believer is gone for good. He has died with Christ. He is no longer bound by sin which was his master. He now has a new Master who is Christ or God. He is a child of God for eternity. However, practically he struggles against sin. He wants to be perfect and obey all the laws of God perfectly. This is the desire of the new man in Christ inside his new heart. This desire propels him toward holiness all the time. That is why whenever he sins he will repent and turn to God to seek forgiveness through Christ.

This means that he prays to God for help to not sin. Whenever he succumbs to sin, he prays to God for forgiveness. This cycle of “before and after transgression” will result in a constant and perpetual prayer to God for strength and forgiveness all the days of his holy life.

II. Wrestle against Principalities and Powers – Ephesians 6:12

The believer serves God in this mortal flesh amongst mortal sinners EVEN THOUGH HE IS A SPIRITUAL PERSON FOR ETERNITY. This means that everything that he handles and faces will be from a spiritual perspective only, no longer from the perspective of carnality which was how he looked at life before salvation in Christ. This new perspective must not be lost but must be consciously held on to when he faces temptations and persecutions for the sake of Christ.

It is easy to forget that the real battle is not flesh and blood but principalities and powers in the spiritual realm. This is what the Bible warns believers of concerning the nature of their daily struggles. **Ephesians 6:10-13**, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. **11** Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. **12** For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. **13** Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

This means that when we face people who slander and malign us because we obey the Bible or defend the honour of Christ or live a holy life that might show forth their sins, we must not see them as personal enemies that we are fighting against. The real enemy is spiritual. These are the enemies that desire to see us fall into sin. Sins that are easily committed by God's people include

bitterness, unforgiveness, murmuring, sinful anger, complaining, giving up, doubting God's love. When we respond in any of the above ways, we sin against God. The enemy wins. These enemies in the spiritual realm are powerful.

- **Principalities** – chiefs or rulers;
- **Powers** – authorities like government bodies or companies, etc.
- **The rulers of darkness of this world** – world's rulers that control the affairs of millions of people by passing laws that are against the Truth of God and hurting Christians in the process by hindering them from obeying God's Word;
- **Spiritual wickedness in high places** – these are the evil spirits in the heavenly realm that are invisible to the naked eye.

These enemies of believers do the will of the god of this world, the Devil himself (cf. 2Cor 4:4) that has blinded the minds of many. They will do his bidding without being aware of it. They will not stop as long as Satan is in control of them. How can any child of God win against such a horde of spiritual enemies if they were to fight using the arm of the flesh? Experience, education, monetary power and all the things of the world are useless against this kind of enemies. We need God's help to fight God's battle against these spiritual enemies. That is why we need to pray without ceasing, for we are constantly at war with these powerful enemies. God alone is able to help us win these battles.

III. The Great Spiritual Benefit – 1Thessalonians 5:16-22

The believer has been given a life of serving Him by God through Christ. It is a life of fulfilment that the world longs to have through all the wrong ways. They try to get it by way of money but it is futile, for the joy is outward only and does not last because illness and ultimately death will snatch it from their cold lifeless hands. Seeking a noble goal to fulfil their lives such as dying for country, or living for family, or a just cause like alleviating global poverty and saving the world by living green is also vanity. The reason is that this world will soon pass away together with every sinner who lives in this sin sick world. The meaning in life will disappear like the dew that appears in the morning and is gone at noon. However, the life of the believer is one of great joy and thanksgiving no matter what he faces in this life. God promises every believer that his life is abundant, not in terms of possession but in terms of his personal walk with God almighty whom he calls Abba, Father! **John 10:10**, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” Also, **Luke 12:15**, “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

The life that God wants for all His children is described in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-22**, “Rejoice evermore. **17** Pray without ceasing. **18** In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. **19** Quench not the Spirit. **20** Despise not prophesyings. **21** Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. **22** Abstain from all appearance of evil.” This is the abundant life. Regardless of what the persecution is, this life remains the life of all of God's children who must shine brightly in a world dying in sin to show what the love of God in Christ is and can do for them.

- Rejoice evermore. There is a joy in his heart and soul that is beyond the material realm. He knows in his heart he is a child of God. He communes with God in prayer without ceasing. It thrills his heart to be able to do that. It give him the great joy;

- In everything he can give thanks. He knows that whatever he faces, it is the best for him even if it means imprisonment for the sake of truth and Christ. He can rejoice because he has prayed. He knows that this is the will of God for him in Christ Jesus;
- He obeys the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit who constantly guides him in all his decision-making. He never walks alone. He decides with God's help all the time. There are no issues in his life that God cannot help. If he has sinned, the Holy Spirit will lead him toward repentance. He experiences peace in his heart once that is obeyed. He will continue to walk rightly according to the Bible. He prays without ceasing and reads God's Word daily with delight because not to do so would quench, i.e. extinguish, the Holy Spirit. Not that the Holy Spirit will disappear from the believer's life, but the Holy Spirit's still small voice is ignored;
- He will also stop despising prophesying, i.e. hearing, studying, and obeying the Word of God. The Bible becomes his wonderful daily diet. The voice of God is what he hears whenever he reads the Bible. He does so with a heart of obedience. He gives God full attention when the Bible is read;
- He is discerning and amazingly wise. He is not easily duped. His sense of right and wrong is sharpened by his close walk with God. Therefore he will test or prove all things. He will hold fast and not let go of all that is good, according to Scriptures. He knows that this will please God even if he has to incur the wrath of man in the process. Pleasing God is all that matters to him;
- As one who is walking close to God, his sensitivity to sin is acute. He will abstain from all appearance of evil. It does not have to be evil but as long as it has that appearance of evil he will not do it. He dies to self daily by this truth. His desires and wants are all secondary to what God wants for him in his life.

He cannot do any of these things if he does not pray without ceasing. To pray without ceasing literally means he depends on God all the time and not on self. When a person stops praying he is telling God that he can fight the spiritual realm and live the abundant life without God's help. This is foolishness. No believer can. All of us need to pray without ceasing so that we can always lean on God to fulfil all that God wants us to do before He calls us home to glory. Amen.

Summary

The passage in the Bible that summarizes what it means to pray without ceasing is **Proverbs 3:1-8**, "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: **2** For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. **3** Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: **4** So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. **5** Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. **6** In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. **7** Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. **8** It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones." [Emphasis added]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it common for you to begin the day with prayer? If not, why not? If yes, what do you pray for?

2. Do you realize how helpless you are when you face the world, or do you think that you are well equipped? What is your confidence in life when you go to work or school, or when at home as a family? Is it self or Christ? Cite an example to support your answer.
3. You are bullied in school during recess time by your friends or in class by your teacher who likes to pick on you because he knows you are a Christian. What is the best response in both cases? What are the criteria you should use to decide what the best way to deal with such issues is?
4. You are deeply hurt because one of your good friends has started maligning you unjustly and refuses to meet you to clarify when asked to do so. The maligning continues. Both of you serve together in the same committee. What is the best way to respond that will glorify God?
5. Is your life in Christ an abundant life? Elaborate. If not why not?