

Pray Without Ceasing

Text : **I Thes. 5: 11-21**

INTRODUCTION :

A. Who is your favorite person in the world ?

1. Is it your spouse ? Or a parent ?
2. It might be a child or grandchild ?
3. Perhaps it's a lifelong friend ?

ILL. **When I was a child my great grandfather was my favorite person on earth.**

- a. The times I spent with him are still among my fondest memories.
- b. When we lived by him I was like his shadow.
- c. When we moved, I missed him terribly.
 - 1) Those two miles seemed like the other side of the world.
 - 2) I looked forward to our trips to his house.
 - 3) When we moved north, he was the reason I looked forward to vacations.
- e. I could listen to his stories for hours on end. (**They got better every time.**)
- f. There has never been a fig as sweet as those he picked, peeled and gave to me.

B. How does your relationship with that special person in your life differ from that with others ?

1. Do you value their opinions more ?
2. Do you seek their approval more ?
3. Do you treasure the time you spend with them ? (**Look forward to it.**)
4. Do you put more effort into maintaining your relationship with them ?

C. What do you do to insure you maintain that special relationship ?

1. You consciously avoid anything you know will irritate them.
2. You spend time with them at every opportunity.
3. You trust and confide in them. (**Would never betray**)

TRANSITION :

The Christian's relationship with His Lord is one of a very special nature : He's our brother, He's our owner, He's our savior, and He's our friend.

I. How much more we should be careful to maintain our relationship with God ?

A. Special relationships are never maintained out of duty.

1. There are relationships we maintain out of duty or expediency and we do it well.
 - a. Employer and/or those with whom we do business
 - b. Authorities
 - c. Neighbors
2. Special relationships are voluntarily maintained because we desire them.
 - a. If one has a positive relationship with God it is one of those special, voluntary, heart-felt relationships. (**One that cannot be out of duty or fear.**)
 - b. People who have a special relationship seek opportunities to be together.
 - c. We can know we don't have a "special relationship" with God when we ask :
 - 1) "Do we really have to attend services on Sunday and Wednesday?"
 - 2) "Is the 10% for our contribution figured before or after taxes?"
 - 3) "Do we have to give thanks for our food when we're in a restaurant ?"

B. God rejected the Jews because they approached Him out of

duty rather than desire. (Their religion had become more about them than Him.)

1. Jesus quoted Isaiah :
 - a. **Matt. 15:8-** This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far away from Me. (**More about how than why.**)
 - b. They had reduced worship to rituals and started making their own rules.
 - c. "Christians" are also at times tempted to ritualize worship. (e.g., "say" prayer)
2. Jesus rejected the attitude of the Jews & gentiles. (**worship based on performance**)
 - a. **John 4: 24-** God is spirit, and those who worship Him
must worship in spirit and truth (*Lady, you're missin' the whole point.*)
 - b. Context : Jesus contrasted the argument over rules (place) with the worship
God wants, the hearts, souls and minds of men being devoted to Him.
* **Still today legalists try to make this verse about rules keeping, proper rituals.**
 - c. There was a proper place to worship, but God wants men to devote their hearts,
NOT for them to just make sure they perform the "acts" (the rituals) properly.
* **Even if all the rituals are correct, if the heart is not right, the worship is vain.**
3. When Christians offer up the sacrifice of praise, it must be sincere. (**from heart**)
Heb. 13:15- Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a
sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. (NVI)

II. When people have a special relationship, they talk freely with each other.**A. The level of conversation directly reflects the level of relationship.**

1. People talk about that which they have in common.
 - a. With strangers ... weather, current events
 - b. With acquaintances ... people, events, and places
 - c. With friends ... mutual experiences, feelings, and personal lives
2. As relationships grow, the topics of conversation move closer to the heart.
 - a. Things that have pleased or displeased you
 - b. Worries and concerns
 - c. Problems and feelings
3. Relationships are developed over time with frequent contact. (**problem in church**)

B. One feels free to speak his mind to those with whom he has a relationship.

1. One must feel secure in the relationship before he will open up.
 - a. If one does not feel accepted, he will not expose himself.
 - b. If one feels the relationship can be destroyed, he will be guarded in his words.
2. This is a problem in most congregations. **Sufficient closeness has not developed.**
 - a. Fear of rejection causes masking. (**Mature love casts out fear. I John 4: 18**)
 - b. They wouldn't like me if they knew that I _____ .
3. This is a problem in many marriages.
 - a. People get married before developing sufficient depth of relationship.
 - b. All relationships start from attraction, but they must grow beyond that.
 - c. Both marriage partners must feel secure in the relationship. ... **BEFORE** marriage.
4. This is also a problem in evangelism.
 - a. Conflict is resolved on the basis of relationship.
 - b. We need to establish a relationship **BEFORE** we deal with controversial issues.

C. One's conversations with God reveals the closeness of his relationship with Him.

1. No one uses canned topics, memorized lines, or other people's words when talking with those with whom they feel a close relationship.
 - a. Imagine the response if we talked to our friends the way we pray.
 - b. **Should we expect a different response from God ? (say prayer -vs- pray)**
 - c. The closeness of one's conversations reveals the closeness of relationship.

2. Biblically, those who've had a special relationship with God talked freely with Him.
 - a. Abraham, God's **"friend"** (**Isa. 41: 8**), negotiated with Him for Sodom. (**Gen 18**)
 - b. Moses persuaded God not to destroy Israel. (**Exod. 32: 7-14**)
 - c. David, the man after God's own heart (**I Sam 13:14**), was angry with God. (**II Sam 6:8**) **GOD KNOWS OUR HEARTS !! BE OPEN !!**

III. When the Apostle Paul told us to **"Pray without ceasing."** he was instructing us in maintain our relationship with God.

A. Relationships are built and they must be maintained.

1. Relationships require a flowing back and forth, interaction. (**Never one-sided**)
2. Interaction requires contact. (and the more the better.)
3. Relationship with God also requires contact.
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Studying His word
 - c. Mutual friends (fellowship of the saints)

B. The great men of faith all had prayer relationships with God.

1. The journey's of Abraham could be traced by the altars he left behind.
2. David prayed to God morning, noon and night. **Psa. 55: 17**
3. The enemies of Daniel knew they could only entrap him via His God. (**tell .. Dan 6**)
 - * **Daniel was willing to risk his life to pray.**

C. The Apostles were men of prayer.

1. Paul
 - a. Started every epistle with prayer.
 - b. Prayed **"night and day"** **I Thes. 3: 10**
2. Peter
 - a. He was on the housetop praying when he saw his vision. **Acts 10: 9**
 - b. Peter and John prayed for the new Christians in Samaria. **Acts 8: 15**
3. Jesus prayed regularly. **Matt. 14: 23, etc.**

D. Regular prayer is essential for our maintaining our relationship with God.

1. **"Pray without ceasing"** does not mean :
 - a. NOT Christians must pray non-stop ... **24-7.**
 - * Some literal interpretations make no sense. (e.g., **all in the name of .. Col 3:17**)

- b. Christians must always have a prayerful thought in his heart? (**Good, but not it.**)
- 2. It means that a Christian must have an uninterrupted prayer life. **Never give it up !**
- 3. It means that we should have the same attitude as the prophet Daniel :
“Even if they kill me, I will never stop praying.”

IV. Every Christian’s prayer life should :

A. Include God as part of one’s internal dialog.

- 1. One’s mind never shuts down.
 - a. It’s normal to talk with one’s self all day long. (**non-verbally**)
 - b. It’s only a problem when we start answering ourselves.
 - 2. The Christian should include God in the ongoing dialog. (**Make it a “*trialog*.”**)
 - 3. *Talk with God like teenagers text each other.*
 - a. They feel threatened if unattached.
 - b. They feel compelled to share every thought and/or experience.
- * Song : *“I must tell Jesus.”*

B. Include set times of prayer every day.

- 1. Peter and John observed the Jewish hours of prayer.
 - a. **Acts 3:1-** Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. (cf. - **Acts 10: 3, 30**)
 - b. **Acts 10: 9-** ... Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.
 - 2. Daniel gives a good example of a daily schedule. **Dan. 6: 13** (**3 x**)
 - 3. Major religions in history have had set hours of prayer.
- * **Grace gives us liberty to set our own hours, NOT to stop praying.**

C. Prayer should be a time that those who love each other enjoy spending together.

- 1. As our love grows we increasingly seek time to be with those we love.
- 2. As love for God grows, Christians seek time to be with God.
 - a. We will not have to be told to spend time with God’s word.
 - b. We naturally spend more time talking with Him.
- 3. **ILL.-** When I visited Bro. Gus Nichols, a fellow preacher told me. “If he invites you for lunch, make sure you eat something before you go. He prays for more than an hour before he starts eating.”

CONCLUSION :**A. Devotion to prayer is part of the Christian character.**

1. When describing the essence of the Christian life to the Roman brethren Paul wrote : **“Let love be without hypocrisy.
Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.
¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love;
give preference to one another in honor;
¹¹not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;
¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,
¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”**
Rom. 12: 9-13
2. When giving final instructions to the Brethren at Colossae Paul wrote :
Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;
Col. 4:2
3. What would the Apostle Paul write to us ? **“Do what I told them.”**
*** No matter how busy life gets, never stop praying.**

B. TEXT : The brethren at Thessalonica were becoming discouraged.

1. Some were dying, but the Lord had not returned.
2. They did not want to miss out on the promise of eternity in Heaven.
3. Paul admonished them to never give up praying ... **i.e.**, never stop seeking God.

C. This advice is just as appropriate for us.

1. We must never take our eyes off the skies.
2. Christians live in anticipation of Christ's return.
3. We keep in touch by prayer until we are finally permanently united with Him.

INVITATION :

1. What is your relationship with God ?
Your prayer life will tell you !!
2. Do you walk and talk with Him as friend to friend ?
3. Are you now ready to begin a relationship with Him ?