

Day Sixteen

pray without ceasing; -1 Thessalonians 5:17

How Often Should We Pray?

Wouldn't it be convenient if you could find the answer right here? If the answer were written plainly on this page for us, wouldn't that make it so much easier? The verses we shall look at here are given as examples of those who leaned upon the Lord in great ways. Perhaps the question to ask would be more aptly put, not in terms of time spent praying, but in the amount of faith you desire to have in your life.

Perhaps our prayer life is a really a barometer of our faith. Do we only pray in times of trouble? Do we only pray when it is convenient? Is prayer reserved for meals and at worship services only? If so, it may be time to take a long hard look at our hearts.

Our verse for the day is one of the shortest verses in the Bible, yet is one with tremendous power, nonetheless. But, "*pray without ceasing*"? For real? Constantly praying, every waking moment? Is that what it means? If taken literally, we might be subject to wild swings of zealot behavior. Come to think of it, that might not be a bad thing. But, nonetheless, we need to look at this verse in context, lest we see it one-dimensional in its nature.

Paul gives us this verse in between two other equally powerful verses. *Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

-1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. There we have it; **first:** rejoice always, **second:** pray without ceasing, **third:** in everything give thanks. Those qualifiers that give us the all inclusiveness of the directives. ALWAYS, WITHOUT CEASING, EVERYTHING.

So, are we talking in terms of "time" here? You know, that annoying thing that keeps on ticking in spite of our best efforts to slow it down. As we have discovered in previous lessons in our study of prayer, it is not the literal we are pursuing but the condition of the heart. True joy is not dependent upon externals. Giving thanks is not about getting what we want. Ceaseless prayer is not about punching a prayer time clock.

Daniel's prayer habits caused quite a stir in his day. *Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God." -Daniel 6:5 "All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den. -Daniel 6:7 Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously. -Daniel 6:10*

Daniel did not alter his praying habits even when the injunction was put in place. Three times a day. David said this concerning devotions: *Seven times a day I praise Thee, Because of Thy righteous ordinances. -Psalms 119:164.* In another place he says that three times a day he prayed; *As for me, I shall call upon God, And the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, And He will hear my voice. -Psalms 55:16-17.* David prayed at unusual times. *At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to Thee Because of Thy righteous ordinances. -Psalms 119:62.*

Martin Luther had said at one point, "*I have so much to do today I shall never get through it with less than three hours of prayer*". Think you don't have time to pray without ceasing? Think again! Our thought might be when we hear "*pray without ceasing*", is that we don't have time to pray! Once again, it is a heart issue. If our heart is in tune to God, we will find time and find it plentiful.

It is known that a Moravian community began praying 24 hours a day in 1727, taking turns an hour at a time, members of the persecuted community that fled to Herrnhut, Germany for refuge. For the next 120 years they prayed night and day! Could we find that kind of time?

Prayerful Thoughts: Our Father, continually, we come to Thee with praise.