

Prayer Unceasing?

In the hurried days of our lives, how is it possible to pray without ceasing? Or is that just a rosy ideal that can never be made real?

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

"**PRAY CONTINUALLY**," said Paul ([1 Thes. 5:17](#)). Many of us memorize the verse early in our Bible memory careers. It's short, pungent, even majestic. But when you meditate on it, you have to wonder, "**Is it possible? What did the apostle mean?**"

Paul had a penchant for potent terms. He told Timothy, "**... night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers**" ([2 Tim. 1:3](#)). He informed the Thessalonians, "**We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith . . .**" ([1 Thes. 1:2](#); [1 Thes. 1:3](#)). To the Colossians he wrote, "**... since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will . . .**" ([Col. 1:9](#)).

Read forward or backward in the New Testament and you find Paul referring to his rather heavy prayer schedule, using such terms as "**always**," "**unceasing**," "**constantly**," all without batting an eye. Was Paul an exaggerator? Or did he really spend this much time in prayer? Or are we misinterpreting his words?

Obviously Paul was no liar. If he was using hyperbole, it's certainly not a very legitimate or even kind statement. It only puts the rest of us under a heavy load of guilt. What did he mean?

WALKING IN PRAYER

An idea that helps me with this comes from a biblical concept, recorded in [Galatians 5:16](#): "**But I say, walk by the Spirit . . .**" (*NASB*).

Walking illustrates prayer without ceasing. Think of yourself as on a hike with Jesus. You're walking down the road together. Sometimes you're engrossed in deep theological discussions. Other times, you're just commenting on the landscape. Suddenly, a rattlesnake slithers into your path and you're nearly screaming to Him. Then there is the moment when you just stand together admiring the sunset. No words. No comments. But real communication.

That's a picture of "**pray without ceasing**" ([1 Thes. 5:17](#), *NASB*). It's simply walking with Jesus. As long as you're walking closely in fellowship, though there may not be words or even thoughts directed to one another, there is a sense of His presence, a communication. Sometimes you're on your knees, sometimes you're talking in the car. Sometimes you're simply rejoicing before Him as you gaze on a flower bed, quietly

praising Him. It's only when you step out of fellowship by disobedience or defiance that the communication is broken. Otherwise the prayer never ends.

If that's an appropriate way of looking at unceasing prayer, how does it happen? How can it become the pattern of our lives, walking and praying in this way?

Consider several principles.

First, Paul is issuing a command. That leads to several ideas. First, if it's commanded, then it is a conscious choice on our part to obey. That means we have to work at it, learn it, cultivate the habit. **Second**, we can only obey in the power of the Spirit. He must teach us. He must lead us. **Finally**, it is something that probably starts out weak and only becomes strong with time and maturity. We have to develop it as we go along. It doesn't come prepackaged.

Since this involves the sovereign work of the Spirit in us and our necessary cooperation, it follows that it can only grow and develop in an atmosphere of obedience. Conversely, it withers when we sin.

This basic spiritual principle applies in every area of Christian living, but particularly here. To go back to the hiking illustration, we must remember that Jesus said the way is "**narrow**." That means it's easy to get sidetracked or to step out of the path. Satan will be out there throwing every obstacle he can dream up to trip us up, flip us over, and tear us apart. The moment we become conscious of sin, we must repent, confess, and go on. Communication with the Lord resumes the moment we turn back to Him.

Thus, prayer without ceasing is part of the overflow of a consistent walk with Jesus. But how does one develop that spontaneous, consistent communication that Paul commands? Obviously, it takes conscious effort. But I have found that there are certain moments ripe for requests, prayers, thanksgivings, and praises.

While driving. Take the time to pray. Pray for people you see on the street, for the guy who just cut you off, or for the fellow fixing a flat.

While watching television. Pray for the people involved in disasters reported on the news—by name if you catch their names. Pray for newscasters and others in the media.

While reading the newspaper. Again, pick out the people in the news. Go to the obituaries and pray for the bereaved. Pray for whole nations—Israel, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Africa, Latin America, Romania. Pray about the issues as you read editorials.

The moment someone asks you to pray. Are you often stymied when people ask for prayer and you forget to pray? Then pray the first free moment you have. You don't have to pray long. Just talk with God about it and move on with your responsibilities. You may forget the request an hour later, but God doesn't.

During church services. Pray for the pastor as he preaches, the soloist as he or she sings, the people in front of you and behind you. Pray in the quiet moments, or when you

have trouble concentrating. Learn to murmur your prayers to God as you think your way through life.

On walks. Take a walk around your neighborhood. Pray for your neighbors, the stores and businesses, the people you meet.

At work. Take a moment here and there to pray for your co-workers. You don't have to bow your head and close your eyes. Just speak to the Lord from your heart.

Wherever you are, God is. He's listening. Tell Him what's on your heart. Develop the ability to speak to Him as the friend at your elbow, the leader at your helm, and the Lord on His throne.

Prayer without ceasing is really not difficult. It's just a matter of being conscious that Jesus is with you and talking with Him as you would with a friend. You aren't like a broken down car on the road. You don't have to flag Him down with, "Now I'm going to pray, Lord." Just speak. He's listening. He will respond. And the more you tell Him, the more He has to respond to. He loves it that way.