

Pray Without Ceasing

By Bill Garner

We are all feeling the effects of the coronavirus. The prospect of getting some extra days off of school probably sounded pretty appealing until the reality of social distancing set in. In our country today, there is much uncertainty about the future. COVID-19 fears have triggered many emotions, including uncertainty, despair, and even anger. I have seen all of this play out on social media. These are uncertain times, and the unknown can seem dark and overwhelming. If you are like me, you have probably been praying a little more frequently than usual because you have had a lot more time on your hands. Unfortunately for most of us, prayer often gets pushed to the side because we prioritize other things. That's until we are met with a crisis.

Evangelist Oswald Chambers once said, **“We tend to use prayer as a last resort, but God wants it to be our first line of defense. We pray when there's nothing else we can do, but God wants us to pray before we do anything at all. Most of us would prefer, however, to spend our time doing something that will get immediate results. We don't want to wait for God to resolve matters in His good time because His idea of 'good time' is seldom in sync with ours.”**

So how can we begin to cultivate a lifestyle of prayer? First, let recognize that prayer is not an event. It's not your quiet time. Prayer is a conversation with God, and we should never marginalize our relationship with the Lord to just a single isolated event that we treat as something to check off the list. In John 15:5, Jesus says, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* The word **remain** is key. To remain means to stay in that place.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 states, *“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”* This quote by Smith Wigglesworth says it best. *“I don't ever pray any longer than twenty minutes, but I never go twenty minutes without praying. Your prayer life is not measured in minutes. Prayer is a lifestyle. Prayer is a constant two-way communication with God. Prayer is essential to living in freedom.”*

The coronavirus has pushed all of us into some form of isolation which none of us would have chosen on our own. But it's also given all of us an opportunity that we will probably never have again in our lifetime. We have before us a window of time when we can draw close to the presence of God. James 4:8 tells us that if we will draw near to God, He will draw near to us. Cultivating a lifestyle that is rooted in prayer doesn't happen by accident. It takes intentionality. These four P's can offer you a guide as you begin to ramp up your prayer life.

1. Priority

If we were to be perfectly honest, prayer is often a last resort instead of our first response. Prayer can sometimes be like a 911 call or something to check off the list. Let's remember that the throne belongs to the Lord and our relationship with Him should be our first priority.

1. Place

Let's look and see how Jesus prayed. Mark 1:35 *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.* Jesus was very strategic. He found a place where it could be just Him and the Father. He also gave God the first part of the day. Think about where you could go to connect with the Lord. I spend a lot of time in my car, so instead of listening to music all the time, I will often spend that time in prayer. I also enjoy going out on my back deck. It's quiet and the sounds of the Cahaba River running is peaceful. Regardless of where you decide to pray, it's important to find a consistent place where it's just you and the Lord.

1. Plan

Let's read Luke 11:1, *One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples"* Did the disciples not know how to pray? Of course not. They grew up around prayer. But when they saw Jesus praying, they saw a style of prayer they had never seen. That's why Jesus gave them a guide which we know as the Lord's prayer.

1. Personal

God speaks to us through his word, and we speak to God through prayer. In 2 Corinthians 13:14, we read *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* I love The Message paraphrase of this verse: *"The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you."* God's desire is to know his children intimately. Notice how all parts of the Trinity are included in this scripture passage. When we pray, we need to embrace this idea. Prayer is not about fancy words and eloquent speech. It's a conversation with God. We don't have to brush up on our King James Bible, and we don't have to write out our prayers as if we are about to give a speech in school. What the Lord desires is that we know Him so that we can make Him known. Hebrews 4:16 reminds us, *"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

Reflection

Read Luke 11:1-13

1. Why does the Lord's prayer begin with "Father, hallowed be your name?"

1. What do you find is the most difficult part of prayer for you personally?

1. What's one thing you could do to put prayer as a priority in your schedule?

Please let us know how we can pray for you.