

The Prayer Life of Our Lord

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Let's open up our Bibles to 1st Thessalonians chapter 5. And in verse 16, we looked at 'Rejoice always,' verse 17: 'Pray without ceasing,' verse 18: In every thing give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Now as we have said before, this whole section is sandwiched in between two things. One is: How do we live in a manner that is of great benefit to the people of God; and how do we ourselves grow in sanctification. In the very heart of this, we have things like 'Rejoicing,' and that rejoicing is only possible if you know God. And I don't mean just simply some experience but to grow in the knowledge of God. And if you are truly growing in the knowledge of God, understanding who He is, what Christ has done for you, and who you are in Christ, then it is much easier to rejoice in every circumstance.

But knowing the character of God not only leads to rejoicing; knowing the character of God also leads to prayer. Because the more you know about God, the more you understand about yourself. And the more you understand about yourself, the more you understand you are weak and He is strong. And the advancement of the Kingdom, whether it be in the microcosm of your own life, or the advancement of the Kingdom in the macrocosm of the world, is an absolute impossibility — if you were to take all the Christians in the world, take all their best strengths, put it all together, we couldn't advance the Kingdom one inch. Even with our gifts, our cleverness, our eloquence or human wisdom: not one inch. That everything is dependent upon God moving. And God has promised to move and not to move, in relation to prayer.

Now what do I mean by that? God is all sovereign and He will carry out His will. And we can hold on to that; and we must hold on to that central truth. But over on the other side is another central truth that balances us out. Even though He has decreed all things before the foundation of the world, "you have not because you ask not." (James 4:2). There is an element of mystery there that we cannot explain, but we must not ignore or override: God moves as a result of His people praying.

You say, "Well, God is my protector; God is my fortress," as brother Joel has pointed out so well in the last several Sundays. God is so many things to us, but don't think that just because you have those promises, that then you are supposed to remain passive. You are to cry out for God to be your fortress in the midst of difficulty. You are to seek Him as your bulwark in the midst of trial. When there is need, you are to call on His name. Yes of course, there will be times when we do not call on His name and He is still faithful. He will still work because He cares for us and He knows what we need even before we ask Him. Yet you must understand always in the back of your mind, two things: . God is sovereign; His decrees will be carried out. . Many things, all sorts of things, and most especially, there are many spiritual realities that are not a reality to me because I do not ask.

And so, next week I am going to bring an end to all this — the study of 1st Thessalonians; but I want to concentrate for just a moment, for just a bit more, on prayer. And particularly I want you to look at the life of prayer in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I think it is absolutely essential. Why? He is not only God-incarnate,

He is not only God in the flesh, He is not only God the Son, but He was genuine Man. And He did what He did when He walked on this earth as a Man in the power of the Holy Spirit. So many times we think that Jesus relied absolutely upon His deity, and therefore all things were easy for Him. If we think that way, we're not understanding the New Testament.

Although He never let go of deity (He was God in the fullest and strictest sense of the term,) you must understand He laid aside the privileges and powers of deity, and what He did on this planet, He did as a Man anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit; and therefore, He is our example. And you cannot use simply the excuse, "Well, He is my example but He is not really my example because of course He was God." No, He is your example. And if you want to follow an example, He is the One to follow.

So let's just take a look at His life of prayer and we're going to see how He practiced this praying without ceasing. First of all, go to the book of Mark, chapter 1 verse 32, "When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon possessed, and the whole city had gathered at the door. And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak because they knew who He was. In the early morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him and said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for you.'"

Now, let's just look at some of the background here in our text. Because if you understand the context here, you'll understand how important prayer was in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. First of all, when we look at the book of Mark, many people who have studied through the entire book of Mark see it as the Gospel of snapshots. Rapid fire snapshots. You will constantly see in the book of Mark, the word "Immediately." Immediately He was here, immediately He was there; Immediately He did this, immediately He did that. As a matter of fact, I would challenge you to sit down one day, and read through the entire book of Mark at one setting, and I guarantee you'll be exhausted. Not because the book is so long, but just by following our Master. I mean He is busy. He is busy. And you need to understand that.

Also, I want you to look at something. In verse 32, "When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon possessed, and the whole city had gathered at the door. And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons." Now, two things: 1. Years ago in an area of Peru in the Andes mountains called Ayabaka in Umpueblo, in a little town by the name of Santa Rosa, about 1100 mountain men, mountain people had gathered there for a conference. And I happened to take with me a doctor (as a matter of fact, the guy who disciplined me when I was in college, and just one year older than me: Dr. Mike Martin, from Tulsa.) Well, we hike all the way up into this mountain range. I was teaching the first day, and then something terrible happened. Everyone found out he was a doctor.

Now he had almost no medicine, no instruments. It didn't matter. For those people, this was the only opportunity most of them would ever have to see a doctor. And those kind and gentle and always courteous mountain people that I had worked with for so many years, almost became like a mob. They literally stood in the doorway — a line that would go clear across the encampment. And they stood there from morning to night, just waiting for a possibility to see the doctor. And needless to say, for three days, my friend, Dr. Mike Martin, tried to minister to these people. He was utterly exhausted. He had to go out at night, I had to lead him through the camp

at night so that he could go to the restroom; because if anyone saw him outside, immediately a crowd would gather. And I don't want to use the word 'violent' because that would be wrong to portray the people that way, but they were desperate to get some help. It literally wore him out.

And that's what we see about Jesus Christ here. That's exactly what we see in the text. But even more so, Mike was ministering, not in the flesh, but he was ministering with regard to natural means. He was using the science of medicine to help the people, and it wore him out. But here, we see something else. We see spiritual means. Do you remember when someone came up behind Jesus and touched Him, and He immediately turned around. Why? Because, as in the King James, it says He immediately noticed that virtue went out from Him; that power went out from Him. Yes.

Now, I don't believe that any of us would put ourselves beside Jesus, saying that we spent a day healing people and casting out demons. But I can tell you this: You spend several hours ministering, even counseling, and it will literally wear you out. I have heard that psychologists have said that one hour of intense preaching is equivalent to eight hours of intense mental work. And I believe it.

So here we have a Man, He is casting out demons, He is healing the sick, virtue is going out from Him; and then what do we see? Verse 35, "In the morning, while it was still dark..." So He ministered, I am sure, up until they had to basically close the door— maybe till midnight; maybe even further into the morning. And yet what do we see? He gets up. "In the early morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was there praying."

Now, I do not want to heap upon you some guilt that would have you sleeping two hours a night. It's not wrong when you have ministered for a long time and you get to bed at one in the morning, it is not wrong to stay in bed till eight in the morning. We need our sleep, that is for sure. I'm not trying to teach that if you're spiritual, you're only going to sleep two hours a day. I'm just trying to use this to point out the importance of prayer in the life of the God-Man. There was no one on this planet as holy as He. No one as filled with the Holy Spirit as He. No one with such a perfect knowledge of God. No one more conformed to the image of Christ. And yet, He saw that to carry out the ministry that was given to Him as Messiah, He would have to get up and He would have to pray.

Now you say, "Well, ministry hasn't been given to me." Yes it has. If you're a Christian, ministry has been given to you. As a matter of fact, I don't like to make this secular-sacred divides in the lives of human beings. Ministry has been given to you. Your whole life is a ministry. Every opportunity is a ministry, whether to the body of Christ, or to someone who doesn't know Christ. To one who loves you, to one who hates you, everything is a ministry. To go home to your family, it is a ministry. Everything is a ministry. And that kind of life exacts its toll, on a man, on a woman. And unless you are refreshed in prayer, you will run out. You will never have what is necessary to be a useful instrument of God. And that is proven by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now, look what it says in verse 35, "In the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place." Especially, this is a good word for the young men who may be thinking about the ministry, who are interested in the things of God. There is one quality that you must possess: You must be a man who can be alone.

Men of God do not live their entire lives alone. They are not lone wolves. They are not someone who sits out on a mountain and come and visit the community once a year to just say, "Repent." We are to be among the

people as Christ was among the people. But if we are to be among the people with any sort of effectiveness, we must be the kind of man, the kind of woman, who can draw away from the crowd; even draw away from brothers and sisters in Christ in wonderful communion. We need individuals who can draw away and be with God. And that is the thing that would mark a man. And that's all there is to it.

You can see a man or a woman with a great amount of knowledge — proper knowledge, theological knowledge, reformed knowledge; maybe even quote the entire book of Romans. And yet, have a sense in which they are not alone with God. They do not spend time alone with God. One psychologist back in, I think, the 70s, (it's probably one of the few things I've ever agreed with, with regard to psychology,) he said this: Busy is not of the devil, it is the devil. And so many people today are so busy. So many Christians are so busy that they cannot pull away. And because they do not pull away, they never develop what Paul is talking about in 1 Thessalonians; and that is the ability to pray without ceasing.

And here we see our Lord in a secluded place. I don't know what it is, I can't put my finger on it, but I know this: As I've read through pious and godly men and women down through the history of the Church, I have discovered that in many things they have differed. In personality — not in the fundamentals of the faith, but in some of the secondary issues of the faith — in personality, in lifestyle, the places where they lived, the economic status that they attained, all of it very different. But I do find one common denominator among all those who were mightily used of God; and that is, they saw the need to pull away and be alone with God, as we see our Savior here, right now, in this text.

And this is not only for the preacher, it's not only for the Bible student, it's for everyone. Everyone. It is for the mother at home. It is for the father overwhelmed at work. It is for the student who feels like they can't go on under this kind of pressure. It is for everyone to spend time alone with God, and it is that thing that marks. After a while, you can just tell it, "This person spends time with God." And there's no way around it. No way around it.

Now, it says, "Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there." He was praying. You know, I've heard people say, "I'd give anything to have been there when Paul preached on Mars' hill; I would have given anything to be there at the giving of the law." Well, if I have to admit, if I could have been anywhere, I would have wanted to behold my Savior dying for my sins. But second only to that, it would be, not even to hear my Savior teach, but to hear and watch Him pray. Isn't it astounding that His disciples came to Him and said, "Teach us to pray."

This is something, when I'm doing a pastors' conference or something, I will ask the pastors, "Has anyone ever come up to you, after having watched your life of prayer, and asked you, 'Would you please teach me to pray like you pray?'" Jesus was a Man of prayer. Mrs Bethany Jones, the wife of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, says, "You can't understand my husband as an evangelist or an expositor unless you understand first of all, he was a man of prayer."

I'm telling you, and I want you to listen to me. All of you, especially those that are thinking about going into ministry, listen to me: This is not an option. This is not something to add on. You will NOT be useful, or as useful, apart from prayer. Mountains come down and are cast in the sea through prayer. Strongholds are destroyed through prayer. The battle is won in prayer. You can be pretty, you can be eloquent, you can be clever, you can have all your things laid out in a row; you can be a marvel in the pulpit with regard to people saying, "Wasn't that quaint, wasn't that beautiful, wasn't that catchy, didn't that..?" But they won't be saying, "Were we not transformed, were we

not transformed. Did our hearts not burn within us.” It’s prayer, brothers, sisters. It’s prayer, it’s prayer, it’s prayer, and it’s more prayer.

Now, notice the response of those who followed Him. Verse 36, “Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him and said to Him, ‘Everyone is looking for you.’” You know, in a very very small way, I almost think I can see into this passage because of things that have happened in my own life. “Brother Paul, why are you praying? Don’t you know there are needs out here? It’s time for you to...I mean, it’s 10 more minutes, and you’re supposed to teach. There’s people out here who need counseling, don’t you care? You’re just being here alone with God?”

What you must understand is what Christ understood. It was His being alone with God that made Him effective when He was with the people. Do you see that? More time with God, more time with God. Not because we want less time with people, but we want that when our time is with people, the power and the grace is multiplied. Do you see. Being alone with God. Being alone with God.

Now, let’s go a little bit further, let’s just run over quickly. I want to go to the book of Luke and take you through there for just a moment. Now, brothers and sisters, Luke is an amazing [book]. It’s rather amazing. There’re several things we can emphasize in the book of Luke, but two things that really stand out for our purpose here; and one is his emphasis on the Holy Spirit, and the other is his emphasis on prayer. And I do not find that unusual that those two things are brought together in the book of Luke; because there is a direct relationship between someone abiding and walking in the power of the Spirit, and prayer. Abiding in prayer, abiding in the Word, enables one to abide in the Spirit— to walk in the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit.

There is a supernatural something to our Christian life. And there’s three options. 1.) You can pretend it doesn’t exist. 2.) You can pretend that you understand it, when you don’t. or 3.) You can pray so that it become a reality in your life.

Luke chapter 3 verse 21, “Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized. And while He was praying, Heaven was opened.” This is magnificent. It’s magnificent. You know, usually in the pictures (which I don’t approve of) that are drawn of Christ in the baptism, you see Christ being baptized, and maybe there’s some reference - small movement of the hand or something - that would make you think that He was praying. But the whole thing most people think is He was baptized and the Spirit came down upon Him; but He was baptized and He was praying. How long? What is the interval between the baptism and the prayer? Was it at the same time? We really don’t know. But know this: This was a praying Man. God in the flesh; but a praying Man. A praying Man. A praying Man.

It was His breath. It is what came out of Him. And I can say that, definitely not to the same degree, but I have been fortunate throughout my life to meet men and women who were this way. It seemed that every breath was a prayer to God. And though their names may never be in conference lights, I would presume to say that in glory, their names are well known. Because it’s not anything to have your name known in a conference. The question that Ravenhill used to tell us was this: Is your name known in Heaven? And is your name known in Hell? Does Heaven hear your name, and is it pleased? Does Hell know your name, and tremble?

Jesus was a Man of prayer, and I want to encourage you in this. In all your getting; in all your getting of knowledge, in all your getting of expertise, get this: Learn to pray. Learn to pray.

Now let's go on to something that would give us a bit more to hang on to. Go to Luke 5:16. In verse 15, it says, "But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sickness. But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." You know what is very common? A young man, a young woman, becomes a Christian; God does a work in their life — they give themselves, by God's grace, to prayer and the study of the Word, and they prosper in the knowledge of God, and their usefulness of God. And pretty soon, their name is known, and people are asking them to preach in different places; and what do they do? They give up the very thing that put them in a position to be used of God. They give up their time alone with God.

Not Jesus. Look at the wisdom. It says here very clearly, "News about Him was spreading everywhere. Large crowds gathering to hear Him and to be healed — there were valid needs — But Jesus Himself..." Now look at that. The emphasis on His person. While everyone else is clamoring, while no one else can see the need, ("He should just be out there, He should just be among the people,") But He Himself, He knew better. And He would slip away. He would slip away, and He would pray.

Now, I don't want to make much of this word 'slip' but the whole idea is this: I want to share with you something I think will be helpful. Most people want to go from zero to sixty, and if they can't do that, then they don't do anything. You'll hear a message like what I'm preaching tonight, and you'll go, "Well, I need to pray an hour, or I need to pray two hours, or I need to be more careful in the night watch when I can't sleep, and get up and seek the Lord, and all these things," but it may be beyond you right now. Maybe you don't pray that much, except over your dinner or a few other things. Then I don't expect you to go out tonight and keep a night watch until early morning or daybreak.

But one thing that I have learned—because it is my personality also, either to do it all the way or don't do it at all—slip away. Slip away. Maybe 5 minutes here, 5 minutes there, 10 minutes here, 10 minutes there. You're coming between classes and you've got 10 minutes to spare, slip away. You're working in the office and there's a little bit of down time, slip away. Meals being prepared at home, and you got home 10 minutes too early, there's still time, slip away. Slip away. Learn that communication with the Lord is ongoing. When a client walks into your office and he's headed for your door; you can see the shadow of him on the other side of the glass, slip away — even if it's fifteen seconds, "Lord, You know. You're wise." Slip away. Slip away. Spend time with Him. Slip away. Take those little moments that are lost.

You know, it is said that some people, they do not order their day at all. Other people who are a bit more successful will divide their work hours in two: Morning and after lunch. People who are really on the ball will divide their time in 1-hour segments. And then we find this out: The top executives in the world divide their hour in 5-minute intervals; so if they finish a meeting in 55 minutes that is scheduled for an hour, they've got something else to do those 5 minutes. And by the end of the day, they've recuperated 3 hours or more, that most people have just lost. Slip away. Make a note. Say, "You know, I waste this time anyway, so what I am going to do when I have this time, I'm either going to meditate on Scripture— with being conscious of the Lord while I am meditating on the Scriptures— or I am going to pray to Him. I'm just going to slip away. You'd be surprised how much that would add up in your life.

Now, let's look at Luke chapter 6 verse 12, "It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and

He spent the whole night in prayer to God.” What is this? The choosing of the twelve. The choosing of the twelve. Wouldn’t we just expect the Holy Spirit just to say to Him, “That one, that one, that one, that one, not that one, not that one, that one, that one”? I mean, doesn’t it make a whole lot more sense in the economy of God? Why should He spend the whole night in prayer? Shouldn’t He just trust in the fact that God’s going to lead Him? That’s where sovereignty—an unhealthy view of sovereignty—would mess you up. Shouldn’t He just presume that God is going to just tell Him? No, that’s not what our Lord does. He spends the night in prayer. And it is so closely associated with the choosing of the twelve, we must believe that, at least, that was the main theme in His seeking the Lord all night.

Sometimes I think, (and I don’t know how many words I could pull from the thesaurus here,) how much arrogance, presumption, atrocious pride do I demonstrate when I have to make a decision for ministry, and I don’t tarry an hour. How foolish and dangerous that is. Just to chalk another one up to the sovereignty of God — He’s going to override whatever foolish decision I make. That is not the way our Lord viewed life. And don’t think this is just about directing this church, or directing HeartCry, or something super-spiritual like that. I’m talking about every aspect of our lives, whether it be business or school, or certain personal decisions that we have to make. Yes we know that God’s overarching sovereignty can give us confidence, but we are never allowed to presume upon that. Never. Never. But we are to seek Him. We’re not to trust in our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge Him.

Now, look at Luke chapter 9 and verse 18, “And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him; and He questioned them saying, Who do the people say that I am?” Now, I think there’s something interesting here. Was it while He was praying that the Father revealed to Him the necessity of asking that question. That the Lord gave Him insight into knowing what the disciples were thinking about, and what needed to be clarified. Could it have been there in that time of prayer that the Lord prompted Him, “Ask this question.” Because, never forget, although He was deity in the strictest sense of the term (He was God the Son, God in the flesh,) He did everything He did by the power of the Holy Spirit, relying totally upon His Father, and the revelation of His Father through the Holy Spirit. Do you see that?

What does this world need? My dear friend and Anthony’s mentor, John Snyder; he preached here a while back. And I’ll never forget something he said: “Everybody is talking about passion, Somebody needs to stand up and talk about caution.” Because your passion can get you in a whole lot of trouble if you don’t have discernment. And isn’t discernment what is needed today? I mean discernment—doctrinal discernment. I mean discernment with regard to how to carry out your ministry. I mean discernment when you’re in the middle of talking to someone on campus, and you need to know, “Should I press further, or should I pull back with patience?” And where does that discernment come from? Yes, it comes from renewing our mind in the Word of God; but it also comes from prayer, from prayer, from prayer.

As you measure the importance of revelation (and I believe revelation in the Scripture,) as you measure the importance of that, esteem it, and respond correctly by studying God’s Word; and He gives you more knowledge and more discernment, I think the same in prayer. That somehow our senses are heightened by being in the presence of God. That the more we stay at His doorstep, the more we linger in His room, the more we understand about even hidden things, and things are brought to light, and discernment is given.

You know, I was trying to, for the last couple of weeks, I've been just dealing with all the old testament passages that use the word 'cup,' because our Lord drank the bitter cup. Our Lord said, "Let this cup pass from Me." And to go back to look at all the passages that speak of the cup as the wrath of God, and then every different detail in those passages that might give me some further understanding into what our Lord suffered when He died on that tree. And on the trip back from California this week, I'm sitting there, and there was so much noise in the plane that eventually I just had to take my computer top and just shut it down, and say, "I give up. There's just no way I can do this here." So much noise. And I do believe that that is one of the greatest problems in modern day evangelicalism—just so much noise! Sometimes I just want to say, "Would everybody just shut up! so that we could hear." Do you see that?

There was a poem, it said, "Weak from the journey, the long passing days (talking about the Lord coming in from the wilderness and the temptation,) Weak from the journey, the long passing days; hungry to worship, to join in the praise; but shock met with anger that burned on His face when He entered the waste land of that barren place, (talking about entering into the temple.) And then the poem goes on where He fastened some cords; He beat them out. And then it says "The noise and confusion gave way to His Word; at last, sacred silence so God could be heard."

Have you ever practiced silence? Now I know someone will probably hear this on YouTube and try to twist it around to say that I've joined the mystics. No, I have not joined the mystics, I am just telling Christians there is a great benefit in just shutting your mouth! And being alone before God, and meditating on His Word, and sitting in the quiet. Do you see that? I had a Professor that told me one time, he said, "Paul, I'm going to stay on you until I can put you in the middle of a 100-acre field, and you can sit so quiet listening to God, you'll hear a caterpillar walking across a leaf. Do you see? This is so important brothers. Quiet. Quiet.

Now, let's go on again. Look at chapter 11 verse 1. We just have two more passages and then we'll go on. Luke chapter 11 verse 1, "It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples.'" Leonard Ravenhill used to tell a story, and I think I've identified the man, but I'm not going to give his name. You probably wouldn't know him anyways. I'm not sure, but from what I know about this other man, and what Ravenhill said, I think I know who it is. I think I actually know him. But Ravenhill said that he walked in on this man one time, while he was praying; and he just stood there, in fear. And then Ravenhill said, "I backed up out of the room, and walked out." And someone said, "Why did you back up? And Ravenhill said, "Because you don't turn your back on royalty." He was this humble man, but on his knees. But he had spent so much time in his life alone with God, he knew that this man was a prince before God in prayer.

And then notice that it says here, "It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him..." I believe, well we know, there were times when they looked at Jesus, and no one wanted to ask Him another question. No one even wanted to bother Him. I think that if there ever was a time when men peered into the holy of hollies, it was when those disciples looked around a tree and saw their Master praying. They saw their Master praying, and they knew—off limits. Don't interrupt this communion, it's sacred. Oh that our children would see that in us when we pray. That others would know that there's a hush that falls when we open our mouth to talk to God. And my friend, you can't memorize this; you can't get this from rhetoric.

You only get this from your time alone with God. Do you see that?

Now it says also, “Teach us to pray.” And I already mentioned this, so we don’t have to go into much depth. But think about this: Jesus did some extraordinary things. He cast out demons, but the disciples never said, “Teach us to cast out demons.” He healed the sick and raised the dead, and the disciples never came to Him and said, “Would you please teach us to raise the dead like you did?” But here we see that prayer must have been the most extraordinary thing in the life of Jesus; because they said, “Lord, one thing we’re going to ask of Thee, Would You teach us to pray like You pray?”

Now, let me just put in a very important side note here. How do you learn to pray? Well, first let me give you a trite answer, and then explain it. How do you learn to ride a bicycle? You just get on one and ride. How do you learn to pray? You pray. But then, we have to be careful, don’t we? Riding a bicycle is a natural thing, praying is a spiritual thing. You’re entering into the presence of God, you’re calling upon the name of the Lord, and there are many many warnings in Scripture that we should do that correctly. So how do you pray? Well, I have some brethren who I believe are sincere in their wanting to learn how to pray, but I think they have literally gone too far. I know brethren that are so fearful of experience, and so fearful of saying something wrong in the presence of God, that their prayer life is simply reading the prayers of Scripture. When they want to pray, they go to the Scripture, find a prayer that is kind of what they are wanting to say to God, and then they read it to God. Now I respect their desire to be orthodox. I respect their passion for being correct. But that is not how we pray.

You say, “Well, how then do we pray?” Well, let me give you an illustration. When I was a young man, I came across Alexander McLaren, who was a great expositor—he was known to spend 60 hours on a sermon. And I read so much of Alexander McLaren that I began to realize, I’m hooking up phrases and using prepositions and following a logical order, just like Alexander McLaren. It’s like he took over. And then I came across R. C. Sproul. And I listened to his ‘Consequences of Ideas’, ‘The Holiness of God’; and his logic is so marvelous, his reasoning is so impeccable in so many ways, and I realized, I am starting to look like R.C. Sproul. Maybe not look like him, I’m starting to sound like him, even to myself. I’m starting to do certain things, and reason in certain ways.

Now, how do you learn how to pray? Read the Scriptures. Read the commands of Scripture. Read the will of God in Scripture. Read who is God in Scripture, and read the prayers of Scripture. Read them. Meditate on them. Study them. Not so that you can repeat them verbatim, but so that you cultivate or develop the mind of Christ. And you begin to think like God thinks, you begin to speak as Christ spoke, that it just takes over. You’re renewing your mind. You’re developing the same way of thinking. And isn’t that what it’s all about? Not some sort of robotic and unhealthy parroting of anything. No! Just saturating our lives in the Word of God, so that we begin to think as He thinks. To speak as He speaks. That our will be conformed to His. That we’re thinking the same thoughts and saying the same things.

Now, let’s just finish here in Luke 18. This is our last text. Verse 1, “Now He was telling them a parable to show them at all times, they ought to pray and not lose heart.” Now we do not have time to go through this parable, but I want to tell you something: If you preach this parable correctly, it’s astounding. Because there is this woman who is so relentless, that the judge says, “I don’t respect her, I don’t fear God, I don’t even like the people, but I am going to answer her petition because she’s beating me black and blue. She will not give me rest.” And then Jesus applies that to our relationship with the all-sovereign God. Now before you go in there thinking you’re going to

beat God black and blue, let me say this: Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. And here's what I have discovered over the years: Those who demonstrate the most biblical boldness in wrestling with God, and not giving up, are the same ones who demonstrate the most biblical reverence for God.

A reverent man or woman who fears God, who counts their words, even in His presence. It is that kind of fear, along with the promises of God, that enabled him to go in and be so bold as to say, "I will not let You go until You bless me." But you better be careful going in there with just some superficial knowledge of God, thinking 'Abba Father' means 'Daddy,' and you're going to go in there and tell Him what He needs to do. Be very careful. So, we grow in boldness, biblical boldness, as we grow in biblical reverence for God. Do you see that? Very important.

But look what He says. And it says, "He was telling them a parable to show that at all times, they ought to pray." In every encounter, in every circumstance, in every obstacle, in every opportunity. What do I mean by that? A great door of opportunity opens up to witness. Don't go in there without prayer. Yes! the door opened, but prayer prepares you as a laborer. Do you understand me? This is very very important. It's not just the obstacles that ought to result in prayer, it is the opportunities that ought to result in prayer.

You see someone coming toward you, and they look as though they are troubled, and that they are going to petition counsel from you. What should you do? The first thing you should do before you open up your mouth to them, you should open up your heart to God in petition: "Lord, whatever this person is dealing with is beyond me, and they don't need my little silly cliches or human wisdom, they need to hear a word from God from Your Scripture. Help me. Help me."

Now, the last thing here. Not only at all times we ought to pray, but not lose heart. Now why is this important? Well, I can begin a marathon. That's why it's important. I can begin a 24 or 26-mile race. I can begin a marathon. My only problem is I can't finish one. And that's one of the greatest hindrances to prayer. Everyone, the gun goes off, you shoot out of the blocks; and pretty soon you look around, and who's there? Who continues running? Who continues asking? Who perseveres?

Again, let me go back to say this: there is a holy boldness in which you are believing God for promises He's made. You're not presuming upon God for promises He has not made. But you're believing Him for promises He has made, and you are not going to give up. You are going to continue on in prayer.

I was reading Martin Lloyd-Jones, he was talking about how so many people want a deeper walk with God, and they'll start off. And he said, so many times he heard things like, "Well, I can't go on." Why? "Well, I prayed for 6 weeks." Really? "Well, you know, I gave it my best but it didn't happen." It's those who go on, and go on, and go on. You see.

Now I want to encourage you. I don't want you walking out of here tonight, thinking, "Oh my! my prayer life is horrific." I don't want that. It's not the purpose. Nor is it my purpose to tell you that tonight before you go to bed, you need to pray at least an hour. As a matter of fact, I don't really want you to do anything, except meditate on the things you have heard, and cry out to God, and say, "How should these things, Lord, in my life, my station, my giftedness, are there areas in my life where I need to be more given to prayer?" That's what I want. And I want you asking those questions joyfully, with expectation.

You see, as one man said—a man that I greatly love, I won't mention his name—but he said that "the Church began by a group of disciples agonizing in prayer in the upper room, and it will probably end with disciples

eating around a fellowship table.” Well, he’s wrong. The Church did not begin with a group of disciples agonizing in prayer in an upper room. The word ‘agonizing’ is never used because there was no need to agonize. Jesus promised them. He didn’t say go into a room and agonize. He said, “Go into a room and wait.” Now, when the Lord tells you, “Go into a room and wait, because I’m going to do something,” you can pretty much count on the fact that it’s going to happen.

So there’s no need to agonize, beat oneself in the back, or thump your chest. That’s a false monkish piety, and we’ll have none of it. What we know is, we have a heavenly Father who loves us. We have a Mediator who is perfect and strong, does not die, and does not need to offer sacrifices for Himself or even for us, because He’s already done that. And that every good word that’s written in this Book, it is God’s desire that it be a great reality in us; and so, with that joy and expectation, go to Him. Go to Him, and say, “Improve me. Improve me in this area, help me in this area. And even when I quit asking, as I’m so prone to do, Lord, don’t listen to my silence, listen to what I am saying now. Just keep working until this thing of prayer becomes a reality.” But be very careful there. Well, there’s two ways of doing this: You can just walk across the wilderness, and be in the promised land in a few days; or you can stay in the wilderness for 40 years. You can go to Nineveh by bus or by whale—by fish.

So, keep seeking Him in this matter, and He will improve you in this area. He will help you. May His Spirit, His good Spirit, His faithful Spirit, be with you tonight and help you. Let’s pray.

Father, thank You for Your Word, and I pray Lord, that it would help us all. Lord, even the one preaching about prayer needs more prayer. Lord, grant us grace that we might seek Thee. Lord, look down upon us; and yes Lord, we’re opening our mouths wide, and we’re asking You to fill it with Your most precious gifts. We ask not Lord, for cars, or houses, or land, or comfort, or healing. Not this time. We ask for the greatest gift—Your presence. Your presence in prayer. Your kind help. Your divine strengthening. That You would meet with us, individually and collectively in this church, Lord. Help us. Please Lord. Give us the greater gift of You in Jesus name, Amen.