

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 5:14-22** . . . We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. [15] See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. [16] Rejoice always; [17] pray without ceasing; [18] in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. [19] Do not quench the Spirit; [20] do not despise prophetic utterances. [21] But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; [22] abstain from every form of evil.

B. Pray

II. Practical Christian living for everyday life and the return of Christ.

A. [17] pray without ceasing.

1. A look at what the word **pray** means

- a. The word “**pray**” basically means to make an earnest or zealous request for something desired.
- b. When used in the context of praying to God, its meaning includes: (1) making a request, (2) expressing love, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving, (3) confession of sins, failings, and waywardness, and (4) fellowship with God.

2. Two of prayer’s synonyms are “**entreat**” and “**supplication**,” and both appear in the Bible.

- a. The word **entreat** speaks of urgent prayer that is looking for an immediate answer given the urgency of the situation. I suspect we have all made entreaties whether or not the situation truly required an immediate answer.
- b. The word **supplication** speaks of humble prayer, such as when the Ninevites repented in sackcloth while sitting on ashes (**Jonah 3:6**), or when, after confessing his sin of adultery and murder, David prayed, “Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. (Instead) Restore to me the joy of Your salvation (**Psalms 51:11-12**).

(1) Another example is found in Hebrews where Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He was crucified is spoken of as **supplication** (**Hebrews 5:7**).

- c. For me, prayer is any form of communication between God and one or more of His children – that is initiated by His children.
 3. A look at what the words **without ceasing** mean
 - a. The words “**without ceasing**” simply mean without stopping or coming to an end.
 - b. The positive way of saying “**without ceasing**” would be to say ceaseless, or continuously, or incessantly.
- B. Remaining rational and realistic in understanding this exhortation.
 1. As with any statement in God’s word that seems excessive or extreme, we ought to humbly, prayerfully, and carefully seek to understand it without making it mean less than it is intended to mean, or without exaggerating its meaning.
 2. For example, sleep is both a normal and a needed part of everyone’s life. And when you are sound asleep, you are not praying. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the exhortation to pray without ceasing does apply to when you are sleeping.
 3. We know this was true for Jesus, and the reason we know this is because sometimes Jesus prayed all night (**Luke 6:12**), and at other times He got up extra early to pray (**Mark 1:35**) – which He wouldn’t have had to do if He was able to pray while sleeping.
 4. Another example where it is doubtful we are ceaselessly praying is when we are having a serious conversation with someone. And even though science claims your mind can think much faster than your tongue can speak – if you are speaking or if you are listening to understand what the other person is saying, it is probable you cannot ceaselessly pray at the same time.
 5. I think the same can be said for certain forms of work.
 - a. It is true that some work is repetitive and so it is possible to learn to do such work and pray at the same time. And we know this is true because many people daydream or their mind jumps from topic to topic while doing repetitive work.
 - b. However, some work requires a level of concentration that prevents you from praying at the same time.
 6. My point is simple, we can remain true to God’s word, and specifically we can remain true to this exhortation to pray without ceasing without limiting or expanding it in ways God does not intend it to be limited or expanded.

C. There are other Scripture passages that express a similar truth. For example –

1. God's word exhorts us to pray instead of losing heart, that is, to pray instead of becoming anxious or discouraged or depressed.
 - a. **Luke 18:1** . . . Now [Jesus] was telling them a parable to show that **at all times** they ought to pray and not to lose heart.
 - b. Trials, tribulation, sickness, and disappointment come to everyone, and often more than once. We can have inner peace in the midst of any of these if we will, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make our requests known to God (**Philippians 4:6-7**).
2. The scripture tells us to be devoted to prayer
 - a. **Romans 12:12** . . . rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.
 - b. **Colossians 4:2** . . . Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.
 - c. Other words which have a similar meaning to the word "devoted" are dedicated, consecrated, zealous, and strongly attached.
 - d. How often is prayer the first thing you think of doing when facing a need or difficult situation, or seeing the beauty of creation or when everything is going well?
3. The Bible calls us to persevere in prayer
 - a. **Luke 11:5-8** . . . Then [Jesus] said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; [6] for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; [7] and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' [8] "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.
 - b. Have you ever grown tired of or lost interest in praying for something or someone? That is an indication that the subject of your prayer is not that important to you, or it indicates you think that if God doesn't answer quickly He is not going to answer at all.
 - c. Persistence in prayer is proof (1) of your confidence that God answers prayer, (2) that you have an unrelenting desire or

desperate sense of need, and (3) that the issue being prayed about is vitally important to you.

4. Jesus exhorts us to be on guard against and continue praying about resisting temptation – whether current or approaching.
 - a. **Matthew 26:41**, “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; (*WHY?*) the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

D. Two different ways of making sense of praying without ceasing

1. Albert Barnes is a respected Bible commentator from the 1800's. His way of dealing with this exhortation was to urge a consistent participation in the church's stated times of prayer. For example, we ought to consistently have a time of private prayer each day. We ought to pray with our family on a regular basis. We ought to be in attendance when our church holds its organized times of prayer. And our commitment to such times of prayer should be such that we would not allow any foolish reason or frivolous activity to get in the way or deter us.
2. My way of making sense of this exhortation is to treat God as you would a good friend who is spending the day by your side while you continue to do your normal activities.
 - a. However, because of your duties and obligations you would not be able to talk – uninterrupted – during the day. But neither would you involve yourself in needless activities.
 - b. Therefore, whenever you were free to talk, you would quickly turn to your friend and either continue a conversation already started or start a new one.
 - c. In my experience, when we treat prayer this way, it becomes a form of fellowship with God – be it private or public prayer.

E. Humility in prayer.

1. It is my opinion that one of the character traits required to pray as the NT exhorts us to pray is humility, and the reason for this is:
 - a. Humility enables me to see what I truly deserve in spite of the good God gives me – and this kind of humility becomes part of the foundation of adoration and gratitude.
 - b. It is humility that bows to the supremacy of God knowing that I am far less than God in all ways – and this becomes part of the foundation of willing submission to God, including waiting patiently for God to act.

- c. Because God is all knowing and all wise, it is humility that understands I am not in a position to judge His motives, or choices, or actions since I only know in part and only sometimes know what is best.
 - d. It is humility that prays for those who mistreat me, or who say all kinds of evil things about me, or falsely accuse me, or even persecute me. Jesus showed this kind of humility in prayer when He prayed, “Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing” (**Luke 23:34**).
 - e. And humility puts me in the right frame of mind and gives me the right attitude to pray in faith, to pray reverently, and yet to pray with confidence and boldness.
2. The second point about humility in relation to prayer is that when praying in public humility prays to God, not the crowd.
 - a. Humility humbly looks to God for help and prays accordingly, whereas pride hopes to receive praise and honor – or to avoid embarrassment – when praying in public.
 - b. In other words, humility compels us to pray simple, honest, reverent, and unassuming prayers whether in private or in public.
 3. My third and final point about humility in relation to prayer is that humility **asks** and **accepts** the answer in contrast to demanding and only being content if God answers accordingly. We see an example of this in **Matthew 26:39** where Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”

III. Conclusion: examples of prayer from Thomas A’Kempis

- A. O Lord, by Your gracious teaching and empowerment, make possible in me what seems impossible to me on my own. You know how little I am able to bear, and how easily I grumble, get discouraged, and feel like a victim when hard times come my way. Teach me to receive with joy, with confident faith in Your provision and protection, with an abiding inner peace, and with persevering patience whatever trial or tribulation You choose or allow to come upon me. Show me the many ways – until I am convinced – that suffering and annoyances for Your sake are exceedingly profitable to my spiritual growth and health.
- B. O my most beloved Spouse, Jesus Christ my Lord, most holy lover of my soul, Ruler of all creation, graciously give me the wings of true liberty

from my flesh and the power to flee all unbelief and ungodly fears, all pride and self-sufficiency, so that I may come to You, alone, for true rest and security. O Lord my God, work with me, work in me, lead me, prod me, convict me, and relentlessly assist me to gain such purity of heart and holiness of life that I will be able to love You wholly, to see You fully, to know You intimately, and to experience just how sweet communion and companionship with You can be. Teach me more and more how to die more and more to self, and live for You. Overwhelm me with Your love so that I no longer am aware of myself, for in losing myself in You, then I am able to revel in knowing You alone, above every pleasure, possession, position, or person this world can offer.

- C. O Lord, help me have a tender heart to the truths in Your word which need to be applied to my life. Teach me to walk according to Your Holy Scriptures, and lead me down the path of living up to what I know. Grant me the wisdom to understand and live according to Your will. Give me the eyes and heart to see and ponder – with reverential awe and sincere appreciation – Your general and special blessings so that my thanks-giving will be worthy of the gift and the Giver.
- D. It is spiritually profitable and life changing for me, Lord, that I pass through troubles, for by it I learn Your statutes (Psalm 119:71), and die to pride of heart and arrogant behavior. It has been good that my circumstances have brought bewilderment and uncertainty because that has driven me to You for wisdom and hope, rather than to men. And without question, I have learned to profoundly fear and highly respect Your unfathomable judgments which fall on the righteous and unrighteous alike, yet never without fairness and justice.
- E. O Lord, graciously teach me to know what I ought to know, to love what I ought to love, to praise that which You deem praiseworthy, to hold precious what is precious to You, and to hate what is vile in Your eyes. Bring me to my senses should I judge according to human eyes and reasoning. Show me my foolishness should I condemn on the basis of hearsay. Teach me to consistently discern between the earthly and the spiritual, the assumed and the real, the one-sided or exaggerated and the truth. And above all, teach me to persevere in seeking to please You in all things.

- F. O my Loving Father, I know that whatever seems to bring contentment, deep inner peace, and heavenly joy are worthless when You are not in them. Without You they may produce a temporary good, but nothing that enduringly satisfies my heart. Truly, You, dear Father, are the source of all good, the fountain of Life, the satisfaction of the heart, the peace that passes all human comprehension, the fullness of joy, and the provider of comfort and encouragement that goes far beyond what I could ask or think. Therefore, I look to You, and You alone as my trust, O my God, for You are the Father of mercies.
- G. May God and communion with God be so precious to us that it could be said of us that we pray without ceasing.