

**WRESTLING IN PRAYER**  
**(SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 2019)**

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**Scripture Reading:** Psalm; 1 Thess. 5:16-28

**INTRODUCTION**

I have stated many times that prayer is an easy subject for a minister to use in beating up his congregation.

Who would say, I really devote myself to prayer?

Who would ever say, my prayer life is the example that you should follow?

I hope no one would dare to say anything like this, save our Lord and Savior.

Now, there are examples today of people who do spend many hours every day in prayer.

I have even heard of people who attempt to fast 40 days and nights.

But I don't think these are examples that we should ever consider following.

Yes, there is a place for prayer and fasting, but we have to be careful to not turn this into something commanded by men.

If there is any example to follow in prayer it would be that of our Lord.

There are times that our Lord did spend extended time in prayer.

**Mark 1:35** Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

**Mark 6:46** And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray.

**Luke 6:12** Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, **and continued all night in prayer to God.** **13** And when it was day, He called His disciples to *Himself*; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:

And, of course, our Lord did spend 40 days and nights in fasting, but this was not to set an example for us to directly follow.

This mighty example of prayer, fasting, and suffering was part of the victory of our Lord over sin and satan.

Now Jesus did call us to take our up cross and follow Him, but this does not mean that we try to duplicate everything that Jesus did.

The example that we do seek to follow from Jesus is that He often spent time in communication with His Father.

**We seek then to cry out to our Heavenly Father following the example of our Lord.**

Several weeks ago, as you know, I spent considerable time at the hospital with my mother and other family members.

There were four long days where we did not know what the end would be.

The many hours that I spent in the hospital did give me a chance for prayer and reflection.

As I prayed and **tried to pray** three points on prayer came to mind:

**Persistence, Patience, and Power**

I want to have us consider God's Word related to these three points.

### **1) PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER**

Persistence or perseverance in prayer can be challenging.

Think of the three disciples who were with our Lord in the garden while He faced an incredible time of testing.

How was their persistence in prayer?

Not very good to say the least. Three times our Lord found his disciples sleeping.

In many cases, we are not much different.

Of course, we must keep in mind that the goal is never seeking to impress God.

Our Lord warned us about vain repetition in prayer.

Listen to Matthew 6:5-7.

**Matt. 6:5** “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. **6** But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. **7** And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

At the same time Scripture calls us to pray without ceasing or pray without stopping.

We read from 1 Thessalonians 5 earlier.

**1Th. 5:17** pray without ceasing,

This verse could also be translated as:

Pray constantly (HSCB) or pray continually (NIV).

The adverb translated as **without ceasing** can mean a *consistent practice – something frequent and regular*.

It is not a common word in the NT. One other place where the same word is used is at the start of Romans.

**Rom. 1:9** For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that **without ceasing** I make mention of you always in my prayers,

Did Paul only pray for the Romans? Did he start and never stop?

Obviously not, rather Paul prayed for the Roman Christians and other congregations regularly and consistently.

This is part of your calling.

Listen to Eph. 6:18 and Col. 1:9.

**Eph. 6:18** praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints —

**Col. 1:9** For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

It is not that we take a stopwatch so we can see how long we are spending in prayer.

I wouldn't recommend the stopwatch approach.

Scripture does tell us that in all situations, **pray and keep on praying.**

I hate preaching techniques, because there is no end to techniques, but as a suggestion using lists and/or reminders can be part of the way we try to fulfill the calling that God gives to us.

I would encourage you to think about how you can pray more constantly, more unceasingly.

You know that you face almost a constant barrage of interruptions.

Keep in mind the calling of God's Word.

What do you need to do to obey the calling of Scripture?

## **2) PATIENCE IN PRAYER**

By patience I mean that we must fully rest in the Lord's timing and provision and not our own.

The idea here is what we find in the Lord's Prayer:

**Matt. 6:10** Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven.

And it is this same powerful example that we see as our Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

**Matt. 26:39** He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*."

Now we know that our God is gracious. He does not despise the cry of His people. God knows our weakness.

But we must not think that our requests become the basis for God's schedule.

**Is. 40:27** Why do you say, O Jacob, And speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the LORD, And my just claim is passed over by my God"?

**28** Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

It is right to pray for specific matters. We see this throughout Scripture.

Paul prayed for specific things.

**Rom. 10:1** Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God **for** Israel is that they may be saved.

**Phil. 4:6** Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, **let your requests be made known to God;**

At the same time we must always keep in mind, God knows far better than you do how to best work out things for His glory and our good.

And we also sometimes face situations where we don't even know exactly how to pray.

There are times when it is very clear. There are also situations where because of the complexity of the matter we don't even know what to pray.

**Rom. 8:15** For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

Then a little later in Romans 8, Paul writes:

**Rom. 8:26** Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. **For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself**

**makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27**

Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

What an encouragement to prayer that even when you don't know exactly how to pray, you are still to seek the Lord in prayer.

And what a reminder of our weakness in prayer. It is precisely in this weakness that you are to come before God in humility and trust.

### **3) POWER IN PRAYER**

We sometimes hear the words that there is **power in prayer**.

I don't like to be a curmudgeon, but we must always keep in mind, the power in prayer is **not our power**.

The power in prayer is **not our own words**.

The power is that of our faithful and gracious God.

Keep this point firmly in mind.

On the other hand, this truth does not mean that we pray just out of duty or slavish responsibility.

Think of prisoners who have to pound an enormous pile of rocks and then move them from one place to another.

This is not the duty of prayer.

We pray because God does work.

**Eph. 3:20** Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly **above all that we ask or think**, according to the power that works in us, **21** to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Listen to James 5.

**James 5:16** Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a

righteous man avails much. **17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. **18** And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

I am sure that I have used the word **mystery** in describing prayer.

By mystery I mean we know that God already knows and has already planned all things and yet we are called to pray.

As I gave more thought to the subject of prayer, I think a better word than mystery would be **faith**.

Prayer is an act of faith.

We don't know how God will work, but we come believing that He can do anything that He pleases.

In faith, we submit to God, cry to Him, and seek to rest in Him.

### **Perseverance, Patience, and Power**

If you struggle in prayer, if you are discouraged in prayer, look to God and look to His Word.

Keep your focus on the faithfulness and power of our great God!

My friends, keep in mind the incredible spiritual battle that we are facing.

Do you see how intense the warfare is?

Do we see how in our own state and nation, we are in a desperate condition?

Oh, that we might be much more watchful, focused, and persistent in our prayers.

I close with Luke 18:1-8.

**Luke 18:1** Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, **2** saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. **3** Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, "Get justice for me from my adversary.' **4** And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, "Though I do not fear God nor regard man, **5** yet because this widow

troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' "

**Luke 18:6** Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. **7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8** I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

## Prayer

Closing Hymn: 531

### **Benediction: 1 Thess. 5:23-25**

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*.

Brethren, pray for us.