



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting

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ISSUE 1

PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING

“Pray without ceasing? You’ve got to be kidding. There’s no way it can be done.” That may be your reaction to **1 Thessalonians 5:17**. In this verse of Scripture, God gives you the command, “Pray without ceasing.” It sounds impossible, doesn’t it? After all, who can spend all their time praying?

Yet, this is God’s desire for you. He longs to have continuous fellowship with you. In fact, this is not the only place where He expresses this desire. He also communicates this desire in **Ephesians 6:18**, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Listen to and meditate on these phrases—“pray without ceasing” and “praying always”. God longs for you to stay in constant contact with Him. He yearns for you to walk daily in a spirit of prayer.

It is obvious that you cannot stay on your knees twenty-four hours a day. You cannot remain at your place for prayer all day, every day of the week. But, this is not what is meant by the phrases “pray without ceasing” and “praying always.” God’s desire is that you maintain an attitude of prayer daily. You are to keep the frame of mind that will allow you to pray throughout your day. It means keeping in constant touch with your Father through prayer. It is using every opportunity so you can talk with God. It is lifting up to your Father

the people, the needs, and the circumstances that you face daily.

In order to pray without ceasing, your lifestyle should be characterized by continual “arrow” prayers. An arrow prayer is a short, pointed prayer that you send quickly and fervently into God’s presence. It may be a short phrase like, “Father, help me.” “Father, have mercy on her,” or “Father, bless that child.” Your arrow prayer may be a sentence like, “Father, I ask to you to meet the spiritual needs of and bless this person who is waiting on me.” It may consist of several sentences. These prayers may be for yourself or for others. They may focus on your needs or the needs of others. Yet, the key is to send these short prayers continually into God’s presence. Praying without ceasing means continually offering these short prayers to the Father. It is an ongoing conversation with our Father. You may be in an office all day, or in a school, or out on the road. No matter how busy you are, your day can be filled with prayer. This is what God desires from you.

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on living daily in a spirit of prayer. It is designed to help you learn how to pray without ceasing. It is our hope and prayer that it will provide you with the encouragement and insights that will enable you to experience the delight and joy of an ongoing conversation with God.

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The Biblical Example: The Prayer Life Of Nehemiah

The Word of God provides you with an example of praying without ceasing. That example is Nehemiah. He is a model of living daily in a spirit of prayer. This godly man stayed in touch with God by offering "arrow" prayers on a regular basis.

There are eleven instances of prayer in the book of Nehemiah. Each of these prayers is a brief cry that leaps out of his heart on a moment's notice. These are the arrow prayers that characterize walking daily in a spirit of prayer. They are short but pointed prayers that flowed out of Nehemiah's heart in a variety of situations.

The arrow prayers of Nehemiah are:

- **Nehemiah 1:4**-In this chapter, one of Nehemiah's brothers visits him. He shares with him how the people of God were distressed and mistreated. He also told him that the walls and gates of the city had been burned to the ground. This was a dangerous situation for the people. Yet, it was also a disgrace to God's glory and honor. The only response that Nehemiah could make was that of prayer. He cried out to the Lord concerning this situation.
- **Nehemiah 2:4**-Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer. One day he was called into the king's presence to sample his wine. Nehemiah was grieved and saddened over the condition of Jerusalem. The king noticed his sadness and inquired about it. It was dangerous to appear sad and upset before a king (**Esther 4:1-2**). Secular history also reveals that King Artaxerxes was an unpredictable person who acted according to the whims of his emotions. He could have sentenced Nehemiah to death if he had been in the mood. Yet, notice what Nehemiah does. The king asks him what is wrong. **Nehemiah 2:4** declares that Nehemiah prayed. His prayer was sandwiched between the king's question and the answer. He breathed a short prayer to God. It is probably the shortest prayer in the Bible. Yet, it was pointed and powerful. After his arrow prayer, he asked for permission to travel to Jerusalem and rebuilt its walls. Artaxerxes not only agreed to let him go but also gave him army officers and troops to protect him. He provided him with enough timber to rebuild Jerusalem's wall and to construct a home for him. He even appointed Nehemiah governor of Jerusalem! Nehemiah's arrow prayer brought about this miraculous answer!
- **Nehemiah 4:4-5**-In these verses, Nehemiah cries out in response to the ridicule and opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah. These men were attempting to stop the rebuilding of the wall through ridicule and discouragement. In the midst of their ridicule, Nehemiah asks God to deal with these men and to prevent them from hindering the work. When he was ridiculed and opposed, he pled with God to intervene. He immediately sought God about the ridicule and opposition. At that moment, Nehemiah brought his concern and need to God. God responded by giving them the strength to continue in spite of the ridicule and opposition (**4:6**).
- **Nehemiah 4:9**-When Sanballat and Tobiah's ridicule failed to stop the workers from rebuilding, they were infuriated. They now planned to attack Jerusalem in order to stop the work. When Nehemiah found out about their plan, he prayed. Without delay, Nehemiah sought God concerning their devious plan. He then posted guards around the city. Nehemiah combined prayer with preparation. He did not neglect one for the other.
- **Nehemiah 5:19**-In this verse, Nehemiah breathes a prayer of blessing on his work. Nehemiah did not take advantage of his position as governor (**5:15-18**). His motives were pure. He never lost sight of God's calling in his life. He was in Jerusalem to help the people, not to exploit them. He was there to rebuild the wall, not to build an empire. He asked God to bless him and help him because of his commitment. He sealed his labor for the Lord with prayer.
- **Nehemiah 6:9**-At this point, the wall is almost complete. Sanballat and Tobiah's efforts to stop its construction had failed. Now they were desperate and tried a new approach. They centered their attacks on Nehemiah's character. They assaulted him through rumors (**6:6-7**).

They claimed that Nehemiah was going to have the people make him king. Then he would lead them to rebel against Artaxerxes. Nehemiah denies this rumor as untrue (6:8). But, even as he is denying the rumor, he is praying. His response to this false accusation is to send a short but pointed prayer to God for His help.

- **Nehemiah 6:14**-Since all their other schemes had failed, Sanballat and Tobiah now hire a man by the name of Shemaiah (6:12-13). This man pretended to have a message from the Lord for Nehemiah. He tells Nehemiah that assassins were coming to kill him. He then suggests that Nehemiah hide in the temple for his own protection. Nehemiah discerns that this message is not from the Lord and that Sanballat and Tobiah were using this man to attack him and the work. In that instant, he pleads with God to thwart and destroy their plans. He asks God to deal with those were striving to intimidate him.
- **Nehemiah 13:14**-In this chapter, Nehemiah confronts the people with their failure to bring tithes and offerings to the Levites. As a result, the Levites had to work in the fields. This meant that they had less time to work in the temple. He then rebuked the leaders and took action to correct this matter (13:11-13). At the same time, he prayed. He cried out for God's help in the midst of correcting this problem. He sought God because he did not want his efforts to be undone by the people's neglect.
- **Nehemiah 13:22**-In **Nehemiah 10:31**, the people committed to keep God's laws concerning the Sabbath. The people were now breaking that promise and violating God's law. They were working on the Sabbath day as they did on the other days of the week (13:15-16). Once again, Nehemiah meets this problem with rebuke and action (13:17-21). At the same time, Nehemiah promptly prays for God's help as he deals with this problem. He pleads with God to show him mercy out of His covenant love.
- **Nehemiah 13:29**-Nehemiah now discovers that the priests had intermarried with pagan people. They had forsaken their promise (10:30). At the same time, they had also disobeyed God's law by marrying these pagan women (**Exodus**

34:12-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-5). A grandson of the high priest Eliashib had married Sanballat's daughter. Sanballat wanted to work through this relationship to destroy the work of God in Jerusalem. Nehemiah drives this grandson out of the temple. At the same time, he prays for God to deal with this Sanballat and this young man. On the spot, he pleads with God to stop Sanballat's evil use of this young man. Nehemiah once again combines prayer and action.

- **Nehemiah 13:31**-Nehemiah now acts to purify the priests that had defiled themselves by marrying pagan women. These mixed marriages had defiled the priesthood (**Leviticus 21:14**). He made them put away all of their foreign influences. He also made sure that the priests and Levites knew their duties. In addition to these things, he saw to it that the people brought their contributions and firstfruits to the temple. And, as he had done before, he prays. He asks for God's blessings on these actions. He labored with diligence while asking for God's strength and help.

There are four basic lessons that we can learn from Nehemiah's example of praying without ceasing:

- (1) **God cares about your faintest prayers.** You should never underestimate your "arrow" prayers. Don't feel that your prayers in the moment are insignificant or meaningless. God hears and cares about your faintest prayer. The example of Nehemiah reveals that God values these short, arrow prayers that we breathe to Him in a moment. They are precious to Him. He values those short, sharp prayers that flow from your heart to Him.
- (2) **God loves to answer your arrow prayers.** Not only does God love to hear your faintest prayers, He also loves to answer them. As you study the example of Nehemiah, you can see that God hears and answers arrow prayers. They are not insignificant. God will honor these short prayers of faith.

(3) **Your little prayers can bring about gigantic responses.** Nehemiah's example reveals that gigantic responses can result from our faintest prayers. His brief prayer before he spoke to Artaxerxes resulted in a gigantic response (**Nehemiah 2**). Nehemiah never performed a miracle, but he overcame tremendous opposition in his labors for the Lord. His praying might not be as impressive as that of Elijah or Moses, but his prayers were just as mighty and effective. Never assume that your short prayers breathed to God in a moment have no power or significance. On the contrary, realize that they can have a tremendous impact. Trust that they will bring about gigantic responses. Eternity alone will reveal how much was accomplished by our arrow prayers.

(4) **You should seal your labors for the Lord with prayer.** Nehemiah continually sought God concerning his labors for the Lord. He prayed for God to make his labors for Him effective. This provides a powerful example of the need to saturate all your efforts for the Lord with prayer. Whatever you do for the Lord, seal it with prayer. Before you minister, while you minister, and after you minister, seek God's power, help, and blessing. Continually bombard heaven with arrow prayers for your labor and those that it is going to impact. When you do not saturate your labor for the Lord, it will rob it of power, life, and effectiveness. Everything that you do for Him must be saturated with prayer from beginning to end. Cover your labors for Him with continual arrow prayers.

Practical Steps For Learning To Pray Without Ceasing

This command to pray without ceasing has often puzzled Christians. Many wonder how this is possible. It is impossible if one has a narrow view of prayer. If you believe that the only time that you can talk with God is when you have an extended

period to do it in, you will not be able to put this truth into practice.

Yet, Paul's command in **1 Thessalonians 5:18** refers to a lifestyle of prayer. It involves walking daily in a spirit of prayer. In a sense, it is making your entire world your prayer closet. It is staying in constant touch with God wherever you go, wherever you are, at all times.

Praying without ceasing calls for you to develop a lifestyle of prayer. God desires that you walk daily in a spirit of prayer. The following are some suggestions to help you develop this lifestyle. They are offered to enable you to cultivate this spirit of prayer in everyday life.

(1) *Meditate on the truth that God is everywhere.* God is omnipresent. This means that He is present everywhere. There is no place that you can go that God is not present. You live your entire life in the presence of God. The following verses teach the omnipresence of God: **Genesis 16:13, 28:16; Deuteronomy 2:7, 4:7; 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139, 145:18; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:24, 27-28; Hebrews 4:13.** Read over these verses; meditate on them. Let this truth sink deep into your heart and mind. Since God is everywhere, you can talk with Him at all times.

(2) *Remember that God is an ever-present help.* The Word of God declares in **Psalm 46:1**, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." God declares that He is a very present help in trouble. He is always present to help and to bless. He is always ready to act in behalf of those who need Him. Because of this, you can always call on him to help you or others. Your arrow prayers can be effective because He is the very present help.

(3) *Don't divide your life between the sacred and secular.* Too many times we divide our lives between what we think is spiritual and what we think is secular. We make the misguided assumption that there is a difference between our walk with Christ and all the other parts of our lives. Sometimes people think that going to

church and that going to work are somehow different. Nothing could be further from the truth. View your entire life as holy to the Lord. Your relationship to God is to affect every area of your life. Every part of your life should glorify God and be filled with prayer. You are to maintain a spirit of prayer on Monday just as much as you are on Sunday. You are to pray as fervently to God during your commute or your cooking of breakfast as you do in the altar or pew on Sunday. Understand that your whole life is holy to the Lord. Praying without ceasing results when you realize that your whole life is set apart to the Lord.

(4) *Ask for God's help.* It is God's command for you to pray without ceasing. His desire is for you to stay in constant touch with Him. Plead with Him for help to do this. Pray that He will help you fulfill His command. Cry out to Him for the power and insight to walk in a spirit of prayer. Since it is His command and desire, plead for the help to do it.

(5) *Pray a heightened spiritual sensitivity.* Plead that the Holy Spirit will grant you an alertness to the needs around you. Ask Him to make you aware of the many people and needs around you that you can pray for daily. Pray that He will open your eyes to the many opportunities that you have to speak to God. It is the Holy Spirit who enables you to stay in constant touch with the Father. Plead continually for this sensitivity. Ask Him to deliver you from getting engrossed in the world and neglecting your Father. Seek the filling of the Holy Spirit with all your being.

(6) *Practice prayerwalking.* Prayerwalking is praying on-site with insight. It is observing people and your surroundings and making your petitions to God on the basis of these. Prayerwalking is one of the best exercises to help you learn how to pray without ceasing. It provides you with the opportunity to train yourself to pray for people and places as you come into contact with them. In my personal life, prayerwalking has helped me develop a spirit of prayer for daily life. As you

prayerwalk, you become more disciplined to talk with your Father in all types of situations and for all types of people. You might consider prayerwalking on a regular basis. It can help you start disciplining yourself to stay in constant touch with the Father daily.

(7) *Talk to God about everything.* Develop the holy habit of sharing everything with God. Talk to Him about everything that is going on in your life. Share with Him all your feelings. Tell Him about the ordinary things and the extraordinary things. After a luncheon, I was riding with a pastor back to his home. As we were riding, I started praying, "Father, thank you for the chicken that we had today. It was the best that I think that I've ever had. It was fixed just the way I like it. You were so good and gracious to provide it. Bless abundantly the lady who prepared it." Now you may feel that this is silly or ridiculous. But, it is significant to God. He is the God who has numbered every hair on my head. He is concerned about the details of my life. The same is true for you. God is concerned about the details of your life. You should talk to Him about those details. There is nothing about your life that is insignificant. Everything in your life matters to God. Stay in constant touch with Him by sharing with Him about everything in your life.

(8) *Be aware of the numerous occasions that afford you the opportunity to pray.* There are numerous occasions that will provide you the opportunity to send arrow prayers into His presence. These occasions are:

- **Thanking God for specific blessings**-When you are blessed with specific blessings, immediately thank God. At that moment, offer Him thanks for His goodness to you.
- **Confessing your sins**-When the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, confess your sin to Him. It does not matter where you are or what time it is. When the Holy Spirit convicts you, cry out to your Father in confession and repentance.