

Introduction

Sometime around the age of seven I decided to become a professional golfer. By the time I was a teenager, I never ceased the pursuit of that dream. When other kids were watching TV or doing other things, I could be found out on a field hitting balls. When other kids were sleeping in during the summer, I was up early and at the golf course around 4:30 in the morning. When other kids were playing basketball or doing something inside in the winter, I was outside hitting balls until I could not feel my hands. I would come in and thaw out and then go back out in the cold. When I looked for a college to attend, I looked at the golf program. Everything that I did was in pursuit of golf; I never ceased to golf. That does not mean that I did not eat, sleep, or do other things. I started on the soccer team that won the state championship in high school. I wrestled on the team that won the state championship. I studied and finished high school at the age of sixteen, and graduated from college at twenty. I did a lot of other things, but my pursuit of golf never ceased. My desire to golf never ceased. My practice never ceased. My daily exercises never ceased. If Paul had written in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "Golf without ceasing," I could have been his example.

Our text today is 1 Thessalonians 5:17, which says to "pray without ceasing." It is part of a short passage that gives three specific things which are God's will for all of us. I gave these as an example in our message on Discovering God's General Will For Our Lives. Over the next three weeks I will be digging much deeper into these three truths. This week we will be looking at praying without ceasing. Next week, our Thanksgiving weekend, we will be looking at giving thanks in everything. Then, on December 1, we will begin the Christmas season with a message on rejoicing always. The holidays this year just happened to line up with our current series on Discovering God's Will. It is God's will in Christ Jesus for us to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks.

(1 Thess 5:16-18) "Rejoice always; {17} pray without ceasing; {18} in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Before I get into our text today, I want to look at a contrast. There are a number of things that God tells us to cease from doing. Then, there are a number of things that are never to cease; we are to be unceasing in them. For example, we are to cease from anger. We are to cease from doing evil. We are to cease from our consideration of gaining wealth. On the unceasing side, we are not to cease in crying out to the Lord. We are not to cease in giving thanks. We are not to cease worshipping the Lord. We are to do God's will here on earth, just as it is being done in heaven, and they are worshipping without ceasing in heaven.

Things God tells us to cease from	Things that should not cease
Cease from labor (Ex 23:12)	Do not cease to cry to the Lord (1 Sam 7:8)
Cease from anger (Ps 37:8)	Lord's lovingkindnesses never cease (Lam 3:22)
Cease <i>striving</i> and know that I am God (Ps 46:10)	Paul did not cease giving thanks for the Ephesians (Eph 1:16)
Cease from consideration of gaining wealth. (Pr 23:4)	The four living creatures do not cease to say, Holy, Holy, Holy..." (Rev 4:8)
Cease to do evil. (Is 1:16)	Pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17)

This morning we will look at what it means to pray without ceasing. First, God's will is that we pray. Second, it is not enough just to pray. God tells us how we are to pray. We are to pray without ceasing. There are a number of other scriptures about how to pray. We are to pray with faith. We are to pray to God with the right motives and for the right purposes. Our prayers are not to make us look holy before others, but to be heard by God. We are to pray fervently. We are to pray about everything. We are to pray in the powerful name of Jesus. God has a lot to say about how we are to pray. But, our focus this morning is on how we are to pray, and to pray without ceasing.

Pray Without Ceasing

1. Pray
2. Pray Without Ceasing

1. Pray

A. God's encouragement to pray

Prayer is simply talking to God. When we talk with someone, if we are going to have effective communication, we must also listen to them. Good communication is two-way, we must listen and we must share. Too often people have a list of things they want God to do and prayer to them is merely telling God what He needs to do for them. God desires a relationship with us, and a good relationship requires time and communication. God does not want to force that on us; He wants us to come spend time with Him because we love Him. In Psalm 32:9, He said, "do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you." God does not want to make us come near to Him. He wants us to understand that He loves us and desires to have relationship and fellowship with us. God is sovereign and He could make us come to Him. He can create circumstances in our lives that would act as a bit or bridle to make us do what He wants, but that is not how God wants us to come to Him.

(Ps 32:9) "Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, *Otherwise* they will not come near to you."

Look at the contrast in Revelations 3 where God is speaking to the church at Laodicea. They were luke warm in their relationship with God. They were self-reliant and thought they were rich. The Lord told them to buy gold from Him and to be zealous and to repent. He said that He reproves and disciplines those whom He loves. God could discipline them and make them come to Him, but that is not what He desires. Notice what He says in Revelations 3:20. We often use this verse in evangelism, but it is not an evangelistic verse. It was written to the church, and it was an encouragement and invitation to fellowship with the Lord. He said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." God is standing at the door of your heart and He is knocking. He wants you to invite Him and to dine with Him. Dining is not about the food; it is about the fellowship that we have while eating the food. We have a fellowship dinner on the first Sunday of the month and on the second and fourth Friday of the month. The end goal is not to feed people; it is to provide an opportunity for people to fellowship and connect with one another. God wants to connect with you and I, and have relationship with us. He wants us to pray.

(Rev 3:20) "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."

There are over five hundred (503) verses about praying in the Bible.¹ God does not mandate that we pray, but He strongly encourages us to pray. He encourages us to pray in a number of different ways. He tells us in James that we have not because we ask not. That is an encouragement for us to freely ask God to meet our needs. He tells us if we are suffering we should pray. If we are sick, we should call for the elders and have them pray. He tells us that the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. These are encouragements for us to pray and ask the Lord.

(James 4:2c) "...You do not have because you do not ask."

(James 5:13-15) "Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. {14} Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; {15} and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. {16} Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

Many years ago I began to ask God for many things. These were not just material things, but many times they were for material things. I asked God to do a work in my life, and to bring greater purity. I prayed and fasted and asked God to increase my ability to hear from Him and walk in the Spirit. I regularly ask God for divine appointments, and He gives me opportunities to meet and share with people. He tells us in Psalm 2:8 to ask Him for the nations. God encourages us to ask Him for people, peoples of all nations. He tells us in Matthew 9:38 to ask Him for workers in the harvest. Karen and I pray for God to give us some laborers in the harvest. These are not material things. But I also pray about other things. We prayed to become debt free, and God answered that prayer. We prayed for a bigger house and he gave us one. We prayed for a new van and He answered that. When we were praying for a new van, I got paired with the Vice President of Ford in a pro-am. He arranged for us to get a new 15-passenger van at 20% below the dealer cost. He also helped us out with some of the repair costs that we had paid on our old van. God answered that prayer just as He always does. It is not just for me; He has done that for everyone. George Mueller is a great example of someone that prayed for provision for his orphanage rather than appealing to people. God faithfully answered his prayers. God will do that for each of you. He wants you and I to ask Him for things. He encourages us to pray.

(Ps 2:8) "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the *very* ends of the earth as Your possession."

(Matt 9:37-38) "Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. {38} Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'"

¹ NASB Boolean search: pray* OR entreat* OR supplication* OR beseech* OR interce* OR confess* OR petition*

B. Jesus' example to pray (Mark 1:35)

In addition to encouraging us to pray, Jesus gave us an example to follow. We read in Mark 1:35 that He got up early and prayed. We see in Luke 5:16 that Jesus would OFTEN slip away to the wilderness and pray. Jesus gave us an example of how to live our lives, and He prayed without ceasing.

(Mark 1:35) "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."

(Luke 5:16) "But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray."

C. Early church's example to pray

The disciples were with Jesus night and day for three years. They saw the way He prayed. They asked the Lord to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). He taught them what we call today the Lord's Prayer. It is just an outline of a prayer. I do not believe it was supposed to be a rote prayer that we use in our services; it was an outline of different topics that we need to cover when we pray. The disciples got the message. We see in Acts 1:14 that they were continually devoting themselves to prayer.

(Acts 1:12-14) "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away....{14} These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."

In acts 2:42, which is after several thousand people had come to Christ and the church had grown by a sudden and incredible number that these thousands of believers were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. It was not just the apostles that got the message; the early church was continually devoting themselves to prayer.

(Acts 2:42) "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

In Acts 3:1, Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. The Jews and Christian Jews would go to the temple at 3:00 every afternoon to pray, and that was known as the hour of prayer. Some theologians say there were actually two different hours of prayer. Our culture today would find gathering together every day for an hour just to pray something difficult to do. I think that most of those meetings would be poorly attended. That was not the attitude of the early church. They gathered to pray because they were continually devoting themselves to prayer.

(Acts 3:1) "Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth *hour*, the hour of prayer."

In Acts 4:23-31, after Peter and John had been threatened and released, they went to the church and everyone lifted their voices to God with one accord and prayed. God answered their prayer and the place was shaken and everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 4:23-31) “When they had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. {24} And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord... {31} And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.”

In Acts 6:4, there was a complaint about the Greek widows not getting served. The apostles told the church to appoint seven capable men to take care of the widows so that they could devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. The apostles were continually devoting themselves to prayer because things come up which demand our attention. But, we have to continually devote ourselves to prayer. It must be a priority that we devote ourselves to.

(Acts 6:4) “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Jesus was devoted to prayer. The apostles and early church were devoted to prayer. In Colossians 4:2, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, commands us to devote ourselves to prayer. Paul also wrote in Romans 12:12 that we must be devoted to prayer. The American church is not devoted to prayer. I saw a statistic a few years ago that said the average pastor spends only two minutes a day in prayer. The church must begin to pray and pastors need to be an example and be devoted to prayer. They need to pray, equip the church to pray, and model it for them.

(Rom 12:12) “rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,”

(Col 4:2) “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*.”

2. Pray Without Ceasing

It is the will of God for us to pray. It is not only God's will for us to pray, it is to pray without ceasing. Praying without ceasing was a constant devotion to prayer. It was what I call a Lifestyle. It is a Lifestyle of Prayer, a Lifestyle of Fellowship, a Lifestyle of Trust, and a Lifestyle of Worship.

A. Lifestyle of prayer

The Greek word for “without ceasing” is *adialeptos* (Strong's G89), which means uninterrupted, without omission, without ceasing, incessant. The word is only used four times in the New Testament, and all four times by the Apostle Paul. In Romans 1:9-10, Paul mentions how unceasing he made mention of them in his prayers. Like my golf, Paul was preaching, writing, and doing a lot of other things in his ministry so without ceasing does not mean that he only prayed for them and never stopped. It meant that he continually kept them in his prayers and made mention of them. He mentions the same thing to the church in Thessalonica, in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 and in 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Even though the same Greek word is not used, Paul conveyed the same thought to the Colossians in Colossians 1:3, to the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:16, and the Philippians in Philippians 1:3-4. Praying without ceasing was a lifestyle of prayer. Paul was devoted to prayer, and in his unceasing prayers he made mention of the various churches.

(Rom 1:9-10) "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly (adialeiptos) I make mention of you, {10} always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you."

(1 Thess 1:2-3) "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention *of you* in our prayers; {3} constantly (adialeiptos) bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,"

(1 Thess 2:13) "For this reason we also constantly (adialeiptos) thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."

(Col 1:3) "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you."

(Eph 1:16) "do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention *of you* in my prayers."

(Phil 1:3-4) "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, {4} always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all."

In Deuteronomy 6:7, we are commanded to teach God's word to our children. We are to teach them when we sit with them, when we walk with them, when we lie down, and when we rise up. Teaching God's commandments to our children is to be a lifestyle. In the same way, we are to pray without ceasing. We are to pray when we go to bed. We are to pray when we wake up. We are to pray when we sit down. We are to pray when we walk. Throughout our day we are to maintain an attitude of prayer.

(Deut 6:7) "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."

B. Lifestyle of fellowship

Praying without ceasing is not just a lifestyle of prayer, it is a lifestyle of fellowship. The first man that I led to the Lord in prison was named Steve. God moved powerfully and he was gloriously saved. The next week I went back and began doing some follow-up ministry. I took him a Bible, and taught him how to have a quiet time. I shared out of 1 Peter 2:2, which teaches us that we must long for the pure milk of the word so that we can grow in respect to salvation. Steve began to read his Bible every day and he grew.

(1 Pet 2:2-3) "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, {3} if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

On that same second visit, Steve brought his bunkmate to meet me. The prison guards allowed him to meet with me, and John gave his heart to the Lord. Because John had very poor eyesight and did not have any glasses in prison, he was not able to read. He had to have other people read to him. But John prayed. He prayed without ceasing. I noticed that both of these men were growing in their faith, and it was a joy to watch. On the third day after John got out of prison, his

parents asked him to fix their antenna on their roof. While he was climbing down from the roof he fell and died from the fall. His parents called me, even though I had never met them, and asked me to do his funeral. They saw such a change in his life that they wanted to meet me. They wanted me to do his funeral because John had constantly talked about me. It was not me that made a difference in John. It was John's walk with God that changed his life. John had developed a lifestyle of fellowship with God through prayer, and it changed his life.

I mentioned that praying is simply talking to God. It is having a conversation with him. God wants us to pray without ceasing because He wants continual fellowship with us throughout the day. He is standing at the door and knocking and He wants to come in and dine with us and us with Him. He longs for fellowship with us. So, He wants us to pray without ceasing because He never wants our fellowship with Him to cease or be interrupted. In the song, *In The Garden*, which was one of my father's favorite hymns, the chorus says, "And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known. This speaks of the fellowship that we have throughout our day as we walk and talk with Him.

In The Garden (chorus)

And He walks with me, and He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known

C. Lifestyle of trust

Praying without ceasing is a lifestyle of prayer and fellowship, and it is also a lifestyle of trust. In Proverbs 3:5-6, We are told to trust the Lord with all our heart and not to lean on our own understanding. We are to acknowledge God in all our ways. How do we acknowledge Him in all our ways. It is to pray without ceasing. It is to continually acknowledge Him throughout our days about everything we do. It is a lifestyle of trust.

(Pro 3:5-6) "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. {6} In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight."

When we have a need in our life, we are to pray, give us this day our daily bread (Luke 11:3). When we are facing temptation, we are to ask God for a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). When we sin, we are to acknowledge and confess our sins before God, who forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). If we lack wisdom we are to ask God to give us wisdom, and He promises to give us wisdom, generously and without reproach (James 1:5). These are just examples in various areas of our life of what it means to pray without ceasing. Philippians 4:6 says that we are not to be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we are to make our requests known to God. Whatever the need, whatever is causing us to be anxious, we are to live a lifestyle of trust and cast those cares upon the Lord. We are to live a lifestyle of trusting God for all the needs in our lives.

(Luke 11:3) "Give us each day our daily bread."

(1 Cor 10:13) “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

(1 John 1:9) “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

(James 1:5) “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

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

(1 Pet 5:7) “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

D. Lifestyle of Worship

We have been through a very tough five years at work. We are constantly crying out to the Lord for our daily bread and His provision for our workers. Many of our employees are believers and we are praying for His provision. We are praying for His leading, and for His wisdom. When we get an enrollment, our employees immediately respond by thanking the Lord for the enrollment and His provision. When God answers our prayers it is natural to give thanks for the answer to prayer. Giving thanks and praises is part of our worship to the Lord. Throughout our days we are to offer up prayers of thanksgivings and praises. In Philippians 4:6, when we pray about the things that are causing anxiety, we are to pray with thanksgiving. It is a lifestyle of worship.

In Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns to God. It was not an answer to prayer for an enrollment. They were in prison for preaching the gospel. They had just been beaten with rods, bound with chains, and thrown into a dark, smelly prison. There was nothing that most of us would see as a reason to pray and sing hymns of praise. It was midnight and Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. For Paul and Silas, it was a lifestyle of worship. They were fellowshiping with the Father and worshipping Him.

(Acts 16:25) “But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”

Prayers and praises go hand in hand. We see that in heaven where the elders and the four living creatures falling down before the Lamb. Each of them were holding a harp and a golden bowl of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. Prayers and worship go together. In the church today, it is okay to sing some hymns, but we leave off the prayer bit. When we pray without ceasing, we are also to worship without ceasing, as these two go together. We are to live a lifestyle of worship.

(Rev 5:8) “When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”

Conclusion and Applications

As we come to a close I want to look to look at one final passage. In Matthew 26, Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane and He is praying. He is about to be arrested and crucified. It says His soul was deeply grieved, to the point of death. Luke records that His sweat was like drops of blood falling on the ground. He was praying intensely. He had asked the disciples to pray with Him in this difficult hour. But, when He went to them, He found them sleeping. He said to Peter and the rest of them, could you not keep watch or pray with me one hour? If Jesus came to the church today, would He find people keeping watch with Him for one hour? Karen and I were challenged to pray for an hour a day back in the mid 80's. There may be some days that we don't pray an hour; we are not legalistic about it. But, we have made a commitment to spend time with the Lord every day praying. We generally spend twenty to thirty minutes praying together in the morning. Then, we have our individual prayer times. We are committed to praying without ceasing.

(Matt 26:40) "And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'So, you *men* could not keep watch with Me for one hour?'"

This morning we have looked at God's will for us to pray without ceasing. We are to pray, and we are to pray without ceasing. How is your prayer life? Do you have regular times of prayer? Are you devoted to prayer? Do you set aside time to pray?

Prayer is about fellowship and talking with God. How is your fellowship with the Lord? Do you talk to Him throughout the day? Do you thank Him during the day? Do you ask Him questions during the day? Do you ask for wisdom? Do you ask for guidance? Do you tell Him that you are sorry for doing or saying something that you should not have? Praying without ceasing is maintaining an ongoing conversation with God. How is your communication going?

God is encouraging us to pray and to pray without ceasing. It is God's will for us to pray and to pray without ceasing.

Introduction (1 Thess 5:16-18, Ex 23:12, Ps 37:8, 46:10, Pr 23:4, Is 1:16, 1 Sam 7:8, Lam 3:22, Eph 1:16, Rev 4:8)

1. **Pray** (Ps 32:9, Rev 3:20, James 4:2c, 5:13-15, Ps 2:8, Matt 9:38)

A. **God's Encouragement To Pray**

B. **Jesus' example To Pray** (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16)

C. **Early church's Example To Pray** (Luke 11:1, Acts 1:12-14, 2:42, 3:1, 4:23-31, 6:4, Col 4:2, Rom 12:12)

2. **Pray Without Ceasing**

A. **Lifestyle of prayer** (Rom 1:9-10, 1 Thess 1:2-3, 2 Thess 2:13, Col 1:3, Phil 1:3-4, Eph 1:16, Deut 6:7)

B. **Lifestyle of fellowship** (1 Pet 2:2-3)

C. **Lifestyle of trust** (Pro 3:5-6, Luke 11:3, 1 Cor 10:13, 1 John 1:9, James 1:5, Phil 4:6, 1 Pet 5:7)

D. **Lifestyle of Worship** (Phil 4:6, Acts 16:25, Rev 5:8)

Conclusion and Applications