

# 5 Keys to an Effective Prayer Life

## Ephesians 6:18

### INTRODUCTION:

We come to a place in Paul's letter to the Ephesians where Paul calls us to personally, regularly engage in prayer. Now let me confess to you at the beginning. In my early walk with God, I've never liked sermons on prayer.

**The reason we don't pray is the same reason we don't run.** *When I first came to my last Church I met a guy named Mike. He had noticed on my resume that I had listed one of my hobbies as running. Well so you can know the background you need to know that I spent months getting ready to run a 5K that I barley finished. So when I said I considered running a hobby, I used the term very loosely. **So I meet Mike and he says, "So you are a runner huh?"** I said, yeah I'm runner. He said, you wanna run sometime? Sure, how far you go. He said, I try to put in a 5K, every day at lunch. **That day marked the retirement of my running career. Haha.***

*Every book I every read and every sermon I have ever heard on prayer have been filled with illustration after illustration of men who ran marathons in prayer.*

**ILLUSTRATION:** Martin Luther was in the habit of praying 4 hours per day, except when he was busy, then he prayed more.

Well some of us are marathon runners, some of us can pray for hours every day... most of us are normal folk that need to really engage in prayer. So here's what I'm going to do.... I'm going to try to do what I believe the text does... I'm going to give you motivation to pray.

**ILLUSTRATION:** *You see, what if I stood up and said, "This sermon on prayer has 4 points, and it is an acrostic that spell the word ACTS. . Point 1 – Adoration. Point 2 – Confession, Point 3?*

SEE! You know how to pray, you know you are supposed to pray... what you are lacking is motivation.

*I'm going to try to give you the best motivation I can find for prayer... I'm going to attempt to tear down bad habits that keep us out of prayer and I'm going to try to strengthen some good habits that may not make you a marathon prayer warrior, but hopefully you will pray more than ever in the days to come.*

**With that in mind let me introduce you to the 5 keys to consistent prayer.**

### **1. Danger is the best motivation to prayer**

This command to pray is directly on the heels of a section on spiritual warfare.

**ILLUSTRATION:**

- What if I told you that ok, let's all gather in groups of 5 and just pray the rest of the service.... You'd be like... oh man. Somebody might have swine flu or something.... Just preach dude.
- What if suddenly the roof started caving in. **YOU ARE IN PRAYER MODE!**

**The strongest motivation to prayer is danger.**

**ILLUSTRATION:** *That's why in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus was praying, sweating drops of blood, the disciples were sleeping. He knew what was coming.*

**ILLUSTRATION:** *I was flying back from Guatemala into the New Orleans Airport. Beside me sat a young lady who was a veterinarian. We talked about my her career and my mission trip and it was obvious she was a lot more concern about saving dogs than souls. I guess you could put her in the agnostic category. But as we started to descend into New Orleans, we hit the worst turbulence of my life. A storm had gathered, lightening was flashing... the plane would make sudden 15 ft drops in altitude. I'm telling you everyone on that plane including that young lady became consumed with prayer...why? Danger!*

**CONTEXT: So I think that's why Paul has placed this command to pray at such a strategic place in the letter.**

*In Chapter 6, it is as if Paul assumes we have been tracking up to this point, and obeying his commands...so he warns in verse 10 that as we follow Christ we would be engaging in a very real spiritual battle against an enemy Satan and his demons. They want to steal, kill, destroy, malign, confuse, dissuade, discourage, they want you to loose your moral witness through compromise and sin.*

*Therefore we are called to take up the full armor of God.*

**ILLUSTRATION:**

- *The first time you saw pornography, if you are over 30 the avg. age was 12, if you are under 20 you may have seen porn around the age of 5. Here is what you need to know, that didn't just happen. It was a set up.*
- *Satan wants to keep you away from God. Satan wants to keep you away from your spouse, Satan wants to come between you and your kids.*
- **PRAY!**

*Now – from that perspective of a Christian thinking rightly about salvation, a Christian in a right relationship with fellow believers, a Christian bringing the*

*Gospel to bear on their role, with demons attacking at every turn Paul says...PRAY. Like a child crying out for her dad, PRAY.*

## 2. Boredom is the Chief Hindrance to Prayer

<sup>18</sup>With all prayer and petition

Literally that means, all kinds of prayers and petitions....

Most people that get bored with prayer do so because they get into a rut. **Someone said, "A rut is grave with the ends knocked out."**

Listen closely, if you get bored with prayer – you aren't doing it right.

**Typically we pray the way we have heard someone else pray...**

- **ILLUSTRATION:** My Pastor used to pray in King James English, so when I first got saved I would talk like a normal guy, until I prayed and then I went into KJV.
- **ILLUSTRATION:** Spurgeon told of a story where a young man in his preachers school was invited to pray. Apparently the young man went to great lengths to write out his prayer with the most precise and impressive of theological terms. After the boy had prayed for several minutes Spurgeon went to the podium and said, "Son call him Father and ask him for something".
- **ILLUSTRATION:** Another mistake I made was just letting my prayer be a conglomeration of meaningless catch all phrases.
  - Bless him... .what does that mean? Do you know? Why do you pray it if you don't know????
  - I challenged the guys at one church not to say BLESS for one week they couldn't pray.

But since then I have learned that I really need to be myself, I need to talk to God reverently, but naturally and not just engage in one kind of prayer, but as Paul says... <sup>18</sup>With all prayer and petition

- **Should we pray publicly or privately?** Which one should it be public or private prayer? ALL Kind of prayer. Learn to pray privately, learn to pray publicly. **It's ok if you aren't cool with it, but learn how to get cool with it. Grow!**
- **We see in scripture some pray in loud cries, in soft whispers, or silently;**

- i. **Ex. 2** while the people were in slavery in Egypt the, “Cried out to God” and God delivered them.
- ii. **Neh. 2** while Nehemiah was talking to the King the Bible says he was silently praying to God.
- iii. **Isaiah 26:16 (NASB95) the people could only whisper a prayer.**

**Which one should it be? ALL Kinds of prayer...** learn that there are situations that aren't conducive to vocalizing a prayer, for example if you are making a presentation at work pray silently. If you are alone in a restaurant, whisper a prayer to God, if your child goes into a seizure, CRY OUT TO GOD!

- **Sometimes prayers are deliberately and planned other times they are spontaneous.**

**Which one should it be? ALL Kind of prayer.** You ought to plan a chunk of your schedule every day of your life to seek God in prayer. But you shouldn't think that your praying is done at that point. You ought to walk with God in such a way that the natural reaction to everything is prayer. You get hurt, pray – you get mad, pray – you get discouraged – pray.

- **You may pray while sitting, standing, kneeling, or even lying down;**

**Which one should it be? ALL Kind of prayer.** We see at times Jesus stood and prayed, at times he laid down prostrate.

- at home or in church;
- while working or while traveling;
- with hands folded or raised;
- with eyes open or closed;
- with head bowed or erect.

**Which one should it be? ALL Kind of prayer**

**There are specific intents of prayers -**

- a. **Personal Requests** – that's when you ask God to do things in your life personally, sometimes you are telling God what you need.
- b. **Personal Repentance** – This is the confessing of sin. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse from all unrighteousness.
- c. **Thanksgiving** – Sometimes you just spend time let God know how much you appreciate what He has provided for you.
- d. **Intercession** – This is praying for others.
- e. **Silence** – This is just enjoying the presence of God and listening.

- f. **Fasting with Prayer** – This is abstaining from food in order to seek God for a specific reason.
- a. **Praying through the scriptures.** Memorize verses then pray them back to God.

Which one should it be? ALL Kind of prayer

### **3. Develop the habit of making prayer the knee jerk reaction to every situation.**

<sup>18</sup>With all prayer and petition pray at **all times in the Spirit,**

- **Paul said it another way in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NASB95)**  
<sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing;
- **Concerning the early church, we read in Acts 2:42 that the disciples**  
"continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" .
- **While Peter was in prison the Bible says in Acts 12:5**  
...prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

**What does that mean to pray at all times?**

- It doesn't mean to be vocalizing a prayer 24/7 up to God. But it has the same idea of what Paul told Timothy about preaching... preach the word in season and out. Well that's all the time. It's either hunting season or it's not. But he doesn't mean pray 24/7 he means when it's good preach the word, when it's bad preach the word!

But the idea he is communicating is despite the circumstance, let PRAYER be your knee jerk reaction to every situation.

**ILLUSTRATION:**

- When you loose a child you pray, you loose your keys you pray.
- When you get cancer pray, you annoyed pray.
- When you are confused pray, when you gain understanding pray.

**Prayer should be your knee jerk reaction to every situation.**

### **4. Persistence is the key to the Store House of God**

<sup>18</sup>With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, **and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition**

## Adrian Rogers

*The Devil cannot keep God from answering, therefore he must keep you from asking!*

### **ILLUSTRATION: The first several years of my Christian walk**

**But back then I did. I had what I call the Babe Ruth syndrome. I always swung for the fence. Babe Ruth hit more home runs than anyone and he struck out more than anyone. Many of his contemporaries tried to match his success and found that the harder they tried to swing the worse they did. Lou Gehrig on the other hand realized that not everyone was a Babe Ruth, but rather most players found greater success by consistently getting on base rather than going for the fence. He recognized the compounding value in **small successes consistently produced over time.****

*In prayer we tend to get all babe ruth, but the key is consistency.*

**Henry Blackaby said, “There is tremendous value in consistent effort in the same direction.”**

### **Jesus told a story making this point in Luke 11:5-10 (NASB95)**

<sup>5</sup>Then He 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; <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; <sup>7</sup>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*.’ <sup>8</sup>“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.** <sup>9</sup>“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup>“For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

- The moral of the story is clear: if you want something from God, just keep banging on the door. God is honored in your persistence.
- I’ve known people that prayed for their kids conversion for 17 years before they got the answer.

### **Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 18:1-8 (NASB95)**

<sup>1</sup>Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, <sup>2</sup>saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. <sup>3</sup>“There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ <sup>4</sup>“For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, **otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.**” <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; <sup>7</sup>now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? <sup>8</sup>“I tell you that He will bring about justice for them

**quickly.**

**INTRODUCTION:** John Wesley, the great Methodist preacher, encountered many times of refusal, and denial, during his early years in the ministry. He logged a few of these instances in his diary:

Sunday A.M., May 5: Preached in St. Anne's. Asked not to come back.

Sunday P.M., May 5: Preached in St. John's. Deacons said, "Get out, and stay out!"

Sunday A.M., May 12: Preached in St. Jude's. Can't go back there either.

Sunday P.M., May 19: Preached in St. Somebody Else's. Deacons called special meeting, and said I couldn't return.

Sunday A.M., May 26: Preached on street. Kicked off street.

Sunday A.M., June 2: Preached at the edge of town. Kicked off highway.

Sunday P.M., June 2: Preached in a pasture. Ten thousand came.

Friend, constant effort in the same direction in prayer and preaching pay off great dividends.

## **5. Remember that you are not alone in the battle**

for all the saints,

**ILLUSTRATION:** *Francis Chan made the point in one of his recent sermons... Most of us get the idea that we are the star of our own movie. We load our ipod's up with our own personal soundtrack. We imagine the cameras following us around in the epic drama of our life.*

*But in reality it's more accurate to imagine the camera focus clearly on Jesus Christ and what He's doing on this planet. If you want to see you part in the drama... Catch a certain scene, pause it... zoom in... that guy in the crowd.... He's you.*

*Under credits you were extra 4,046.*

You play a part in a drama that has been unfolding throughout the centuries... it's a story of betrayal, love, redemption, agony, tragedy, romance, heartache and it's a story of war, fallen warriors, forgotten heroes, the greatest contribution you can possibly make to script is the prayer you offer for yourself and those in the battle around you.