

FELLOWSHIP NOTES



Sunday, September 15th

Part 1: "Let's Pray" 1 Thessalonians 5:17

This morning as we kick off this emphasis on prayer, I want to approach it from the context of what we talked about last Sunday. In case you weren't here, last Sunday we talked about the need for revival.

We discussed the fact that our mission, which is Christ's mission for the church, requires our full devotion and revival is the key to our church fulfilling the mission that the Lord has given us.

We considered the fact that because of the nature of spiritual warfare in living the Christian life, every believer can lose their edge in full devotion to Christ and His mission.

We concluded with the fact that experiencing a fresh encounter with God can renew our devotion to Christ. This is what revival is all about.

And we learned from Psalm 85 that prayer is the means that God uses to bless us with a fresh work of spiritual revival in our lives.

Not only does Scripture teach this truth, but church history is replete with it.

(Slide)

“The history of revival shows plainly that all movements of the Spirit have started in prayer.” ~ Missionary Jonathan Goforth

“When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing He does is to set them to praying.” ~ Matthew Henry

“Satan laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.” ~ Unknown

(Slide)

“No church can ever expect revival unless it is praying for it.” ~ Brian Edwards

*“All revivals in the history of the Christian church that have shaken towns, cities, and countries have all begun with people saying, ‘We can’t take the status quo anymore. We must seek God for something fresh. LET’S PRAY.’”
~ Pastor Jim Cymbala*

So my message to you this morning Fellowship is this, “LET’S PRAY!!!” Say that out loud with me, “LET’S PRAY” Please bow your heads and close your eyes. PRAY.

Probably THE most mysterious, confusing, challenging, misunderstood, underestimated and underutilized aspect of spiritual living for followers of Jesus Christ is prayer.

In both the Old AND New Testaments God makes it clear that the characteristic that He desires the most that His followers embrace, embody, practice, and be known for before a watching world is prayer.

(Slide)

“It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer [for all nations].”

~ Jesus

Matthew 21:13; Isaiah 56:7

Yes, preaching is important. Praise is important. Worship – oh boy, very important. Fellowshiping together? You bet.

These are all necessary practices as well, no doubt about it. But God has insisted that His house – His people, His followers – be a house of prayer. Prayer is the spiritual aroma that God’s wants His people to be known for to a world that needs Him.

(Slide)

“For everyone who calls [prays] on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Romans 10:13

Why? Because God wants the world to know that He is ready to hear them and help them in their hour of need if they will cry out to Him and put their faith in Him.

(Slide)

*“Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find.
Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you.”*

Matthew 7:7

And, because when BELIEVERS go to the Lord in prayer in earnest faith and seek Him, and ask in prayer and knock in prayer, God has promised that His door will be opened and the floodgates of His blessings will be made available.

In addition, things change when any believer commits themselves to seeking God in prayer. Small things change, big things change, people change, situations change, families change, nations change, and lives are transformed when God’s people pray.

Now the truth is, for most followers of Christ, by their own admission, their prayer life is the weakest aspect of their Christian walk with the Lord.

Polls show that the majority of born-again Christians admit that when they attend worship services (most only attend twice a month) that it’s the only time they worship God in their week. They admit that prayer is lacking in their daily experience with Christ.

50% of born-again believers say they don’t feel they’ve entered the presence of God or experienced a genuine connection with God in the past year!

It's a sad commentary on the state of Christianity in America, especially considering what we learned about worship this summer that God has enabled us to worship Him anytime, anywhere, as long as it's in spirit and truth. And the same can be said for prayer.

Gone are the days when the place of prayer was a necessity in order to fellowship with God and present our requests to Him like it was under the Old Covenant in the Old Testament.

So beginning this morning and the next 5 weeks I want to help us see just how transformational prayer, when you understand it and you practice it the way God intended, can be to your life.

I'm asking God to instill inside us a deep desire to seek Him in prayer, to spend time with Him in prayer personally and corporately, and to experience the blessings that come when we prioritize God through prayer.

Let me give you 3 simple truths about prayer this morning. They're simple to state, but they're complex in their depth and richness and they're at the heart of what prayer is all about.

The first one is this, more than anything else...

(Slide) 1. Prayer is a relationship.

Prayer is the expression of the relationship that a person has with God through Jesus Christ. It's the conversation you have with the living God of the universe, between you the created, and He, the CREATOR.

More than anything else, God wants you to love Him with all your heart, because He loves you with all His heart.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

Deuteronomy 6:5

God wants you to know and experience His love and presence in your life. God is seeking a deep and fulfilling relationship with you during your life here on earth and in heaven for all eternity if you know Him as your Savior.

(Slide)

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.”

Revelation 3:20

“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

John 14:23

“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

John 15:7

These verses tell us that God seeks a love relationship with each and every person here this morning and everyone listening to my voice. He is knocking on the door of your heart so that together you might fellowship with Him.

As you respond to His knocking and fellowship with Him, your love relationship with God grows out of that fellowship. A love relationship with God is the point at which effective prayer begins.

And Jesus promised in John 15:7 that those who remain close to the Lord in fellowship, and live in obedience to His teachings and commands, in other words you're doing your best to live the way Jesus wants you to live to the best of your ability with His help...

His promise to you is that He will respond to your prayers. Answered prayer is the promise Jesus gives to those who walk in close fellowship with Him. Jesus also made a special prayer promise to those who pray together in His name, watch this...

(Slide)

"Again, I assure you: If two of you agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them."

Matthew 18:19-20

Here Jesus makes 2 promises to believers who pray together...

(Slide) Promise: God gives greater spiritual authority, when believers pray together in Jesus' name.

There is a spiritual dynamic that opens up when believers seek God together in united prayer in the name of Jesus. If you're praying about a difficult matter in your life and it seems like you're not making any headway...

Have you tried taking that need to a few other believers and asking them to pray with you? I don't mean they pray on their own and you pray on your own. I mean, getting together and physically praying together in united prayer for that need.

Jesus promised greater spiritual authority and power when we pray *together*. By the way, one option for this kind of prayer is with the members of your growth group. That's what they're there for. Here's the other promise Jesus makes...

(Slide) Promise: God Himself is present where believers gather together to pray in Jesus' name.

I believe Jesus is telling here that when we gather together with other believers and pray in the name of Jesus we experience a greater dimension of His presence and power.

From an experiential standpoint, I can give witness this morning to the reality of that promise. Many of the greatest times when I have felt in the presence of the Lord is when I am praising Him and praying to Him together others. And nowhere has that been more felt than at our prayer summits.

(Slide) 3 Day PRAYER SUMMIT at Wesley Woods by Indianola

USHERS will give you one of these flyers as you leave this morning.
Registration begins the first Sunday of October.

Fellowship, the starting point for prayer is understanding that prayer is a living relationship with a loving God who wants nothing more than to spend time with You and guide your life and show you His love in greater ways as you walk faithfully with Him.

God didn't create prayer just to be an emergency button that we push when things get bad or an emergency in life pops up. Should we pray in those times, yes, but that's not it's sole intended purpose.

Prayer's not an activity on your to-do list that you check off when it's completed.

It's a love relationship with God that He made possible for you because He loves you and showed His mercy for you by sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins so you could have a real love relationship with Him now and forever in heaven.

Do you have this relationship? Here' how... (GOSPEL)

Here's the second truth about prayer...

(Slide) 2. Prayer is an expression of dependence on God.

At it's core, when we walk with God in prayer, we are expressing to Him our need for Him. And when we give in to the urge and the temptation not to pray, we are expressing to God that we don't need him.

Let me give you three reasons why we all desperately need God.

(Slide) 1.) We need Him because only through Him do we have life.

Here's what the Scripture says...

- Christ is life and His life is the light of our lives (John 1:4)
- Only Christ has the power to give us life (John 5:21)
- The life Christ gives us is abundant in every way (John 10:10)
- Only Christ brings us to the Father because He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)
- Christ's life is His resurrection power working in us during this earthly journey and for all eternity (John 11:25; Romans 8:11)
- Christ, who IS our life, will also bring us to eternal life and glory (Colossians 3:4)

(Slide)

"To declare our independence by neglecting prayer is to play into the hands of our enemy who came "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy (John 10:10). ~ Pastor Daniel Henderson

(Slide) 2.) We need Him because to depend on ourselves is both foolish and fruitless.

Hold your place here in 1 Thessalonians and turn to Jeremiah 17:5-9. (READ)

(Slide) 3.) We need Him because without Him we can do nothing.

(Slide)

"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in Him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me."

John 15:5

"I said to Yahweh, 'You are my Lord; I have nothing good besides You.'"

Psalm 16:2

"I keep the Lord in mind always. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

Psalm 16:2

"Who do I have in heave but You? And I desire nothing on earth but You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever."

Psalm 73:25-26

(Slide) 3. Prayer is meant to be constant.

There's a teeny-tiny verse in the Bible that has caused confusion for many believers. You wouldn't think such a small, 3 word verse could be so confusing, yet so powerful at the same time.

It's our memory verse for this week and it's on the bracelets that we put on your seats. Look at that verse and let's say it together out loud: 1 Thessalonians 5:17 "PRAY WITHOUT CEASING".

This command – and that’s what it is – seems definitive – and impossible at the same time. The idea we get here is that prayer is essential to our existence as followers of Christ.

In fact, the famed reformer Martin Luther said this about prayer,

(Slide)

“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

~ Martin Luther

We can’t live without prayer, yet at the same time, it seems impossible to adhere to. Who could pray every second of every day? Let’s look at this closely.

The words “without ceasing” mean “without interruption, constantly”. One Greek New Testament dictionary describes it this way: it denotes “that which was continually and repeatedly done, like the uninterrupted payment of taxes; the continual service of an official; or a continual uninterrupted cough.”

In each of these 3 examples there’s the idea of a nagging, constant action. Like the dripping of a faucet. Have you ever had that happen to you?

You’re trying to get some sleep but the faucet in the bathroom is dripping. And with each drip you threaten to get up and turn it off but you can’t drag yourself out of bed. You’re too tired.

Finally, out of sheer exhaustion, you throw the covers off and walk into the bathroom and turn the handle on the sink. That's the idea.

The command to "pray without ceasing" comes the Lord because He wants us to remain committed to prayer like a nagging cough, a dripping faucet and not let anything deter us or turn us off from going to God in prayer.

Let me show you 2 benefits from learning to pray constantly...

(Slide) 1.) Praying constantly will protect you from temptation.

"Stay awake and pray so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ~Jesus

Mark 14:38

Jesus was telling His disciples that not being diligent to live a life of prayer leaves us in a vulnerable position spiritually, making us easy prey for temptation from the enemy.

Prayer keeps us alert to our own weakness and our tendency to easily sin. Author and Pastor Lehman Strauss said,

"No one can both sin and pray. True prayer will prevent us from sinning, or sin will prevent us from praying."

~ Lehman Straus

(Slide) 2.) Praying constantly will keep us alert to the attacks of the Devil

“Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.”

Ephesians 6:18

Paul reminds that with the reality and intensity of spiritual warfare that we fight every day, we need to be in a constant state of prayer.

(Slide)

“Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.”

1 Chronicles 16:11

“Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

Luke 18:1

So how does this truth, this command, work on a practical level in your everyday life? Well, first, if you view prayer as a religious activity that you check off your to-do list each day, then you're missing it.

Remember, prayer is a relationship with our loving God. He always present with you so you can talk to Him anywhere, anytime, all the time. You can always be in a spirit of prayer because you enjoy a never-ending relationship with Him.

So look at it this way: tomorrow when you wake up, as you're getting out of bed, whisper a prayer in your heart to God for a new day. You're alive again for another day, so He's not through with you yet!

Then you get in the shower and you think about Him and ask Him for His guidance throughout your day. Then you sit down to eat breakfast and you acknowledge His provision for the food you're eating, thanking Him for granting what millions around the world could only dream about today.

Then, because you've gotten up early enough to have some extra time, you sit down and spend some time devoted just to Him. Why? Because He's worthy. He's worth it.

Without you have nothing; you ARE nothing. He deserves some time with you and you need that time with Him to be productive in your day for His glory.

In that time together you read your Bible. Why? Because that's the primary way God speaks to you. Every time you read your Bible, that's an encounter with the living God who is using it to speak to you, grow you and protect you from the enemy.

Also in that time you spend time responding to His Word in prayer, confessing sin, thanking Him for your blessings, interceding for your spouse, your children, your family, your friends, your church family. And you take your own needs to the Lord in prayer and entrust them to Him.

When you finish your time of fellowship with the Lord in prayer, you say, "Amen". BUT, that's not good-bye. You close your prayer with the understanding that the line is still open as you continue to talk to God throughout the day.

On your way to work or school, you ask God to guide you in what you will be involved in throughout the day. Commit your day ahead to Him in prayer.

While you are driving and praying, look around at the beauty of what God has created. And thank Him for eyes to see what He has made for your benefit. Thank Him for His creative genius and the fact that He continues to keep everything in creation in motion and operating like it should be.

Ask the Lord to use you during the day to be a testimony and a witness to people who need Jesus as their Savior. Throughout the day, as problems arise, and they will, whisper a prayer for God's strength and His guidance.

Over lunch someone might talk to you about a family or personal problem they're dealing with. Don't be shy. You're a Christian. Offer to not only pray for them, but to pray with them about the issues they're facing.

Even if they decline the offer for you to pray with them, deep down inside, they appreciate the fact that you even offered to do that with them.

In the evening you once again raise a prayer to heaven thanking God for His provision as you eat dinner. Sometime during the day, you spend time with your spouse praying for each other and for your family.

As you lay your head on your pillow at night, you whisper a prayer to the Lord thanking Him for His hand of blessing on you that day.

Praying without ceasing means that you have a God-awareness all throughout the day that He is with you and He is watching you. It means, you have a self-awareness of your total dependence on Him.

You need Him for everything – every aspect of your life and spiritual walk. And all you have to do is cry out to Him in prayer for anything and everything.

And it means that because you are in a loving relationship with God, you walk with the Lord throughout the day in prayer, if for no other reason, because He loves you and He deserves your constant focus and dependence on Him.

Maybe you're thinking, "But Rob, I'm not used to this. Where do I start?" Start right now by asking God to help you to build up your dependence on Him each day.

That is a prayer God is ready to answer if you'll pray it with sincerity to Him from your heart. Then get out of bed in the morning and start the conversation. He'll help you take it from there.

Fellowship: Let's Pray!!! Say that out loud with me, "Lets Pray"!