

Teach Us to Pray

Lesson 10: A Life of Prayer: Pray Without Ceasing -- 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18; Colossians 4:2

Imagine a friendship in which the two people only ever spoke during scheduled appointments. No passing comments, no shared glances across a room, no quick texts during the day, just formal meetings at set times, and silence in between. We would not call that a close friendship. We would call it a business arrangement. And yet that is how many of us, if we are honest, relate to God. We meet him at appointed times, a few minutes in the morning, grace before meals, a service on the first day of the week, and then we go silent until the next scheduled slot.

Paul has something far better in mind. In three short, almost breathless commands he sketches the whole atmosphere of a Christian life: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Pray without ceasing. Not pray sometimes, not pray when in trouble, not pray at the scheduled hour, but pray without ceasing, as naturally and continually as breathing. To the church at Colossae he says it another way: “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” Keep at it. Stay awake in it. Let gratitude run all the way through it.

This is the destination our whole study has been moving toward. We began by learning that prayer is drawing near to God through Christ our great high priest. We learned the pattern Jesus gave, how to come to the Father through the Son, how to adore and confess and give thanks, how to ask and intercede, how to persist and trust. But all of it was always meant to become not a series of techniques but a life, a steady, unbroken companionship with God that fills the ordinary hours. Prayer was never meant to be a room we visit. It was meant to be the air we breathe.

That is where this final lesson begins, and where, in a sense, the rest of your life begins. Read these brief verses slowly. They are God’s own will for you, that you would rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything, walking through every day in continual, watchful, grateful companionship with the God who is always near.

Group Discussion: For many of us, prayer is something we do at certain times rather than a continual companionship that runs through the whole day. What is the difference between having a prayer time and living a life of prayer, and what would it actually look like for someone to “pray without ceasing”?

Personal Reflection: Think back over this whole study on prayer. How has your prayer life actually changed, and where do you still long for it to grow? Is prayer becoming more of a continual companionship with God, or is it still mostly a scheduled appointment you keep or miss?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18; Colossians 4:2

Study Questions

1. Paul commands, “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Since we cannot literally speak words to God every waking moment, what does Paul actually mean, and how is “praying without ceasing” more about a continual attitude and companionship with God than about non-stop talking?
2. Be honest about the current state of your prayer life. Is it mostly a scheduled appointment, sporadic and easily crowded out, or is it becoming a steady companionship that runs through your day? What is one honest word to describe where you are right now?
3. Paul says of rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks, “this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). What does it mean that a life of continual prayer is not an optional extra for especially spiritual people but the revealed will of God for every believer?
4. Paul calls us to “give thanks in all circumstances,” not just the pleasant ones. Think of a hard circumstance you are facing now. What would it look like to give thanks to God in the middle of it, not for the hardship itself, but in it, trusting his goodness?
5. In Colossians 4:2 Paul writes, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” What do “continue steadfastly” and “being watchful” add to our understanding of a praying life, and why does sustained, alert prayer require perseverance and attentiveness rather than drifting on autopilot?
6. Even committed believers find their prayers fading, crowded out by busyness, distraction, or simple drift. What most often pulls you away from steady prayer, and what is one concrete practice or rhythm that could help you “continue steadfastly” rather than starting and stopping?
7. Thanksgiving runs through both passages: “give thanks in all circumstances” and “being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” Why is gratitude so central to a healthy life of prayer, and how does a thankful heart keep our continual prayer from becoming either anxious or merely a list of demands?
8. A lifelong life of prayer is built on sustainable, everyday rhythms more than on occasional bursts of intensity. What is one specific, realistic rhythm you could build into your daily life, tied to ordinary moments, that would help prayer become continual rather than occasional?
9. This study has taught that prayer is drawing near to the Father, through Christ the one mediator, submitted to God’s will, sustained by grace, and lived out in the company of God’s people. How does “pray without ceasing” pull these threads together into a whole life of prayer, and how do we pursue such a life as a joyful, grace-empowered companionship with God rather than a crushing legal burden, remembering that faithfulness in prayer is part of remaining faithful to the end?
10. Look back across this entire study, from drawing near to God in Hebrews 4 to a life of unceasing prayer here. Name the single most important way Jesus has been reshaping how you pray over these ten lessons, and one specific commitment you will make so that prayer

becomes a continual, lifelong companionship with God rather than something you study and then set aside.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Luke 18:1, the call always to pray and not lose heart; Acts 2:42, the early church devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers; Ephesians 6:18, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all perseverance; Daniel 6:10, Daniel's lifelong habit of praying three times a day; Psalm 1:1-3, the blessed life rooted by streams of water through delight in the Lord.