

A close-up, artistic photograph of an hourglass. The top bulb is partially filled with dark sand, and a stream of lighter-colored sand is falling from the narrow neck into the bottom bulb. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

PERSPECTIVE

MARCH 2022

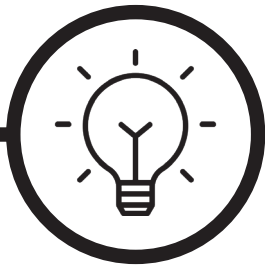
**What Does
it Mean to**

Pray Without Ceasing?

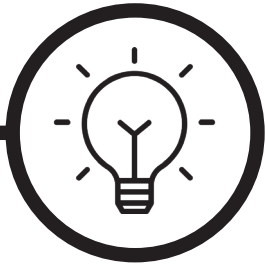
CONTENTS



ARTICLE	1
<i>What Does it Mean to Pray Without Ceasing?</i>	
Dane Ulett	



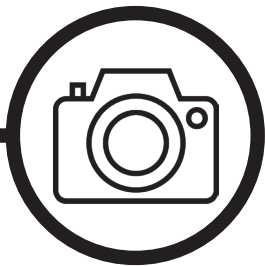
BOOK HIGHLIGHT	5
<i>Only a Prayer Meeting!</i>	
by C.H. Spurgeon	
Recommended by Daniel Sanderson	



BOOK HIGHLIGHT	6
<i>The Prayer of the Lord</i>	
by R.C. Sproul	
Recommended by Kalep Kanode	



BIBLE READING PLAN	7
<i>Take Up & Read</i>	
March	



NEW MEMBERS	8
<i>Nourredine & Cherifa Benzid, Zack & Erin DiPrima, Hannah Hair, William Manirakiza, & Sarah Reed</i>	

What Does it Mean to Pray Without Ceasing?

Our God and Father speaks. He is the Creator of the universe, and he spoke it into being. He also speaks to us through his Word, the Bible. The Bible is the *Vox Dei*; it is the “voice of God.” All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). The word inspiration is from the Greek word meaning “God breathed.” God speaks to us through his Word.

Why does God speak to us? In his kindness and mercy, God has condescended to speak to us to tell us who he is and what he requires from us. We, too, as his creatures speak. So, as God speaks to us, we too can speak to him. As those who have been recreated in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are commanded to speak to our God and Father. When we speak to our Father, this is prayer.

PEOPLE WHO WALK TOGETHER TALK TOGETHER

In the Garden of Eden, God walked with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8). In the Bible, to walk with someone is to have friendship with that person. People who walk together talk together. After the Fall, man lost this friendship with God. But now that we have been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, we can walk and talk with God. When we pray in Jesus’s name and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we have communion with him. Our friendship has been restored, as we are no longer at enmity with God. So, prayer is a dialogue with God.

As we read God’s Word, the Holy Spirit convicts and illumines as we read it, and so we hear God speak to us through his Word. Once we know and understand that prayer is a conversation with God, we should connect scriptural meditation with prayer. Meditating on Scripture should inevitably lead to prayer. We should listen as God speaks to us through his Word. Think closely on what that reading reveals to you about God and self, then speak to God. This is vital for knowing and drawing closer to God.

As MVBC focuses on prayer this year, I want us to think about what it means to pray without ceasing. How does one talk with God without ceasing? In A.D. 51, the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica after fleeing from the city due to persecution. He wrote to encourage them (1 Thess. 1:2–10), to comfort them (2:3–16), to express his joy in their faith (2:17–3:13), to remind them to be morally pure (4:1–8), and to exhort the flock in the

basics of Christian living (5:16–22).

In verses 16 through 22, Paul gives various exhortations such as to always rejoice, pray without ceasing, give thanks in everything. And here we have this exhortation to pray without ceasing. Paul commands the Thessalonians and us to speak to God without ceasing. Is Paul commanding us to pray at all times without ever stopping? No, Paul is not exhorting us to pray every waking minute of the day. He does not mean that we are to pray continuously or repetitiously.

DON’T PRAY LIKE THE PAGANS

Paul and Jesus did not pray repetitiously or continuously without taking a break. In fact, Jesus commands us not to use meaningless repetitions. Our prayers are not to be merely recited, nor are our words to be repetitive and thoughtless when we pray. This is what the pagans did. They repeated the names of their gods and used the same words over and over again without thinking. This is what the prophets of Baal did. 1 Kings 18:26 says, “And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon.” We need to understand that praying without ceasing is not the offering up of mindless, repetitive prayers. Our Heavenly Father knows what we need before we ask him, and he wants us to come boldly before his Throne of Grace. He wants us to make our requests known to him because we have access that has been granted to us through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING—FREQUENTLY

The Greek word for “without ceasing” was used for a hacking cough. We have all witnessed and heard someone with a hacking cough. Someone who has a hacking cough does not cough continuously. A person with a hacking cough coughs often and repeatedly. The Greek word was also used to speak of repeated military attacks. If an army attacked a city and did not succeed at first, the army would regroup and keep attacking until victory. This analogy is used to illustrate that, like a hacking cough, praying without ceasing is praying with frequency and persistence.

To pray with frequency means that we should, if possible, do everything throughout the day with conscious thought and reference to God. Throughout the day, there should be a heart posture of thankfulness and joy behind every occurrence in our day. The attitude and habit of our heart should be one of spontaneous, constant prayer.

This attitude and habit of heart requires the discipline of regular, daily prayer. Daily prayer has been an honored

biblical practice. Daniel got down on his knees three times daily (Dan. 6:10). During medieval times, there was the practice of fixed hours set aside for prayer; this was known as *horae canonicae*, also called the Daily Office. Multiple services of daily prayers were held in monasteries. There were seven fixed times throughout the day for prayer. The seven fixed times for monastic prayers were at Matins (midnight), Lauds (3 a.m.), Prime (6 a.m.) Terce (9 a.m.) Sext (noon), None (3p.m.) Vespers (6 p.m.), and Compline (9 p.m.). The monks set aside these times based on Jesus's challenge to his sleeping disciples, who fell asleep and could not watch with him for one hour (Matt. 26:40).

These traditions don't need to be copied! In fact, these set times proved to be physically insupportable. Therefore, many of the monastic orders decreased the number of services. But these traditions do show us how believers have wrestled over the years to better understand and practice frequent prayer.

A MODERN HISTORY OF FREQUENT PRAYER

Thomas Cranmer, the British Reformer, asked the question, "How can busy people, ordinary people, with a full day of work do daily prayer?" The monastic practice only gave people short daily Bible passage, so the ordinary people did not become acquainted with the entire Bible. What was the solution to this problem? He eliminated the numerous prayers throughout the day but kept the morning and evening prayers. He then devised a plan where one would read the entire Old Testament once in a year and the entire New Testament twice in a year. This led to twice daily prayer that could be done in private or in community.

In more recent times, the practice of a single, daily time of prayer was developed. This was known as the daily "Quiet Time." It started in the 1930s and 40s. British and Australian evangelical leaders composed a booklet, *Quiet Time: A Practical Guide for Daily Devotions*. The booklet advised one to find a quiet place to meet with God. It instructs the reader to write down the results of Bible study in a journal, then close in a time of prayer. The Quiet Time specified only twenty minutes. The booklet outlined prayers as first approaching God in confession of our sins, then responding with thanksgiving and praise for our salvation, then intercession for others followed by petition for our needs.

This practice of Quiet Time downplayed the experiential aspects of prayer. Rather, it promoted a method of daily inductive Bible study. It also led to less time in prayer and

less frequent prayers. In other words, this Quiet Time led to believers being *too* quiet!

This has been the practice of many evangelicals today. A daily Quiet Time of only a few minutes has led to less frequent prayers, and, in a sense, may not leave room to obey the biblical command to pray without ceasing. So how does this look practically for us? I think daily prayer should be firmly grounded in Bible reading, Bible study, and meditation on Bible passages.

HOW TO PRAY MORE FREQUENTLY

Do a Bible reading plan that takes you through the Bible in a year, and follow each reading with meditation and prayer. Think on a Scripture passage or Bible verse throughout the day and apply it to your daily life. John MacArthur says: "To pray at all times is to live in continual God consciousness, where everything we see, and experience becomes a kind of prayer, lived in deep awareness of and surrender to our Heavenly Father." To obey this exhortation means that when we are tempted, we hold temptation before God and plead with him for help.

When we experience something good and beautiful, we immediately thank the Lord for it. When we see evil around us, we pray that God will make it right and are willing to be used by him to that end. When we meet someone who does not know Christ, we pray for God to draw that person to himself and to use us to be a faithful witness. When we encounter trouble, we turn to God as our Deliverer. In other words, our life becomes a continually ascending prayer, a perpetual communing with our Heavenly Father.

Daily Prayers done in private should also connect to the church's corporate prayer. Our prayer lives should not only be in private. We should learn how to pray by hearing the prayers of the church. Read prayers such as *The Collects of Thomas Cranmer* and *The Valley of Vision: Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*. Doing this equips us to pray well when we gather corporately on the Lord's Day.

HOW TO PRAY PERSISTENTLY

To pray without ceasing also means to persist in prayer. Many Christians do not persist in prayer and therefore do not pray without ceasing. Why do we not persist in prayer? One may grow tired of asking. We may also doubt that God will answer us. Delayed answers may lead one to believe that God does not want to answer us. God is never offended when we return to him. Jesus told us not to

give up. We are told not to lose heart and that we should always pray and not give up (Luke 18:1). Jesus gives us these reminders to persist in prayer. In the parable of the neighbor asking for bread at midnight, the host who was not prepared repeatedly asks him for bread despite the man's explanation that he is already in bed (Luke 11:5–8).

In another parable in Luke 18, a woman receives justice from an unjust judge after persistent petitions. Jesus concludes this parable by saying that God is willing to bring about justice for his elect who cry out to him day and night. There are also other biblical accounts of saints who prayed for months or years on end before finally receiving an answer to their prayers. Habakkuk said, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear” (Hab. 1:2).

Daniel waited 40 years for the conversion of the pagan king he served. Sarah waited many years for God to fulfill the promise of a child. Hannah went up to the temple year after year to ask for a child before her prayer was answered. The Psalmist said, “I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.”

The Bible commends those who did not receive an immediate answer to prayer as those great in the faith. Faithful prayer is marked by persistence, that is, praying without ceasing. Believers should not worry that our prayers may become too frequent or repetitive. We cannot know the power of prayer if we do not persist in prayer. We should pray and pray again. But why does God want us to pray without ceasing? God can answer any prayer in a millisecond.

Why does he sometimes delay in answering us? He does it because he may have something better in store for us. He may be protecting us. When we pray persistently in the face of delayed answers or initial disappointment, it becomes the instrument of divine nurture. We grow to trust God more by seeing that he often has something better prepared for us than our initial prayer requests.

THE PRAYER LIFE OF ERIC LIDDEL

The movie *Chariots of Fire* tells the story of the English runner Eric Liddell. Eric prayed without ceasing, and he had no idea how God would use his prayer. He was favored to win gold in the 100-meter race at the 1924 Paris Olympics, but he did not run that race because it was scheduled on a Sunday. Eric prayed for God to glorify Christ's name; Eric then went on to run the 400-meter race, and he won gold. Eric did not train to run the 400-meter race, but God, in his sovereignty, helped him

to win a gold medal for an event that he had not trained for. This is not the end of Eric's story.

Winning a gold medal was not Eric's greatest ambition. Eric's greatest ambition was to serve Jesus Christ as a missionary in China. Eric repeatedly prayed that God would use him to bring many in Asia to faith in Christ. After the Olympics, Eric went to China, but his ministry was not fruitful. Soon after his arrival in China, he was imprisoned by the Japanese who invaded China. Eric later died in prison. From this story, it seems like Eric's prayers were unanswered. But this is not so. After Eric's death, a camp survivor would later write about Eric's life. He said, “Without the faithful and cheerful support of Eric Liddell, many people would not have been able to manage the squalor and deprivations of the camp.” A story is retold of how one day a prisoner edged toward an isolated corner of the camp with a knife hidden in his clothing. He intended to end his misery by committing suicide. Eric followed the prisoner and then spoke to him, saying, “Look at the birds flying above us. As long as our hearts rest in Jesus, our souls are as free as the birds, regardless of what happens to our bodies.” These words spoken by Eric gave his fellow prisoner hope. He did not commit suicide, and later, he became a training leader for hundreds of ministers and missionaries who took the gospel and hope in Christ throughout Asia.ⁱ Another fellow prisoner also wrote about the eventual ministry of the children Eric helped in the prison camp. The prisoner wrote, “Also present were Jim Taylor and Steve Metcalf. Jim Taylor, the great-grandson of Hudson Taylor, became General Director of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, with its more than 900 missionaries. Steve Metcalf went to serve in Japan as an OMF missionary.”ⁱⁱ

God, according to his sovereign plan, placed Eric in the prison camp at the precise time needed to preserve the lives of key Asian leaders. It was an answer to persistent prayer. Eric prayed without ceasing. We know that Eric prayed without ceasing because others have reported how they saw Eric praying: “by the flickering light of a peanut-oil lamp early each morning he (Liddell) and a room-mate in the men's cramped dormitory studied the Bible and talked with God an hour every day...[His] desire was to know God more deeply, and as a missionary, to make him known more fully.”ⁱⁱⁱ Eric persisted in prayer, and we should too. His prayers persisted through apparent futility, but all the while, God was doing something better.

GOD IS FAITHFUL

In conclusion, God speaks to us through his Word, and

he wants us to speak to him. We do this when we pray to him. God wants us to speak to him frequently, and he wants us to persist in our prayers. Frequent, persistent prayers are what it means to pray without ceasing. We need to remember that God desires to hear from us, and may we desire to speak to our loving and faithful Father.

Our frequent, persistent prayers do not offend him or betray a lack of faith in him. Jesus commands that we pray without ceasing because he works through prayers offered overtime to help us grow in our prayer life, to grow in him, to further his kingdom, to change us into the image of Christ, and to answer our prayers. He is faithful, so pray without ceasing.

– Dane Ulett

ⁱ David J. Michell, *After the Gold*, Heart Values, available at www.heartvalues.com/eric_Liddell_after_the_gold.html (2004).4.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

Only a Prayer Meeting!

Written by C.H. Spurgeon

Never have I been more thankful for an exclamation point than when I read the title of this book: *Only a Prayer Meeting!* Without the exclamation mark, the title conveys the very reason the book was written—an indifference to prayer and especially prayer meetings. The book documents Spurgeon's unprepared messages from the Metropolitan Tabernacle's Monday night prayer meetings. Those meetings have come and gone, yet Christians who read this book can garner practical instructions and fuel for their prayers today.

The beginning of the book is a compilation of teachings on praying better in prayer meetings. Some are known by Christians but not spoken out loud. For example, Spurgeon grieves over excessively lengthy prayers and robotic or dispassionate prayers. Other teachings address tough topics in prayer, such as the confession of national, social, and personal sins. These gut-punch teachings and sophisticated addresses are off-the-cuff remarks of a praying pastor who was strengthening his congregation's prayers.

The addresses aimed to fuel prayers at prayer meetings, and they serve the modern reader in the same way. The fuel comes from expositions of Scripture, illustrations, and exhortations. Surprisingly, only four addresses in the book directly teach on prayer! Nonetheless, in typical Spurgeon fashion, he opens the eyes of the heart to see its corruption and to behold the beauty of grace. In one address, Spurgeon encourages overwhelmed Sunday School teachers to get the "bread" of God's Word into kids' minds by "break[ing] it up small, and giv[ing] it to them with some nice warm milk of affection." The book's short prayer meeting addresses are good examples of this encouragement from Spurgeon to Sunday school teachers. The reader gets a short gospel message that warmly springboards a Christian to prayer with each chapter.

Sometimes a book that systematically teaches prayer isn't what's needed to foster a prayer life. *Only a Prayer Meeting!* immerses the reader into the Tabernacle's prayer meetings to spur on prayer. The book has been a great tool for strengthening my own prayer life as I have felt disciplined by those prayer meetings. More is certainly caught than taught through this book.

— RECOMMENDED BY DANIEL SANDERSON



Excerpts From the Book

1

"...Whatever your service is, do not neglect to entreat the prayers of your brethren for a blessing upon your work; however limited may be your sphere, you will not get on without the supplications of others"

— The Pastor's Need of the People's Prayer, p. 109

2

"Though you have nothing, He has everything. The mercy is that, just in those very points where you fail, Christ excels; and His merits just fit your demerits as the key fits the wards of the lock. Christ was prepared on purpose for such a one as you are! His character and His work precisely meet the needs of your sad and fallen condition."

— A Full Christ for Empty Sinners and Saints, p. 163

3

"My trials from the adversary are awful... In whatever condition I am, I feel that he is doing all he can to ruin my poor soul; therefore I request the earnest prayer of all Christians for my poor soul, and I know for one, and for the first one, that you will not refuse this supplication to me."

— Tempted of the Devil, p. 186

The Prayer of the Lord

Written by R.C. Sproul

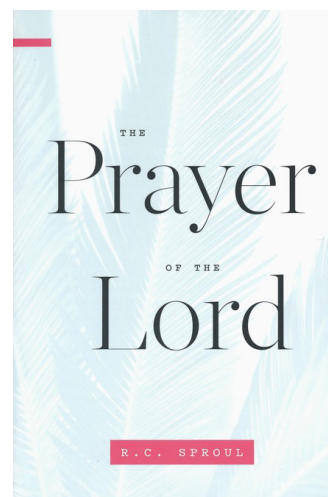
Familiarity breeds contempt. More often than not, this is the fate of the Lord Jesus' instruction to his disciples on prayer in Matthew 6. We know the Lord's Prayer. Many of us memorized it at a young age. But do we really know it? Has it shaped your prayer life at all? In his little book *The Prayer of the Lord*, R.C. Sproul lifts up the hood on the Lord's Prayer, arguing that if God's people are to pray rightly, then they must deeply understand the Lord's Prayer.

It's possible that some of the problem is due to a misunderstanding of how we should use the Lord's Prayer. Sproul argues that, though a word-for-word usage of the Lord's Prayer has some value, this is not its primary intended use. Rather, it is a model for prayer that lays out the most basic principles for how God's people are to have communion with God (15). In this sense, the Lord's Prayer is a gentle lesson from our Savior on what truths govern our communion with God in prayer.

The structure of the book is simple. Each chapter looks at one phrase from the Lord's Prayer and explores the biblical principles undergirding them. Like me, you may find yourself surprised at the depth of theological content contained in each short phrase. For example, do we recognize how radical it actually is to refer to God as our Father? Through Christ, we children of wrath have now become children of the living God (19). This truth is the foundation that supports all the other petitions of the Lord's Prayer. One short chapter surely won't exhaust the depth of riches contained in those two words, "Our Father."

Sproul has an uncanny ability to make difficult truths easy to understand. While this book is no different, don't let its clarity fool you. I suggest reading the book slowly, taking time to really meditate on each phrase contained in the Lord's Prayer. Jesus could have said many things when his disciples asked him how they should pray. The few words he spoke were carefully chosen to shepherd us into a deeper understanding of who God is and how we, as his children, can have fellowship with him in prayer. I pray this book takes you deeper into the immense joy that is communion with the living God, our Creator, and our Father.

— RECOMMENDED BY KALEP KANODE



Excerpts From the Book

1

"Every time we say the Lord's prayer, every time we open our mouths and say "Our Father," we should be reminded of our adoption, that we have been grafted into Christ and have been placed in this intimate relationship with God, a relationship that we did not have by nature."

— Our Father, p. 20

2

"If we find that God's hand seems to be invisible to us and that we cannot discern His providential intrusion into our life, that may be due partly to the way we pray. We have a tendency to pray in general. When we pray in general, the only way we will see the hand of God's providence is in general."

— Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread, p. 72

3

"Yes, my sins have all been paid for, once and for all, on the cross. But Jesus taught us to pray for forgiveness as part of our ongoing communion with God. We need a fresh understanding, a fresh experience, of His grace and of His forgiveness every day. There is no greater state than to get up from your knees knowing that in God's sight you are clean, that he has forgiven every sin you've ever committed."

— Forgive Us Our Debts, p. 84

MARCH

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

March 1	Matthew 1	March 17	Jeremiah 19
March 2	Matthew 2	March 18	Hebrews 12:18-29
March 3	Matthew 3	March 19	Jeremiah 20
March 4	Isaiah 9:1-7	March 20	Jeremiah 16:14-21
March 5	Matthew 4:1-11	March 21	Jeremiah 23:1-8
March 6	Matthew 4:12-25	March 22	Jeremiah 21-22
March 7	Jeremiah 13:15-27	March 23	Jeremiah 23-24
March 8	Jeremiah 11	March 24	Jeremiah 25-26
March 9	Jeremiah 12	March 25	1 Corinthians 1:18-31
March 10	Jeremiah 13-14	March 26	Jeremiah 27-29
March 11	Ephesians 2:1-10	March 27	Jeremiah 23:1-8
March 12	Jeremiah 15	March 28	Jeremiah 31:31-40
March 13	Jeremiah 13:15-27	March 29	Jeremiah 30
March 14	Jeremiah 16:14-21	March 30	Jeremiah 31
March 15	Jeremiah 16-17	March 31	Jeremiah 32
March 16	Jeremiah 18		

*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



Nourredine
Benzid



Cherifa
Benzid



Zack
DiPrima



Erin
DiPrima



Hannah
Hair



William
Manirakiza



Sarah
Reed



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH