

Sunday February 4, 2024  
Lesson 10: Steadfast Prayer  
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

**Context:**

We continue our new winter curriculum, “God Abides,” focusing on how the Holy Spirit reminds us of God’s constant presence with humanity. We start a new unit today titled “Faithful Prayer.” In lessons with faithful prayer, we will both learn what prayer is and how this discipline applies to our walk with Christ. Today’s lesson will encourage constancy in prayer.

Our lesson comes from the book of First Thessalonians, a letter in the New Testament written to the church at Thessalonica. The letter is written by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy with Paul’s voice dominating in several sections.<sup>1</sup> The audience is the church in Thessalonica, and the people are known as Thessalonians. From several things in the writing, we gather the church is primarily made up of Gentiles who have become believers in Israel’s God and in Jesus as God’s son.<sup>2</sup> Thus, these Christians are new to a community of faith and have things to learn about conduct in a religious community.

Our scripture lesson comes from the end of this first letter to the Thessalonians and concludes with a focus on conduct within the community of believers. There are ethical instructions with a kind of order to help believers understand how they are to do things. It is like a list with each item building up from the last.

Verses twelve and thirteen focus the community on where they are to begin with their work as believers. They are to have respect and esteem for those who lead them with peace in their hearts towards one another. There is a correlation for believing communities can to be at peace when there is a sense of respect and regard for its leaders.<sup>3</sup> Everything flows well when there is trust and respect for those who lead.

Verses fourteen and fifteen emphasize how they are to take care of those struggling in their congregation. There is a caution to warn those who cause trouble and to also take care of those who are discouraged or weak. Patience is to be shared, especially in dealing with these individuals as the community can only move forward with compassion and yet also boundaries with behavior.

The final set of verses about behavior, verses sixteen through twenty-two, possess imperative phrases to help the church in how they worship and how this informs everything they do. There is counsel as well as encouragement given about the Spirit, prophecies, and then there are specific practices named such as praying and rejoicing. As the community worships properly, they will be set for all things to follow.

Paul concludes his counsel with a prayer in verses twenty-three and twenty-four. This model prayer will remind the Thessalonians of how prayer is to be at the center of their Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. “First and Second Thessalonians.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

formation. As God has been faithful before with humanity, God can be counted on again.<sup>4</sup> The Thessalonians are called to be a people of prayer.

### **Application**

Of all the spiritual disciplines, I think prayer is one which never gets old, and you can never discuss or do enough. When I led a study on spiritual disciplines, nearly every one of them intersected with prayer. Prayer is the cornerstone of worship and is also the cornerstone for every believer on their walk with Christ. And as many saints will tell you, learning to pray is a lifelong endeavor. Just when you think you have learned all there is on how prayer works, you discover something else and how God speaks to you through prayer.

For the Thessalonian Christians it appears they needed some structure to their life together. If you read the rest of the letter in addition to the prescriptions given in our passage today, you discover they needed quite a bit of direction. At the center of the counsel they are given is the short verse and exhortation in verse seventeen: “Pray continually.”

To pray continually sounds like a challenge, doesn't it? We all know how difficult it can be to multitask, especially when it comes to such an important spiritual discipline. It is hard to pray when you are trying to help little ones get dressed or get ready for a meeting or event. There are some days which are so jammed pack, it's hard to do anything but just get through the day.

Yet if you look at how Paul places this verse in the list given you can see how we are not to overthink it. There are of course times for reflection where you will sit in the pew/worship chair or your recliner and engage in prayer with solitude and a focus on the time with God. However, Paul places this line between rejoicing and giving thanks, indicating prayer is also an active verb which can be engaged in things going on around you.

Prayer is not just about sitting down with a prayer list and going through the names or listing all the problems God already knows you possess. Prayer is also about an open invitation to looking for God in everything and everywhere you go. To live a life of prayer is about embracing what comes and surrendering to God in various moments trusting in what God can and will do. There is a place where prayer is about release and surrendering to God. And it is also where we try to listen to God through all the noise which seeks our attention.

One of the cautionary tales I have seen with prayer though is a using of it to justify things you've said or done. For example, choosing to do something you know is wrong or not exactly ethical and then saying, “well I prayed to God about it,” is not living a life of constancy in prayer. That kind of prayer is about using a spiritual discipline as an excuse to do whatever you had already decided to do.

Instead, constancy of prayer is about seeing everyday as an opportunity to ask the Lord to show direction and in matters both great and small see if those other things connect to decisions. Does this choice praise God as the one who is over all things? Will this decision I make show thankfulness to God or show my own agenda? Praying invites us to name we do not have answers and to also trust God will reveal all things over time. In the meantime, we are called to praise God, to confess our sins to God, to thank God, and to pray for those in need.

To pray constantly also means God will reveal to us different ways we lift up our prayers in various times and places. One of my favorite new ways of praying has been when I travel to at one point sitting in silence and allowing different people to come to my mind. Sometimes I will feel the Spirit nudging me to pray for a specific person or family. Sometimes there are things

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 86.

going on with those individuals and other times, I just feel they need a prayer over them. For me, it has been joyous as I am reminded of how the constancy of prayer connects us and God is at work strengthening our bond with the Lord and with those whom God has placed on our journeys.

One of my spiritual director friends once gave me a book on prayer and I remember being amazed at all the different ways there are to pray. My hope for every Christian is we find those different ways to connect to the Lord and the Lord will fill us up in ways we only could have imagined. And as we pray constantly, we might be open to what the Lord wants to speak or pour into our lives.

How have you discovered ways to pray to God constantly? Why do you think some people use prayer as an excuse to make poor or unethical life choices? Where are your favorite places to pray? How comfortable are you with your prayer life? How do you want to grow as a person of prayer?