

2024 BIBLE STUDY SERIES
THEME: “GET YOUR HOPES UP!”

October 9, 2024

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIVING
“The Prayer Life of a Christian”
I Thessalonians 5:16-18

Topics

- Reflection Questions
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- Introduction
- Background And Context
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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

A. What is your reaction when asked to pray in a public setting?

B. How can you find a quiet place to pray in small living quarters?

C. Have you ever felt as though God was not hearing your prayers? If so, briefly share what you did about it.

IMPORTANT EMPHASIS

Prayer defined – Dialogue between God and people, especially His covenant partners.

William Carey – Prayer- secret fervent, believing prayer- lies at the root of all personal godliness

Prayer is the Modus operandi of filtering faith

Prayer is the breaker box for the house of your faith

F. Laubach has stated it is the believer's business to look into the very face of God until he or she aches with bliss

Matthew 6 This is the model prayer: Our Father which art in heaven hallow be thy name thy kingdom come on earth as it would be in heaven...

John 17:21 The Lord's prayer; I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one as you are in me, Father, and I am in you.

Community of Thessalonica

Both 1 and 2 Thessalonians are powerful witnesses to the early church's struggles with the suffering of its members.

This final section is sometimes labeled "Paul's shotgun paraenesis" because Paul quickly fires off one row of imperatives [requirements or rules] after another.

The church has to face local hostilities, but it does not have to face them without some resources- that is without joy and prayer.

What needs to be accomplished in verses 12-15 can only be accomplished through verses 16-18 verse.

Petition Vs. 17

Persistence Vs. 17

(No) Prejudice Vs. 18

KEY TERMS

Always
Authority
Breath Prayer
Ceaseless
Compassion
Community
Contemplative
Continuous
Constant
Christ Jesus
Everything
God's Will

Heart
Intercession
Monastic
Persistent
Perpetual
Pray/Prayer
Rejoice
Spiritual Disciplines
Steadfast
Thanksgiving
Thoughts
Unwavering

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NASB)

¹⁶ Rejoice always;
¹⁷ pray without ceasing;
¹⁸ in everything give thanks;
for this is God's will for you
in Christ Jesus.

OUTLINE

- I. Constant Joy (v. 5:16)
- II. Ceaseless Prayer (v. 5:17)
- III. Continuous Thanksgiving (v. 5:18)

INTRODUCTION

In the Authentic Christian Living Series, we have explored the topics of "What it Means to Be a Genuine Christian" and "An Effective Devotional Life." The third topic in the series is "The Prayer Life of a Christian." You will notice a progression in the discipleship process and movement toward spiritual growth as each topic connects to the previous topic.

An authentic Christian must develop a relationship with God through spending quality time with Him, reading and meditating on His Word (**Joshua 1:8**), and communicating through prayer (**Philippians 4:6**), as emphasized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King spoke of prayer as "the sacred heart of faith, as the foundation of devotional life..." He also focused on various aspects of Christian prayer such as adoration, confession, supplication, petition, thanksgiving,

intercession, meditation, and contemplation, recognizing their importance in a structured prayer life.

Henri Nouwen explores prayer in "The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life." He emphasizes that prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit through us, making it central to the Christian life. Nouwen suggests that true prayer involves constant communion with God, aligning all thoughts with His presence.

Dr. Renita Weems questions the challenges of maintaining ceaseless prayer during spiritually dry periods, amidst life's busyness, noise, messiness, clutter, and distractions. She reflects on obstacles hindering wholehearted devotion to God, questioning ways to organize life, silence the clamor, declutter, and eliminate distractions.

Richard Foster describes God's yearning for our return, expressing sorrow for our distance, forgetfulness, and distractions. God longs for our presence, inviting us to rediscover our true purpose. He eagerly awaits our homecoming from a chaotic, stressful world to one of peace, joy, belonging, and spiritual fulfillment.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

"Be joyful ... pray ... give thanks"—Communion with God (5:16–18)

In this group of three exhortations [calls or encouragements], Paul leaves the instruction about the social obligations of the believers (**1 Thessalonians 5:12–15**) and turns to the habits that characterize Christians' relationship with God.

The marks of a Christian laid out in these verses are joy (v. 16), prayer (v. 17), and gratitude (v. 18). The person so oriented lives according to the will of God (v. 18). The apostle joins these three together, showing the Thessalonians that they should be constant [persistent, unceasing, incessant, continual, relentless, steadfast, and faithful] in joy, prayer, and gratitude—at all times and in every situation ("always," "continually," "in all circumstances").

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. In what two ways did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. describe prayer? (Intro)
2. What other aspects of prayer did Dr. King focus on? (Intro)
3. What did Henri Nouwen say about the Holy Spirit and prayer?

4. What did Henri Nouwen suggest that true prayer involves? (Intro)
5. What does Nouwen say becomes aligned with God in His presence? (Intro)
6. Dr. Renita Weems questions how to maintain ceaseless prayer during what times? (Intro)
7. What does Richard Foster say that God yearns for from us? (Intro)
8. What are the three marks of a Christian as laid out in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18?

EXPLORING THE TEXT

I. Constant Joy (v. 5:16)

¹⁶ *Rejoice always;*

The first of the three exhortations is, to “*rejoice always*.” Paul has already noted the *joy* the Thessalonians experienced, even in the face of suffering (**1:6b**; cf. Matt. 5:11–12; Luke 21:28; Acts 14:17; 2 Cor. 4:8–10; Col. 1:11, 24; 1 Pet. 1:6; 4:13), which was evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (**1:6c**; cf. **Gal. 5:22**; Rom. 14:17). This joy should *always* be in their lives, in whatever circumstances they found themselves (**Philippians. 3:1; 4:4; James 1:2**).

The apostles never encourage believers to deny that adversity brings sadness and grief (see **Philippians 4:13; 1 Pet. 1:6; Rom. 12:15**), but they recognize that during the most agonizing situations, the presence of God through his Spirit can infuse the soul with _____ and the heart with _____. Even in the most heartbreaking circumstances, such as losing loved ones. Believers find their hope in Jesus (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**).

The joy we can experience when adversity strikes is rooted deeply in the gospel (**Luke 2:10–11**) and has become one of the primary characteristics of

the Christian community. In contrast, joy was not a characteristic of other religions of the era. The church was unique in its proclamation that joy was at the heart of its faith (see **Rom. 14:17**).

II. Ceaseless Prayer (v. 5:17)

¹⁷ *pray without ceasing;*

The second exhortation from the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians is to *pray continually* or _____. This requirement is sometimes understood as a call to pass each waking moment every day in prayer, a goal that is psychologically out of reach for many people—unless one has chosen to live a contemplative or monastic life!

Some days, prayer is an intimidating task. How do you speak to the Creator of the universe? On other days, prayer can seem meaningless or useless. If we are being honest, prayer can often be overlooked in the monotony of day-to-day living. However, God calls us to “pray continually” or “without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), be devoted to prayer (**Colossians 4:2**), and pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests (**Ephesians 6:18**).

Prayer, emphasized by Paul in **Romans 12:12**, is crucial for daily life, reflecting joy, patience, and faith. It is essential to God and individuals, for duty, service, and spiritual growth, as it facilitates divine assistance.

Even though prayer is essential in the life of an authentic Christian, some Christians are not comfortable praying in public settings.

What are some reasons that people are reluctant to pray in public?

What might help a person overcome their reluctance to pray in public?

It's normal to feel nervous when asked to pray in public, but there are many ways to help you feel more comfortable:

- **Practice:** Start by praying out loud at home, or with a small group like a Sunday school class.
- **Write it down:** Writing out your prayers can help if you lose your words.

- **Pray with others:** Praying with a group can be comforting, and you can hear your needs being lifted to God.
- **Pray scripture:** Praying scripture can be powerful and may help you get over your nerves.
- **Repeat the prayer:** Repeating the prayer can ease nervousness.
- **Pray silently in advance:** Ask God to direct your mind and heart to Him.
- **Express gratitude:** Express gratitude for things, like being God's child and knowing that God hears you.
- **Use an acronym:** Use an acronym like ACTS to structure your prayer. ACTS stands for Adoration, Confession, and Thanksgiving.
- **Confess your insecurities:** Confess your insecurities to God, who promises to help in times of need.

Biblical Examples of an Effective Prayer Life

Nehemiah (1:4-11, 2:4, 4:4-5, 5:1-9, 6:9, 6:14, 9:5-38, 13:14, 13:22, 13:29)

The book of Nehemiah in the Bible teaches that prayer is a way to seek God's guidance, confess sin, trust in God's plan, live life before God, and prayer can be done at any time.

- **Prayer is a way to seek guidance**
Nehemiah prayed and fasted after learning about the situation in Jerusalem, and then sought God's guidance to determine his next steps.
- **Prayer is a way to confess sin**
Nehemiah confessed his own sins and the sins of his people before God.
- **Prayer is a way to trust in God's plan**
Nehemiah's prayer and actions demonstrate his trust in God's plan and his willingness to leave his comfort and career to pursue God's mission.
- **Prayer is a way to live life before God**
Nehemiah's spontaneous prayer in the presence of the king was the result of living a life before God.
- **Prayer can be done at any time**
Nehemiah's brief prayers remind us that God hears us at all times, not just when we set aside specific times to pray.

Jesus

Some themes in Jesus' prayers include Giving thanks to the Father, Communion with the Father, and Submission to the Father.

Example of Jesus' Prayers:

- In the Garden of Gethsemane: Jesus prayed three times:
 - Jesus asked God to be glorified
 - Jesus prayed for his disciples
- On the cross: Jesus prayed three times:
 - "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34)
 - "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46, Mark 15:34) [**Prayer of the Forsaken**]
[*"Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani?"* (Aramaic)]
 - "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46)
- Before raising Lazarus: Jesus prayed, "Father, I thank You that You have heard me" (John 11:41-42)
- After entering Jerusalem: Jesus prayed, "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour"
- For all believers: Jesus prayed, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (John 17:20-21)
- The Lord's Prayer: Jesus taught how to pray, "Our Father in Heaven..." (Matthew 6:9-13)

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, he instructed them with a model prayer--"The Lord's Prayer." This prayer is found in two places in the Bible, Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4.

Jesus says, "This, then, is how you should pray:

'Our Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the kingdom and
The power and the glory

Forever.

Amen.” (Matthew 6:9-13 NIV)

The Lord’s Prayer teaches us six unique steps to prayer.

1. Address God appropriately as the Father.
2. Praise God for who he is and what he has done.
3. Acknowledge that God’s plan is in control, not ours.
4. Ask God for what we need.
5. Confess how we have sinned and repent with a humble heart.
6. Request God’s protection and support in overcoming the evil one’s attacks on our lives.

Jesus also instructed his disciples on how not to pray.

babbling...[and think we will be heard because of our many words]” (Matthew 6:7)

Remember that communicating with God is not about a formula or a step-by-step rote process. It is not about praying like the Intercessory prayer warriors. It is simply talking to God about anything and everything. We say grace over our food. We pray for our families and loved ones. We pray for our pastor and his family. We pray for those who are sick. We pray for our church. We pray for our nation and the world. We pray for our leaders, and so much more. We should also be praying to God for who He is, not just for what He has done or what we want Him to do. Though God is omniscient (all-knowing), He wants to hear from us.

Words of wisdom on prayer from an eighteenth-century theologian named Dom John Chapman: “Pray as you can, not as you can’t.”

III. Continuous Thanksgiving (v. 5:18)

*¹⁸ in everything give thanks;
for this is God’s will for you
in Christ Jesus.*

The third exhortation from the Apostle Paul is “*in everything give thanks.*” Although the one who receives the thanks is not specified, we may assume that the author is thinking about giving thanks to God. Frequently Paul heads his letters with thanks to God for the churches (Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:3). Now he encourages the Thessalonians also to give thanks to God as an essential part of their relationship with him.

Giving thanks to God was a key element in Christian worship (Matt. 26:27; Mark 8:6; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Cor. 11:24), but in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, the focus is on the daily thanksgiving of believers. The call to give thanks in all circumstances does not mean that they should engage in thanksgiving every moment (2 Cor. 4:8; 7:5; 9:8; Phil. 4:12), although Paul elsewhere understands prayer as a constant in the Christian's life. In Ephesians 5:20 believers are called to "always [give] thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here the call is limited to thanksgiving in every situation, however good or adverse it might be.

Paul concludes this trilogy of Christian characteristics by explaining that **joy, prayer, and thanksgiving** are what God has called them to, *for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*. Under this reading, *God's will*, outlined in vv. 16–18, is for those who are in relationship with Christ Jesus. Frequently Paul speaks about the realm in which the benefits of God are given to humanity as *in Christ Jesus*, such as his redemption (Rom. 3:24), eternal life (Rom. 6:23), the grace of God (1 Cor. 1:4), or inclusion in the people of God (Eph. 3:6).

Under this reading, *God's will ... in Christ Jesus* would not be *God's will* as demonstrated in Jesus' life or made known by Jesus. Rather, it is his gracious gift, the blessing of his will, which was given to the Thessalonians to follow. Understood in this way, God's call, expressed in his will, is part of his gift. They are blessed by being drawn into the sphere of doing his will *in Christ Jesus*. The reason the apostle gives for this **call to joy, prayer, and thanksgiving** is the strongest and highest imaginable for the Christian.

These are not optional, secondary characteristics of the Christian's existence but stand at the center of God's plan for his people in Christ Jesus.¹

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

9. The Apostle Paul saw the joy of the Thessalonians amidst their suffering. What was the evidence in their lives?

the fruit of the Spirit

10. Where is the joy that Christians experience during adversity rooted?

deeply in the gospel

¹ Green, Gene L. 2002. [*The Letters to the Thessalonians*](#). The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

11. The Apostle Paul emphasized prayer as crucial for daily life. What three elements of the fruit of the Spirit does it reflect?
12. Name one thing that might help alleviate the fear of praying in public.
13. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, what did He give them?
14. What two places in scripture are the Lord's Prayer found?
15. Under what circumstances are Christians to give thanks?
16. Where do the Christian characteristics of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving stand in God's plan for His people in Christ Jesus?

Life Application

- How can the Lord's Prayer benefit your life?
- What will you commit to do to strengthen your prayer life in the next 30 days?