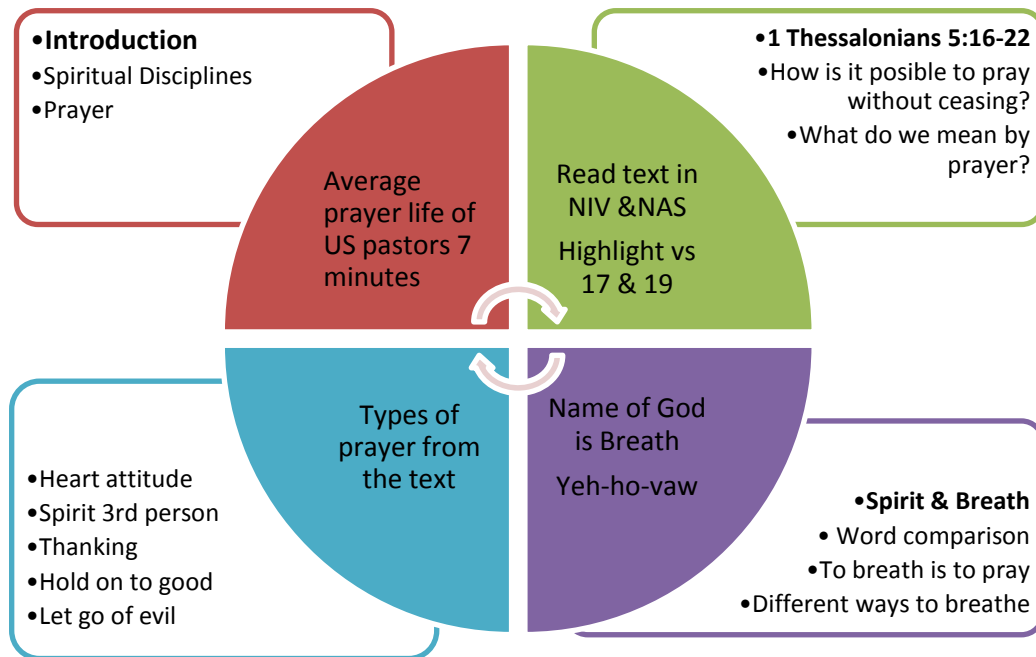


How do we pray without ceasing?

Sermon – Dean Donaldson

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- **Overview**



- Happy 2010!
- We are going to kick off the New Year with a six week series on spiritual disciplines.
- The Art of Spiritual Discipline
- Which Steve introduced last week.
- For the next 6 weeks we are going to look at:
 - Prayer
 - Listening to the word
 - Confession
 - Solitude & silence
 - Sabbath rest
 - Meditation
- So I am going to be speaking about prayer today.
- Why is it important to speak about prayer now?
 - Life gets busy.
 - Reflect on our prayer lives last year.
 - Good time to evaluate how we choose to live.
- What do I mean by prayer?
- Research shows that the average American pastor prays for 7 minutes a day?
- Response to this by a guy named Pastor Ron Mckey...

If you don't pray – you don't deserve to lead! I hope that statement offends you or even better; I hope it makes you angry...The truth is, we don't pray because we're too busy, too lazy or we simply don't care. You and I both know we don't need just another book on prayer. We've read and highlighted most of them already, but still we are not praying. **We have prayer books, prayer tapes, prayer calendars, prayer meetings and prayer lunches, yet we still don't pray.**

- He is probably right but what does the research mean when they talk about prayer?
- When we talk about prayer it usually includes:
 - a quiet/holy space?
 - On our knees?
 - speaking with our words
 - Petitions – God bless us, God protect etc.
- That is how I was thought to pray, get up early, find a quiet space and talk to God for 30 minutes – nothing wrong with this but...
- I am not a talkative person at the best of times, so to speak for 30 minutes at that time of the morning just does not go so well.
- So what do we do, we get up for a few mornings. It does not go so well, we get up fewer and fewer mornings.
- We feel guilty about it but then hear a sermon on grace after which we forget about it again until the next sermon on prayer.
- Sound familiar?
- I want us as a church to change the way we understand prayer this morning and change the way we approach prayer and pray in a way that it is sustainable.
- We need to be praying - Jesus tells us to pray, he teaches us to pray and he shows us how to pray.
- So let's not fall into that cycle again.
- Let's turn to **1 Thessalonians 5:16-22**

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22 (New International Version)

¹⁶Be joyful always; ¹⁷pray continually; ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹Do not put out the Spirit's fire; ²⁰do not treat prophecies with contempt. ²¹Test everything. Hold on to the good. ²²Avoid every kind of evil.

(New American Standard Bible)

¹⁶Rejoice always; ¹⁷pray without ceasing; ¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit; ²⁰do not despise prophetic utterances. ²¹But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

- Pray continually or pray without ceasing.
- How do we pray without ceasing? (C. H. Spurgeon)
 - **Using our voice would leave no time for:** preaching, talking to friends, business/work, day to day activities (Phone call), would sound like Baal worship?
 - **Prayerful posture:** painful, harmful, why did god give us feet?
 - **Place:** if we choose to pray at the church building then we would need to set up living space here.
 - **Time of Day:** It can always be at the crack of dawn.

- So what does Paul mean by pray without ceasing?
 - The verse starts with rejoice always or be joyful always?
 - Talks about a heart attitude?
 - An attitude of appreciating life, and mentally acknowledging it?
 - (Talk about fasting and appreciating the subtle taste of food again.)
 - (Talk about how as we get older the years seem to be shorter and shorter – we spend so much time on autopilot.)
 - Prayer without ceasing is like broadband as opposed to dial-up (expand)
 - Rom 8:26

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

- So if we are open to The Holy Spirit, dwelling inside of us and in agreement then we are praying.
 - Which means that we can pray while driving, working, changing a nappy etc.
 - The text says do not put out the Spirit's fire or do not quench the Spirit.
 - Allow Gods spirit to intercede on our behalf don't quench it.
 - Let's take this to another level though because how do you pray while you are asleep?
- ❖ **Let's look at the word Spirit used in this text (1Th5:16-22) as well as in Romans 8:26**
 - ❖ It is the Greek word **pneuma**, or the Hebrew word **ruah** which in its primary sense means breath.
 - ❖ If breath is Spirit and the Spirit intercedes then the mere fact the we are alive is a prayer to the Creator God, the one who gave us breath in the first place.
 - ❖ We take on average 26,000 breaths a day.
 - ❖ That's a lot of prayer.
 - ❖ Rob Bell helps us understand this concept even better in one of the Nooma DVD's – Breathe
 - ❖ He says that if you look at the story of Moses and the burning bush... Moses asks God who shall I say sent me he replies... say The LORD...
 - ❖ The Hebrew word for The LORD = YHVH pronounced Yeh –ho-vaw
 - ❖ The name of God is breath – according to rabbi's.
 - ❖ What is the first thing a baby does when it is born – breath or say the name of God.
 - ❖ The last thing you do before you die – breath or say the name of God.
 - ❖ To no longer say the name of God, or to breath is to die.
 - ❖ Breath is prayer.
 - ❖ How often do we acknowledge it?
 - "There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God. Those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it." ... **Brother Lawrence**
 - He would set an alarm every hour on the hour to acknowledge God (consciously)
 - Breathing like prayer has many different types...
 - The breathing exercises I looked up generally start with being aware of our breathing... which is what Brother Lawrence teaches us about prayer.
 - Many other techniques that we can learn and practice... in the same way as there are many different prayer techniques.

- **Let's go back to our text 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22**
- Rejoice always – Our heart attitude (brother Lawrence)
- Give thanks – continually thank/worship God throughout the Day
 - Driving in car
 - Passing something beautifully created
 - When enjoying food, health, breath
 - Seeing the image of God in another person – then responding
 - Choosing to look after our environment (tend Gods garden)
- Do not put out the Spirit's fire:
 - Holy Spirit always with us, 3rd person in discussion
 - Talk naturally to The Holy Spirit as if He was physical present as you would include someone else in conversation.

- Test everything:
 - Hold onto what is good
 - Avoid evil (Spurgeon comments that if you put yourself in a place, situation where you are unable to pray then you need to get out)
- Spending time alone with God is also necessary in prayer but it needs to be practiced through continuous prayer. Then it's not like trying to start up a conversation with a stranger.
- The last verse of the last Psalm, Psalm 150:6 says: Let everything that has breath praise the LORD (Yeh-ho-vaw)
- Pray