

Effective Prayer

by Zac Poonen

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Scripture: Luke 18:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Matthew 18:20, Zephaniah 3:11, Zephaniah 3:13, Zephaniah 3:15, Zephaniah 3:17

Topics: "Continuous Prayer", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

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Transcript

One part of following Jesus is to pray. And the important thing is to recognize that for Jesus, prayer was never a ritual, nor was it a formality that he had to somehow complete. If we understand what prayer really is, then we will understand some of those very difficult commands about prayer in the New Testament.

For example, the Bible never says pray for five minutes every day. Those are good suggestions to people who don't do it at all. It never says pray for five hours every day.

What the Bible does say, what Jesus said in Luke 18 verse 1, was he told them a parable to show that at all times they should pray and not lose heart. So how often should we pray? At all times. And that is confirmed in another verse which the apostles wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5 where Paul says, 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 17, Pray without ceasing.

You probably heard me say this before, that when I was a young Christian, I read about these people who used to pray for two hours a day and four hours a day and prayed all night. And those days I was very challenged by that because I was young, ignorant of the Bible. And I thought, boy, that's a great thing.

But as I read the Bible, I discovered some things. One was, Jesus said when you pray, don't let anybody know how long you prayed or where you prayed. So I said, how in the world do people discover that these people prayed for so long? Jesus specifically said, when you go to pray, don't let anybody know.

Lock the room. Don't let them know at all. And so I said, if I obey that, nobody is ever going to know when I prayed or what I prayed.

And so when somebody asked me, Brother Zak, how long do you pray? I said, you want me to disobey scripture now? The Bible says, pray without ceasing. So I tried to understand that verse. And I asked myself, what is it that I do in my life without ceasing? One thing, breathing.

Whether I'm asleep or awake, I breathe without ceasing. So then I realized, because I like to think in pictures, I find when I read the scripture and I see a picture, I can understand it better. That's why you find me using illustrations.

Jesus used illustrations all the time. So then I realized, my prayer must be like my breathing. Which is not something I have to be conscious of.

Sometimes I'm conscious of my breathing. You know, if I've got a little difficulty in breathing, like wheezing or something, then I'm conscious I'm breathing. But most of the time I'm not conscious that I'm breathing, just like you.

But I'm breathing. That's how I live. In fact, I'll be conscious when I stop breathing.

If suddenly you stop breathing, that's the time you're conscious. And the proof that you're breathing is that you're alive. You're in touch with reality.

So what I learned from that is that there must be an attitude of prayer more than an act of prayer all the time. So in that context, Jesus said in Luke 18, when he said that men should always pray, now I'm trying to convert you to my understanding of prayer, which has liberated me from bondage, liberated me from boasting about how much I pray, liberated me from even telling other people how much you pray. You should pray without ceasing.

If it doesn't happen, you work towards it. There are many commands in scripture which we don't immediately obey, rejoice always. But don't give up.

Say, Lord, I want to get there. Be anxious for nothing. It may not have happened yet, but if you fight it, you can get there.

You believe there are commands in scripture I have not yet reached, but I want to reach the top of the mountain, you can get there. So you can say, Lord, I'm not yet praying without ceasing. I want to come to that life where prayer, whether I'm conscious or not conscious, my whole attitude is one of prayer.

That means if I wake up in the middle of the night, for example, I think of Jesus. I wake up in the morning, I think of Jesus. Because that's the most important reality for me.

It should be like that for you. It doesn't happen immediately. But if you work towards anything the Bible has commanded and the Lord sees you're serious about getting there, you will get there.

That I can assure you. But it may take time, it may take a few years. And during that time, the Lord will see whether you're persisting.

So in Luke 18 verse 1, where he said you must always pray, in the King James Version it says like that, may not always to pray. And then he gave a story. The story was of a widow who kept coming to a judge in verse 2 and 3, saying protect me against my enemy.

A lot of things we can learn from that. Whenever you read a parable, try and meditate on it. If a widow has to come herself to a judge, it shows us two things.

She doesn't have a husband, and she doesn't have a son, and probably doesn't even have a daughter. Because if she had a son or a daughter, the daughter or son would go and speak to the judge on behalf of the mother. So here is a widow with no children and no husband, and she has to come herself.

She's helpless. Nobody in the world to help her. And she's not coming asking for money.

She's not coming asking for any gifts. She's only saying, my enemy is troubling me. Protect me from my enemy.

So what I learned from that is, the main thing I come to the Lord in prayer for is protect me from Satan. Don't let Satan harm me. Not only that, what I picture in my mind is the widow living in a compound, and the neighbor trying to encroach into her property and trying to take some of her property by moving the borderline or something like that.

Taking her property. Why do I say taking her property? Because he says, give me legal protection. That means, what is my right? I'm not asking for what is not my right.

I'm not asking for general help. It's my right to have this property. But this enemy is coming in.

Please give me my right. So that the enemy does not take anything that belongs to me. That should be the main burden of our prayer.

Lord, I don't want the enemy, which is the devil, to take anything which has been purchased. Think of the widow. Her husband maybe bought a bit of land for her and gave it to her.

And the enemy is taking it. And our divine husband has purchased something for us on Calvary and given it to us. And the enemy is trying to take it from us.

And if you look into your life, you'll find the enemy has taken many things from you. For example, the Lord has purchased for you a life completely free from anxiety. But the enemy has taken off a lot of that.

He's making you anxious about 101 things. Almost most of the property is stolen. The Lord has purchased for you a life where you give thanks always, rejoice in all situations.

The enemy has occupied that also. The Lord has purchased a life for you where you can love everybody even if they hate you. But the enemy has occupied that.

Think of the areas in your life that Jesus purchased for you. A life of freedom from anxiety and fear and complaining and grumbling. And a life where you can love everyone even if they don't love you.

Stolen, stolen, stolen. And you can sit back and say, OK, the enemy has stolen it. Think of the habit you have of gossiping, backbiting.

It's also areas which the devil has stolen in your life. You don't see it. You would not allow your neighbor to occupy three quarters of your property like that on earthly things because earthly things mean so much to you.

But the spiritual stealing of what Jesus purchased for you on the cross, which the devil takes away, you ignore it. Thereby you're saying to God, Lord, earthly things mean more to me than spiritual things. Whatever I may say on Sunday morning, I will not let any neighbor take my earthly property or steal my bank account.

I will check that nobody has hacked into my bank account about spiritual things. You know, when the Lord sees that that is your attitude to spiritual things and what is your attitude to earthly things and those earthly things mean more to you, OK, you can take care of your earthly things. But I'll tell you this, you will lose out spiritually.

I want to say to you in Jesus' name, from my own experience for more than 50 years, seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first. And I promise you, everything that you need will be added to you. You won't have to ask for it.

You won't have to fight for it. Just fight for your right to possess what Jesus has purchased on the cross. And the judge said, no, I don't have time for you, I don't have time for you.

But she kept on coming. That is the meaning of pray always. I keep on going to the Lord, saying, Lord, I haven't yet got there, I haven't yet got there, I haven't got all my property back.

There's still some more left, there's still about 25% left. I want it, I want it, I want it. I want 100% of what Jesus purchased for me on the cross.

I hope there'll be a few people like that here. I tell you, you'll be amazed to see what God can accomplish through you, even if you're a sister, even if you're weak, helpless like that widow. I don't think there's a single widow sitting here who is as helpless as this one.

If you're a widow, there are many people in this church who are ready to help you. But this widow had nobody. She was more helpless than the most helpless person sitting here.

And she accomplished, she got what she wanted. And that's what Jesus is saying. God will bring, verse 7, justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night.

There again, we see what prayer is like. It's breathing. You breathe day and night.

And there is a prayer, you can't keep on crying day and night. What does He mean? He means there's an attitude in your heart that's always seeking the Lord, saying, I'm not going to give one inch to the devil. Think of some of your children who are not wholeheartedly following the Lord.

What are you doing about it? Are you giving some territory to the devil? No. Say, Lord, I will not give one inch to the devil. Not even one inch of my children, the area of my children.

Not even one inch to the devil. Do it like that. I mean, I pray like that for my grandchildren now.

So we must, we have a responsibility to cry to God day and night. We cannot pray for the whole world. We cannot pray for all of India.

Some people say pray for India. I don't do that. John 17 and verse 9. Jesus said, I do not pray for the world.

People ask me, why don't you pray for India? I don't pray for India. I don't pray for Karnataka. I don't pray for the world.

I follow Jesus. But I pray for those whom God has chosen. Lord, are there people whom you have called, who have not yet found you? I want to find them.

People who should become disciples. I want to find them. He says, I pray for those whom you have given me.

And I believe there are people whom God has chosen, whom God wants to draw to himself in India, in other countries. I say, Lord, bring them in. Bring them in.

We want them. This is what we prayed for 40 years. Lord, is there anybody seeking a godly life here? Please bring them to us or bring us to them.

That's what we've always prayed. We base it on John 17 and 9. All these people who say, Oh Lord, I pray for Karnataka. What are they praying? That's a very pious prayer that makes them look very spiritual.

Garbage. They are trying to be more spiritual than Jesus. Jesus said, go into the world and make disciples.

So I'm only looking, I'm praying for those who want to be disciples. Lord, I want to find them. We need to pray, but we need to pray for those who want to be disciples.

And that God will bring them to us. Not all those who want to go to heaven. They can go to some other churches.

But we are called to make disciples. These are the things we pray for, that whatever the enemy has taken, we want to possess back. Those who are under the grip of the devil right now, since Satan has been bound, that we can take his property from him.

That we need to pray. So when we come together, the reason why we pray together, is because Jesus said, there is more power in two people praying, than in one person praying. Matthew 18 and verse 20.

He said, if two or three are gathered in my name, I am in the midst. So that's why we come together to pray. There is a power in praying together.

I find that it's easy to pray just alone, even if there are other believers around. In my mind, for example, if I am alone praying, that's good. But when there are other believers just sitting there, and I pray in my mind, it's much easier.

Because the presence of Jesus, listen to this, the presence of Jesus is more there, when there are two people who are agreed. It says in verse 19, they must be agreed. That means they are not in conflict.

If you and your wife are in conflict, then Jesus is not there. I might as well tell you, he is not there. You can put a board there saying, Christ is the head of this house.

He is not there. Because the two people living in that house are not in agreement. That's what the devil is interested in.

So when we come together, we want to, at least from your heart, make sure your heart is clear and open, towards everybody sitting here. And then, we can spend a little time in prayer. We can pray for personal needs, we can pray for church needs, we can pray for the country.

We can pray for the coming elections here in Karnataka, and the rest of the country later on. We can pray for the direction things are going. And especially, we want to pray that those who are seeking for a godly life will come here.

And we also pray that the hypocrites sitting in CFC will get exposed one way or the other, and will be driven out one way or the other. That also we pray for. Lord, bring in those who are seeking for a godly life, and expose one way or the other.

Expose the hypocrites who are sitting here, so that they don't pollute the atmosphere, and drive them out. Send them away. That is God's will.

He gathers, and He sends away. Isn't that a good prayer to pray? We are praying according to scripture in the book of Zephaniah in the Old Testament. Zephaniah is almost towards the end of the Old Testament.

Two or three books from the end of the Old Testament is Zephaniah. And in Zephaniah chapter 3, this is what the Lord says. In Zephaniah chapter 3, verse 11, in the middle of that verse, the Lord says, I will remove from your midst all the proud, boastful people.

And in my church, no one will be proud and haughty. But when they are removed, then I will leave among you a humble, lowly people who trust in the Lord. That is the prayer I pray.

Lord Jesus, according to your word, remove from our midst those who are proud, those who exalt themselves, those who are critical of others and backbiting. Remove them. And leave among us a humble, lowly people who are leaning upon the Lord.

Verse 13, who will do no wrong, who will tell no lies. Ya Lord, those are the people we want. Because then we can say, the Lord is in our midst.

Verse 15, middle. The Lord is in your midst. Again in verse 17.

The Lord is in your midst. He will exalt over you with joy. It's the same thing we read in Matthew 18.20. Why do we want the Lord to remove the proud and leave the humble? So that the Lord can be in our midst.

The church is going through a constant purification. There are people who come, the Lord cleanses and some are removed. And some still are not yet removed.

God will remove them. And some have not yet come, who need to come. So, there will always be that.

That's why we say, we welcome those who come, but they get sifted here, they get examined, and some people get offended and go. And others remain. God is the one who does the sifting.

But ultimately there will be a strong church that fulfills God's purposes. So that is the direction in which we pray. So that's a good thing to pray like that for our personal life, and for our home, for our children, and for our church, and then for the country as well.

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