

How God's Word and Jesus Teach Us to Pray

by Zac Poonen

The key to effective prayer is listening to God and seeking His guidance and wisdom, rather than just speaking to Him.

Duration: 27:30

Scripture: Luke 11:5

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Jesus Teaches"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of aligning our prayer life with the Word of God, focusing on persistent prayer, listening to God, and seeking His guidance. It highlights the need to pray without ceasing, persistently bringing our requests before God, and learning from the example of Jesus who prayed in solitude, listened to God, and sought His will before making important decisions.

Transcript

As you all know, we preach some revolutionary things here which others don't preach, sometimes contrary to what others preach. Because we stick to the word of God completely, everything. So in this matter of prayer, which we are coming to do, we must stick to the word of God.

I find a lot of people don't. For example, people ask me, Brother Zach, how many hours do you pray every day? I said, have you read the word of God which says you must not tell anybody how much you pray? You are asking me to disobey the word of God? Imagine asking a person a question like that, which is direct disobedience to God's word. That is just an example to show you the stupidity of so-called believers who ask such a question.

I never ask such a question. So when I read in some biographies that somebody would spend two hours in prayer, some man of God, or four hours in prayer, I don't judge them. Maybe his wife knew about it and told others, so I'm not saying that he himself revealed it.

But I'll tell you, when I read such things, I get thoroughly discouraged. I'm telling you the honest truth. As a young Christian, I read these biographies.

I try to kneel down four hours, and half the time I'm sleeping, and my mind is wandering here and there. And I wake up, and I say, what am I doing? This is my honest experience. And I say, Lord, there must be something I'm missing here.

So when you're a young Christian, you tend to read books and listen to other people. But gradually, I came to go only by the word of God. So when I looked into the word of God, as to how, you see, one is the commands of scripture, the other is the example of Jesus.

These are the two things, the commands of scripture and the example of Jesus. Those are the only things I go by now. The commands in the New Testament especially, and the example of Jesus.

If I go by this, I'll never go wrong. So let me tell you something I discovered about the commands of scripture, and the example of Jesus in the matter of prayer. And it changed my life.

It delivered me from condemnation. It brought greater results in my life, in terms of answer to prayer and many things like that. So if you follow the commands of the New Testament and the example of Jesus, you cannot go wrong.

So first of all, the commands of scripture, Jesus himself said in Luke 18 and verse 1, Luke's gospel chapter 18 and verse 1, he was telling them a parable to show that at all times, at all times we ought to pray and not lose heart. Not two hours, not four hours, not six hours, but at all times we must pray and not lose heart. And he told a parable.

And the parable was about this widow, verse 3, who went to a judge and said, give me legal protection from my enemy, which is a picture of my going to God, and saying protect me from Satan who is trying to harass me. And the judge was unwilling, but this widow kept on bothering him, again and again and again and again and again. He finally said, she'll wear me out, I'll do it.

And Jesus said, hear what the unrighteous judge said, and don't you think God will do more? God is not unrighteous. But we have to keep going to him. That's the message of this.

How do you know you have faith? At the end of this parable, Jesus said, when the son of man comes, verse 8, will he find faith on the earth? This widow said, well I can't, he's not going to listen to me, but I'm going to keep on bothering him. At 2 o'clock in the morning I'll go and knock at his door, and late at night I'll go and disturb him, I'll keep on disturbing him. And Jesus said, that is the parable he taught on prayer.

You keep on going back, again and again and again, with the same request. Don't let the enemy have any power over me. Basically.

I don't want Satan to have any power over me. He's sort of encroaching into territory that God has purchased for me. The widow is probably complaining, and some neighbor who's occupying part of her property, because she's helpless, she has no husband, she has no adult member in her house, otherwise she wouldn't be going herself.

It's a picture of a helpless believer, going to God again and again, saying, Lord, protect me from all these powerful enemies, in the world, or from the devil. And you keep going, and God does it. But, the proof of faith is what? That you keep going to God.

That's the message of this parable. When the son of man comes, will he find such faith, on the earth? That means you ask for something, you don't give up, just because you prayed 2 or 3 times. Many, many good things we get from God, only after we pray many, many times.

I don't know why, don't ask me that. But I know that's the way it works. And that's what Jesus taught here also.

That this widow got, when she went again, and again, and again, and again. And then, he said also, God will bring, verse 7, justice for his elect, who cried to him day and night. So that means there are people who are crying to him.

That means when they wake up, I'm not saying that you stay up all night, but you have a burden on your heart, and you wake up in the middle of the night and say, Lord, I'm again reminding you of this, I want this. I remember the days when I used to pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It was really like that, day and night.

I'm not saying praying all night, but it was so much a burden, that anytime something came up, and if I found somebody else who had a similar sense of need, I would pray with them. And one day, all of a sudden, I found God met with me. And now it is other burdens, and continuous fullness of the Spirit, but whatever it is, God's elect cried to him day and night.

Will he delay long over them? No, he will bring justice speedily. When the answer comes, it will be speedily, but it is for those who cry to him day and night. The other parable Jesus taught on prayer, Luke chapter 11, is about a man who went to his neighbor, at midnight, Luke 11 verse 5, a man goes to his friend, you know, this is an answer to what? Disciples are asking him in verse 1, Lord, teach us to pray.

OK? So now we go to Jesus and say, Lord, teach us to pray, and the Lord says, OK, I'll teach you how to pray. Here's a friend who goes to his friend at midnight, in verse 5, and says, give me three loaves, and the friend says, no, I'm not going to answer you, my children are asleep, don't disturb me, get away. But he keeps on pestering him, and because of his persistence, verse 8, middle, what did the widow have in the previous parable? Persistence.

What did this man have? Persistence. And he got what he wanted. The widow got what she wanted because of persistence.

This man got what he wanted because of persistence. He got as much as he needs. I say, Lord, there are a lot of things I need.

And the promise is, he'll give me as much as I need, and especially, verse 13, if you ask him for the Holy Spirit. This is in the context of the Holy Spirit. Especially if you're asking to bless somebody else.

See, this man was not saying, hey, I'm hungry, give me some food. But that's not what he said. I'm not hungry, but this chap, this other person I know, he's in need.

I want you to give me something to give to this friend of mine. When you go to God like that, Lord, I have a burden for this person. Please give me something to bless him.

And persist, Lord, until you give me, I'm not going to give up. I want to be anointed with the Holy Spirit so that I can serve these people. God will answer you if you persist.

And the other verse is, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, and verse 18. Here also it says, pray without ceasing. Now, we have to use our common sense.

It doesn't mean that we have to be on our knees 24 hours. But there must be a spirit of prayer in us all the time. And that is like, you know, supposing I were to say, breathe without ceasing.

It's not a burden. In fact, it's a burden if you stop breathing. But to breathe without ceasing, that's not a burden.

Anybody feels breathing without ceasing is a burden? You can come into a life where praying without ceasing becomes like breathing without ceasing. What does that mean? You know, you're breathing even when you're not conscious. You sleep 6-7 hours at night and you're breathing.

You're not even aware of it. And your prayer to life with God can become like that, where even unconsciously, how can I do something without ceasing if I have to be conscious of it? For example, when I'm asleep, how can I pray? But it says I have to pray without ceasing. How do I pray without ceasing when I'm asleep? Have you ever thought of that? We've got to take God's word seriously.

Some people just take it so superficially. I read that and my question is, Lord, how in the world can I pray when I'm asleep? And the Lord says prayer can become like your breathing. It can become something so part of your life that you keep doing it.

It becomes part of your life that even when you wake up in the middle of the night, you think of God first. If you find your life like that, I mean, you know that you've come into a life where God is first in your life. I mean, if you wake up in the middle of the night like many of us do and you suddenly think of all the things to worry about in the world, what you have to do tomorrow and what you did yesterday, you've got to change that habit.

Yes, do think about that, but think of God first. Lord, you'll handle that. As you took care of my yesterdays, you'll take care of all my tomorrows.

So it's a very good thing to develop this habit of not two-hour prayer or four-hour prayer, but praying with persistence and praying without ceasing. Those are the two messages I get from the New Testament on prayer. So I don't go by and also don't tell anybody how much you pray.

Next thing is I look at the life of Jesus. Here we have seen the commands of Scripture. Now look at the life of Jesus.

The two passages I want to show you. One is Luke chapter 5. It says here in verse 15, the news about him was spreading further. Great multitudes came to hear him to be healed.

Can you imagine? Think of yourself. Put yourself in that place. If as a result of your prayer, you fulfilled a great ministry, what do you do immediately after that? Go and have a meal and say, wow, praise God that he did it.

Jesus didn't do that. He went to pray. Now most believers pray before they have a meeting.

Before they go for a ministry. Before they have to do something. Jesus prayed after the ministry was over.

Very few people do that. Jesus prayed after because he wanted to give the glory to his father. You know, if you don't pray after you have had a very effective ministry, the chances are you will take the glory to yourself.

Do you recognize that? I've seen it in my life. It's so easy when you had great liberty somewhere. Not consciously to tell people, see what a great man.

You don't do that. But unconsciously you are thinking, your thoughts are, wow, wow, that was great what the Lord did. And a little bit of that glory comes to you.

So you have to learn to pray after you have ministered and to go to God and say, God, that was all of you. I won't touch your glory. It is all 100% of you.

You see, this is the way we live in the presence of God. Otherwise what happens with a lot of people is they are very effective once and then they take the glory to themselves. The next time it's a flop.

Because they don't learn to pray after they have ministered and give the glory to God. Jesus prayed after and he went into the wilderness. And he would slip away.

That's a great word. He would slip away. It means he didn't tell fellows, hey fellows, I am going to pray now.

No. Slip away means here are 10 people talking together and all of a sudden they look around and Jesus disappeared. Hey, where was he? He was here a moment ago.

He slipped away. That's the way we must pray. We must slip away without people knowing.

He always did things in secret. And the other verse is if you turn to Luke chapter 4 after a great ministry demons came out, verse 41 and crying out and many people were healed. Luke chapter 4, verse 40 He healed every one of them.

So what did he do? He slept because it was very late at night and early morning verse 43 he departed to a lonely place and we know he was praying there. Again, after the ministry he said what to do next Lord? The people came and said you must stay here and he said no, I have to go to other places. How did he get that guidance? He had met with God before he met with those people.

It's a wonderful thing to meet with God before you meet with good believers. Because good believers have got a lot of bright ideas but they may not be at the plans of God. This is a good idea.

Why don't you stay here Lord? There is a revival here. But that was not his father's plan. So what we learn there is I must meet with God before I meet good wholehearted believers.

Otherwise their wonderful plans may lead me astray from the will of God. So these are things I learned by watching Jesus pray. And the other thing is Luke chapter 6, verse 12 He went off into the mountains to pray and he spent the whole night in prayer to God.

And when day came he called his 12 disciples. So I know what he was praying. He was praying, Lord there are many disciples I have who are the 12 I should select.

He already had some idea because he was a person of discernment among all the 70 disciples or bigger number of disciples. I think this and this and this and this. God also gives us discernment concerning who all are spiritually minded.

Supposing you are sitting and there is a chair there and you imagine that a very godly person is there. Nobody is there really but you imagine a very godly person sitting there. It is quite likely you will talk and talk and talk and talk and talk and keep on talking and talking and talking because there is nobody there.

You are imagining that a godly person is there. You are imagining that you are talking to God. If you want to continue doing that I don't do it.

I have more respect for God to keep on talking to Him. I talk and I listen. Let's see Isaiah chapter 50.

I want to show you from scripture so you don't think this is just my ideas. Isaiah 50 verse 4 The Lord God has given me the tongue of a disciple that I may know how to sustain the weary one with the word. He awakens me morning by morning awakens my ear to listen.

And what do I do with my tongue? My tongue is to help weary people around me. Not to keep on talking to God. I have an ear and a tongue.

Both are mentioned in verse 4. But I listen to God with my ear and talk to people. Talk to people with my tongue. This is an example.

This is referring to Jesus actually. That is how I know what Jesus did when He was alone with the Father. He listened and listened.

So when He was all night in prayer He wasn't talking, talking all the time. He was listening. Father I just want to be clear.

Is it Matthew? Is it Peter? Is it Thomas? Is it somebody else? And the amazing thing is humanity. You see His humanity there. It was not like the Father said, okay it's Matthew, it's Thomas, it's James, Peter, John.

No. It was like that. Then you would have prayed only one minute.

But you see how God the Father dealt even with Jesus. That His humanity made Him so much like us. Listen carefully.

That He had to wait on the Father all night to get clarity in His mind about that very important decision. That teaches us don't be in a hurry when you are taking a very important decision. Don't just pray two minutes and get up and say I got the answer.

I am in touch with God. Jesus was more in touch with God than you and I and He waited all night. We are fooling ourselves.

We are talking to an imaginary person sitting in that chair. We need to get into God's presence. When we get into God's presence, He speaks.

I tell you He speaks. The first page of the Bible You know what it says in the first page of the Bible? On the first day God spoke. Second day God spoke.

Third day God spoke. Fourth day God spoke. Every day He is speaking.

What is the message in the first page of the Bible? Every day God will speak to you. What is the message in Revelation? Revelation chapter 1. I, John, was in the island of Patmos and I heard the voice of the Lord

like a trumpet. But if you are deaf, you don't hear anything.

So, the problem is not that God is not speaking. He is speaking throughout the scriptures. But I need to take time to listen.

And so, now I am not telling you about public prayer. In public prayer we should not delay. We should open our mouth and pray and lay our burdens before God.

When I am talking this more about private prayer, please keep that in mind. But when we pray in private like that, listening to God, listening to God, when we pray in public, we don't need to pray long prayers. The prophets of Baal prayed for six hours, nothing happened.

Elijah prayed for one minute and the fire came. You know, Jesus said how people pray long prayers thinking that they will be heard. Let me turn you to Matthew chapter 6. Don't keep on praying like the Gentiles.

Matthew 6 verse 7. For they think they will be heard because they spoke so many words. It's a very common understanding even among some Christians. I prayed for two hours so God will definitely listen to me.

Rubbish. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. It is freedom from sin that enables God to hear our prayer.

Don't be like the heathen who think if they pray a long time many words God will hear. No. The other thing, he said, your father knows what you need.

Verse 8, before you ask him. Remember that everything you are going to pray now, your father already knows. Whatever you are going to pray for.

Then why should we pray? Because he wants to make us co-workers with him in answering that prayer. He wants cooperation. I sometimes use the example of a father carrying a table from one room to another room.

And his little 3 year old son comes in and says Daddy I want to help you. If he is a wise father, he will say Sure son. Please hold that corner of the table.

And the little son will hold that corner of the table. He is not really lifting any weight. The father is carrying the whole weight.

And he will carry the table in the next room and the son is so excited. He goes and tells mommy, Mommy, I and daddy moved the table to the next room. That is the excitement God wants us to have when he says that you prayed and something happened.

Your father already knew. It is a wonderful privilege. I love when God treats me like a 3 year old child saying Dad, can I help you move this table? And God says sure.

Can I help Lord in some of your work you are doing over there? God says sure. You think I am doing such a great thing? I am just holding the corner of the table. But he wants me to do that and I am glad to do that.

That is why we pray and that is why we should pray. That is why we should pray for our children. And if you have got grandchildren, pray for them.

It is our responsibility. It is our responsibility to pray for those whom God places on our heart as a burden. You can't pray for everybody in this church but you can pray for those who are close to you, those who are burdened.

That way somebody will be burdened for somebody and somebody for somebody else. Like that the whole church will be covered. We don't need one person praying for everyone.

It is a wonderful thing and there are many burdens the Lord has. God puts one on you and one on somebody else. Like that all of God's work is done.

So these are just a few guidelines. We pray together because we read in the scriptures many times people coming together to pray and see God and God hears and answers prayer because Jesus said when two or three are gathered together and they pray together in unity, they can get what they want. So let's now go to prayer.

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