

**Series on Prayer
The Attitudes That
Accompany Us In Prayer
I Thess. 5:16-18**

Introduction**A. God's Word Calls Us To PRAYER.**

1. Throughout the Scriptures, God's people are called to prayer.
 - a. Jesus prayed, often all through the night.
 - b. Paul prayed in each and every circumstance and situation, and as this text today says, "without ceasing."
2. No one would be able to argue that prayer is a critical part of the Christian's life.

B. God's Word Calls Us To MORE THAN PRAYER.

1. However, you cannot simply put prayer alone as the most Godly practice and attitude of the Christian.
 - a. The **Pharisees** prayed.
 1. Luke 18:9-14 (read)
 2. Jesus warns us **NOT** to pray like the Pharisees.
Matthew 6:5-6 - "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."
 - b. Even **pagans** pray.
 1. The Buddhist believes that you can overwhelm Buddha with the sheer volume of prayers. Many Buddhists spin wheels containing written prayers, believing that each turn of the wheel sends prayers to their god.
 2. **Matthew 6:7 - "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words."**
2. Prayers offered to God in an ungodly attitude are actually offensive to God.
 - a. **Mark 12:38-40** - As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. **They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers.** Such men will be punished most severely."

b. **Matthew 6:6** – “**But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**”

3. Today, we will look at spiritual attitudes that should accompany prayer.

I. The ATTITUDES Of A Godly Christian.

A. Be JOYFUL.

Vs. 16a – “Be **joyful** always.”

1. The **explanation** of joy.

a. Joy **defined**.

1. Joy is seen as one of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit as seen in Galatians 5:22-23.

2. In fact, it is the **SECOND** aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, right behind the most noble fruit of all – love.

3. So, joy is seen as a spiritual characteristic that comes from God’s Holy Spirit.

a. In a sense, it is “not natural” for people to be joyful.

b. God must give us the ability to have joy in our lives.

b. Joy **delineated**.

1. It is **not happiness**.

a. We must realize that joy is not happiness.

1. The word happy comes from the root word “**hap.**”

a. From where we get the word **happen** – to be or occur by chance; to have the luck or occasion; to come by chance.

b. In other words, happiness defined is an attitude brought **to** us because of our “good fortune” or “good luck.”

c. Happiness thus depends on how well our life is going.

Ruth 2:3 (KJV) “And she went and came and gleaned in the field after the reapers and her **hap** was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz.”

1. Unforeseen meeting

2. Happeneth (KJV)

3. Fortune, accident

2. **Ask yourself if you are currently “happy.”**

a. **Yes, I am “happy.”**

1. Because of my wonderful family.

2. Because of my lovely wife or husband.

3. Because of my home or my job.

b. **No, I am not “happy.”**

1. Because I am alone.

2. Because I don’t like my job.

3. Notice, despite your answer of yes or no, you used the same reasoning.
 - a. I am happy **BECAUSE** of my good fortune.
 - b. I am not happy **BECAUSE** of my lack of good fortune.
 - b. Now, we must realize that there is nothing wrong with happiness.
 1. This past weekend, some of my family was here visiting for Thanksgiving. I was “happy” looking forward to their coming. I was “happy” when they got here. I was “not happy” when they left.
 2. You see, happiness, not joy, is **DEPENDENT** on outward circumstances and responds to those outward circumstances.
 3. **F.E.Arn, The Living Church – “Joy is that which encompasses and transcends both happiness and sadness. Once endowed with joy, a person is not likely to lose it and in fact it grows with awareness of it. Joy is like the sun, always shining even when night falls or clouds cover it. Happiness is like the moon, waxing and waning. Happiness is a kiss, joy a golden wedding anniversary. Happiness is frequently shared but not always – joy is always. Happiness is born in the mind, joy in the heart. Happiness comes from humans, joy from God. Happiness is exchanging Christmas gifts – joy is awareness of what Christmas is all about.”**
2. It is **joy**.
- a. The word joy is based on the Greek word **charis**, from whence we get the word grace.
 - b. The sense of joy is that it is based on three truths.
 1. **One – Our joy in this life is based on the wonderful saving grace of God in our eternal lives – a grace that we don’t deserve.**
 - a. How can you not be joyful about getting something that you don’t deserve?
 - b. Reveling each day in how God “graces” your life all the way into eternity.
 2. **Two – We are able to be filled with joy because God gives us His grace in each and every situation.**
 - a. Whatever happens to us, God’s grace is there to bless us.

- b. So, you see, while happiness is “**dependent**” upon the outward circumstances, joy is “**independent**” of those circumstances, because God’s grace does not change.
 - 3. **Three – We trust in the sovereignty of our gracious Heavenly Father and His plans for our lives.**
 - a. Confession of Faith - I. Of Providence - **God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible fore-knowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.**
 - b. What “other choices” do you have?
 - 1. Chance?
 - 2. Fate?
 - c. We trust our lives in the gracious sovereignty of our God.
 - d. **“I can see that Jesus drew men and women in the Kingdom by promising them two things: first, trouble - hardship, danger; and second, joy. But what curious alchemy is this that He can make even danger and hardship seem joyous? He understands things about human nature that we grasp only dimly: few of us are really challenged by the promise of soft living, by an emphasis on me – first, or by a life of easy compromise.” Catherine Marshall in A Closer Walk.**
 - e. **“Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.” Leon Bloy**
- 2. The **extent** of joy.
 - Vs. 16a – “Be joyful **always**.”
 - a. HEREIN lies the difference between happiness and joy.
 - 1. **You CAN’T be happy always, because your circumstances are not always “happy.”**
 - 2. **But you can ALWAYS be joyful because our sovereign God DOES NOT CHANGE:**
 - b. So, joy becomes an indication of where you are in your spiritual life.
 - 1. Yes, you may and do pray, but where is your joy?
 - 2. **ESPECIALLY** in the bad times –
 - 3. Maid in Miss. **“Do you still have your joy?”**
 - a. in a run-down house
 - b. with an invalid husband
 - c. with her only income from her ironing business

4. **“I don’t envy those who have never known any pain, physical or spiritual, because I strongly suspect that the capacity for pain and the capacity for joy are equal. Only those who have suffered great pain are able to know equally great joy.” Madeline L’Engle in A Stone For a Pillow**

B. Be PRAYERFUL.

Vs. 16b – **“Pray continually.”**

1. The **explanation** of prayer.

a. **NOTICE that joy PRECEEDS prayer.**

1. Although you can and should pray when you are sad, it seems much easier when you pray with joy.
2. And if I am trusting in the sovereign work of my heavenly Father, if I am trusting in His divine providence for my life, **THEN I WILL PRAY WITH JOY!**

b. That is not to say that you should not pray when you are sad – you should.

1. But Paul is saying here that prayer and joy go together!
2. You see, if I truly believe in the sovereignty of God, in the providence of God, I will pray!
 - a. I will pray with questions – “God, I don’t understand what you are doing. Yes, I believe that you’re sovereign, but what have you done?”
 1. 9/11
 2. My mother’s death – the worst depression I had ever been through.
 - b. I will pray with doubt, “God, I don’t think that I will make it. Please show me what I am to do.”
 - c. I will pray with praise. “Lord, I am amazed in seeing how you have shown yourself in this situation.”

c. If I place my life on the sovereignty of God in my life, then

1. Prayer will not only be a joy,
2. It will also be a continual conversation with the sovereign God in my life.

2. The **extent** of prayer.

Vs. 17 – **“pray continually.”**

a. The Greek word for continually comes from two Greek words: pas and hote.

1. **pas** – all things, whosoever, everyone, everything, whatsoever.
2. **hote** – when, as soon as, as long as.

b. The word means that prayer should be:

1. **continual** – every day
2. **collectively** – about everything

c. Paul is not saying that prayer should be such that you are driving with your head bowed and your eyes closed.

1. But you are to be so filled with joy and trust in your sovereign God
2. **And your life is so dependent upon Him, that you cannot go ten minutes with not reengaging in conversation with your heavenly Father, NO MATTER WHAT THE ISSUE OR PROBLEM.**
3. **In a sense, the lack of your joy should be the indicator that something is WRONG with your prayer life.**
 - a. Because IF you are not praying at all times for all things then you will NOT be a joyful person.
 - b. Joy becomes the “indicator” and “initiator” of your prayer life.

C. Be THANKFUL.

Vs. 18a – “**give thanks** in all circumstances.”

1. The **explanation** of thankful.
 - a. While the Greek word does mean gratitude and thanksgiving; this Greek word is from the same word that was translated joy in verse 16.
 - b. Basically, Paul is saying that our prayer life should be not only active and without ceasing, but to be full of joy, praise and thankfulness.
 - c. So, in Paul’s mind, you cannot separate prayer from joy and thanksgiving. They all go together.

2. The **extent** of thankful.

Vs. 18a – “give thanks **in** all circumstances.”

- a. In this verse, Paul uses the word in – Greek – **en**
 1. The preposition in, with, among, on.
 2. **WHILE** you are in the circumstances, praying, you are to be thankful.
 3. This is seen in the lives of saints throughout the Scriptures.
 - a. **Daniel in Daniel 6:10** – “**Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.**”
 - b. **Peter in Acts 5:40-42** - His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. **The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.** Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.
- b. But, in another text, Paul uses **another preposition** – look at **Ephesians 5:20** – “always giving thanks to God the Father **for** everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1. Paul uses the Greek preposition **huper** which means **for**
2. So, not only is a believer to be thankful “in” his circumstances, he is to be thankful “for” his circumstances.
3. **We are never to praise God for evil, HOWEVER, our God is SO sovereign that we can praise Him for His sovereignty EVEN in the failures, mistakes and sins of our lives.**
 - a. Joseph in Genesis 50:19-20.
 - b. **Confession of Faith – II. Of Providence - Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.**
 - c. **Romans 8:28 – “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**
 1. Does the verse really mean ALL THINGS?
 2. DO WE REALLY BELIEVE THIS?
- c. **ESSENTIALLY, whether we thank God “in” or “for” our circumstances, we are asking ourselves whether or not we believe in the sovereignty of God.**
 1. Because, if God is truly sovereign in our lives, then He is sovereign in EVERYTHING that touches my life.
 2. You are really thanking God for His sovereign hand in your life!
 3. John McArthur says it well – he says that there are **three levels to thankfulness.**
 - a. **Level one** – to be thankful at the **exact time** of our blessing.
 1. We are thankful “when” we are blessed.
 2. We are thankful for a good job, a wonderful family.
 3. We are thankful for God’s blessings on our life.
 - b. **Level two** – to be thankful for the blessing that **we will receive in eternity.**
 1. We anticipate our blessing “before” it happens.
 2. We know that God will be faithful; if not physically, then spiritually in heaven.
 3. Even death becomes a time for praise.
 - c. **Level three** – to be thankful **in the midst of the battle.**
 1. To be thankful “during” hard times.
 2. This is the pinnacle of a thankful heart.
 3. **As McArthur says: “If we can only thank God when things are going well, our thankfulness in on the bottom rung of faithfulness.”**

- d. **Francis Anderson – Commentary on Job. “It is equally right for God to give gifts and to retrieve them: it is equally right for God to send good or evil; receive is a good active word, implying cooperation with providence, not mere submission. Such positive faith is the magic stone that transmutes all to gold; for when the bad as well as the good is received at the hand of God, every experience of life become an occasion of blessing. But the cost is high. It is easier to lower your view of God than to raise your faith to such a height.”**

II. The ALTITUDE Of The Godly Christian.

A. We CAN’T Have This Attitude In OUR OWN POWER.

1. As noble as it is to be joyful, prayerful and thankful, we CANNOT do this without the work of God in our individual lives.
 1. Because each of these attitudes are a work of God’s Holy Spirit in us.
 2. Because God’s Spirit ENABLES us to be joyful, prayerful and thankful.
2. Have you ever asked Jesus to come into your heart as Savior and Lord?
 - a. You will know that you have done so by these attitudes in prayer.
 - b. Be honest with yourself.

B. We CAN Have This Attitude In GOD’S POWER.

Vs. 18 – **“give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”**

1. As a believer, you do not need to know what attitude you should have in prayer.
 - a. **Look at the verse – “This is GOD’S will for you in Christ Jesus.”**
 - b. **HOW OBVIOUS CAN THESE VERSES BE? GOD IS TELLING YOU THAT IT IS IN HIS WILL TO HAVE THESE ATTITUDES.**
 - c. In fact, each verb – be joyful, pray and give thanks, are all in the PRESENT IMPERATIVE.
 1. It is a command.
 2. It is a constant.
2. But you are no different than a non-believer. You cannot have these attitudes without:
 - a. The constant, daily filling of **God’s Holy Spirit.**
 - b. The constant, daily **time of worship and praise in His Word.**
 - c. The constant, daily **confession of your sin through repentance.**
 - d. The constant, daily **trust in a sovereign God.**

On **June 6, 1981, Doug Whitt and his bride, Sylvia**, were escorted to their hotel’s fancy bridal suite in the wee hours of the morning. In the suite they saw a sofa, chairs, and table, but where was the bed? Then they discovered the sofa was a hide-a-bed, with a lumpy mattress and sagging springs. They spent a fitful night and woke up in the morning with sore backs. The new husband went to the hotel desk and gave the management a tongue-lashing. **“Did you open the door in the room?”** asked the clerk. Doug went back to the room. **He opened the door they had thought was the closet.** There, complete with fruit baskets and chocolates, was a beautiful bedroom! Opening all the doors in a honeymoon suite is like obeying all the words of Jesus. discipleship is the door to happiness. Cynthia Thomas, Glen Ellyn.

