

Pray Without Ceasing

By Patrick Swayne

Every day of his life, brother Gus Nichols made it a practice to begin his day with prayer, and not to say “Amen” until the day was over. He did this because he kept a prayerful disposition throughout the day; he was never truly done with his conversation with God until he laid his head in sleep.

While we can take or leave the idea of delaying our “Amen’s” until the end of the day (as “Amen” simply means, “may it be so,” when used in conclusion), we would do well to emulate brother Nichols’ prayerful disposition. The apostle Paul told the brethren at Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). His words shouldn’t be taken lightly, as they are not advice or a suggestion, but represent an inspired command. However, there is another reason we shouldn’t take his words lightly; like many of God’s commands, when we put this command into practice, it can only yield both physical and spiritual blessings. There are at least three reasons why we should carry out the command to pray without ceasing: because we realize the source of all blessings, because we have daily needs and concerns, and because we know the power of prayer.

James removed all doubt surrounding the source of our blessings when he said, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). This verse also reveals the nature of our God. While the snares of Satan and the makings of man have the ability to do great harm, nothing that comes from God ever has the intent of evil behind it. Every gift, every word, and every action that comes from God is for the benefit of man, for “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Knowing that our God is the source of everything that is good and knowing that God seeks only good for us, we ought to turn to Him in prayer.

We are in constant need of the blessings and favor of God; prayer allows us to access these things. Spiritual blessings such as cleansing of sin, God’s abiding presence, and a way of escape when we are tempted are things that God has promised (1 John 1:7; Hebrews 13:5; 1 Corinthians 10:13) but are things we should request from God in prayer. In terms of our physical needs, since everything we have or receive is from God, we ought to ask him for what we need and thank him for what we have. Jesus told his disciples to pray for their daily bread, implying that He expected them to make praying for this basic necessity a daily habit (Matthew 6:11).

There is much power in the prayer of the righteous. James told us that, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

He then went on to illustrate exactly how powerful prayer is by citing the example of Elijah. Elijah prayed that it might not rain for three and a half years, and his prayer was granted (James 5:17-18). The implication of the text is that if Elijah had not prayed, it would not have rained. Prayer cannot always change the will of God, but prayers that respect the will of God will always be heard (1 John 5:13,14). When righteous people turn to an all-powerful God in prayer, amazing things happen.

Mary A. Kidder lived from 1820-1905. Her husband Ellis enlisted in the Union army to fight in the Civil War when he was 40 years, leaving her with their three children. Two years after joining the fight, he died of dysentery. Two years later, her son Walter drowned in a swimming accident. Neither of these tragedies kept her from seeing the power and importance of prayer. She wrote a hymn entitled, "Did you think to pray?" which contained these words:

Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray? In the name of Christ our Savior, did you sue for loving favor, as a shield today? O how praying rests the weary! Prayer will change the night to day; so, when life seems dark and dreary, don't forget to pray.

The words of this hymn remain as true today as the day they were penned. Christians ought to be a prayerful people, not only because Paul commanded us, but because we know the source of all blessings, the necessities that we each have, and the power of fervent prayer.