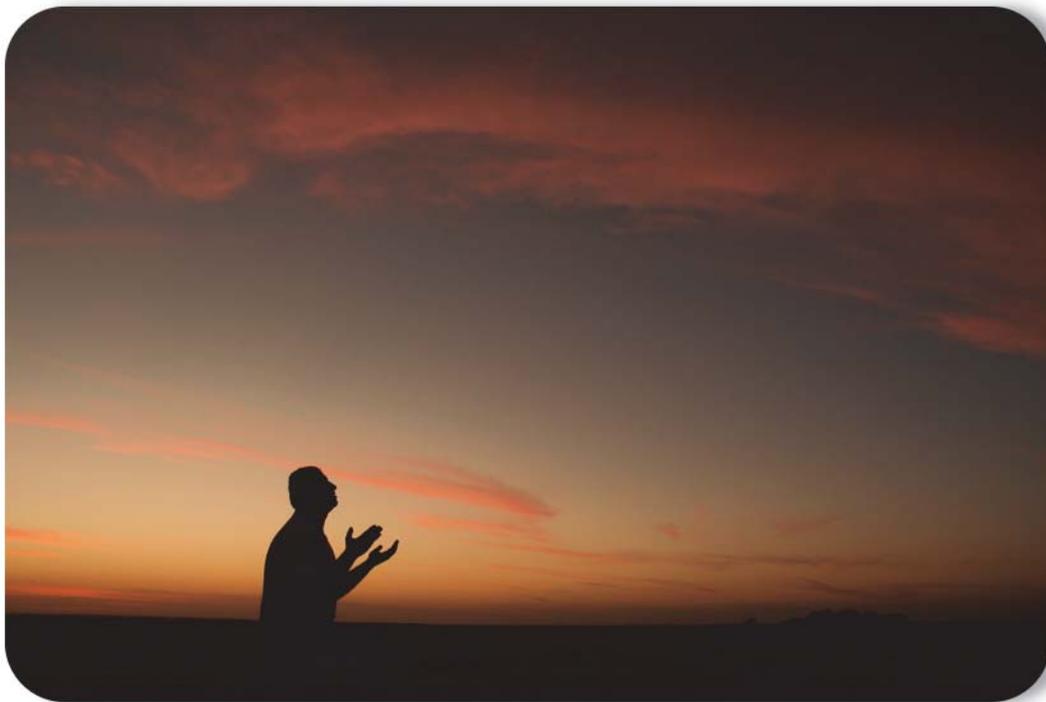


The Primacy of Prayer

Parameters of Prayer 2



T. M. Moore

The Fellowship of Ailbe

A ReVision Study

The Primacy of Prayer
Parameters of Prayer 2
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Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *The Primacy of Prayer*

Welcome to *The Primacy of Prayer*, Part 2 of a six-part study on *Parameters of Prayer*. In this series of studies, we will consider the teaching of Scripture concerning prayer and its role in the life of faith. God intends prayer as the *defining discipline* of our walk with and work for the Lord. For too many of us, however, our prayers are something less than that.

Jesus' standard for prayer is pretty high – always, and without losing heart. We are temples of the Lord, and He is building us up as houses of prayer, so we'd better try to figure out how we can begin to rise to His standard.

It's not as hard as you might think. It's harder. We can learn some ways of maintaining an attitude of prayer throughout the day. But we're going to be opposed in this effort, so we'd better know how to keep the weapon of prayer always engaged in the spiritual warfare that is continuously upon us. Happily, the Lord keeps up His end of the prayer conversation without ceasing and without fail, so there's always something we can respond to as we work to realize the primacy of prayer in our walk with and work for the Lord.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

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T. M. Moore
Principal

1 A House of Prayer

Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" Mark 11.17

A house abused

It's rare to see Jesus ticked off. But there's no denying that, as He strode through those temple precincts, wielding that whip and turning over those tables, Jesus was ticked off. And certain merchants, scam artists, and deal-seekers had the bruises and scars to prove it.

Why was Jesus so upset? What caused our gentle Jesus, meek and mild, to explode into a hurricane of rage and violence?

The answer is simple: People were using the Lord's house for the wrong reasons. They may even have been well-meaning folk, just trying to help travelers make sure they had the right animal for their sacrifice, or providing currency exchange services to ease their way around in Jerusalem. Shouldn't the temple be a place where we try to meet people's needs? Shouldn't the Lord's house be open to any and every program that helps people get what they need?

Jesus disagreed. The temple of the Lord – the Lord's house – was intended as a house of prayer for all the nations. The temple was the place where people should come, not to have their needs met – turning the sanctuary of the Lord into a place for robbing Him of His glory – but to turn their faces heavenward, seeking the Lord in humility, contrition, and faith, crying out to Him words of praise, adoration, confession, repentance, intercession, and supplication. The noise and clamor Jesus heard in those temple courts was not that of people pouring themselves out in prayer, but of merchants lining their pockets, customers purchasing their salvation, religious leaders counting noses, and misguided worshipers serving themselves rather than God.

And such misuse of the Lord's house ticked Jesus off big time.

"I will build My Church"

Jesus promised that He would build His Church, and the Apostle Paul explained that His Spirit has taken up the work Jesus began, and is building His Church into "a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2.21). Indeed, Paul insists, each believer is a temple of the Lord, and should conduct himself accordingly (1 Cor. 6.19). Do we suppose that Jesus' intention in building *this* temple is any different from His Father's intention in building the temple in Jerusalem?

If we do, we are sorely mistaken. And, as churches and believers, we may be in danger of coming under the lash.

Where is the church that takes as its primary purpose seeking the Lord in prayer for all the nations? Where are the believers, members of those churches, for whom prayer without ceasing is the great project of their lives? Who begin their day in prayer, hang their day on prayer, and end it in prayer, giving thanks and praise to God for another day of life? Where are believers gathering in these turbulent times to seek the reviving grace of God according to His Word, like those first Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 4.24-26)?

If we are honest, we will admit that, in most of our churches today, as well as in the lives of too many believers, prayer is a bit like costume jewelry – it doesn't cost much, looks OK, and you only haul it out when

you need it, and then, only as much as is necessary.

But if we're not praying, if prayer is not the *defining discipline* of believers and their churches, then what *are* we doing in the Name of the Lord? All those programs. All that frenzied activity. Those buildings and staff, budgets and grounds – what's all this *for*, if not to promote and practice prayer without ceasing?

What the Lord is seeking

The Lord is seeking men and women who seek Him in prayer. He has provided abundant access for us, along with the promise that God the Father will hear and answer our prayers. He commands us to pray. He has taught us how to pray. He has provided us with abundant scripts to guide and lead us in prayer. With His Spirit He stands ready to assist us in prayer. He has explicitly declared that people ought *always* to pray, and not to lose heart (Lk. 18.1).

While we sit at our tables, chatting away happily about how great it is to be Christians and how much we love our church, and as the money flows from wallets to offering plates to ecclesiastical expenses, individuals offer their gifts in this or that arena of service, and the whole place teems with religious conversation and activity, a word of warning:

That familiar Face, standing in our midst, is looking for us to be looking for Him. He holds behind His back the means of bringing our programs, buildings, budgets, and all our Bible-bustle to ruin, because these are *not* what He is seeking from those for whom He bore the lash, the nails, the crown of thorns, the mocking, and the scourge of death.

Jesus is building His house, and all the members of it, as a temple of prayer. We will only be on page with Jesus when prayer becomes the first priority and continuous practice of all our Kingdom-and-glorify seeking lives.

For reflection

1. How is it apparent that Jesus is building your church as a house of prayer? What about your life?
2. What do you suppose it would look like if prayer were the defining activity of your church and your life?
3. What obstacles stand in the way of our making prayer the defining component in our existence as churches and believers?

Next steps – Preparation: Review your practice of prayer. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest rating, how would you assess the state of your prayer, against the expectations of our Lord? What's one thing you could begin to do to improve that assessment?

2 Always to Pray?

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart... Luke 18.1

A heart for prayer?

We are, I fear, a generation of believers who have lost heart where prayer is concerned.

Or perhaps not so much lost heart, as having our hearts – our affections – *misguided* where prayer is concerned.

I'm quite sure I don't need to belabor this point. We know that prayer is not a primary effort in our churches. Oh sure, we have prayer during worship, as part of our Bible study groups and other programs, and perhaps even a weekly prayer meeting. But would you say those prayers are the *essence* and *substance* of your church's life, or just outward adornments, appropriate as needed? Would you call your church above all else a house of prayer?

And you know your own life as well as I know mine. We sustain the work of prayer as long as we are seeking something *from* the Lord. But aren't we too easily satisfied? And don't we therefore *not* seek the Lord Himself merely for the glory, joy, and pleasure of being in His presence in prayer? "Lord, thanks so much for Your many blessings. I'll call you again when I need you."

Hardly what we might expect of lives which have been devoted to seeking the Lord in prayer.

Prayer will never have primacy of place in our lives, so that we are a people *characterized* above all else by prayer, until we get our hearts right concerning prayer – its nature, purpose, and use. And to do this, we must begin by looking away from ourselves and to the Lord and His Word.

Jesus on the primacy of prayer

We don't have to search very hard to learn how important prayer is to our Lord Jesus. Luke 18.1-8 provides a concise summary of His teaching on the primacy of prayer.

Jesus sought to impress on His followers that they ought *always* to pray, and not to lose heart. Whatever else we're doing in life, Jesus insisted, we should be in prayer. He explained that such prayer is a true and indispensable *indicator of saving faith* (v. 8). What the Lord is looking for in people of faith is that we should be always in prayer. We should *keep coming* to the Lord in prayer (v. 3), *continually coming* and even *troubling the Lord* (v. 5) as we plead with Him for mercy and grace to help in our time of need.

Those whom God has chosen through our Lord Jesus Christ "cry out day and night to Him" (v. 7). They understand that apart from Him they can do nothing, and they cast themselves continually on Him in prayer.

Such prayer is a tall order, it's true. Few of us would say we are able to maintain such a high standard in our prayers, or that we even understand what this requires.

But do we even take Jesus' teaching seriously? Do we call ourselves believers, temples of prayer to the Lord of glory, and yet do not consider prayer without ceasing to be our primary Kingdom-seeking activity? Do we suppose we can define ourselves as true believers by some standard other than what the Lord Himself holds?

We have to conclude that, whatever praying always involves, or whatever the forms such prayer might take,

Jesus believed that prayer without ceasing, always and without losing heart, is what sets us apart *in the first instance* as His followers. When we get our *hearts* around this discipline, so that we *truly desire* to pray like this, and find in such prayer the *glory, joy, and pleasure* our Lord intends, then prayer without ceasing will certainly define us as people of faith and followers of Jesus Christ.

But we must begin in our hearts. And that means first of all sweeping *out* of our hearts every affection, attitude, or aspiration that prevents us from furnishing our souls with a heart for continuous prayer.

Hindrances to prayer

Four affections in particular can cause us to lose heart for prayer, and especially for praying always. The first of these is *unbelief*. We read Jesus saying that we ought always to pray. Paul echoes the same idea (1 Thess. 5.17). We understand that Jesus and Paul believed that we could and should practice the discipline of prayer at all times, in every situation, no matter what else we're doing.

But if we do not *believe* these words, if we rationalize them away as mere spiritual rhetoric, or choose to ignore them as simply not possible, our hearts will never embrace the Lord's instruction with the kind of energy and consistency He is looking for among those who believe. Let us receive this instruction, crying out as we do, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

The second hindrance to a heart committed to the primacy of prayer is *love of the world*. This can take the form of sin, obviously – which we refuse to acknowledge or repent of – but it can also appear in the form of diversions not related to our Kingdom-and-glory calling in the Lord. These take up our time, occupy our minds, delight our souls with fleeting gratification, and distract us from remembering the Lord in prayer.

Third, *self-reliance*: If in our hearts we think we can handle the daily details of our lives without the mercy and grace of the Lord, we're not likely to seek Him, except when we feel the inclination or need.

Finally, *distrust* of the Lord can keep us from devoting ourselves to the primacy of prayer, refusing to accept that He knows what we need and that His ways are better than our own.

We will never have a heart for praying always as long as such affections linger in our souls. Let us wait on the Lord and His Spirit, to search the deep recesses of our souls, to rid us of any affections or attitudes which can keep us from taking Jesus at His Word, and to make prayer the delight of our souls and the defining characteristic and practice of our lives, *always*.

For reflection

1. What obstacles are presently keeping you from seeking a life of prayer without ceasing? Are you willing to overcome these?
2. How can believers encourage and help one another in learning to pray always and without losing heart?
3. What would it look like for prayer to be a more constant presence in your daily life?

Next steps – Preparation: Begin praying each day that God would call you to prayer at times throughout the day, and that you would be alert and ready to respond when He does.

3 Hang Your Day on Prayer

*As for me, I will call upon God,
And the LORD shall save me.
Evening and morning and at noon
I will pray, and cry aloud,
And He shall bear my voice.* Psalm 55.16, 17

Begin here

In order to pray like people who have true saving faith – that is, to pray *always* and *without losing heart* – we will need first of all to make up our minds that *this* is the kind of prayer we want to practice every day. When our minds are *set* on the primacy of prayer, we'll be able to discipline our hearts to *delight* in it.

Praying always and without losing heart requires a commitment of *mind* before it becomes a longing of the *heart* and a priority of the *conscience*. We must overthrow every rationalization that denies or rejects this clear teaching of Jesus and Paul. Then we can devote our minds to thinking about what such prayer might require, envisioning and imagining ourselves actually praying this way, talking with other believers to gain additional insights and perspectives, and beginning to connect all other topics and activities that occupy our minds with this most important discipline.

Bringing our minds to the point of embracing the primacy of prayer at all times and in all situations takes time, and will require us to think out loud in prayer with the Father, seeking His mercy and grace to help us achieve this frame of mind.

Getting our minds around praying always and without losing heart is a choice. Make that choice now, then let's press on together to learn how to achieve this ideal of the primacy of prayer.

The hour of prayer

Where to begin in actually *practicing* this kind of prayer? In Acts 3.1 we find Peter and John going up to the temple at what is described as *the hour of prayer*. That would have been around 3:00 pm, and appears to have been a *set time* for people of faith to pray. We find in Acts 10.30 that Cornelius, that godly Gentile, also turned aside from his daily activities to pray at that time. In Acts 10.9 Peter retired to a rooftop for prayer at around noon, before he took his lunch.

Reference to set times for prayer appears in several places in the Old Testament. Our text mentions three times set aside for prayer – evening, morning, and noon. Praying three times a day like this was Daniel's practice, as we see in Daniel 6.10. Indeed, Daniel was so faithful at this practice, that his enemies knew where and when to find him in prayer, contrary to Darius' command. The writer of Psalm 119.164 insisted that he prayed seven times a day, a practice which has been maintained by various Christian communions for centuries.

Establishing set times for prayer – *hours* for prayer – in your daily schedule can be a first step toward praying always and without losing heart. Observing these hours of prayer doesn't mean you need to pray for an hour each time; usually 10 or 15 minutes, sometimes more, will suffice to keep us focused on the Lord throughout the day and in continuous communication with Him.

Remember when you were a kid and played on monkey bars? The goal was to get from one end to the other without falling to the ground. The challenge was to swing from one overhead bar to the next, gathering and maintaining enough *momentum* to keep you going forward toward the end.

Observing set times of prayer during the day can work like that, helping us to get through to the end of day in a forward movement of prayer, reinforced at predetermined intervals throughout the day.

Set appointments to pray

Setting times to pray throughout the day is like setting an appointment to meet with someone. You call a friend or colleague and say, “Hey, let’s get together.” The response is something like, “Sure. What’s on your mind?” So it should be when you establish set times of prayer throughout your day.

Make sure you know in advance what you’re bringing to your appointment with the Lord. Perhaps your time with Him will focus on *thanksgiving* for the day thus far, and *praise* for any observations you’ve made of the Lord’s grace at work in you. You might also preview the rest of the day ahead, or the next day, by *prayers of intercession and supplication* or simply by *waiting in silence* on the Lord for direction or wisdom.

You could also choose a psalm to guide your different appointments for prayer. Read through the psalm in an attitude of concentration and listening, then pray it back to the Lord, lining up your words with the words of the psalm as you let the psalmist guide you into the Lord’s presence, glory, joy, and pleasure.

Start with three set times for prayer – evening, morning, and noon. They don’t have to be long, but they should be so important that you treat them as true appointments with the Lord. Be on time. Stay focused. And use your time wisely and well. If you hang your day on prayer like this, retreating to these oases for prayer at set times each day, you’ll establish a momentum of prayer to carry you forward in the Lord, and this will provide an excellent foundation for continuing to master the discipline of praying always and not losing heart.

For reflection

1. What would be the best times each day for you to set aside 10-15 minutes to meet with the Lord? Why are these the best times? Do you think you’ll need more than this much time? Explain.
2. Which psalms might you choose to bring to such times? Have you begun praying these already?
3. How might Christians help one another to take up this Biblical practice?

Next steps – Transformation: You can transform your daily schedule by setting three or more times to meet with the Lord in prayer. Try doing so for the next several days. Does this help to enhance your awareness of the Lord, and your dependence on Him in prayer?

4 Before All Things

*So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.* Psalm 90.12

Prayer as a journey

Praying always and without losing heart is like a journey. When you get up in the morning, the journey begins. It continues throughout all the activities, duties, and responsibilities of the day, and comes to an end as you lie down to sleep at night.

Setting hours for prayer during the day can create a forward momentum for your day's journey with the Lord. It's a bit like planning where to stop for a meal as you travel. Whenever Susie and I have driven anywhere that takes a whole day, we're careful to know where we're going to stop to eat and refresh along the way. We may not write out a trip plan, but we agree together that we'll go so far in the morning, then stop for lunch, and go so far before again getting some dinner. After that, we'll probably go a bit farther before stopping for the evening.

But we don't just jump into the car and head out – not without some *careful forethought* about the trip ahead.

When you see each day as a journey with the Lord, part of your time, first thing in the day, will be involved in getting on the same page with Him concerning the trip ahead.

Number your day

This is what Moses had in mind in Psalm 90 when he sought the Lord in prayer to assist him in *numbering* his days. That phrase means something like “to know truly and uprightly,” and it carries the sense of *getting the mind of God* concerning the day ahead. Moses wanted to get on top of his day *before* the day rushed in upon him. During your morning time of prayer, therefore, it's a good idea to work through the day ahead with the Lord, itemizing the details of your trip, setting up your appointments for prayer, and seeking His counsel, advice, and will for the day.

Your day will be filled up with various kinds of work – not just the work you do at your job, but all the work which fills up your personal calling from the Lord. In Psalm 90.16 and 17, Moses sought the Lord to *show* him the work that lay ahead, and to *establish* that work for him. He acknowledged that the work before him was *God's work* (v. 16), and that it held the potential to *reveal the glory of God* to those around him, beginning with his children. He prayed that God would *establish* or *set right* that work, and then repeated that petition, as if he knew he would not realize the purpose of God for his work unless the Lord was with him in it.

You're probably going to need a more extended time of prayer in the morning if you're going to include *numbering* the trip of that day in conversation with the Lord. But think of the advantages of doing so, and how these can help you realize the goal of praying always and without losing heart.

Set to travel

If you begin your day in prayer, enumerating all the activities ahead of you for the day, waiting on the Lord to give you His wisdom and guidance for each activity, then offering those activities to the Lord as a *sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving*, you will find it very likely that, as you take up each of those aspects of the work you've been given to do, your mind will recall your time with Lord, in which you devoted these details of your daily trip to Him. Then you can continue your journey in prayer. You'll always have something to talk about with the Lord in your appointments for prayer if you simply touch base with Him about the plan you established

at the beginning of the day.

As you take up each task – meetings, chores, deliveries, shopping, projects, and the like – treat them as the offerings you committed them to be. Offer a brief prayer to the Lord as you begin each one: “Not my will, Lord, but Yours...” Or “Grant me grace to glorify You, Lord.” Or “Lord, strengthen me for this work, and help me to do it as unto You, and not merely as unto people.” As you progress through each task, don’t hesitate to offer a simple “Thank You, Lord” for each stage of the process. When the task is completed, and before you turn to the next stage of your daily journey, pause for a few moments of silent reflection. Turn your mind to the Lord. Be still, know His presence, and listen for His “Well done!” or other word, whether of correction, conviction, or commendation.

Do you think taking up your daily duties in this manner will affect your *attitude* toward your work? Do you think you might do your work more *conscientiously*? With greater *joy* and *focus*? Even with *greater aplomb* and *effectiveness*? And do you suppose doing your work like this might actually allow you to *express the hope that is within you*? The hope that God might be glorified in your work?

And when this begins to happen – and it will happen – your children and others around you may be so piqued and curious, that they might actually ask you a reason for what they are observing (1 Pet. 3.15).

Our days don’t have to be a soul-grinding, forced march over difficult and disagreeable terrain, filled with distasteful tasks. They can be an offering to the Lord resulting in Him being glorified, and us entering that glory for joy and pleasure in Him (cf. Ps. 84).

So number your days in prayer at the beginning, and review and work your plan throughout the day in prayer. You’ll be praying without ceasing before you know it, and delighting to know the presence of the Lord with you always.

For reflection

1. If you think about your day as a trip, how do you gauge *progress* in your journey?
2. Do you expect to glorify God in *all* the work of your day? How can “numbering” your day in prayer help you to live more toward that outcome throughout the day?
3. Many people know that J. S. Bach, when he finished a composition, wrote the letters *SDG* at the end – *solli deo gloria*, to God be the glory. What most don’t know is that, at the *beginning* of each composition, *before* he started writing, he wrote the letters *JJ* – *Jesu juve*, Jesus, help! Apply this practice to your daily trip with the Lord.

Next steps – Transformation: How will your morning time of prayer need to change to include the approach suggested in Psalm 90.12, 16, 17?

5 In Everything

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God... Philippians 4.6

Everything?

Scripture simply does not back down from the Lord's expectations concerning our prayers. Not only does Jesus insist that we pray *always* and *not lose heart*; and not only does Paul command us to *pray without ceasing*; but the Apostle also instructs us to make our prayers and requests known to God *in everything*.

Every situation. Every undertaking. Every state of mind or frame of emotion. Whether in public or in private, alone or in a crowd, doing something we may regard as of consequence, or something of no consequence at all. In *everything*.

This makes sense for several reasons. First, we don't have to bear anything in our lives by ourselves. The Lord is with us always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28.20), and He will never fail us nor forsake us when we seek His mercy and grace in our times of need (Heb. 13.5).

Further, the Lord Jesus upholds the universe and everything in it by His powerful Word (Heb. 1.3). He is thus actively involved in everything we might do, no matter how small or great. His power is at work within us to make us willing and able to do what meets with the Lord's pleasure (Phil. 2.13). It makes sense to acknowledge His sovereign involvement, rest in it, and draw on His power for whatever we may be involved in at any moment.

Moreover, since everything we do has the potential to bring glory and honor to God (1 Cor. 10.31), we will want to make sure that we're doing *everything* above all to please Him, and maintaining conversation with Him in the midst of everything can help to keep us on course for glorifying the Lord.

Finally, praying in everything is a good way to keep our minds focused on the Lord, and can help us fulfill another charge from the Apostle Paul, that of setting our minds on the things that are above, where Jesus is seated in heavenly places, and thinking always on Him (Col. 3.1-3).

As you number your day in prayer, and prepare for your journey with the Lord, consider ways you might fulfill this calling to commune with the Lord in prayer in and about everything during the day ahead.

Prayer and supplication

Paul suggests that "prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving" is the way to fulfill this charge. But these do not necessarily involve your talking all the time. Prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving are as much a frame of mind and an attitude of heart as they are spoken words. You can be grateful for someone or offer praise for something merely by thinking of them, as the Lord calls them to mind. We can continue in prayer with the Lord without speaking as long as we bear in mind *in everything* that He is with us and within us, upholding us, calling us to focus on Him, and ready to glorify Himself in whatever we do.

With, within, underneath, above, and throughout: Apart from the Lord we can do nothing. But with Him, nothing is impossible – especially not praying always and in everything.

What can we do to keep that in mind at all times, in everything we do? Surely, doing so will keep us from falling into anxiousness or doubt, and can keep us on the road to the righteousness, peace, and joy that

express our citizenship in the Kingdom of God (Rom. 14.17, 18).

Pray as you move from one activity to the next. Listen for the Spirit's leading – a friend brought to mind, a chore left undone, a reminder you need to write down, a prompting to praise or thanks. Offer a word of thanks, even if spoken only in your mind, for each completed task. Seek the Lord's direction, and the help of His angels for difficult challenges ahead in your journey, and rejoice in Him, with thanks and praise, even when things don't work out quite the way you'd hoped. Take up your duties to the words of a psalm or hymn or spiritual song, and like sailors of hold, hauling in the anchor to the rhythm of a delightful chanty, do your work as unto the Lord, singing and making melody in your heart.

It is possible to remain in a mindset and heartset of prayer *in everything* you have to do during the course of a day. But you will have to train your mind to work this way, so that you *think* about the Lord at all times, or are *open to His prompting* in midst of your responsibilities, and can respond with even the briefest, "Thank You, Lord" or "Yes, Lord" always and in everything.

The promise of peace

Is it possible to know when we're actually beginning to realize this ideal? I believe it is. Paul promises that when in everything we pray with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving – when we pray always and without losing heart – we will know the peace of the Lord, a peace we can neither fully understand nor clearly explain, but a peace that *guards* our hearts and minds, keeping them focused on and resting in our Lord Jesus Christ.

As you begin to realize that, increasingly, you are not easily perturbed, and you don't look forward to your duties and responsibilities with dread, that in the midst of your work you are imbued with a sense of joy and purpose from beyond this temporal plane, and that the thought, the Name, even the glorious Face of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6) seems ever more present with you in everything, then you can know that you have a Companion with you on your journey with Whom you are maintaining communion always and in everything.

Which is only to say, then you will know the peace that passes understanding that guards your heart and mind *in Christ Jesus*. Then not only will you not lose heart for prayer, but you will the more eagerly and gladly engage it, as often as you may.

For reflection

1. Does this seem realistic to you, to pray always and in everything? Why or why not?
2. What can keep you from learning to pray like this? How might a fellow believer be of assistance to you in this project?
3. Do you think that working at Scripture memory throughout the day might help to remind you to pray always and in everything? How might that work?

Next steps – Transformation: Make a concerted effort today to pray always and in everything. How will you prepare for this? What will you do to make this more likely to happen? How can you maintain this attitude and mindset of prayer throughout the day?

6 In the Heat of Battle

...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints... Ephesians 6.18

This won't be easy

The closer we examine this calling to pray always, without ceasing, and in everything – that is, to give prayer the primacy in our lives – the more doable it actually appears.

Start your day in prayer, looking toward the journey ahead, and seeking the Lord to establish your work. Set appointments to meet with the Lord for prayer. Go forward mindful of the Lord, Who is with you, within you, underneath you, and throughout everything. Set your mind on Him, listen for Him, and be ready at all times with a word of thanks, praise, or supplication. Sing to the Lord. Yeah. You can do that. It will take cutting some new grooves in your daily walk with and work for the Lord, but you can get there. You can pray always, without ceasing, and in everything. And as you do, the peace of God will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

But as in most things, to be *forewarned* is to be *forearmed*. There is trouble ahead in your journey with the Lord. Your adversary, the devil, stalks about looking for someone to devour, and he sets his table of temptation, trials, troubles, and other traps for each of us, every day. He is especially powerful with those he is able to distract from the work of prayer. When we are not in communion with the Lord through prayer, we are vulnerable to the wiles of the evil one. Ask Adam and Eve. Ask Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, and so many others.

When the devil can get your attention apart from prayer, he can lead you right into his jaws, and then, well, it can be hell to pay.

So as *simple* as praying always and in everything can *seem*, it's not going to be an easy road. You'll need to be ready to deal with the devil at every step along the way.

Temptation

We're most vulnerable to the devil, and his troll-line of temptation, when we are wandering along the path of life apart from communion with the Lord. Temptation is not sin. As Martin Luther observed, you can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair. But temptation can *lead* to sin unless we recognize it for what it is. To be tempted, Helmut Thielicke explained, is to find yourself at the point of wanting to be disloyal to God. Like Asaph in Psalm 73.

Asaph was a humble servant of God, diligent in his devotion to the Lord and content with his relatively unadorned lifestyle. Until he stopped to think about it. As he observed the rich, going through the motions of religion while they aggrandized themselves at the expense of others, always with the best food and clothing, in good health to the very end, and unconcerned about what anyone, including God, might think – as Asaph contemplated these rich people, there began to rise within him a feeling of resentment and jealousy. He was being tempted by the devil to covet, the easy bait on the hook of sin, because covetousness is the gateway to all other sin.

But Asaph recognized this invitation to disloyalty, and he stood up to it promptly, boldly, and completely, so that, by the end of Psalm 73, he can be seen rejoicing in the Lord and fully happy to be His humble servant once again.

The way to deal with temptation, and thus to defeat the devil's plan to devour you, is to *recognize* it as such, *resist* the invitation to sin, *reject* the proffered path, and *return* to the Lord through prayer and His Word. We'll only *recognize* temptation when, through meditating on God's Word and Law, we have a good idea what sin looks like (Rom. 7.7; 1 Jn. 3.4). *Resisting* the devil and *rejecting* his suggested path are part of the same action, which is the logical outcome of *recognizing* sin and *hating* it as such (Ps. 97.10). We can then *return* to the Lord's path by seeking Him in prayer, and rejoicing in His presence, promise, and power.

Our most important weapon

We can expect to engage this spiritual struggle against the devil every day. We need to take up the weapons of our warfare and be on guard continuously against spiritual forces of wickedness in high places, which seek to distract us from our Kingdom-and-glory calling in the Lord.

The Lord has provided us with strong weapons for this struggle. Truth, righteousness, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, faith, assurance of salvation, and the Word of God: we'll need each one of these at one time or another to maintain the Lord's victory over the devil. But *prayer* we will need *at all times*, as Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6.18, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." Always, all, all, all. Got it?

That's temple talk, isn't it? Praying at all times. Praying for all the saints. Being watchful in all prayer with a view to defeating every foe that would hinder or divert our daily journey with the Lord. Prayer is the incense that fills the temple of our bodies and wafts into the nostrils of our loving heavenly Father. Stay in prayer, and you'll be better positioned to stand your ground against the devil, when he comes suggesting some thought, affection, word, or deed which would dishonor God and derail your faith.

Prayer is the last-named of the weapons in our spiritual armamentarium, not because it's the *least* important, but because it's the *most* important. Praying always, without ceasing, and in everything will help us keep the devil in check, and advance the cause of Christ and His Kingdom along the path of our daily journey with Him.

For reflection

1. How would you suggest preparing for the day's temptations during your morning time of prayer?
2. What should be the *first* step you take whenever you become aware that you're being tempted? What should be the *next* step after that?
3. Why does it make sense to believe that praying always and in everything is the best defense against the wiles of the devil?

Next steps – Conversation: Meditate on Psalm 73. Asaph found several ways of escape from the temptation that was before him (1 Cor. 10.13). How many can you identify? Share your findings with a Christian friend.

7 In Response to the Lord

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.* Psalm 19.1-4

Listen up!

When someone is talking to you, it's a good idea to pay attention. And when that Someone is your Savior, King, and Lord, it's even more important that you listen up and respond accordingly.

We mentioned previously that Jesus Christ upholds the universe and everything in it by His Word of power (Heb. 1.3). In a sense, a mysterious and spiritual sense, the Word of God speaks *continuously* to the creation, in all its details, everywhere, concerning everything. Secular scientists describe the universe as operating on the basis of certain material or physical laws. The stuff of this world is what it is and does what it does because of the laws of matter and physics.

Well, that's only partially true. The *laws* of the universe are not *prescriptive*, that is, they do not *cause* the world to be as it is. Rather, they are *descriptive*, they describe the world as it is, and as the Word of God upholds it in His steadfast love and faithfulness. Jonathan Edwards put it this way: "It is by the immediate influence of God upon things according to those constant methods which we call the laws of nature, that they are ever obedient to man's will, or that he can use them at all."

The world is what it is, and as it is, because the Word of God continually speaks *to* it, maintaining and sustaining it by His own power. And because He speaks *to* the world, He also speaks *through* it, revealing in and through created things His glory, goodness, wisdom, power, and love. The "line" of Christ's speech "has gone out through all the earth." He is always speaking, always making Himself known, always keeping up His end of the prayer conversation to which He calls us always and in everything.

Are we listening?

Most people simply aren't listening to the Word of God as He speaks to us through the world. Those who do not believe in God *hear* His voice, but choose to ignore it (Rom. 1.18ff). Those who believe *hear* His voice and *see* His glory at certain times, when they are confronted by some particularly impressive manifestation of the glory of the Lord, whether in a sunset, a storm, a beautiful landscape, or some other created wonder.

But the Lord is speaking *continuously* to us through the things He has made, and, at the very least, we need to learn to pay a bit more attention, because we can find in the revelation of God, in created things, abundant matters to remark on, give thanks for, and offer praise to God in prayer.

We are at every moment subject to some word from the Lord, something in the creation that speaks of Him, reveals something about Him, and invites us to respond. The Scriptures teach us what to look for in these works of God, so they can guide us in what to seek and how to hear the Lord, as He helps us, through the revelation He provides in creation, to keep up our always and without ceasing conversation with Him.

Revealed in His works

Psalm 145 offers guidelines for seeing and hearing the revelation of God in creation. The creation bears witness to the *power* of the Lord (vv. 4, 6, 11). It speaks to us of His *splendor and majesty* (vv. 5, 12), invites us to remark on and talk about His many *specific acts* (v. 6), bears witness to His *immensity and greatness* (v. 6), proclaims His *goodness* (v. 7), testifies of His *righteousness* (v. 7), witnesses to the reality of His *Kingdom* (vv. 11, 13), and leads us to encounter His *glory*, that is, *His very presence with us* (v. 11). All the works of the Lord, speaking to us about Him in all these ways, remind us “The LORD *is* near to all who call upon Him” (v. 18). I take this to mean that, as we *observe* or *hear* the Word of God speaking to us in any of these ways, and if we respond with praise, thanks, or supplication to what we see or hear, the Lord will draw near to us, reveal Himself and His glory to us, and “will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him: He will also hear their cry and save them” (v. 19).

All around us, creation is speaking to us about the Lord. He is in all, through all, over all, and for all things. We can train our eyes and ears to discern the revelation of God in creation, and thus enhance our ability to keep conversation with the Lord throughout the day, listening and observing even while doing other things, uttering silent praises and storing up words to pour forth when we arrive at our next oasis of prayer in our daily journey.

I find it helpful to jot down observations of the Lord’s revelation in creation. That way I impress them more firmly on my mind, and I have a reminder to turn to as I go to prayer, as well as an invitation to deeper meditation and prayer at some later date.

The Lord is speaking, and we are communing with Him in prayer as we listen, observe, and respond, if only with wonder, amazement, and gratitude of heart at the continuous, unfailing, and manifold demonstrations of His faithfulness and love. Let the love of Christ, revealed in His world, be a continuous reminder to you of the primacy of prayer, as you travel this world’s journey of faith with Him each day.

For reflection

1. When have you ever seen or heard the Lord in some aspect of the creation? What did He speak to you about Himself?
2. Why is it so easy for us to overlook the presence of the Lord in creation, so that we fail to see or hear Him there? How can we improve in this matter?
3. What would be some reasonable responses to the Word of the Lord through creation?

Next steps – Boasting in the Lord: Jot down ways that you hear or see the Lord in the world around you. Respond accordingly in prayer. At some point during the day, share an observation with a Christian friend, and invite your friend to respond.

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by saying that prayer should have primacy of place in our lives? What would this look like?
2. What are some things that can keep us from giving prayer this kind of place? How can we overcome these?
3. How can Christians help one another to realize more of the primacy of prayer? How can they help in bringing more prayer into their churches?
4. How should we hope to benefit by learning to pray always and in everything?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned about the primacy of prayer from this study?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.