



PRAYER – WEEK 3

June 17, 2018

(Notice that this week's format is a little different than other weeks. Please use it as a study asking open questions and ideas that are initiated. Have a great session!)

Warm – Up: What does it mean to be devoted to prayer?

Read: [Romans 12:12](#) is part of a longer chain of exhortations. It says we are to be “rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted (*proskarterountes*) to prayer.”

Your version might say, “constant in prayer” or “faithful in prayer.” Those all get at aspects of the word. “Devoted” is a good translation. The word is used in [Mark 3:9](#) where it says, “[Jesus] told his disciples to have a boat ready (*proskartere*) for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him.” A boat was to set apart — devoted — for the purpose of taking Jesus away in case the crowd became threatening. “Devoted” — dedicated for a task, appointed for it.

Now, boats just sit there. But people are not dedicated that way. When the word is applied **to** a person it means devoted or dedicated in the sense not only of designation and appointment but of action in the appointed task, and pressing on in it. So for example in [Romans 13:6](#) Paul talks about the role of government like this: “You also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.” That is, they are not only designated by God for a task, but are giving themselves to it.

What's remarkable about this word is that five of the ten New Testament uses apply to prayer. Listen, besides [Romans 12:12](#) there are:

- [Acts 1:14](#) (after the ascension of Jesus while the disciples were waiting in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Spirit): “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”
- [Acts 2:42](#) (Of the early converts in Jerusalem): “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”
- [Acts 6:4](#) (The apostles say): “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”
- [Colossians 4:2](#) (Paul says to all of us): “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”

So, you could say from the New Testament Scriptures that the normal Christian life is a life devoted to prayer. (Agree / Disagree?)

And so you should ask, “Am I devoted to prayer?”

It does not mean that prayer is all you do — any more than being devoted to a wife means all the husband does is hang out with his wife. But his devotion to her affects everything in his life and causes him to give himself to her in many different ways. So being devoted to prayer doesn't mean that all you do is pray (though Paul does say in another place, “pray without ceasing,” [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)).

It means that there will be a pattern of praying that looks like devotion to prayer. It won't be the same for everyone. But it will be something significant. Being devoted to prayer looks different from not being devoted to prayer. And God knows the difference. He will call us to account: have we been devoted to prayer?

Is there a pattern of praying in your life that can fairly be called “being devoted to prayer”?

Most of us would agree on some kinds of praying that would not be called “being devoted to prayer.” Praying only as crises enter your life would not be a pattern of devotion to prayer. Praying only at meal times is a pattern, but does it correspond to Paul exhorting the church to “be devoted to prayer”? A short “Now I lay me down to sleep” prayer at the end of the day is probably not “being devoted to prayer.” Hit and miss “Help me, Lord” in the car as you need a parking place is not “being devoted to prayer.” All those are good. But I think we would agree that Paul expects something more and different from followers of Christ when he says, “Be devoted to prayer.”

Some obstacles to prayer fall under the question, *why* pray? And some of them fall under the question *how* pray....Let’s look at both with some emphasis on practical *how* questions that hopefully will stir up to venture new levels of “being devoted to prayer”

Why Pray?

1. The Bible tells us to pray and we should do what God says.

This text, along with many other says, “Be devoted to prayer.” If we are not, we are disobedient to the Scriptures. That is foolish and dangerous. If prayer doesn’t come easy for you, consider yourself normal, And then “fight” for this.

2. The needs in your own life, and in your family, and in this church and other churches, and in the cause of world missions, and in our culture at large are huge and desperate.

In many cases heaven and hell hang in the balance, faith or unbelief, life and death. Remember Paul’s grief and anguish for his perishing kinsmen in [Romans 9:2](#), and remember that in [Romans 10:1](#) he prays for them earnestly, “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” Salvation hangs in the balance when we pray. You will not know what prayer is for until you know that life is war. One of the great obstacles to praying is that life is just too routinely smooth for many of us. The battlefield is way out there, but here in my tiny bubble of peace and contentment all is well. Oh may God open our eyes to see and feel the needs around us and the great potential of prayer.

3. A third reason to pray is that God acts when we pray.

What an amazing thing to be able to bow our heads repeatedly and plead with God, even while we prepare for the day; or during some crisis, or some witnessing conversation, or some planning meeting, etc....., and to have breakthrough after breakthrough which did not come until we prayed.

There are more, but these are three answers to *why* pray: (1) God commands us to pray; (2) the needs are great, and eternal things are at stake; (3) God acts when we pray and often does more in seconds than we could do in hours or weeks or sometimes years.

Are there other obvious reasons that come to mind?

How to Pray

We are all very different. Our schedules are different. Our families are different. We are in different stages of life with different demands on our days. We are at different levels of spiritual maturity, and no one matures overnight. What you may be doing in five years in your devotion to prayer may make you look back and wonder how you survived this season of leanness. But all of us can move forward.

Paul loves to write to his churches and say, “You are doing well, but do so more and more” ([Philippians 1:9](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:1, 10](#)). And if there is any place where the “do so more and more” applies, it is in our devotion to prayer.

Let's put these practical suggestions in five pairs each beginning with a different letter that together spell *F.A.D.E.S.* There is no significance to the word *fades*. That's just what they happened to spell. But if you wanted to force it, you could say without these pairs, devotion to prayer *fades*.

F — Free and Formed: Think about the differences between structured and unstructured prayer. Being devoted to prayer will mean that what you say in your times of prayer will often be free and unstructured, and often be formed and structured. If you are only free in your prayers you will probably become shallow and trite. If you are only formed in your prayers, you will probably become mechanical and hollow. Both ways of praying are important. Not either-or, but both-and.

By free I mean you will regularly feel like pouring out your soul to God and you will do it. You will not want any script or guidelines or lists or books. You will have so many needs that they tumble out freely without any preset form. This is good. Without this it is doubtful that we have any true relation with Christ at all. Can you really imagine a marriage or friendship where all the communication read from lists or books, or spoken only in memorized texts. That would be artificial in the extreme.

On the other hand, I plead with you not to think you are so spiritually deep or resourceful or rich or disciplined that you can do without the help of forms. I have in mind four kinds of forms that I hope you all make use of.

Form #1: The Bible

Pray the Bible. Pray Biblical prayers. This week, try building your prayers around the prayer in [Ephesians 3:14–19](#):

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith — that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Memorize it and pray it often. Or, pray the Lord's prayer and as you pray it put each phrase in your own words and apply it to the people you are burdened about. Pray the commands of the Bible: "Help me — help my wife, my children, the elders, our missionaries — to love you, God, with all my heart and all my soul and all my strength."

Pray the promises of the Bible: "Lord, take all the authority that is yours in heaven and on earth and make our missionaries feel the sweetness of the promise that you will be with them to the end of the age."

"With one elbow on either side of the Bible, turn its paragraphs into praises and petitions."

Pray the warnings of the Bible: "Lord, grant me to fight against lust with the kind of urgency that you taught when you said, gouge out your eye and go to heaven rather than leave it good and go to hell."

Open the Bible in front of you and put one elbow on one side and one on the other and pray every paragraph of into contrition or praise or thanks or petition....sounds crazy! (?) Try it!

Form #2: Lists

Pray lists. I have in mind lists of people to pray for and lists of needs to pray about. If you can remember all the people and needs you should be praying for without a list, good for you. Most people need lists, some in their heads and some on paper. Be encouraged to use lists of people and lists of needs. Keep some kind of prayer folder or notebook or files on your phone... Remember, we're only talking about the second half of this pair: freedom and form. Don't forget the value of freedom either. It is both-and, not either-or.

Form #3: Books

Pray through books like [Operation World](#) — a different country, and the cause of Christ in it, every day or two. What a powerful way to get a globe-sized heart and vision of God’s supremacy! Pray through a book like [Extreme Devotion](#) — a one-page glimpse into the suffering, persecuted church for every day of the year. As you are reading and studying then — make a habit of praying while you move through it.

Form #4: Patterns

Develop patterns of prayer that give you some guidance of what to do first and second and third when you get down on your knees. One pattern, as I already mentioned, would be to structure your prayers around each of the petitions of the Lord’s prayer.

The bottom line is that without some form or pattern we will tend to freeze and go nowhere.

So the first pair is free and formed. Unstructured with free flowing needs and thanks and praise; and structured with helps like the Bible, lists, books and patterns. If you are “devoted to prayer” you will pursue freedom and form in your prayer life.

A — Alone and Assembled: Being devoted to prayer will mean that you will regularly pray alone and regularly pray in the assembly of other Christians.

Oh how crucial it is that we meet God alone through Jesus Christ. There is no Christianity without a personal trust in and communion with God through Jesus. All is show and husks and pretension without this.

Praying in the assembly of other believers is more neglected than praying alone. Alone and assembled. The New Testament is full of corporate prayer gatherings. In fact, most prayer in the New Testament is probably thought of in terms of gatherings for prayer.

[Acts 1:14](#): “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” — that is typical of what you find. [Acts 12:12](#): When Peter got out of prison “he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.” Prayer meetings were normal and I think normative in the early church.

Being devoted to prayer in the New Testament surely included praying with God’s people. How are you doing in this? This is not advanced Christianity. This is basic Christianity. This week we have twelve thirty-minute prayer meetings planned plus the eight hours of prayer all night on Friday. The options are meant to help you make a new breakthrough. During the rest of the year there are thirty-minute prayer meetings six mornings each week, Wednesday evening at 5:45 downtown. Then there are the small groups that meet for prayer and ministry. Then there is Sunday morning that includes prayer in song and other ways. If assembling for prayer is not part of your devotion to prayer, make 2003 a breakthrough year. Both-and: free and formed, alone and assembled.

D — Desperate and Delighted: Being devoted to prayer will mean that you come to God in prayer often desperate and often delighted. I simply mean that prayer is a place for meeting God with your deepest heartaches and fears and prayer is a place for meeting God with your highest joys and thanks. The pillow you use for your elbows when you kneel daily before the Father, will be a tear-stained pillow.

“Devoted to pray will mean that you come to God often desperate and often delighted.”

And yet, because God is a prayer-hearing God, you will say with the apostle Paul, “sorrowful yet always rejoicing” ([2 Corinthians 6:10](#)). And often that joy will overwhelm the burdens of this fallen world — as it should — and make you want to leap for joy. The Father wants to meet you at those times too. Be devoted to prayer in desperation and in delight — in fasting and feasting. Not either-or, but both-and.

E — Explosive and Extended: All I mean here is short and long. I would have said short and long, but then the letters would not match and the acronym would not spell anything. Besides explosive is more vivid and is exactly what prayers can be from time to time. If you are devoted to prayer you will explode regularly with prayers of praise and thanks and need and they will not last more than a few seconds.

And if you are devoted to prayer you will have times when you linger for a long time in prayer to the Lord. Sometimes I make a quick phone call to Noël and other times we spend an evening together. If you love Christ and lean on him for all things and treasure him above all else, you will meet him often with explosive prayers and often with extended prayers.

S — Spontaneous and Scheduled: What's the difference between this and "free and formed" or "explosive and extended"? By "free and formed" I meant the content of our prayers — what we do when we come to pray. By "explosive and extended" I meant the length of our prayers. By spontaneous and scheduled I mean when we pray.

If we are devoted to prayer we will pray spontaneously through the day — without ceasing as Paul says — a constant spirit of communion with Christ, walking by the Spirit and knowing him as a continual personal presence in your life. No plan will govern when you speak to him. It will happen dozens of times in the day. This is normal and good. This is being devoted to prayer.

But if you only have this, you won't have this very long. The true rich fruit of spontaneity grows in the garden that is well tended by the discipline of schedule. So I plead with you, have your set times of prayer. Plan it for 2003. When will you meet him regularly? How long will you set aside? I encourage you to begin every day this way. Are you willing to plan one or two half-days or days away by yourself or with a friend or your spouse — not to read a book but to pray for four hours or eight hours. How?

By simply reading your Bible and turning it all into prayer. Noël and I have had some of our richest days away by taking a short book of the Bible and reading a chapter and then pausing and praying that chapter into our family and church. Then reading another chapter and praying, and so on. But that does not just happen. It must be planned. It is not spontaneous. It is structured. And it is glorious.

So there you have it. God's word to us today is "Be devoted to prayer." Be constant in it. Be faithful in it. Why? God commands us to; the needs are great and eternity hangs in the balance; and God hears and does more in five seconds that we can do in five years.

So, how shall we be devoted to prayer? These things... Without them prayer *fades*. Let your prayer be:

F — Free and Formed

A — Alone and Assembled

D — Desperate and Delighted

E — Explosive and Extended

S — Spontaneous and Scheduled

Forward or fading?

Pray