

40 DAYS OF PRAYER: PRAYING THROUGHOUT YOUR DAY

Sermon Written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: Ephesians 6:18, I Thessalonians 5:17, Phil. 4:6

James was a grocery store clerk, who started with a capital of \$65, to peddle cheese from a one-horse wagon. To say he was a dismal failure would be putting it kindly! James kept pushing himself, but he kept getting increasingly more in debt. He was young and inexperienced – so he finally asked the counsel of a trusted Christian friend.

“You haven’t included God in your business,” his friend observed. “You haven’t let Him take over the work – you’ve only asked Him to be a part of it. That’s not how God works.”

This sent the young clerk into a tailspin. James was gripped with mixed emotions. He was offended that such a judgment be laid upon him. At the same time, he was struck by his friend’s blunt honesty. It was a pivotal moment for him.

Days passed as the young clerk prayed and pondered. Finally, he crossed a line in the sand. He wrote his friend, saying, “If God wants to run this cheese business, I’ll work for Him.”

From that moment on, God became the senior partner in his business, the chief Person in every decision. A chair was left open in meetings, reminding key staff of His presence. Over the months, the business grew and prospered. It eventually became the largest cheese company in the world! James L. Kraft’s pivotal prayer made all the difference in the Kraft Cheese Company.¹

What a difference prayer makes! Especially when you make prayer a part of your life. For James L. Kraft – prayer became a part of every decision. He was in a close partnership – a deep relationship with God – and everyone knew it. His prayer life permeated all he did – and was not just a few words recited on a Sunday morning in worship and then forgotten the rest of the week.

Kraft was actually following the words of Scripture which calls us to pray continually.

One of the main Scriptures for our sermon series of *The 40 Days of Prayer* is from Ephesians 6:18 - *Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.*

Notice the Apostle Paul doesn’t say, “Pray every Sunday at church or pray just when you are about to eat a meal.” No - he says to pray at ALL times – and on EVERY occasion. It is a theme he keeps sharing in his other letters. In his letter to the Thessalonians he says, “*Pray without ceasing*” (I Thess. 5:17); and in Philippians, he says, “*Don’t worry about anything, but pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for what He has done.*” (Phil. 4:8)

But how can you pray about everything – at all times – without ceasing? What does he mean? Is that even possible?

Well, I don't think Paul expects us to walk around with our eyes closed all the time – or have prayers that last for hours at a time. Rather I think Paul is calling us to have such a close relationship with God that prayer is just like a running conversation with God. You keep in contact with Him and talk to Him about anything and everything. It comes as naturally as breathing – or even just talking to yourself. You know what it is like to talk to yourself – right? So, you just talk to God about anything and everything. They can be long or short prayers – or maybe even just an sigh, calling out the name of Jesus!

So, pray at all times – in constant connection and conversation.

The early church also tried to find ways that they could pray at all times and so they came up with scheduled times to pray throughout the day – to help them remember to pray. This was called a “Fixed-hour prayer” or the spiritual practice of “Divine Hours.” Stephanie Soderstrom tells us, *“Fixed-hour was a part of every believer’s daily life in the early church, shaping their days around Scripture and prayer, most often the Lord’s Prayer. The typical schedule for the Divine Hours follows a three-hour pattern, with prayers at 6:00 a.m., 9:00 a.m., noon, 3:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m. In addition, there are evening prayers and morning prayers outside of these times. Simpler adaptations of the Divine Hours involve a morning prayer, a mid-day prayer, and an evening prayer.”*²

The Catholic Church – and specifically some monastic communities – still follow some form of these Divine Hours for prayer and Scripture reading.

Pastor Rick Warren, in his writings for the 40 Days of Prayer, suggests that to pray at all times that we adopt a form of praying these fixed hours throughout the day, using the Lord's Prayer as a model or guide. When Jesus taught the disciples this prayer – He said to pray like this – He didn't say, “Repeat these words every time you pray.” Rather He wanted us to use the Lord's Prayer as a guide or model of how we could pray.

So today, I want to share with you Rick Warren's suggested way to pray through the fixed hours of the day, using the Lord's Prayer as a guide. I invite you to write these down as I go through each section. They are fairly easy to learn as you think about them throughout the different times of the day – and compare with the Lord's prayer. I've been using it for prayer time the last few days – and found it easy to memorize. This will be my adapting of Rick Warren's prayer schedule of praying 7 times a day – plus 1 more that I have added to the list. And remember – these aren't long, eloquent prayers. These are just short sentence prayers – maybe only a few minutes. But just a way to keep in constant contact with God all throughout the day.

Fixed hour prayers usually begin with the start of the day – say at 6am. The beginning of the Lord's Prayer is “Our Father, who art in heaven.” - and with that phrase we want to “Get up with gratitude”.

Get Up with Gratitude – Our Father Who Art in Heaven

Bless God's Name at Breakfast – Hallowed Be Thy Name

Seek God's Will Mid-Morning – Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done

List Your Needs/Others at Lunchtime – Give us this Day our Daily Bread

Confess/Forgive at Mid-Afternoon – Forgive us our Sins

Seek God's Protection at Supper – Lead Us Not Into Temptation/Deliver Us from Evil

Praise and Thank God at Bedtime – For Thine is the Kingdom & Power³

Remember God's Promises through the Watches of the Night – Psalm 63:6-8

Every part of your day – keep have check-in appointments with God
Keep your relationship/conversation going

A minister passing through his church in the middle of the day,
Decided to pause by the altar and see who had come to pray.
Just then the back door opened, a man came down the aisle,
The minister frowned as he saw the man hadn't shaved in a while.
His shirt was kinda shabby and his coat was worn and frayed.
The man knelt, he bowed his head, then rose and walked away.
In the days that followed, each noon time - came this chap,
Each time he knelt just for a moment, a lunch pail in his lap.
Well, the minister's suspicions grew, with robbery a main fear,
He decided to stop the man and ask him, "What are you doing here?"
The old man said, he worked down the road - Lunch was half an hour.
Lunchtime was his prayer time, for finding faith, strength and power.
"I stay only moments, see, the factory is so far away;
As I kneel here talking to the Lord, this is kinda what I say:
"I just came again to tell you Lord, how happy I have been,
Since we found each other's friendship and you took away my sin.
Don't know much of how to pray, but I think about you everyday.
So, Jesus, this is Jim - just checking in."

The minister feeling foolish, told Jim that was fine.
He told the man he was welcome to come and pray anytime.
"Time to go", Jim smiled, and said "thanks" as he hurried to the door.
The minister knelt at the alter, he'd never done that before.
His cold heart melted, warmed with love, and met with Jesus there.
As the tears flowed, in his heart, he repeated old Jim's prayer:

"I just came again to tell you Lord, how happy I have been,
Since we found each other's friendship and you took away my sin.
Don't know much of how to pray, but I think about you everyday.
So, Jesus, This is me - just checking in."

Past noon one day, the minister noticed that old Jim had not come.
As more days passed with no sign of Jim, he began to worry some.
At the factory, he asked about him, learning he was ill.
The hospital staff was worried, but Jim had given them a thrill.
The week that Jim was with them, he brought changes in the ward.
His smiles, a joy contagious - changed people, were his reward.
The head nurse couldn't understand why Jim was so glad,
When no flowers, calls or cards came, not a visitor he had.
The minister stayed by Jim's bed, he voiced the nurse's concern.
No friends came to show they cared, he had nowhere to turn.
Looking surprised, old Jim spoke up and with a winsome smile -
"The nurse is wrong, she couldn't know, that in here all the while,
Everyday at noon - He's here, a dear friend of mine, you see,
He sits right down, takes my hand, leans over and says to me:

"I JUST CAME AGAIN TO TELL YOU, JIM,
HOW HAPPY I HAVE BEEN,
SINCE WE FOUND THIS WONDERFUL FRIENDSHIP,
AND I TOOK AWAY YOUR SIN.
I ALWAYS LOVE TO HEAR YOU PRAY,
AND I THINK ABOUT YOU EVERY DAY,
AND SO JIM, THIS IS JESUS ... CHECKING IN."⁴

PRAYER

INVITATION

RESOURCES

¹John Hull and Tim Elmore, *Pivotal Praying*, Thomas Nelson, Sept. 2002

²Stephanie Soderstrom, "Praying through the day with the Divine Hours",
<https://www.faithward.org/praying-throughout-the-day-with-the-divine-hours-intro-to-spiritual-practices/>

³Rick Warren, *40 Days of Prayer*, www.pastors.com

⁴"Just Checking In", www.rogerknapp.com/inspire/justcheckingin.htm