

# INTRODUCTION



**M**artyn Lloyd-Jones once wrote: “Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God.”<sup>1</sup> Commentator J. Oswald Sanders adds this lofty view of prayer:

No spiritual exercise is such a blending of complexity and simplicity. It is the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try, yet the sublimest strains that reach the Majesty on high. It is as appropriate to the aged philosopher as to the little child. It is the ejaculation of a moment and the attitude of a lifetime. It is the expression of the rest of faith and of the fight of faith. It is an agony and an ecstasy. It is submissive and yet importunate. In the one moment it lays hold of God and binds the devil. It can be

focused on a single objective and it can roam the world. It can be abject confession and rapt adoration. It invests puny man with a sort of omnipotence.<sup>2</sup>

The essence of prayer is simply talking to God as you would to a beloved friend—without pretense or flippancy. Yet it is in that very attitude toward prayer so many believers have trouble. Because communion with God is so vital and prayer so effective in the fulfillment of God's plan, the enemy attempts constantly to introduce errors into our understanding of and commitment to prayer. Every generation faces the necessity to reprioritize and purify a corrupted or confused perception of prayer. For many, prayer has been replaced with pragmatic action. Function overrides fellowship with God; busyness crowds out communication. For others, prayer lacks a sense of awe and respect. Their efforts are flippant, disrespectful, and irreverent. Then there are those who believe prayer is designed to make demands and claims on God. They attempt to force Him to do what they believe He should do for them. Finally, for some prayer is nothing more than a routine ritual.

You may hold prayer with the utmost respect, yet you find your own practice lacks purpose and vitality, so you don't spend time with God like you know you should. While there are many reasons Christians struggle to pray, I believe there is one overriding factor. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

It is the highest activity of the human soul, and therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man's true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life.... Ultimately, therefore, a man discovers the real condition of his spiritual life when he examines himself in private, when he is

alone with God.... And have we not all known what it is to find that, somehow, we have less to say to God when we are alone than when we are in the presence of others? It should not be so; but it often is. So that it is when we have left the realm of activities and outward dealings with other people, and are alone with God, that we really know where we stand in a spiritual sense.<sup>3</sup>

Alone with God—such an opportunity should be the Christian’s one great desire. How sad that so many believers spend brief amounts of time with Him, or don’t go to Him at all, because they have so little to say.

Some twenty-five years ago when I preached through Matthew’s gospel at Grace Community Church, and specifically chapter 6 and the portion most commonly known as the “Lord’s Prayer,” it so revolutionized people’s praying that I took the opportunity to write a book on the subject. Titled *Jesus’ Pattern of Prayer*, it dealt exclusively with the pattern Jesus set for prayer in Matthew 6, which is so foundational to all our understanding of prayer.<sup>4</sup> The original publisher has graciously relinquished the rights to it, which has allowed me the opportunity to revise it and publish it as part of my study series with Victor Books.

But this book is more than a simple revision of the chapters from the original; I have also added several chapters made up of various passages from the New Testament that should broaden and enhance your understanding of prayer. While Jesus’ pattern for prayer occupies the central portion of the book, you need to understand what the Holy Spirit-inspired New Testament writers built on that foundation.

The first part will examine the attitude all believers should have regarding their communication with God. All Christians ought necessarily have their hearts focused on God so that communion with Him is an everyday, natural function of their

lives. The first chapter will define and examine this vital need for us to be praying without ceasing. At the same time, we all need to guard against praying with the wrong attitude. That was what plagued the Pharisees, who viewed prayer as a means to show off their spirituality rather than as a humble opportunity to glorify God.

To correct the disciples' tainted perspective of prayer gleaned from those hypocritical religious leaders, Jesus offered a pattern that gave a comprehensive view of all the essential elements of righteous prayer, every one of which centers on God. This central portion of the book will cover each phrase of our Lord's pattern of prayer. From beginning to end, you'll discover that Jesus focuses our attention on God—on His adoration, worthiness, and glory.

To help you apply what you have learned, the final two chapters of the book will examine the specific things all believers should pray for. What you read may surprise you, for just as a father must correct his child's priorities in life, God must do the same with regard to our practice of prayer.

It is my prayer for you that when you have completed your journey through this book, you'll rediscover the power and passion that time spent alone with God can bring. I also hope you'll understand that prayer is not an attempt to get God to agree with you or provide for your selfish desires, but that it is both an affirmation of His sovereignty, righteousness, and majesty and an exercise to conform your desires and purposes to His will and glory.

PART ONE



THE ATTITUDE  
OF PRAYER



# A HEART SET ON GOD



**F**or Christians prayer is like breathing. You don't have to think to breathe because the atmosphere exerts pressure on your lungs and forces you to breathe. That's why it is more difficult to hold your breath than it is to breathe. Similarly, when you're born into the family of God, you enter into a spiritual atmosphere wherein God's presence and grace exert pressure, or influence, on your life. Prayer is the normal response to that pressure. As believers, we have all entered the divine atmosphere to breathe the air of prayer. Only then can we survive in the darkness of the world.

Unfortunately, many believers hold their spiritual breaths for long periods, thinking brief moments with God are sufficient to allow them to survive. But such restricting of their spiritual intake is caused by sinful desires. The fact is, every believer must be continually in the presence of God, constantly breathing in His truths to be fully functional.

Because ours is such a free and prosperous society, it is easier for Christians to feel secure by presuming on instead of depending on God's grace. Too many believers become satisfied with physical blessings and have little desire for spiritual blessings. Having become so dependent on their physical resources, they feel little need for spiritual resources. When programs, methods, and money produce impressive results, there is an inclination to confuse human success with divine blessing. Christians can actually behave like practical humanists, living as if God were not necessary. When that happens, passionate longing for God and yearning for His help will be missing—along with His empowerment. Because of this great and common danger, Paul urged believers to “pray at all times” (Eph. 6:18) and to “devote yourselves to prayer” (Col. 4:2). Continual, persistent, incessant prayer is an essential part of Christian living and flows out of dependence on God.

### THE FREQUENCY OF PRAYER

Jesus' earthly ministry was remarkably brief, barely three years long. Yet in those three years, as must have been true in His earlier life, He spent a great amount of time in prayer. The Gospels report that Jesus habitually rose early in the morning, often before daybreak, to commune with His Father. In the evening, He would frequently go to the Mount of Olives or some other quiet spot to pray, usually alone. Prayer was the spiritual air that Jesus breathed every day of His life. He practiced an unending communion between Himself and the Father.

He urged His disciples to do the same. He said, “Keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place” (Luke 21:36).



The early church learned that lesson and carried on Christ's commitment to continual, unceasing prayer. Even before the day of Pentecost, the 120 disciples gathered in the upper room "with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). That didn't change even when 3,000 were added to their number on the day of Pentecost (2:42). When the apostles were led to structure the church so that ministry could be accomplished effectively, they said, "We will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (6:4).

Throughout his life, the apostle Paul exemplified this commitment to prayer. Read the benedictions to many of his epistles and you'll discover that praying for his fellow believers was his daily practice. To the Roman believers he said, "God ... is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request" (Rom. 1:9–10; cf. 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3, 11; Philem. 4). His prayers for believers often occupied him both "night and day" (1 Thess. 3:10; 2 Tim. 1:3).

Because he prayed for them so continually, Paul was able to exhort his readers to pray that way as well. He urged the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). He commanded the Philippians to stop being anxious and instead, "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (4:6). He encouraged the Colossians to "devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving" (4:2; cf. Rom. 12:12). And to help the Ephesians arm themselves to combat the spiritual darkness in the world around them, he said, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18). Unceasing, incessant prayer is essential to the vitality of a believer's relationship to the Lord and his ability to function in the world.

## *A WAY OF LIFE*

As a child, I used to wonder how anyone could pray without ceasing. I pictured Christians walking around with hands folded, heads bowed, and eyes closed, bumping into everything. While certain postures and specific times set aside for prayer have an important bearing on our communication with God, to “pray at all times” obviously does not mean we are to pray in formal or noticeable ways every waking moment. And it does not mean we are to devote ourselves to reciting ritualistic patterns and forms of prayer.

To “pray without ceasing” basically refers to recurring prayer, not nonstop talking. Thus it is to be our way of life—we’re to be continually in an attitude of prayer.

Famous nineteenth-century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon offers this vivid picture of what praying at all times means:

Like the old knights, always in warfare, not always on their steeds dashing forward with their lances in rest to unhorse an adversary, but always wearing their weapons where they could readily reach them, and always ready to encounter wounds or death for the sake of the cause which they championed. Those grim warriors often slept in their armour; so even when we sleep, we are still to be in the spirit of prayer, so that if perchance we wake in the night we may still be with God. Our soul, having received the divine centripetal influence which makes it seek its heavenly centre, should be evermore naturally rising towards God himself. Our heart is to be like those beacons and watchtowers which were prepared along the coast of England when the invasion of the

Armada was hourly expected, not always blazing, but with the wood always dry, and the match always there, the whole pile being ready to blaze up at the appointed moment. Our souls should be in such a condition that ejaculatory prayer should be very frequent with us. No need to pause in business and leave the counter, and fall down upon the knees; the spirit should send up its silent, short, swift petitions to the throne of grace.

A Christian should carry the weapon of all-prayer like a drawn sword in his hand. We should never sheathe our supplications. Never may our hearts be like an unlimbered gun, with everything to be done to it before it can thunder on the foe, but it should be like a piece of cannon, loaded and primed, only requiring the fire that it may be discharged. The soul should be not always in the exercise of prayer, but always in the energy of prayer; not always actually praying, but always intentionally praying.<sup>1</sup>

I think of praying at all times as living in continual God consciousness, where everything we see and experience becomes a kind of prayer, lived in deep awareness of and surrender to our Heavenly Father. It is something I share with my Best Friend—something I instantly communicate with God. To obey this exhortation means that, when we are tempted, we hold the temptation before God and ask for His help. When we experience something good and beautiful, we immediately thank the Lord for it. When we see evil around us, we ask God to make it right and to allow us to help accomplish that, if it is according to His will. When we meet someone who does not know Christ, we pray for God to draw that person to Himself and to use us

to be a faithful witness. When we encounter trouble, we turn to God as our Deliverer.

Thus life becomes a continually ascending prayer: All life's thoughts, deeds, and circumstances become an opportunity to commune with our Heavenly Father. In that way we constantly set our minds "on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2).

### *FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD*

Since the ultimate purpose of our salvation is to glorify God and to bring us into intimate, rich fellowship with Him, failure to seek God in prayer is to deny that purpose. "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also," says the apostle John, "that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

Imagine spending an entire workday with your best friend at your side. You would no doubt acknowledge his presence throughout the day by introducing him to your friends or business associates and talking to him about the various activities of the day. But how would your friend feel if you never talked to him or acknowledged his presence? Yet that's how we treat the Lord when we fail to pray. If we communicated with our friends as infrequently as some of us communicate with the Lord, those friends might soon disappear.

Our fellowship with God is not meant to wait until we are in heaven. God's greatest desire, and our greatest need, is to be in constant fellowship with Him *now*, and there is no greater expression or experience of fellowship than prayer.

In one of his classic works on prayer, *Purpose in Prayer*, nineteenth-century pastor E. M. Bounds provides us with this reminder of how we must cultivate our fellowship with the Lord:

Prayer is not a meaningless function or duty to be crowded into the busy or the weary ends of the day, and we are not obeying our Lord's command when we content ourselves with a few minutes upon our knees in the morning rush or late at night when the faculties, tired with the tasks of the day, call out for rest. God is always within call, it is true; His ear is ever attentive to the cry of His child, but we can never get to know Him if we use the vehicle of prayer as we use the telephone, for a few words of hurried conversation. Intimacy requires development. We can never know God as it is our privilege to know Him, by brief and fragmentary and unconsidered repetitions of intercessions that are requests for personal favors and nothing more. That is not the way in which we can come into communication with heaven's King. "The goal of prayer is the ear of God," a goal that can only be reached by patient and continued and continuous waiting upon Him, pouring out our heart to Him and permitting Him to speak to us. Only by so doing can we expect to know Him, and as we come to know Him better we shall spend more time in His presence and find that presence a constant and ever-increasing delight.<sup>2</sup>

### *THE WAYS AND MEANS OF PRAYER*

In Ephesians 6:18 Paul says we are to pray with "all prayer and petition." The Greek word translated "prayer" (also in 1 Thess. 5:17) is the most common New Testament word for prayer and refers to general requests. The word

translated “petition” refers to specific prayers. Paul’s use of both words suggests our necessary involvement in all kinds of prayer, every form that is appropriate.

### *The Posture*

To pray all the time necessitates being in various positions because you will never be in the same position all day. In the Bible, people prayed standing (Gen. 24:12–14), lifting up their hands (1 Tim. 2:8), sitting (Judg. 20:26), kneeling (Mark 1:40), looking upward (John 17:1), bowing down (Ex. 34:8), placing their heads between their knees (1 Kings 18:42), pounding on their breasts (Luke 18:13), and facing the temple (Dan. 6:10).

### *The Circumstances*

While some people today think prayer ought to be very formal, the Bible documents that people prayed in many different circumstances. They prayed wearing sackcloth (Ps. 35:13), sitting in ashes (Job 1:20–21; 2:8), smiting their breasts (Luke 18:13), crying tears (Ps. 6:6), throwing dust on their heads (Josh. 7:6), tearing garments (1 Kings 21:27), fasting (Deut. 9:18), sighing (Ezra 9:4–15), groaning (Ps. 6:4–6), crying out loud (Heb. 5:7), sweating blood (Luke 22:44), agonizing with broken hearts (Ps. 34:18), making a vow (Acts 18:18), making sacrifices (Ps. 20:1–3), and singing songs (Acts 16:25).

### *The Place*

The Bible records people praying in all sorts of places as well: in battle (2 Chron. 13:14–15), in a cave (1 Kings 19:9–10), in a closet (Matt. 6:6), in a garden (Matt. 26:36–44), on a mountainside (Luke 6:12), by a river (Acts 16:13), by the sea (Acts 21:5–6), in the street (Matt. 6:5), in

the temple (1 Kings 8:22–53), in bed (Ps. 4:3–4), in a home (Acts 9:39–40), in the stomach of a fish (Jonah 2:1–10), on a housetop (Acts 10:9), in a prison (Acts 16:23–26), in the wilderness (Luke 5:16), and on a cross (Luke 23:33–34, 46). In 1 Timothy 2:8, Paul said, “I want the men in every place to pray.” For the faithful, Spirit-filled Christian, every place becomes a place of prayer.

### *The Time*

At a pastors’ conference I attended some years ago, one man preached on the subject of morning prayer. To support his point, he read various passages that show people praying in the morning. As he did, I looked up all the Scriptures that show people praying three times a day (Dan. 6:10), in the evening (1 Kings 18:36), before meals (Matt. 14:19), after meals (Deut. 8:10), at the ninth hour or 3:00 p.m. (Acts 3:1), at bedtime (Ps. 4:4), at midnight (Acts 16:25), day and night (Luke 2:37; 18:7), often (Luke 5:33), when they’re young (Jer. 3:4), when they’re old (Dan. 9:2–19), when they’re in trouble (2 Kings 19:3–4), every day (Ps. 86:3), and always (Luke 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:17).

Prayer is fitting at any time, in any posture, in any place, under any circumstance, and in any attire. It is to be a total way of life—an open and continual communion with God. After having embraced all the infinite resources that are yours in Christ, don’t ever think you’re no longer dependent on the moment-by-moment power of God.

### *Coincidental Attitudes*

Throughout his life the believer senses his insufficiency, thus he lives in total dependence on God. As long as you feel that insufficiency and dependence, you’ll pray without ceasing. At the same time, you also know you are the beneficiary of tremendous blessings from God. That’s why Paul

instructed the Thessalonians to “rejoice always” and “give thanks” in everything in their unceasing prayers (1 Thess. 5:16–18). That reflects a beautiful balance in our communion with God. While we offer specific petitions for our needs and the needs of others, at the same time we can rejoice and give thanks—not just for His specific answers, but also for the abundant blessing He pours out to us each and every day.

### FERVENCY IN PRAYER

Since communication with God is to occur throughout the day, don’t imagine that precludes the need for passion in your prayers. Paul commanded the Colossians, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it” (4:2), and he warned the Ephesians to “be on the alert with all perseverance and petition” as they prayed (6:18). For prayer to accomplish what God wants in our lives, it must be an all-consuming practice that makes alertness and perseverance its most valuable commodities.

### *ALERTNESS*

In its most basic sense, Paul’s command to keep alert means to stay awake and not fall asleep during prayer. In Gethsemane shortly before His betrayal, Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to keep watch while He prayed (Matt. 26:38). He returned soon after only to find them already asleep, so He said to Peter, “So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (vv. 40–41). It is impossible to pray while sleeping—you must be awake and alert to talk to God, just as you are when talking with anyone.



Paul's instruction, both in Colossians 4:2 and Ephesians 6:18, encompasses more than mere physical alertness, however. Believers should also look for those things they ought to be praying about. Evidently Peter learned this deeper truth from his failure to stay awake, for he wrote in his first epistle, "Be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer" (4:7).

Christians sometimes pray vague, general prayers that are difficult for God to answer because they do not really ask for anything specific. That's why specific prayer is so important. While general requests can be appropriate in certain instances, it is through His answers to specific prayers that we see God put His love and power on display. Jesus promised, "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13–14).

Those believers who continually seek the Lord have specific concerns; if you are not alert to the specific problems and needs of other believers, you can't pray about them specifically and earnestly. But when you do, you can watch for God's answer, rejoice in it when it comes, and then offer Him your thankful praise.

### *PERSEVERANCE*

Unfortunately, most believers never get serious about prayer until a problem occurs in their lives or in the life of someone they love. Then they are inclined to pray intently, specifically, and persistently. But Paul says we are to *always* pray that way, and to "be on the alert with all perseverance" (Eph. 6:18). The Greek word translated "perseverance" and in the command "devote yourselves" (Col. 4:2) is from *proskartereō*, a compound word made up of *kartereō* ("to be steadfast" or "to endure") and an added preposition

that intensifies the meaning. The verb means “to be courageously persistent,” “to hold fast and not let go.” It is used of Moses’ faithful endurance when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt (Heb. 11:27). To be devoted to prayer is to earnestly, courageously, and persistently bring everything, especially the needs of others, before God. Sensitivity to the problems and needs of others, including other believers who are facing trials and hardships, will lead us to pray for them “night and day” as Paul did for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3).

### *Our Lord’s Example*

Jesus Himself was the epitome of perseverance in prayer. Hebrews 5:7 says, “In the days of His flesh, when He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death.” That verse is a commentary on our Lord’s prayer life while on earth—a life characterized by passionate prayers offered with great intensity and agony. Although Scripture does not chronicle the details of His prayers, we can be sure that He persevered in them, even if it took all night (Luke 6:12).

The greatest illustration of His intensity in prayer took place in the garden prior to His death. Luke writes, “He knelt down and began to pray, saying, ‘Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done.’ ... And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (22:41–42, 44). In Matthew’s version of this same event, we find that Jesus petitioned God three times (26:36–46). That was one fervent, prolonged prayer experience, so much so that during it the disciples fell asleep several times.

Our Lord performed many mighty works when He was on earth, yet in none of them is there any apparent expenditure of energy. Although the Scripture says virtue went out

of Him, there is no record that would indicate He had to exert any effort to perform His miracles. Only when He prayed do we see Him agonize and toil over His petitions, even to the point of sweating great drops of blood. Such persistence is foreign to us, yet it is that kind of intensity Christ wanted the disciples to learn from two parables He taught them.

### *Our Lord's Parables*

Among the many parables of our Lord, two stand out as different from the others. While the other parables relate to God by comparison, those He gave in Luke 11 and 18 relate to God by contrast. They illustrate people who are unlike God, and in so doing, these parables make a strong case for the value of persistent praying.

He said to them, "Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he shall answer and say, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened." (Luke 11:5–10)

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily." (Luke 18:1-8)

The contrast between God and the reluctant friend and unjust judge is obvious. If such unwilling and sinful humans will honor persistence, how much more will our holy, loving Heavenly Father? If you don't get an immediate answer to your request, or if events don't turn out exactly or as quickly as you hoped they would, our Lord's word to us is "don't lose heart." Just keep praying without ceasing and don't give up. Keep knocking. Keep asking. Keep seeking.

Spurgeon offers this insight to the importance of our persistence:

If we would prevail, we must persist; we must continue incessantly and constantly, and know no pause to our prayer till we win the mercy to the fullest possible extent. "Men ought always to pray." Week by week, month by month, year by

year; the conversion of that dear child is to be the father's main plea. The bringing in of that unconverted husband is to lie upon the wife's heart night and day till she gets it; she is not to take even ten or twenty years of unsuccessful prayer as a reason why she should cease; she is to set God no times nor seasons, but so long as there is life in her and life in the dear object of her solicitude, she is to continue still to plead with the mighty God of Jacob. The pastor is not to seek a blessing on his people occasionally, and then in receiving a measure of it to desist from further intercession, but he is to continue vehemently without pause, without restraining his energies, to cry aloud and spare not till the windows of heaven be opened and a blessing be given too large for him to house. But, brethren, how many times we ask of God, and have not because we do not wait long enough at the door! We knock a time or two at the gate of mercy, and as no friendly messenger opens the door, we go our ways. Too many prayers are like boys' runaway knocks, given, and then the giver is away before the door can be opened. O for grace to stand foot to foot with the angel of God, and never, never, never relax our hold; feeling that the cause we plead is one in which we must be successful, for souls depend on it, the glory of God is connected with it, the state of our fellow men is in jeopardy. If we could have given up in prayer our own lives and the lives of those dearest to us, yet the souls of men we cannot give up, we must urge and plead again and again until we obtain the answer.<sup>3</sup>

When Paul commands us to pray without ceasing, he is simply supporting the principle Jesus taught in Luke 11 and 18 that prayer is to be incessant. We are not heard for our many words, but for the cry of our hearts. The man who came to his friend to ask for bread did not recite some formula request, he pleaded for what he needed. The same is true for the widow—she cried out for protection to one who had the power to answer her request. Persistent, continual prayer that comes from the innermost part of your being is what moves the heart of our compassionate, loving God.

### *POWER*

The most important and pervasive thought Paul gives about prayer is that it should be “in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18; cf. Jude v. 20). This qualification has nothing to do with speaking in tongues nor with some other ecstatic or supernatural activity. To pray in the Spirit is to pray in the name of Christ—that is, to pray consistent with His nature and will. To pray in the Spirit is to pray in complete agreement with the Spirit, who “helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words [real words unuttered, not nonwords uttered]; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:26–27). Zechariah 12:10 calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of grace and of supplication.” Just as we are to pray continually, know that the Holy Spirit continually prays for us. When we pray in the Spirit, we align our minds and desires with His mind and desires, which are consistent with the will of the Father and the Son.

How do you make your prayers consistent with the Spirit? By walking in the fullness of the Spirit. As your life is

filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and as you walk in obedience to Him, He will govern your thoughts so your prayers will be in harmony with His. As you submit to the Holy Spirit, obey His Word, and rely on His leading and strength, you will be drawn into close and deep fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Our lives must reflect a continual commitment to the constant exercise of prayer. All that you learn about God should drive you into His presence. Make that your goal as you take every aspect of your life to Him in prayer.