

Can We Really Pray without Ceasing?

Your Disposition Determines Endless Fellowship

By Kathy Wenrich



After an abusive, unfaithful relationship, I found myself completely disillusioned. I tried dating again, but was frustrated with the egocentric behavior I encountered. It left me bitter and doubtful about the opposite sex. When I detected a shift in my thoughts toward my father—the most loving and gentle daddy in the world—I knew I needed help. I turned to my mother, hoping her many years of experience in biblical counseling would bring me the calming peace she always managed to exude.

As she poured cups of hot coffee, I began to share my heart. It didn't take long for her to detect that my negative feelings had begun to include—gasp!—God. Mom's always-first reaction in any situation—prayer—was as natural to her as breathing. Prayer wasn't something she did; it was something

she lived. Her response to this crisis was no different. As she led me to the throne, I poured out all my pain, humbly seeking forgiveness for harboring discontent and ill will toward those who had hurt me.

Mom let me exhaust myself as I unloaded all my burdens. She then prayed a simple yet powerful prayer, asking God to fulfill the desire of my heart: a godly man who would love and protect me. A few weeks later I met and soon married God's answer to my mom's faith-filled prayer. We will celebrate our 32nd wedding anniversary this year.

Quiet Confidence

Over the years, I've pondered my mother's quiet confidence in prayer. The Bible tells us to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17, NKJV)—obviously something my mom embraced as a lifestyle. But I'll have to admit that verse troubled me. How can anyone pray all the time when we have life duties like working and caring for our families, not to mention sleeping and eating?

Wanting to embrace a prayer relationship with God as meaningful as my mother's, I found myself steeped in guilt over the message of that verse. Certainly I was not able to live up to it, yet it was in the Bible so I knew it was God's desire.

Fueled with the knowledge that condemnation was not from God (Rom. 8:1), I started to seek answers. God's Word gently led me to understand that prayer in its purest form is simply communion with the Holy Spirit. Praying without ceasing is not us speaking words on a continuous basis. It is us communing with God nonstop. When we stop fellowshiping with God, it damages our relationship and cuts off our ability to receive from Him. Prayer should be an attitude we remain in, which includes and seeks God first in all that concerns us.

An attitude is a disposition. It can be positive or negative. The word disposition is described as “the predominant or prevailing tendency of one’s spirit.” So to be in an attitude of prayer is to have the prevailing tendency to keep the lines open to commune with God at any given moment.

That was the secret my mom discovered. Prayer was natural to her because her attitude was to keep her line of communication open and available. There was never a moment she didn’t feel welcomed by God or know that He was listening.

Sin Hinders and Destroys

If praying without ceasing involves an attitude of open communion, what can cause us to fail? We find some insight in 1 Peter 4:7: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers” (ESV).

What does it mean to be self-controlled? The Greek word translated here for self-control is *enkrateia* which means “possessing power, strong, having mastery or possession of, self-governing.” Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament adds that it means “holding in hand the passions and desires.” It suggests we are to have a defense against disobedience and lusts of the world that destroy our ability to fellowship with God. Too often, we regard the invitation to boldly approach God’s throne (Heb. 4:16) as *carte blanche* to ignore iniquity in our lives, yet sin will always hinder our prayers. Psalm 66:18 is clear: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (NKJV).

How does sin destroy our ability to fellowship with God? Notice that the verse does not say if we sin, God will not hear our prayers. In that case, God would not answer any of our prayers. Romans 3:23 tells us that we have all sinned and come up short of God’s glory. When David said, “If I regard

iniquity [sin] in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," he was speaking of sin that we love and refuse to put down, sin that has taken up residence in our hearts and controls our mind, will, and emotions.

Living with deliberate, unconfessed sin in our hearts will eventually cause us to make our own will an idol that we bow to in thoughts and actions. Jesus said to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind (Luke 10:27)—that leaves no room for self-fashioned idols.

Welcomed Gift of the Holy Spirit

When we accept Christ as our personal Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, and sin no longer has dominion (power) over our souls (Rom. 6:14). However, we must exercise the authority given us to subdue sin, not allowing it to master us any longer (Rom. 6:22). John G. Lake once said, "Sin is that peculiar thing in the life of man which dims the consciousness of man so he cannot comprehend God. When sin is removed, the veil over the soul of man is gone."

As we allow the Holy Spirit to unveil and transform us through the washing of the Word (John 15:3), we begin to possess the mind of Christ, applying the righteousness of God in a practical way (Heb. 4:12; Matt. 5:6).

If we allow ongoing sin in our lives, in essence, we are taking advantage of God's grace. He paid too high a sin-cleansing price for us to allow it to reign in His place. Imagine someone selling everything he owned to purchase a lavish new home for you completely debt free, beautifully furnished with lifetime maintenance, yet by choice you continue to live homeless in the impoverished lifestyle from which your benefactor rescued you. This is a perfect picture of what happens in our souls when we choose to live in the bondage of sin rather than the freedom and provision of the

Holy Spirit.

Psalm 24:3–4 states, “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.” No sin can abide in the presence of God. The psalmist is telling us that when we enter the Lord’s presence, our souls cannot be divided between God and fleshly idols. To give place to anything that usurps His throne in our lives is forfeiting the ability to have an open flow of communion.

For clear, two-way communication with God, we need to unveil our hearts and free them from anything that would hinder Him from hearing us, as well as our ability to hear His voice.

Character of Our Thoughts

The other key element in 1 Peter 4:7 is to be sober-minded. Sober-mindedness is a clear understanding that you are powerless to manage without the help of God. Sober is the opposite of intoxicated. A sober mind comes as a result of allowing the principles of God’s Word to permeate your decision-making and thought process. A mind controlled by the intoxicating passions of this world is full of pride and self-reliance. Pride is sin and will always block fellowship with God (James 4:6).

Our lives will manifest the character of our thoughts. When our minds are focused on Christ, faith and power will infuse our thoughts and actions, and our heart’s desire will be to abide in the presence of and in fellowship with the power source.

My mother’s open line of communion with God—living prayer that never stopped—gave her confidence to ask in faith. She knew she could talk to God or hear from Him in any situation and in any place. Praying without ceasing was a natural consequence to her close, personal relationship with her Heavenly Father. Her reward was the ability to exercise authority to bring

change.

That nonstop prayer relationship with our Father is available for all of us to enjoy. If we allow the Word to transform our minds and attitudes so we remain in constant fellowship with God, we will attain that self-controlled, sober-mindedness that makes our prayers effective and fervent. They will be full of passion and reliance on the One who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.

KATHY WENRICH is the director of the ministry of helps at Church for All Nations in Colorado Springs, CO.

(C) 2014 *Prayer Connect* magazine.