

## Pray Without Ceasing

Paul encouraged us to

Rejoice always,  
pray without ceasing,  
give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

**I Thessalonians 5:16-18**

Was he encouraging us to stay in our prayer closets for every moment of the remainder of our lives? Was he speaking of some kind of attitude of prayer? No. He was using a figure of speech. He used it three times. We are to rejoice always.<sup>1</sup> Pray without ceasing.<sup>2</sup> Give thanks in all circumstances.<sup>3</sup> He was using hyperbole, that is, exaggeration to clarify the point.

It works something like this. Have you ever heard someone say they love country music and listen to it all the time? We do not assume they listen to country music every moment of every day. We do not expect to see them hooked into their iPod during school or the church's assembly because they claimed to listen to country music all the time. Rather, we recognize they are fans of country music. They listen to it regularly and repeatedly. When given the chance to listen to music, they will most likely listen to country music. Further, they are not likely to quit listening to country music anytime soon.

I, on the other hand, would never say, "I listen to country music all the time." I do listen to it sometimes. But I am by no means a country music fan. There are some songs and some artists I like and listen to on occasion. I even have a few country songs on my iPod. But my occasional foray into country music wouldn't qualify for the statement, "I listen to it all the time."

Back to prayer. Paul was using that same hyperbole. We should be able to say, "I love to pray. I pray all the time." But recognizing the hyperbolic nature of the statement does not mean we are fulfilling this passage just because we have prayed some in the past week, month, or year. If I only pray as much as I listen to country music, I could never say I pray without ceasing.

We need to be able to say, "I pray all the time. I pray regularly and repeatedly. Nothing's going to make me stop praying." I need to do it always. That is, it needs to be a continually repeated habit. I need to do it without ceasing. That is, nothing interferes with my habit of prayer. Like Daniel who did not even allow the law to stop him from praying, I need to pray without stopping. I need to do it in all circumstances. That is, prayer should be my response to every situation. Whether times are good or bad, I should be praying.

Sadly, in our hectic lives, without meaning to, we can end up going all week and then realize we never stopped to individually pray. We meant to. We just didn't. We can't let this be us.

The question for all of us is, "Can I really say I pray all the time?"

--Edwin L. Crozier