

Praying At All Times

Presented by Mary Lowman

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Day One

You know, sometimes following biblical directives can seem like mission impossible, and one of those is found in 1 Thessalonians 5, where it says we are to *pray continually*. Did you ever wonder how in the world you could do that?

How can you pray continually and still keep a job or sleep or do anything else? Some translations say *pray without ceasing* or *pray at all times*, but any way you look at it, it doesn't seem possible. And that passage goes on to say this is God's will for you. So, it's God's will that we should pray continually, but we don't know how we can do that. What does it mean? Surely God knows we must do other things, yet, there it is: *Pray continually. Pray without ceasing.*

I highly recommend Sherry Harney's book, *Praying with Eyes Wide Open*. It's a very helpful book, and I'll be sharing some of Sherry's thoughts with you.¹

When you think of praying, what comes to your mind? Do you see prayer as a time when you must be quiet, either sit or kneel, close your eyes and bow your head? Does it seem almost sacrilegious to open your eyes when you are praying or when someone else is? Is prayer to be reserved for those specific times in a day—or a week—when you can get in the right position and the right frame of mind for prayer? If that's how you see prayer, then praying at all times or praying continually will continue to be an impossibility.

Did you know the Bible gives no specific directions about your posture or the state of your eyes when you pray? You won't find any references in the Bible demonstrating that people are praying with heads bowed and eyes closed. In fact, you'll find many times when prayer was often given standing up, with arms outstretched toward heaven. We have passages that speak of God's people praying in the midst of a battle, while shepherding sheep or on a journey, in public and private places. In John 17:1 we read that: *After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed.*

We see where Solomon spread his hands out toward heaven as he prayed, and David lifted up his hands. The apostle Paul exhorted us to pray with holy hands lifted, as we read in 1 Timothy 2. And often the apostles laid their hands on people as they prayed for them.

So, I want to encourage you—and hopefully equip you—to see how you can pray continually, no matter where you are or what you're doing.

Day Two

What is the right way and time to pray? The Bible says we should pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers. And it also admonishes us to pray continually or without ceasing. Well, you may be thinking, how in the world can anyone pray on all occasions without ceasing? Seems like it's mission impossible.

¹ Sherry Harney and Kevin G. Harney, *Praying with Eyes Wide Open: A Life-Changing Way to Talk with God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017).

Well, that's true if prayer for you means you must be in a certain place with a certain posture and say certain words. On one of my trips to Rwanda, I spoke to the women about praying with eyes wide open and encouraged them to learn to keep a conversation going with God throughout the day. One woman gave a testimony the next day and said she always thought you had to be in church to pray. She didn't know she was allowed to pray at any other time or in any other way.

"But," she said, "now I know I can pray while I'm working or walking or whatever I'm doing."

She was so delighted to have this new freedom to pray at all times.

As I mentioned, we traditionally close our eyes and bow our heads to pray, but there's no requirement in the Bible for this posture in prayer. In fact, you won't find any reference to closing your eyes to pray. Now, there are good reasons at times for us to close our eyes and bow our heads in prayer, but that is not a requirement. Therefore, praying at all times or praying continually might not truly be impossible if we can pray at any time, in any position, and in any place, wouldn't you agree?

Consider this, if prayer is limited to certain postures and places, then our prayer time is very limited. But if you can pray with eyes open, silently or verbally, anywhere and anytime, then you are much more likely to expand your prayer life and spend far more time in the presence of God. We just need to develop a new attitude toward prayer and determine to keep a conversation going with God throughout the day, as you stand, sit, drive, run, work, lie down—whatever!

I want to encourage you to practice praying with your eyes open. Pray at all times in your day. Talk the God throughout your day. Sometimes those prayers will be silent ones, sometimes you can verbalize them out loud, but either way, you can learn to let your automatic response to any situation be one of prayer. Just talk to the Lord about it.

Day Three

Are you happy with your prayer life? Do you pray as much as you know you should or wish you could? I believe when you learn to incorporate prayer into your daily lifestyle, your prayer time and effectiveness will increase greatly.

Here's how it works to pray continually. You must become intentional about practicing the presence of Jesus. That means, you must determine to be aware—at all times and in all places—that because you are a Christ-follower and have been born again, you are surrounded with the presence of Jesus all day, every day, 24/7. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, you have him with you at all times; the problem for us is we all too often don't recognize or acknowledge his presence.

For example, let's say you have a really close friend or family member—that person on this earth closest to you. You are with them as often as possible, and when you are with them, you communicate. You share the problems and issues of your life, but you also share the joys. You laugh together; you cry together; sometimes you're just silent together, but that person's presence is there with you.

This is not a perfect analogy, but just consider that Jesus is your best friend, your closest companion, your confidant. And, unlike earthly companions, he is with you 24/7. You're never away from him. So, if you are aware that he is there, what are you likely to do? You're going to talk with him, right? Whatever is happening to you in your day, you're going to share it with Jesus. When you need help or guidance, he's right there to show you the way. When you see something beautiful, he loves you to share that experience with him. When something makes you laugh, he laughs with you. When sorrow fills your heart, he cries with you.

This is the meaning of praying continually—praying at all times. As you develop awareness of his presence, then boldly and confidently talk to him throughout your days—all days, everywhere. Just simply take advantage of your privilege of praying in the flow of life, and as you learn to do this, you are learning what it means to pray without ceasing. You never cut off the communication with Jesus. You don't have to say "Amen," meaning this is the end of my prayer time, and I'll come back later. You just keep the conversation going all the time.

And the good news is, you can pray with eyes open or closed, by yourself or in a crowd, out loud or silently. Prayer is not limited by any of our usual prayer routines; we can truly pray continually, and what an incredible blessing and privilege that is.

Day Four

Ephesians 6:18 tells us to pray at all times with all kinds of prayer for all people. So, to do this, we have to learn to pray with our eyes open, wherever we are.

In her book, *Praying with Eyes Wide Open*, Sherry Harney says, "When we pray with our eyes wide open, our time with God is limitless."² God invites us to be with him, consciously aware of his presence, at all times, and that means whether we are in a quiet place alone, standing in line at the grocery store, driving to work, or singing praise songs at church, we are able to directly and personally connect with God. And God delights in our presence.

Zephaniah 3:17 says: *The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.* Don't you love that thought—the God of the universe rejoices over you and takes great delight in you? So, when you choose to be in his presence throughout your day—verbally or silently—he's very pleased.

Let me give you some examples of ways you can pray at all times with your eyes wide open. While you are at work, take those short opportunities you have for prayer. When you walk down the hall, pray for the people you work with. When you're sitting in a meeting, pray for those in authority over you. When you're talking to a customer or client, send up a silent prayer for wisdom and care for that person.

Here are some other suggestions. When you watch or listen to the news, most of which is not good, pray for those in the news. For example, the news is usually full of all kinds of tragedies. Just stop and pray for the people involved. Instead of griping about our government leaders pray for them even as you listen to the news, with your eyes open, silently or out loud, if you can.

If you don't like the way your organization is headed, or you're upset at something your boss has done or said, or some new policy seems wrong to you, instead of participating in the office gossip, just pray about it as you perform your work. If you're concerned about a situation at your church, maybe about something the leadership is doing, just pray about it every time it comes to your mind. That's a lot more helpful than criticizing and complaining, don't you think?

Praying at all times is not mission impossible. It is totally doable, provided you set your mind to pray throughout your day, talk to the Lord who is there with you, and just let prayer be a part of your daily flow of life. Then you're going to pray much more than you do now.

Day Five

² Sherry Harney and Kevin G. Harney, *Praying with Eyes Wide Open: A Life-Changing Way to Talk with God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017).

I've been challenging you to become intentional about praying at all times about everything. Just talking to God all day long. He's with you at all times, so why not take advantage of that and talk to him at all times.

One of the difficulties we have with praying at all times is that our lives are full of distractions, and in the last few decades, that has become an increasingly real issue. In addition to praying with our eyes wide open through our entire day, busy or not, we do need times when we put the distractions aside and turn them off while we communicate with God. It is not uncommon for me to work on my computer at home. It's there, all my work is there, so I am often found sitting in my home with a computer in my lap, working or surfing the internet or texting or something. When my husband was alive, he would begin a conversation with me, which I would catch maybe halfway through because I was distracted by my computer. And he often said, "Can you just put that away for a minute so I can talk to you?"

I wonder how often God thinks the same thing about me. "*Mary, can you just put those distractions aside long enough to give me your full attention and talk to me and listen to me?*" Honestly, I think we have to be even more proactive in guarding and keeping our prayer time with God than in former days because there are so many gadgets all around us, making noise, interrupting our thoughts, demanding our attention.

A few years ago, our pastor challenged us to turn off all electronics for three days. Unless our work demanded it, we were asked to turn off televisions, radios, computers, smart phones, all the things that demand so much of our attention in a normal day. Let me tell you, it was not easy to do at first. The silence was deafening. But those who took part in this agreed that we came to love the quietness and it reduced our stress. Of course, it gave us more opportunities to communicate with the Lord, to recognize his presence, and keep the conversation going with him.

So, praying at all times is learning to pray in the midst of our busy lives, in crowded places and public arenas. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, it is learning to pray: *in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people* (Ephesians 6:18).