

## 1 Thessalonians 5:17 A Year for Prayer

The 2nd Chapter of Acts, verse 42 reads as follows;

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

We have already prayed this morning as the Lord taught his disciples to pray:

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.” We prayed, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We prayed, “Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.” We asked, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

Jesus himself was known to pray, from the 40 days praying in the wilderness where he was tempted, to the many times he withdrew privately to pray. And who could forget the prayer in the garden, “remove this cup from me.”

And there are many references to prayer throughout the psalms and the prophets and the gospels and the epistles, particularly from Paul, like in Philippians 4;

“Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses

understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Or in Romans, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.” And of course, the text in 1 Thessalonians which is in the same vein, “Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Pray unceasingly.

## A Year for Prayer

Prayer is a foundational part of the life of the believer, and of the life of the Church. It is because of this biblical emphasis and because it such an important part of our lives, that along with the deacons (with encouragement from the Board of Christian Education and the mission/outreach committee), we are announcing an emphasis on prayer for the coming year. It will be called, “A Year for Prayer.” And that is what I want to talk about today.

First, let me tell you about what will be happening this fall. Our annual World Missions Offering will be accompanied by a series of devotions and prayers over 60 days beginning of September 29. These prayers and requests are very short and may be used as a part of one’s daily devotions, and they are written by the ABC missionaries that we support with offering. There will be more information about this in the next two or three weeks.

Second, on October 27, we will have a “Day of Prayer,” it will be like a prayer vigil. Opportunities will be given for anyone to come to the church at a scheduled time to pray in the sanctuary. There will be suggestions and helps, which will also be available for those who would be better able to pray from home.

A vigil often has an object, to pray for something in particular, like a building project or the launching of a new ministry program. This day will be different, for there is no specific aim but to pray more intentionally for our church and for each other, that the prayer ministries of our church will be enhanced and that our lives will be enriched.

Thirdly, around Thanksgiving, there will be introduced a “Prayer Chest,” literally a container like a box, which will offer each of us an opportunity to be intentional about praying for each other. Much more information about this will be given in the months to come. Today I just want to offer a map of the fall part of the emphasis.

More activities are in the planning stage for the spring. There will be prayer gatherings to learn about different types of prayer, and to give opportunities to grow and try different approaches.

Because it is Rally Day, and I had mentioned it in a newsletter article and a sermon, I thought it would be good to set it before you today, so that you may

thoughtfully and prayerfully consider your participation in this emphasis for the next several months. There is still time to ask and answer questions. This will be a time of encouragement.

### Qualification

Let me make a qualification. It is voluntary. There will be parts of this emphasis that will be powerfully meaningful to you, I believe that. There may be parts of it that could be challenging. Do not be afraid of a challenge.

But there may some parts that leave you empty or feeling burdened. Give what you can to it, what you feel spirit-led to give. Do not be burdened. Take what helps, builds up and encourages, leave behind what does not, what burdens and overwhelms.

Finally, in order to help prepare for the Day for Prayer on October 27, I will offer a series of “prayer moments,” like, “missions moments,” beginning next Sunday. There will be some suggestions and I will describe some resources that I hope will be helpful.

### My Life in Prayer

I also want to tell you is what it means to me, this focus on prayer. If you are anything like me, Paul’s imperative in 1 Thessalonians 5 is challenging - “pray continually.” I have many times attempted to be more

intentional and determined in prayer. Most often these efforts have been successful for awhile, but have then faded, until distraction ends them.

At a most crucial period in my life, however, prayer became very important to me, and since that time it has remained so. I think you all know what I am referring to, the experience that resulted in a divorce.

When I think about how I survived that time with my faith intact and in whatever sense one may speak of it, spiritual and emotional and even physical health, I can think of three things that proved meaningful:

I ran a lot, I read a lot, I prayed a lot

At the time, I did these things out of a sense of desperation. Now I don't run much anymore because my knees don't like it very much. But you can substitute any form of exercise or physical therapy in its place.

As for reading, it is a kind of avocation. But I understand that not everyone likes reading I do. But everyone can have a hobby, or an engaging activity that helps pass time meaningfully.

I would not say that an enhanced prayer life is available only to those who run or read. But prayer is something that we all can do, and for me it became crucial:

Because I *listened* more intently than I ever had before. I learned prayer as listening as well as speaking.

I became more aware of my deepest petitions, what I asked for in prayer, what is important to me. I learned prayer as a way to self-knowledge.

I was also confronted with the many ways I have been well-cared for; things I had never thought of before as God's Providence leapt at me with great force. Which means I also learned about God. The result was gratitude, peace, and hope. Perhaps you also have a story to tell. Over the course of the next year and beyond we will have the opportunity to share at greater length our stories.

A Year for Prayer. We set this before you as an opportunity for increased faith, for an enhanced awareness of God's Grace, that our lives, our church, and our world might be transformed.

Be Joyful always,  
*Pray* continually  
Give thanks in all circumstances  
This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, and to the breaking of bread;

And to prayer."

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