

**Don't Forget
James 5:12-20
5-12-2024**

One of the most significant and often controversial catholic theologians of the past century was a man named Hans Kung.

in 1974 he published his book, On Being a Christian which opens with a question, Why should one be a Christian? He then spends the next 602 pages answering that question by explaining the Christian life and what it means to be a Christian.

After it was published, it was discovered that in this 602 page theology of the Christian life, there is not a single section devoted to prayer.

when he was asked why, Hans Kung answered simply, I forgot. he apologized and admitted it was a serious oversight, explaining that with all the pressure and harassment he was receiving from his superiors as well as trying to meet his publishers' deadlines, he simply overlooked prayer.

while he received a great deal of criticism for forgetting prayer, it's probably not that different from many of us.

in the midst of our busy schedules, sometimes overwhelmed by the demands on our time and the often-hectic pace of life, prayer can be the first thing to go. in our busyness, we forget or think we just don't have time for it today.

the very thing which can help us through and keep our lives and attitudes in perspective, can be the first thing overlooked and cut out of our schedule when under pressure

what does that say about what we really believe about prayer?

That it's optional?

Not as important as our work, our busy schedules, as the things we want to get done?

Perhaps even not as important as time to relax and escape into our favorite video game or TV program or social media posts?

Are we willing to sacrifice our time with God before letting go of other things?

perhaps not even realizing that part of our busyness may well be merely a consequence of our failure to spend time with God through our neglect of Him, we can fail to maintain the natural balance in life he intended when he created us.

I daresay there are not many who can say, as Martin Luther so famously did, I have so much to do today that I will have to spend the first three hours in prayer

In Isaiah 30:15 God said, "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength"

God is telling his people to slow down and stop running
To turn and be still before him

but they refused to listen, so the verse continues, "you would have none of it."

God wasn't enough for them so they filled their lives and hopes with other things in the end this meant not just ignoring but trying to run from God being distracted by things they considered more pressing and important at the time

verse 16 continues, You said No, we will flee on horses. Therefore you will flee! and if that doesn't work, they would double their efforts

You said We will flee on swift horses.
but this wont work either, because God says, Therefore your pursuers will be swift. they will be just as fast

how do we try to run from or avoid God?

we try to run we faster, get busier, fill our lives with more things to distract us and drown out his voice so we can't hear it over all the noise but adding more to our schedules doesn't really get us anywhere other than tired, worn out, and out of touch with God

we can become addicted to speed and busyness

In 1973 Fred Smith did what many thought would be not just impractical but impossible, he started Federal Express overnight delivery service. almost immediately it was delivering 4000 packages a day. Within 25 years they were delivering over 3 million. But for some this was still not fast enough. 10:30 in the morning was too late so they started a new delivery service which promised delivery by 8:30 in the morning. but it wasn't too long before that wasn't good enough so they started same day delivery. and when 6 day a week delivery wasn't enough, they began delivering on Sundays. and to go along with this ever-growing need for speed they changed their name from federal express, which took too long to say and it became simply FedEx instead.

this of course is merely a reflection of the world at large and sadly far too common for the spiritual lives of many

God says slow down. Come apart and spend some time with me.

and it is too easy to say we can't because we are too busy and have too much to do right now to pray

but maybe later when things slow down and we have nothing else to do

The director of the Center for Prayer and Spiritual Renewal in Holton, Kansas was describing what she had heard in response to the question she puts before Jesus in her prayers each morning. her question is, What do you want me to tell the people? For many years the response she received was always, Tell the people, I love them. then one day the reply changed and the Lord told her, Tell the people, I miss them.

God wants to spend time with you!

thank God he is not too busy running the universe to hear from us

as he told the prophet Jeremiah, “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3)

as we come to the end of James, think of all the issues he had dealt with in his emphasis on practical Christianity and a faith that works.

he wrote about what faith looks like among people who are discouraged and struggling to get by, facing trials and temptations and persecution, sharp tongues and those who are all talk and no action, favoritism and quarreling, boasting and greed, perseverance and patience

and now as he draws the letter to a close, he says don't forget to pray

no matter how busy and fast life may be moving, it is important to make time for the Lord

“Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned. Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.” (James 5:12–20)

here is one of the most all-inclusive calls to prayer in the New Testament

- Are any of you in trouble, suffering, in pain, facing hardship or persecution, struggling and having a difficult time in your life? Then pray

the Psalmist said I call to the Lord in my distress and he answers me

- Are you happy, cheerful, encouraged by life because things are going well, feeling on top of the world because life seems to be falling into place and the future bright?
Don't forget God in it all, express your gratitude to him by singing songs of praise and giving thanks, give God the credit he is due.
following the words of the Psalmist we are to come before him with thanksgiving and praise him with music and song
- Are you sick or weary, down in the dumps either physically or emotionally or spiritually? Don't just pray, or keep it to yourself, suffering in silence, isolated from others just when you need their support most.
get other people to pray with and for you.
call on others in the church to come alongside of you and get involved to help
as Paul told the Thessalonians, *"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up,"* (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
That is what it means to be part of Gods family, the community of faith.
- Are you in need of forgiveness, struggling with some sin or area of weakness in your life?
Confess your sin and pray.
lean on others for strength, asking for their understanding, advice, help and prayers

he has promised that *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

we need to stop treating prayer like the girl who was getting ready for bed. as she was heading to her room, she stuck her head out and said, I'm ready to say my prayers, does anybody want anything?

whether we see it or not, receive the answer we want or not, prayer does make a difference in far more significant ways than merely getting what we want

the prayer of a righteous person is strong and effective even when it may not be in the way we want

former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ken Hemphill wrote,

remember the old joke about the guy who angrily brought his new chain saw back to the hardware store for a replacement? He stormed through the door and flung his purchase onto the front counter. It lay there, bent and beat up, much of the paint chipped off and the teeth at all angles.

I've been using this thing all day, he sputtered to the first face within shouting range, and I haven't even cut a handful of firewood!

the sales clerk, trying hard to remain cooperative, assured the man he'd be glad to take a look at it and do what he could. The saw was a mangled mess, all right. And trying to see if it might start in this condition seemed like a foolish waste of time. But not knowing where else to begin, he took a chance and yanked hard one time on the ripcord. Sure enough, after several uncertain seconds of tired gasps and coughs, the motor somehow rattled its way to full throttle.

the red-faced customer suddenly went white, backing up two full steps from the counter in stunned confusion. So that's what that string was for!

before giving up on prayer, thinking it doesn't work or make a difference because we don't get what we want or ask for, maybe we need to ask whether we understand the main purpose of prayer and what it is there for.

- **It is not** primarily about informing God of your desires or needs.
- **it is not** the process of giving God our wish list
- **it is not** a way to try to manipulate God into giving us what we want.

- **IT IS** having a conversation with our loving heavenly father with the confidence that he wants to hear from us.
- **IT IS** above all else about spending time with God and in his presence.

and when we forget or neglect our time with him, he misses us.

after all, he did give us Jesus so we can spend eternity with him because he loves us

So Hebrews 10:22 reminds us, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and in full assurance of faith

Hemphill continued:

Before he became president of the seminary, he spent a great deal of time flying across America to lead church growth conferences and would always bring home a small gift for his two young girls. He said it happened almost without fail. as soon as his car would enter the driveway, they would run out of the house to greet him with the tender words, Hi daddy, What did you bring us?

after one particularly long and exhausting trip, he arrived home to be greeted by the same predictable welcome, Hi daddy, what did you bring us? what did you bring us?

but this particular time he was in no mood for it so instead he proceeded to give his daughters a lecture instead, telling them how tired he was and hard it was to always have to travel and be away from them. Just once, he said, it would mean so much to him if they would let him know how much they missed him and how glad they were that he was home, not just to have a gift. he said he gave them quite a guilt trip.

The following weekend he returned from another trip out of town, having forgotten his lecture to his girls the previous weekend. as usual they ran out to greet him in the driveway, only this time his youngest daughter

leaped into his arms, gave him a big hug, and said in the sweetest voice, I love you daddy, I'm so glad you're home, Now, what did you bring me?

do our prayers ever sound like that, little more than requests and demands, little more than what did you bring me daddy?

a passion for prayer centers on the giver not the gift
from spending time with him, being in his presence, expressing our love for him, thanking and praising him for his goodness and constant care
Giving him the honor due his name.

contrary to the teaching of some, the prayer of faith does not obligate God to answer us and give us what we ask for so long as believe hard enough
nor is the prayer of faith merely reading a verse and claiming it as a promise
it is not trying to get God to change his mind so his will lines up with ours and he will give us what we want
It is to change us, so our will lines up with his

as E Stanley Jones wrote, If I throw out a boathook from the boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore. Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God.

his word becomes the guide for our prayer, because as Paul said, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God

in light of that, as Hemphill said, communication is reward enough. and if that is our purpose, there is no such thing as unanswered prayer.

a well-known theologian spent over 600 pages writing about the nature of the Christian life yet forgot to mention prayer because he was too busy

how many of us can go through the week with all its demands on our time, pressure from deadlines, and assorted distractions and forget to pray?

so James which is a very practical book, closes with a reminder
Don't forget:

“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5:13–16)