

*Living a Prayer-Filled Life*

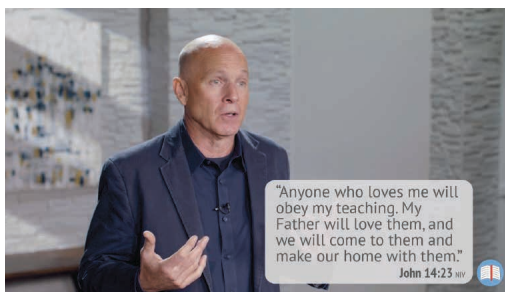
I have a five-year-old grandson who really loves me in his own little way. Just before he turned two, my daughter was visiting and I was leaving the house on an errand, and as I walked out of the room where she was and said goodbye, my grandson started to cry. So of course, I went back. And then a minute or so later I tried to leave the room again, and the same thing happened. After the third time this happened over the course of about five minutes, my daughter finally said, “Dad, why don’t you just take Him with you?” And that’s exactly what I did.

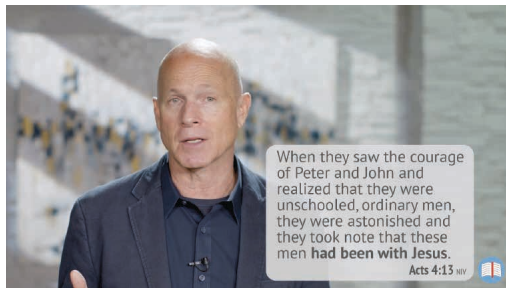
I share this with you today as we begin this last lesson on living a prayer-filled life because it illustrates something about living in the moment with God: When our hearts cry out to Him, when we just want to be with Him, He will take us places and show us things that we otherwise would not see. And we will know His comfort and His peace.

When Jesus called the disciples, one of His main purposes was that they would simply keep company with Him. Mark 3:14 tells us, “He [Jesus] appointed twelve that they might be with him.” Tucked away in those few short words is one of the simplest and best definitions of what prayer is meant to be: *Prayer is being with Jesus*. Throughout this series we’ve been talking about how God has given us prayer to help us discover what it means to have a relationship with Him.

Living with Jesus moment by moment is something that we are always growing into. While Jesus has ascended into heaven, in Matthew 28:20 He also promised to be with us always. When He promised us His Holy Spirit, He said in John 14:18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” And just a few short verses later He said, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

God wants us to live at home in His presence, until the day that we are with Him for eternity. So living in His presence is possible. Prayer isn’t just about talking. It’s also about listening and being quietly aware. It’s about resting in Him and leaning into Him as we live. Jesus has promised to be with us always, but the question



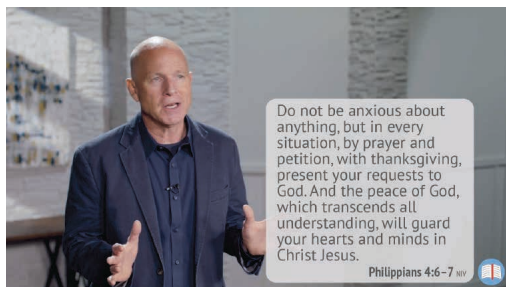


Phillips Brooks 

*"These last years have a peace and fulness which there did not use to be. I do not think it is the mere quietness of advancing age. I am sure it is not indifference to anything which I used to care for. I am sure that it is a deeper knowledge and truer love of Christ. . . ."*

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*I cannot tell you how personal this grows to me. He is here. He knows me and I know Him. It is no figure of speech. It is the reallest thing in the world. And every day makes it realler. And one wonders with delight what it will grow to as the years go on."*



is, Are we with Him? Nothing matters more than this. Remember what was said about the apostles in Acts 4:13? "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men *had been with Jesus*" (Acts 4:13, italics added). Jesus taught not just by words, but by His presence, by example.

And we can learn much from the examples of others who have discovered how to live in His presence through prayer. In John 15:5, Jesus said, "I am the vine, and you are the branches." Today we're going to learn from several very different people who have lived connected to Him.

I love what Phillips Brooks, the writer of the hymn "O Little Town of Bethlehem" wrote about this. Toward the end of his life, a friend wrote him and asked what his secret to personal peace was. Brooks responded this way:

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Brooks' description of knowing Jesus resonates with me because it shows what happens when we live with an increasing awareness of our Savior's love. And that leads us to this promise from Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." That word *guard* is a military term that means "garrisoned." Tucked within this verse is practical instruction for how to live in God's presence. It tells us to take our worries, whatever they may be, and turn them into prayer. And there's a key to doing this, as we'll see in a moment.

And that brings us to Ruth Bell Graham, wife of the late Billy Graham. In her excellent book *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them*, Ruth tells about worrying about one of her children who was far

Ruth Bell Graham



*"Suddenly the Lord said to me, **Quit studying the problems and start studying the promises.** Now God has never spoken to me audibly, but there is no mistaking when He speaks.*

*So I turned on the light, got out my Bible, and the first verse that came to me was Philippians 4:6-7...*

Ruth Bell Graham



*Suddenly I realized the missing ingredient in my prayers had been **"with thanksgiving."** So I put down my Bible and spent time worshipping Him for who He is and what He is. This covers more territory than any one mortal can comprehend. Even contemplating what little we do know dissolves doubts, reinforces faith, and restores joy...*

Ruth Bell Graham



*It was as if suddenly someone turned on the lights in my mind and heart, and the little fears and worries which, like mice and cockroaches, had been nibbling away in the darkness, suddenly scuttled for cover. That was when I learned that **worship and worry cannot live in the same heart:** they are mutually exclusive.*

from God, and waking up at 3:00 a.m. with fears only a mother can understand. And, in that moment, she sensed the Lord telling her, "Quit studying the problems and start studying the promises." She opened her Bible to the verses we just read from Philippians, and later she wrote this about that moment:

Suddenly I realized the missing ingredient in my prayers had been "with thanksgiving." So I put down my Bible and spent time worshipping Him for who and what He is. This covers more territory than any one mortal can comprehend. Even contemplating what little we do know dissolves doubts, reinforces faith, and restores joy. . . . It was as if someone turned on the lights in my mind and heart, and the little fears and worries that had been nibbling away in the darkness like mice and cockroaches hurriedly scuttled for cover. That was when I learned that worship and worry cannot live in the same heart: they are mutually exclusive.

Thanking and praising God is such a vital part of living in His presence. When I researched God's Word for my book *Praying the Prayers of the Bible*, I discovered that there are more prayers of praise than any other kind in Scripture. But the second greatest number of prayers are requests for God's help. So you see His people crying out to Him for help and then praising Him when the help comes—it's a continuing cycle of dependence and discovery and delight.

You see this in the life of Harriet Tubman. Harriet Tubman was a former slave, a brave follower of Jesus whom God used to rescue over three hundred people from slavery. In spite of a permanent physical disability incurred through the abuse of a cruel slave owner, again and again she went into harm's way with a bounty on her head, knowing that she could be killed if she were captured. So she learned to pray all the time. When she first escaped the proslavery South and arrived in the North, no one was there to welcome her. She recalls, "How I prayed then. 'Oh dear Lord,' I said, 'I ain't got no friend but you. Come to my help, Lord, for I'm in trouble.'" On another occasion she describes what it's like to pray in the moment:

I prayed all the time, about my work, everywhere; I was always talking to the Lord. When I went to the horse trough to wash my face, and took up the water in my hands, I said, "Oh, Lord, wash me, make me clean." When



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This continual conscious reliance on God is so vital, so important, whatever our calling in life may be. You want a person who is praying for you when they tighten the lugs on the wheels of your car, or when they hold your heart in their hands during surgery. This is at the heart of what it means to be a child of God. Even if we can only stay mindful of God's presence a little in the course of the day, He will help us if we ask Him and rely on Him with childlike faith. This is the kind of relationship that Jesus came to demonstrate for us. It's interesting that if you read through the Old Testament, you'll find that God is referred to as Father fifteen times. But when you get to the first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—you'll see that Jesus refers to God as Father no fewer than 165 times. That's a radical shift—and Jesus was setting the example for our own relationship with the Father, the relationship He would offer us through His death on the cross for our sins. Just look at how He described how dependent His life was: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing" (John 5:19). And remember what He told his followers? In John 15:5, He said, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

And so we come to Brother Lawrence. Brother Lawrence was a former mercenary who became a dishwasher and a cook during the 1600s. He wrote in a letter to a friend that he had read several books about how to know God and mature spiritually, but what helped him most was just trying to live in a relationship with Him.

I tried to keep my heart in this father/child relationship as much as I could, adoring Him there. I held my spirit in His holy presence, recalling it whenever it went astray. This exercise was rather difficult. Yet I was able to continue it without being disturbed when I was involuntarily distracted. It occupied as much time during my regular working day as it did in my prayer time. At all times—every hour and every minute—I drove everything out of my spirit that might take me from the thought of God. This has been my everyday routine since I began my walk with the Lord. Although sometimes I practice it timidly and with a great many mistakes, I'm still quite blessed by

Brother Lawrence

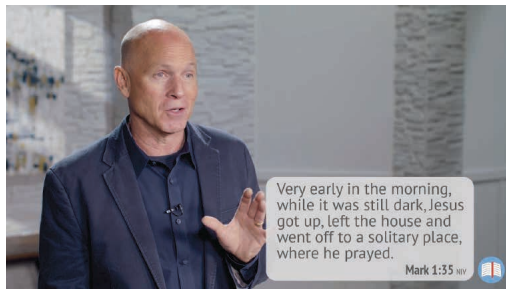


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R. Murray M'Cheyne



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it. This has to be due to the great goodness and mercy of God. We can indeed do nothing without Him.

The first time I read that I thought, Wow, do I have a long way to go! But God meets us where we are and helps us. The important thing is to keep our eyes on Him and not ourselves, to lean into Him and His love and to stay close throughout the day. I wanted to share these very different individuals because each of them, living in different centuries, shows us the same living Lord and how good it is to cling to Him.

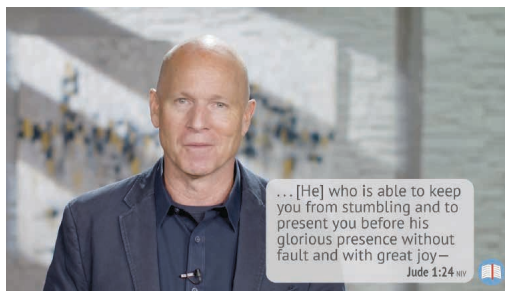
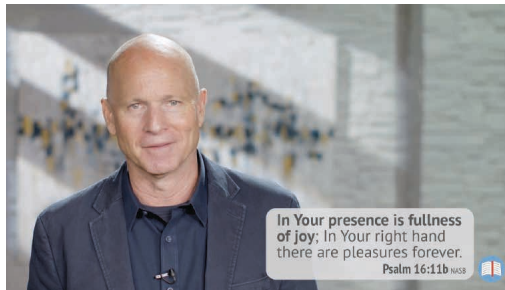
One more example. R. Murray M'Cheyne was a Scot pastor during the 1800s. I mentioned him earlier and his advice to his congregation to turn the Scriptures into prayer—great advice for living a prayer-filled life. He also said this:

If you are a child of God, you will find some secret place to pray. It will not do to say, you will pray when walking, or at your work, or in the midst of company. It will not do to make that your praying time throughout the day. Get alone with God. Spend as much time as you can alone with God every day; and then, in sudden temptations and afflictions, you will be able to lift your heart easily even among the crowd to your Father's ear.

That's good advice. A prayer-filled life begins alone with God. That was Jesus' practice. Mark shows us: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35). And Luke tells us that when more and more people were coming to see Jesus, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16). Matthew also records these words from Jesus: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6).

Set distractions aside and start the day with God. Ask Him to fill you with His love and with His Spirit. Let Him speak to you in His Word. Take His Word to heart, and pray it back to Him, and oh, the rewards will be many. Our heavenly Father does indeed want to show us things and take us places as we pray, but most of all, He wants to give us Himself. And so, David wrote of Him, "In Your presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11 NASB).

We can do this, because our loving Lord *will* help us. And He "is able



to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). He "is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 1:24).

We were made for this, for Him. We were saved for this. And this is only the beginning of what it means to live in His presence forever. Let's wrap up our time together with this simple prayer: *Loving Lord, help us to be with you.*

May God bless you and many, many others deeply as you pray.