

Romans 12:12

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 December 2013

Preacher: Graham Weeks

[0 : 00] Our thoughts this morning are from Romans chapter 12 and verse 12.

! Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.! Now you might think that from that verse there's three clear points for a preacher, but in fact I'm only going to be addressing the last one.

Be constant in prayer. Why am I addressing this? Because it's something in which we know we all fall short.

So if we are thinking about New Year's resolutions, even in the context that we know we always fail, here is a Biblical New Year's resolution for us.

To be constant in prayer, to improve our prayer life. And it's also fitting because after this week, the next week from the 12th, we are going to have a week of prayer for the life and work of our church.

[1 : 10] So to dwell on constant in prayer is appropriate. However, I think any preacher, certainly me, approaching this feels unqualified.

One feels like the poorly briefed politician facing an interview. You know, the politicians are briefed before they face interviews.

Likely questions, but also what points or points they must get across no matter what. Get the point across the one that you want to make no matter what the interviewer asks you.

And some politicians can do this quite seamlessly. Some, it's pretty obvious what they're doing. You listen to the politicians being interviewed and you'll see and watch category they come.

Poorly briefed and somewhat therefore unqualified on prayer. But then it says being constant in prayer. Well, then the preacher feels perhaps he should shut up because he's a hypocrite preaching on that when he isn't constant in prayer as he should be.

[2 : 23] But as far as that's concerned, I will leave you with one thought from G.K. Chesterton. Who said, I may not practice what I preach, but will betide me if I preached what I practice.

So I'm preaching you from God's word. And I've really got four main points. The first one is why we are not constant in prayer.

Secondly, the remedy for being constant in prayer. Then to look practically by way of application at individual prayer and corporate prayer, praying together.

And last of all, a recommendation for three books. Well, first of all, why are we not constant or as the NIV says, faithful in prayer?

Well, I would suggest to you the number one reason is we don't see the need. We are self-sufficient and don't see the need.

[3 : 32] We don't see the need for forgiveness. If we don't see the need for forgiveness, then we will not be praying for forgiveness through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All too often, we are self-sufficient. I read something of a church history in the United States. And it said there was a definite pattern of rise and decline in active faith there.

As they went west to win the west, then there were many, many people of prayer and active faith. Because this was a perilous task, going to win the west of the country.

But when they were there and settled and urbanized, then church attendance declined. Active living Christianity declined.

Because they've become self-sufficient. And we're not depending upon God in prayer. Or we don't pray because we are self-centered. We're concerned about ourselves and we've got sufficient.

[4 : 40] We're not really concerned about others and their troubles in life and in the world. So there you are. Not seeing the need is number one.

Things stopping us being constant in prayer. Secondly, known sin. Sin comes down and separates us from God.

It's the first thing it did in the Garden of Eden. The man and woman hid themselves from God. Because they knew they'd sinned. And all too often, known sin, persistence in sin, will separate us from God and from approaching Him.

Of course, if we really know that we have sinned and are repentant and that there is forgiveness with God, that will be a spur to prayer. But all too often, the devil will tempt us.

And when he's got us entrapped, then he'll say, ah, who are you to be praying? Who are you to be approaching God? You're not good enough. Well, of course, the answer to that is we aren't good enough, but we don't come before God because we are good.

[5 : 47] We come before Him because we are not. And because the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we come, He is good. So, we don't see the need.

There's no sin. Thirdly, we don't believe prayer makes a difference. We might believe God's in control of all things. Therefore, what difference does it make whether or not we are praying? We don't believe that prayer really makes a difference. And yet, prayer is the means by which God chooses to act.

God chooses to act in answer to His people's prayers. God, who foreordains the end, also foreordains the means. The best illustration of this, I know, is Paul in the storm on the Mediterranean, off Malta, and the storm's been going on for days.

And Paul tells them, fear not. God has spoken to me. An angel has spoken to me. We will be saved. And then the crew want to abandon the ship to save themselves.

[7 : 00] And Paul says, no, you must not abandon the ship. If you abandon the ship, we'll be lost. In other words, the means for them being saved was the sailors staying on the ship.

God, who foreordained the end, that they would be saved. And they were shepherd on Malta. They were saved from the storm. He ordained the means.

And that was the actions of the crew. So, we must believe that prayer does make a difference because it's the way that God chooses to act.

Fourth reason why we are not faithful in prayer. It's hard work. And we aren't disciplined. This is not an age of discipline.

Older men here will have gone through national service. Two years you had to be in the Army, Air Force or Navy. It's those who are older than me, by the way, if you know.

[8 : 00] Because I'm thankful I just escaped it. But the one thing everyone says is, national service taught discipline. You had the sergeant major on the parade ground.

You were taught discipline. I don't know if it taught you self-discipline. I think some of it would rub off. But we are very lax on being disciplined. And disciplined in prayer.

We are in an age, a culture that says, do what you like when you feel like it. But the scripture says, be constant in prayer.

Be disciplined. And also, one more. We just think we are too busy.

Well, if you are too busy to pray, you are too busy. If you see prayer as the most important thing in your life, you will be too busy to give time and be constant in prayer.

[9 : 07] And lastly, it's a spiritual battle. It isn't as simple as just saying some things before God.

There is spiritual opposition and battle involved. Why is it that you can concentrate on a book, a television program, Facebook, etc.

But as soon as you come to pray, your mind wanders. Because it is a spiritual battle. So there you are. I'll just revise, I think, six things.

Why we aren't faithful and constant in prayer. We don't see the need. Sin separating us from God. Not believing prayer will make a difference. It's hard work and we aren't disciplined.

And there's a spiritual battle involved. And we're too busy. Right, that's the first thing. Why we aren't faithful. What's the remedy? What help does God give us to be faithful in prayer?

[10 : 10] Well, first of all, what am I preaching from? I'm preaching from God's word. And the first thing to help us to be faithful in prayer is God's word. It's a book that tells us about prayer, the necessity of prayer, the necessity even for the Son of God to pray.

And in these 66 books in the Bible, there's one book, the longest one, which is a prayer manual. Which we should be using each day in our prayers.

Namely, the book of Psalms. As we use the book of Psalms, we should be thinking, what did this mean to the person who wrote this in his context? What does it speak to us about our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ?

And how does it help us in our prayers and our spiritual battles? So, first of all, we should be looking to God's word. Find the Psalms particularly helpful.

Look to our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. If the Son of God needed time to be alone and pray, he who was perfect man, how much more do we, imperfect men and women, boys and girls, need to spend time before our Heavenly Father in prayer?

[11 : 26] And of course, our Lord Jesus Christ taught us the pattern of prayer. The Lord's Prayer, more of that to come. Also, remedies.

We've said, look to God's word. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ. Look to the Holy Spirit. Read the book of Acts. See what the Holy Spirit did in answer to God's people's prayers.

Sometimes they weren't even expecting the answers to the prayers. Like Peter locked up in prison in Jerusalem. But the Lord springs open the door.

Because God's people had been praying together. See what the Holy Spirit did for the growth of the church in the book of Acts. And then you attend to those portions which tell you what you should be doing.

How you should be praying. And we'll have some more verses on that also from three other epistles. And finally, look to the Old Testament saints and their prayers.

[12 : 33] Ezra, Daniel, David, Solomon. Look and see how the saints of the Old Testament prayed. And you can pattern some of your prayers on their good examples.

So, there you are, five remedies. Look at God's word. Look to Christ. Look at what the Holy Spirit did. Look at what you should be doing. And look at the Old Testament saints and their prayers.

Right. Now we move on to points three and four. Which are the practical ones. And as I said, remembering G.K. Chesterton's maxim about hypocrisy.

And I believe I can share these with you. Because I have learned some of these in almost 50 years of professing to be a Christian.

These are things I think drawn from God's word and the University of Hard Knocks. So, first of all, I talked about being disciplined and we're not.

[13 : 40] But I do believe it's important we set times for prayer. Even if you're not a morning person. I believe that's the way you should be starting the day.

I mean, this is the one thing that you can do and you can be assured of some time. I.e. just set that alarm clock a little earlier and you'll be up.

The only people who may have some problems with this may be nursing mothers. But, of course, I can't speak practically about this. But I wouldn't have thought that feeding and prayer were completely incompatible.

There we are. So, first of all, set times. So you've got some pattern. Personally, first thing. If I don't pray first thing, the likelihood is I let it go later in the day.

Except for prayers at times of meals. For saying grace. So, set your times. And if you're someone who's good in the evening and you can do it, then fine.

[14 : 49] Whatever is the time that you can discipline yourself to do it. If it's during lunch hour at work, if you get such a thing. So well and good. So, the pattern.

The pattern of prayer. Well, the pattern is the Lord's Prayer. We start with remembering the one we're approaching. Our Father, who is in heaven.

We are not coming before any ordinary person. Any equal to us. We are coming before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who is our Father.

We are coming to a King, large petitions. Should we bring. Remember, we are coming before a Holy God. He is great and high and lifted up and transcendent.

And yet, He is imminent. He is near to us. Relationship of Father. So, the first thing is, we remember. Before whom we come.

[15 : 54] And then we move to consider. That in all our prayers we must put God's glory first. Hallowed be your name. May your name be made holy.

May people honour you, Lord God. We put God's glory first in our prayers. Not our need. And then we come before God and in our prayers.

And we do bring our needs before Him. Give us this day our daily bread. We bring our needs and the needs of others before Him.

We ask for forgiveness daily. Because daily we have sinned. Forgive us our trespasses. We ask God for protection. To save us from the evil one.

Lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. And of course, evil stalks around us in many forms. Many ways that we may be tempted.

[17:03] Although also this would lead us for prayer for the persecuted church. And then praise and thanksgiving. These should be there in all our prayers.

Giving thanks in all circumstances. One practical thing. IPC for the past several years has produced a prayer calendar.

We've got a new one. Are you out soon? Good. We're going to be armed, ready with the prayer calendar. I love that prayer calendar. It means that every day I know there will be someone in the church praying for me.

Unless of course you aren't faithful in prayer. But that is great. And if you're an elder it's even better than that. Because you know that one day every week everybody should be praying for the elders. Monday. Prayer calendar, very practical. I'll give you some other practical helps. In conclusion. So individual prayer.

[18:10] And corporate prayer. That is praying together. Now the first and primary corporate care. Is probably the one that most of us fail in.

And I put my hand up here. And that is having time for family prayer. That's particularly difficult in our busy rushing culture. Children want to get off for school.

However. However. I do definitely know of one family that is sitting in this congregation. Who as far as I know are faithful in this.

Because I've been with them. And I also know. That the father there learned it from his parents. From a good example set. So family prayers.

Family prayers. Something to aim at. But I'm not the best person. To advise on that. Because we weren't that good. I think mores were children's prayers.

[19:08] At bedtime. But that will nurture the children. And give them a good pattern. That they should be following. As covenant children.

In the family. So first of all family prayers. And then small group prayers. With particular friends. Or in your house group. Those of you who aren't in house groups.

This is a good reason. To be in a house group. So you can learn from God's word. But also. That you have a more. A smaller.

More intimate group of friends. In the Lord. With whom you can share things. In the small group. There is more freedom. I know some of you.

You find it possible. To pray aloud in small group. And you are too afraid to do it. In the gathered church. In the whole prayer meeting. So small groups.

[20:05] Deals with the intimidating nature. Of the big meeting. Gives you freedom to share. People you know.

Get to know. And people you can trust. And there is confidences. In that. So to encourage. Small group meetings. The house groups.

You can see how this definitely is preparation. For our week of prayer. And for the year's life of the church. And then. Finally. The gathered church. We hear from Paul.

Our minister. That he thinks. The monthly prayer meeting. Is the most. Important meeting. Of the month. And just. One or two. Tips.

For the church prayer meeting. If you don't come. If you don't come. The tip is to come. But if you do come. Just one or two things to say. And practically. Don't be shy.

[21:03] Paul often says this. Don't be shy. Just. You pray. Even if it's a. A small prayer. Remember. Remember. We are praying for one another.

And we are praying before God. And we are not being. Paid to be. Praying. To be heard. By our brothers and sisters. In the meeting. Although we should speak up enough.

That they can hear us. But we are there. Communicating with God. On his heavenly throne. So there should be. In a way. No difference. In your freedom. To come before God.

When you are on your own. Or. When you are with. The church. But you will remember. That you are there. In a sense. Leading in prayer. And.

That does make. Some. Difference. So. The gathered church. We meet to pray. For one another. And. We meet.

[21:58] To centre upon. The needs. Of. One another. We. May bring up. Things. That some might. Consider. Trivial.

But yet. God may see them. As important. And we are to pray. And we are to act. But practical tips. For gathered church. Prayer meetings. Speak up.

Especially. When those planes. Are flying overhead. Head. To and from Heathrow. Please speak up. So that we can join in. And say. A hearty.

Amen. If you. Are timid. About praying. Well you can pray something. Beforehand. Think about it. Write it out. What you want to praise God.

For. And give thanks for. Write it out. And read out. That prayer. In the prayer meeting. There is nothing wrong for that. We are meeting together to pray.

[22 : 56] For. The whole church. So. I said. Lastly. I would give you some tips. About some books. Well I'll tell you.

The three. Most helpful books. After the Bible. I've come across. On prayer. Vanderbilt Truth. Publish a book. By Matthew Henry. Matthew Henry.

The famous. Bible commentator. Called. A method of prayer. It's absolutely wonderful. There's prayers there. For all occasions.

And he teaches you. Biblically. What you should be praying. Because many of the prayers. See there. Are actually. In the words of the Bible. Are actually quotes. From the Bible.

So Matthew Henry. A method of prayer. Death. Secondly. One of my teachers. At All Nations Missionary College. Back in the late 60s. Was a vicar.

[23 : 50] Called Arthur Bennett. And Arthur Bennett. I thought. When this book of his. Came out. It was far better. Than his lectures. It's a book. Called The Valley of Vision.

And it. He calls it. A book of Puritan prayers. And those are there. For different occasions. Different subjects. That's a paperback. By the banner of truth. The Valley of Vision.

And then. Last. But certainly not least. Because it's the most. Foremost book. Of prayers. Has to be. Cranmer's book. Of common prayer.

The book of common prayer. Which was used. From the. Sixteenth century. Century onwards. In various forms. In the Church of England. The prayers are superb.

You may not have realized it. But you prayed one this morning. In our general confession. Or a modern version of it. So. I will commend to you. The book of common prayer.

[24 : 47] Also. After the authorised version. This actually is the book. That is most. Influenced. The English language. Which we speak. So.

There are three books. And I'm going to end. With three more verses. For you. From three of Paul's epistles. In Ephesians 6.18.

Paul says. Praying at all times. In the spirit. With all prayer. And supplication.

For all. The saints. Colossians. Devote yourselves. Sorry. Continue faithfully. In prayer.

Being watchful. In it. And thankful. And 1 Thessalonians. 5.17. Pray. Without ceasing.

[25 : 49] Give thanks. For this is the will of God. In all things. In Christ Jesus. For you. So. Let this year to come.

Be a year of us. Being more constant. More faithful. In prayer. For Jesus sake. Amen.