

The MINISTER'S PRAYER LIFE

by KEITH ROBERTS



INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED

LEADERSHIP Journal recently surveyed 125 preachers about their prayer lives. Most felt that their church isn't too concerned about the preacher's prayer life. One said, "I get the feeling others don't think my personal devotional life is important... Not one person (including the senior pastor) has asked me about the health of my personal faith. I feel totally unsupported in this aspect of my life."¹

C. Peter Wagner, a writer on prayer and church growth, surveyed 572 U.S. preachers of all denominations about their prayer habits and found these statistics:

- *57% pray less than 20 minutes per day.
- *34% pray between 20 minutes and 1 hour per day.
- *9% pray 1 hour or more per day.
- *The average was 22 minutes per day.²

But when Wagner studied prayer habits of preachers in other nations, he found remarkable differences:

- *Preachers in Australia average 23 minutes per day.
- *Preachers in New Zealand average 30 minutes per day.
- *Preachers in Japan average 44 minutes per day.
- *Preachers in Korea average 90 minutes per day.

In Korea, one study reported that 83% of preachers pray 1 hour or more per day. Many Korean preachers have built "prayer closets" into their offices, and some even have beds and showers so they can pray all night Saturday before preaching on Sunday.³

Where do you fit in all these statistics? Which end of the spectrum? Where do you want to be? Is it important for the preacher to develop an exceptional prayer life?

E.M. Bounds once wrote, "This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man or sink the man in the plan or organization. God's plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God's method... The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men."

"What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Spirit can use - men of prayer, men mighty in prayer."⁴

Charles Spurgeon concurs: "Of course the preacher is above all others distinguished as a man of prayer. He prays as an ordinary Christian, else he were a hypocrite. He prays more than ordinary Christians, else he were disqualified for the office he has undertaken.

"If you as ministers are not very prayerful, you are to be pitied. If you become lax in sacred devotion, not only will you need to be pitied but your people also, and the day cometh in which you shall be ashamed and confounded. All our libraries and studies are mere emptiness compared with our closets."⁵

Exactly how important IS the preacher's prayer life? Is there a Scriptural emphasis on the preacher's devotional life?

I. JESUS' DEVOTIONAL LIFE

With no fear of argument, we can assert that Jesus was the greatest preacher who ever lived, or ever will live on this planet. What were his prayer habits? What kind of devotional life did he maintain? Note these 15 mentions of Jesus' prayer life:

A. LUKE 3:21 - At his baptism. He accepts his role as sin-bearer. He needs power to begin his ministry.

B. MARK 1:35 - Starting a new preaching tour. After an extremely busy day, Jesus is up early and praying.

C. LUKE 5:16 - When coping with large crowds. Just after the events of Mark 1:35. Jesus' popularity grows, yet he withdraws and prays more.

D. LUKE 6:12 - At choosing the Twelve. He spent all night praying before this awesome decision.

E. MATTHEW 14:13, 23 (Mark 6:46) - As opposition mounts. Before walking on the sea Jesus spent the night in prayer.

F. LUKE 9:18 - Dealing with hard teachings. Before questioning his disciples about his Divine nature and work, he prays.

G. LUKE 9:28-29 - At his transfiguration. Staying all night on the mountain, Jesus prays as the disciples sleep.

H. LUKE 10:21 - At victory over Satan. After sending the Seventy-Two out with authority, Jesus praises the Father in prayer at the victory.

I. LUKE 11:1 - Before teaching on prayer. His disciples heard the Son of God pray; they wanted to be like him in prayer life.

J. JOHN 11:41 - At raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus exhibits prayer's power to split open a tomb and raise the dead.

K. JOHN 12: 27-28 - At facing his future. His hour has come; he prays for the Father's will, not his own.

L. LUKE 22:32 - As his disciples face trials. As the crucial hour nears, Jesus intercedes for his own.

M. JOHN 17 - On preparing to leave his disciples behind. He prays for their protection and their unity.

N. LUKE 22:39-46 (Mt. 26 & Mk. 14) - On the Mount of Olives. He prays for the strength to do his Father's will.

O. LUKE 23:34, 46 - From the cross. In agony, and dying for the world's sins, Jesus continues to pray.

II. THE EARLY CHURCH'S DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Did Jesus' exceptional devotional life inspire the early church to imitate him? Note these incidents from the Book of Acts:

- A. ACTS 1:14 - They prayed and waited for power from on high.
- B. ACTS 1:24 - They prayed when choosing a new leader.
- C. ACTS 2:42 - They devoted themselves to prayer.
- D. ACTS 4:23-31 - They prayed for boldness despite persecution.
- E. ACTS 6:4 - The leaders devoted themselves to prayer.
- F. ACTS 6:6 - They prayed when appointing special ministers.
- G. ACTS 7:59-60 - They prayed while dying as Jesus did.
- H. ACTS 8:14-24 - They prayed for spiritual novices.
- I. ACTS 9:40 - They prayed for God to raise the dead.
- J. ACTS 10:9 - They prayed regularly.
- K. ACTS 12:5-14 - They prayed for imprisoned brothers.
- L. ACTS 13:3 - They prayed when starting new works.
- M. ACTS 14:23 - They prayed when appointing elders.
- N. ACTS 16:13, 16 - They prayed as a habit.
- O. ACTS 16:25 - They prayed in hardship.
- P. ACTS 20:36; 21:5 - They prayed when parting company.
- Q. ACTS 26:29 - They prayed when preaching to the lost.
- R. ACTS 27:29 - They prayed when in danger.
- S. ACTS 28:8 - They prayed for the sick.
- T. ACTS 28:15 - They thanked God for each other.

III. THE APOSTLE PAUL'S DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Note the Apostle Paul's prayer habits, and how they related to his approach to ministry:

- A. ROMANS 1:9-10 - He prays for disciples he can't teach in person.
- B. ROMANS 10:1 - He prays for the lost.
- C. ROMANS 15:30-33 - He sees prayer as combat, and wants them to join him.
- D. EPHESIANS 1:15-23 - He prays for their spiritual growth.
- E. EPHESIANS 3:14-21 - He prays for their strength.
- F. EPHESIANS 6:10-20 - He sees prayer as warfare, asks them to pray for him.
- G. PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11 - He prays for their spiritual growth.
- H. PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9 - He teaches them about prayer and contentment.
- I. COLOSSIANS 1:9-14 - He prays for their growth.
- J. COLOSSIANS 4:2-4 - He calls them to prayer.
- K. COLOSSIANS 4:12-13 - The example of Epaphras.
- L. 1 THESS. 1:2; 2:13; 3:9-10 - He thanks God constantly for them.
- M. 1 THESS. 3:11-13 - His prayer for them.
- N. 1 THESS. 5:16-25 - More calls to prayer.
- O. 2 THESS. 1:3; 2:13 - He thanks God for them again.
- P. 2 THESS. 1:11-12; 2:16-17 - More prayers for them.
- Q. 2 THESS. 3:1-5 - He calls them to pray for him again.
- R. 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-8 - He calls on Timothy to promote prayer in the church.
- S. PHILEMON 4-7, 22 - He saw prayer as the atmosphere of the Christian life.

Endnotes:

1. C. Peter Wagner, *Prayer Shield* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1992) page 78.
2. *Ibid.*, 79.
3. *Ibid.*, 79-80.
4. E.M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Chicago: Moody, 1980) pages 9-10.
5. *Ibid.*, 34-35.