

August 19. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17. We can pray with our eyes open, or we can pray with our eyes closed. We can pray anywhere, in any position, at any time. The main thing is to pray. We may feel as though God hears our prayers more in a church sanctuary. But God is not in a place of worship any more than He is in another place. God is present everywhere. At the same time, there is no question that when God's people gather together for worship and prayer, God chooses to show His presence in a special way. The Bible says that God inhabits the praises of His people (see Psalm 22:3). Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). When we pray together as a body of believers, there is power in that prayer. Having said that, God will hear you anywhere. Daniel prayed in a lion's den, David prayed in a field, Peter prayed on the water and under the water, and Jonah prayed from the belly of a great fish. The main thing, as Paul wrote, is to "pray without ceasing". God will hear your prayer, wherever you are.

August 20. Read Ephesians 6:18. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah's job was to taste the king's food before the king ate it. Because the cupbearer was required to be in close proximity to the king, he often became more than someone who tasted the food. In time, he would become the king's confidant, adviser, and friend. Nehemiah was a Jew who was in a position of great influence with the king. But one day he was feeling a bit down. He was thinking about the plight of his fellow Jews in Jerusalem and how the walls of the city lay in ruins. Nehemiah must have been always happy and upbeat, because the king noticed that he looked miserable. He asked, "Why are you looking so sad? You don't look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled" (Nehemiah 2:2). So Nehemiah told the king about the plight of his people, and the king asked how he could help. I love what Nehemiah did next. The Bible tells us that "with a prayer to the God of heaven, [Nehemiah] replied, 'If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried' " (verses 4–5). Sometimes we have the luxury of time in prayer. But sometimes we can only send up a quick prayer to the God of heaven. We can pray all the time, everywhere.

August 21. Read Luke 18:1. Why should we pray? The simple answer is because Jesus told us to. Jesus himself was a model of prayer. He was always praying. In the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus contemplated the horrors of the cross, He prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). On the cross, Jesus prayed for His enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, we read that He lifted up His eyes to heaven and prayed (see John 11:41–42). Read Matthew 14:19. The Bible also tells us that mothers would bring their children to Jesus for Him to lay His hands on them and pray for them (see Matthew 19:13). If Jesus felt the need to pray, then how much more should we feel it? Jesus was God, yet He prayed all the time, even through the night. We are commanded to pray. We ought to pray. We should pray because Jesus told us to. But to make a point, let's just say that prayer was the most painful thing you could do, like getting a root canal. If you've ever had one, you know it's miserable. But because of what results from it, you believe it's worth it. In the same way, if prayer were painful, you probably would pray anyway because you know it's worth it. Thankfully, prayer isn't like a root canal. It isn't difficult or painful. So let's pray and never give up.

August 22. Genesis 5:23–24. Did you know it's possible to pray the most beautiful, eloquent prayer ever prayed and not have it go any higher than the ceiling? Sometimes we are filled with sin. Maybe it's unforgiveness, or maybe it's a sin we have never confessed. But that sin is like a barrier between God and us. It is like being on a phone call with God and having the battery go dead. Maybe you've allowed some sin to work its way into your life, and it has brought your prayer life to a halt. If you want to reconnect with God again, then you will need to confess your sin. The Bible tells us that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Remember Enoch? He "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). This simply means that every day, Enoch would get up and take a walk with God. Apparently he did this for many years. But one day God effectively said, "Enoch, we're closer to My house than yours. Why don't you come on home with me?" God wants a relationship with you, and prayer is communication with Him. It's an ongoing conversation that you can have with Him all day, all afternoon, all night long—and all lifelong. Like Enoch, you can walk with God day in and day out, year in and year out, decade in and decade out. You can walk with God in your younger years, in your middle years, and in your older years. And then one day the Lord will say, "Come on. We're closer to My house than yours. Why don't you come on home with Me?"

August 23. James 5:13. Have you ever been in what appeared to be an impossible situation with no way out? Have you ever desperately needed or wanted something, but it seemed as though there was no way you would ever have it? Or, have you ever thought there was no future for you? If so, you need to know about the power of God that can take place through prayer. One thing that comes out very clearly in the pages of God's Word is that prayer can dramatically change situations, people, and sometimes even the very course of nature. But what prayer actually changes the most is you. You change when you pray. The objective of prayer is not to change God or to get Him to do something differently. The objective of prayer is to align yourself with the will and purposes of God. God will allow hardship and challenges and need—and sometimes even tragedy—so that He can reveal Himself to us and put His power and glory on display. He allows things to happen in our lives so we will turn to Him in prayer. Yet we usually regard prayer as a last resort: Well, I've called all my contacts. I've pretty much done everything I can do. . . . So I guess all I can do now is pray. In reality, the first thing we should do is pray and ask the Lord for His help, His direction, and even His provision. We need God's help—that is why we pray. When we see our own weakness, we have a greater glimpse of the strength of God. As someone wisely said, "If you are swept off your feet, it's time to get on your knees." No matter what situation in which we find ourselves, we need to pray.