



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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1 Thessalonians 5:17 "Pray without ceasing."

The football nation watched in horror last week when Buffalo Bills Damar Hamlin collapsed with what seemed to be a routine tackle. Players dropped to their knees as on the field CPR was administered for minutes. An ambulance carried away the stricken player, as coaches, fans and fellow players cried in disbelief. Hamlin's heart had stopped. He was taken to a local hospital and was placed in ICU. Messages flowed in. Announcers collectively stated the same thing, "Our prayers are for Damar." Others said, "In a divided world, we are united in praying for Damar." The game was postponed. Everyone was asked to pray.

And in an instant, without anyone realizing it, one of the greatest evidences and needs for God was demonstrated in that Cincinnati football stadium. People came for a game. A fun night of football, food and friends. I expect as people were arriving, getting settled into their seats, that the thought of God was not on very many minds. The players, the staff, the stadium employees all had jobs to do and very likely God wasn't on their radar. But that night, as people left, tears in their eyes, prayers were being lifted upward. Watching the game on TV, I prayed.

It's easy for the elite, the arrogant intellectual, the man of the world to declare that there is no God. It's easy for them to scoff at the writings of the Bible and to boldly deny the existence of God. They can fill the minds of young college students with all kinds of unproven theories and mock religion as repressive and controlling. But when a player falls to the ground and his heart has stopped beating, help beyond ourselves is sought. God was needed. Prayers were requested. Theories are tossed out the window. We are helpless and hopeless without the divine power of God. And, in one collective moment, in all places, a football stadium, thousands recognized that God is greater than we are. God can do things that we cannot. The secular worldview was tossed out in an instant. Without God, we are on our own. Without God we are helpless. Without God, there is nothing.

And, this is what we find throughout the Gospels. A synagogue official lays aside all his prejudice about Jesus and falls at the Lord's feet before others, begging Him to save his dying daughter. It was a similar scene as football players on both sides were on their knees, heads bowed, begging the Lord to help.

It's like the Canaanite woman who cried out to Jesus to save her demon possessed daughter. Or, the ten lepers who begged Jesus to have mercy upon them.

(OVER)

On sunny days, when life is going well, many have no place, or time for God. But in a crisis, in a moment of desperation, the call is to pray. Even the President of the United States said, “we are praying.” I expect those announcers would likely lose their jobs had they asked the audience to pray if nothing tragic was taking place. Just a regular game, nothing unusual happening, “let’s pray.” The networks would pull the plugs and their careers would be over. But in a moment of hopelessness and helplessness, the call to pray was fitting.

Life is precious and much more important than a football game. In just an instant, life can end.

Our verse today reminds us that:

First, prayer is as normal to us as breathing. We don’t need someone to tell us to pray. We pray in the sunshine as well as in the darkness of life. We pray when our hearts are happy and when our hearts are hurting. We love to pray. The fact that the God of Heaven listens to us is amazing. We are thankful. We praise Him and we seek His will in our lives.

Second, the “without ceasing” part of our verse is hard for some to get. Not every moment is a prayer. Not even in worship is everything prayer. Singing has a place. Preaching has a place. Encouragement has a place. We couldn’t do those things if we are praying and only praying. I liken the “without ceasing” to an on going conversation. My wife leaves for work in the morning. She heads one way and I head the other way. When we connect at the end of the day and ask how the day went, it’s as if the conversation has never ended. Talking often. Talking about all kinds of things. That’s praying without ceasing.

Third, as time rolls on, one wonders what impact that football night had upon that audience? Would they pray more? Would they take a step closer to the Lord? Or, once, things seem to be ok, would they return to their old ways once again?

It is interesting that Mark gives us the name Jairus, the synagogue official whose little girl was dying. The first readers of that Gospel knew his name. In many ways, this is like God’s footnote in a reference paper. People could go to that village and look up that person. And, don’t you just think, when that little girl had her next birthday, that Jairus looked Heavenward and thanked the Lord. A request answered. A life restored. And, a heart changed.

Prayers at a football game—a simply reminder that we need Thee every hour.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)
