

Living for God in the Last Days (God's Prayer Plan for the Family)



By Kim Butts

We, of course, do not know the day or the hour of Christ's return. What we do know is that it could happen at any time. This knowledge alone should significantly affect our actions, our attitudes and our relationships with one another. It is difficult to consider the reality of the last days when our children are young, or when we feel that there is so much of life yet to be lived. However, Jesus tells us to be ready: *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come... So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him"* (Matthew 24:42-44).

If we are not spiritually prepared as families, we will be unable to respond to the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in our lives during the end times: *"'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your*

old men will dream dreams'" (Acts 2:17). How can we, as individuals and as families be ready to do what God has called us to in the last days? God's Word has much to say in this regard; however, one specific command may indeed be the key to all of the others: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (1 Peter 4:7). The Message, by Eugene Peterson, translates this passage as, "Stay wide-awake in prayer."

Peter emphatically stated, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that prayer is the key to living effective lives in the last days. It is obvious that the Lord wants our prayer lives to be powerful and effective as we face what lies ahead. Clear minded Christian families should have clearly defined, purpose-filled lives that are characterized by wise choices and mature decisions made from a relationship with Jesus in prayer. However, if the enemy can successfully see to it that our minds are cluttered with the unproductive excesses of our culture, then we can be turned off of the course Christ has set before us. The race cannot be won when the baggage of fuzzy thinking and the uncertainties of right or wrong hinder us. The only right way is the way of Jesus.

To be clear minded requires that Christians pay attention to what the Word of God says: *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does"* (James 1:22-25). It is difficult to pray focused, powerful prayers when our minds are distracted. We are of no use to the Father if our prayers are characterized by uncertainty or double-minded thinking: *"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown*

and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does" (James 1:6-8).

Peter said that we must be self-controlled so that we can pray. Self-control is difficult at best! However, if we ask ourselves one simple question we can put this issue into God's perspective: Who is controlling us? Is it God, our Father, who loves us and wants what is best for us ... or Satan, our enemy, who would seek to destroy us? As a family, look at the activities you are engaged in, the habits you have, and the things that you hold tightly to. Are all of these things bringing honor and glory to God because they are lived out through you under His control? Or, are you trapped by the vise-like grip of the deceiver in things that do not please the Father? *"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).*

If the enemy can dissuade us, distract us, or damage us in some way to keep us from praying – especially in our families – he will! A lack of self-control will allow us to be distracted by worldly things or ungodly pursuits. As a result, we will certainly not be prayer minded, watchful or aware. *"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control" (Proverbs 25:28).* Walls that are broken down are defenseless and open to attack from the enemy. When we lack clear minded self-control, we open ourselves up for attack.

Are the walls around your family built up and well defended? Are you praying with and for one another? Are you holding one another accountable to behave like Christ, and confessing sin to one another? *"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.*

Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:13-16).

Without self-control our prayer lives will be weak, erratic, powerless and useless to the Lord! When we are able, with His help, to bring every area of our lives under control, our prayers will increase in power and effectiveness. *"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline"* (2 Timothy 1:7). Listed below are some of the many prayer commands the Lord has given us in His Word. If your family will take the time to study, meditate upon, and obey each of these commands, you will be clear minded and self-controlled, and able to stay "wide-awake" in prayer:

- **Pray so that you might not fall into temptation.** Prayer is the Lord's way of protecting us from the enemy. If we are not clear minded and self-controlled, we can easily fall into the traps that Satan sets for us. *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak"* (Matthew 26:41). In the last days, it is important that we are prayerfully watchful! Teach your children how easily sins such as anger and unforgiveness (Mark 11:25) can hinder our prayers. Have family members make a list of the things that tempt them. Determine to "watch and pray" about these things. Making a family covenant to pray for one another in these areas will be of great help to avoid temptation, as will the accountability that goes with it!
- **Pray so that all might be saved.** Prayer is the Lord's

strategy for bringing the lost into His kingdom. *"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth"* (1 Timothy 2:1-4). We know without a doubt that this is God's plan. If our families are not clear minded and self-controlled, then His plan to involve His people in the ministry of Christ and in the salvation of others will fall short. We must obediently pray for all people – even those who persecute us or mistreat us (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28). And it is critical to pray for those in authority over us! As a family, begin to pray for government leaders, co-workers, teachers, etc. Make a list of neighbors, friends and family members who don't know Christ and begin to intercede for them!

- **Pray with faith, believing that you have what you asked for, so that it will be yours.** If our families are not clear minded and self-controlled, we will pray ineffective, faithless prayers. When we pray prayers of faith that are lined up with the plans and purposes of God as revealed in His Word, then we are being obedient to the Lord's command: *"'Have faith in God,' Jesus answered. 'I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, "Go, throw yourself into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours'"* (Mark 11:22-24). As you read and study the word of God together, ask Him to show you what He wants you to be doing. As you pray through His precious Word, He will give you amazing insights, and show you His perfect plans for you, your family, and for His world! When He does, you will be better equipped to know how to pray what is on His

heart, because it will be on yours as well!

- **Pray in the Spirit as you stay alert!** The Holy Spirit is our teacher – our guide. He gives us words to pray when we don't know how. As we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit, our prayers will be powerful and effective. *"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 1:20). "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18).* As you teach your family to obey these commands, help them to know that even when we are unable to find the words to pray, the Holy Spirit will intercede on our behalf as we yield ourselves to Him: *"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26-27).* As we seek after the heart of God in the midst of our prayers, desiring to pray His will into being, we will be lining ourselves up with His plans and purposes so that He can use us to the fullest!
- **Devote yourselves to faithful prayer** – *"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2).* When we have thankful hearts, and minds that are alert (watchful) to the enemy's schemes, we will be better able to maintain the faithful practice of prayer. *"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Romans 12:12).* Your family can determine to obey this command by setting aside time each day to pray individually and together. The Father will reward your faithfulness. If this time is difficult to find, sit down together and plan what activities are taking away opportunities to spend time in prayer together. It may only take a few minor adjustments to

find a segment of time to pray together daily. Perhaps all it will take is to turn off the television or give up excess time at the computer, etc. Talk about what being devoted means. Ask yourselves if you are more devoted to other activities than to prayer. Determine to change your priorities if this is the case.

- **Pray continually because it is God's will for you** – *"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). It is never easy to be joyful and to give thanks in the midst of circumstances that are difficult. Why would God state that His will is for us to do so? Because He knows that we grow stronger through the rough spots in life. He can give us victory over the darkest circumstance if we will turn it over to Him in prayer. *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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 your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6-7). Teach your family that as we obediently lay every concern, difficulty, frustration and sorrow at his feet, He will bring peace to guard our hearts and minds. Therefore, prayer comes full circle: we pray, and the Lord gives peace to guard our hearts and minds in Christ. Such peace will allow us to be clear minded and self-controlled so that we can pray. What a wondrous plan the Lord has made for us!

"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (1 Peter 4:7).

Family Prayer: Father, enable us to be clear minded in these last days. Help us to live wisely, and with purpose. Show us those things that give us fuzzy thinking instead of clear mindedness. May we be able to focus on Your precious Word to define our thinking and decision-making. Make clear to us the

areas where we are lacking in self-control and help us to resist the enemy in these areas so that he will flee from us! Help us to know how to pray what is on Your heart! We desire powerful, Spirit-filled lives of prayer that will bring You glory in these last days! Teach us to pray, dear Lord! In Jesus' Name we ask it and look forward to your answer! Amen!

–Kim Butts is the co-founder of Harvest Prayer Ministries and the author of [*The Praying Family*](#).

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