

We are nearing the end of our study of Ephesians. We began the study in September of 2019 and we have given careful consideration of every verse. And now, as we near the end, Paul brings our attention to that most important subject of prayer.

Prayer is one of the most important things we can do as Christians. We even have one book of the bible that is devoted to prayer and that is the Psalms.

Our savior often exhorted us to pray and he himself was a prayer warrior. As disciples of Christ, we are called to follow him in every way and one of the specific ways we are to follow him is in prayer.

And so our goal today is to become more devoted to prayer.

So let us read our text from Ephesians 6. In order to provide context, we will read verses 10 and 11 and then 18-20.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ...**18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, **19** and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

***This is God's holy and infallible word.
The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.***

Our focus today is on prayer and I want to start us off with a question:

What grade would you give yourself in the area of prayer?

Do you do a great job?

Are you an "A" student?

Or are you like most Christians and you don't want to talk about the grades on your report card?

Most of us, if we are being really honest, fall very short of being the praying people the Lord desires us to be.

Why is that? Why do we fall so short in the area of prayer?

Why are we not more devoted to it?

Well, there are many reasons for this.

A lack of faith. Improper priorities. Thinking ourselves more powerful than we really are.

We struggle with various idolatries and loves of the world.

And let us not let ourselves off the hook for being lazy and lacking self-discipline.

There are many reasons we do not pray as we should. But just because we find it hard to be devoted to prayer does mean that the command is ever relaxed. Jesus and his apostles frequently command us to pray.

And here in Ephesians 6, Paul encourages us to pray by showing us that **prayer is the front-line activity in spiritual warfare.**

Prayer is essential to living faithfully as followers of Christ.

Because, as we have already studied, we are in a spiritual conflict.

The devil and his host are arrayed against us.

He employs his schemes so that we might fall and be ineffective as Christians.

That is why we have to take up the whole armor of God.

In Ephesians 6:18, Paul applies all he has said applies to prayer all he has said about the armor of God and spiritual warfare.

You have a sermon outline and the first point there is...

I. Prayer is the Primary Place Where Spiritual Battles are Fought (10, 18)

Notice how verse 18 begins- it's not complete in itself.

Rather, it's completing a thought. Paul writes:

...**18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

That first part of verse 18 can't stand alone.

We need verses 10 and 11 to make it complete

We are to "put on the whole armor of God" and "stand", praying at all times in the Spirit.

So prayer is the primary way we employ God's armor and stand against the devil.

Prayer is the front line defense against the schemes of the devil.

It's where the spiritual fight is won or lost.

And so it is imperative that all of us learn to pray.

Now, for us to really grow in our devotion to prayer, we have to first be convinced of how necessary it is.

And this typically happens as we taste the sadness of our own spiritual unhealth and powerlessness.

The disciple learned to pray through the experience of failure.

In Mark 9:18, the disciples of Jesus encountered a man who had asked them to cast a demon out of his son.

And the disciples were not able to cast this particular demon out.

And so an argument arose.

Then Jesus entered into the situation and said:

19 "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." **20** And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. **21** And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. **22** And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." ...**25** And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." **26** And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He

is dead.” 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. 28 And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” 29 And he said to them, “**This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.**”

Jesus was a prayer warrior. He was prayed up. His disciples were not. And because of this, they failed in this particular conflict.

Spiritual failure shows us how powerless we are and how much we need to depend upon the Lord in prayer.

The gospels show us that Jesus was a model of prayer. He frequently awoke early to pray or went off alone to pray. It was vital to his spiritual life.

In Hebrews 5:7, we read:

Hebrews 5:7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.

If Jesus prayed, so should we. And our lack of prayer shows us that we still have a ways to go in realizing our own powerlessness without prayer.

Prayer is the Primary Place Where Spiritual Battles are Fought. And so the fight for us for us, in the here and now, is to pray.

That is the battle, which leads us to our next point.

II. The Battle To Pray

In some ways, prayer has never been a harder discipline to engage in than it is today. First, there is the spirit of the age that is decidedly anti-supernatural. To pray at all these days is to go against our culture which says that prayer is something you do when you can't do anything else. God might be there, he might not. Who knows? And therefore, prayer is the last resort. It's the last stand.

In addition to the anti-supernaturalist age we must battle against, we also have to contend with our flesh. In our flesh, we like to think that we are able to take up any of the challenges that come our way. We naturally have a high regard for our wisdom and abilities. And when our wisdom fails, We have Google! All the wisdom of humanity is online! And when we lack anything, We have amazon! We can just order the items that solve our problems.

Our own wisdom and abilities, combined with the worldly wisdom and abilities that are so readily available have left us spiritually deluded. We are perhaps more deluded now than any other generation has ever been- regarding our trust in our own wisdom and strength.

Yet when we pray, we rightly question our strength and wisdom.

This is where the first battle of prayer is fought.

We have to battle through the pride of our supposed strength and wisdom in order to pray.

Another reason it is so hard to pray is because we have so many **distractions**.

Our phones are always with us.

There's social media. News. Online shopping. Email.

Texts. Phone calls.

Our friendship circle is as broad as it has ever been but our interactions are shallower than ever.

This person has cancer. That person is having a baby.

This person is getting married. That person's marriage is failing.

This person is celebrating a great life win. That person is in the throes of lament.

We are all on information overload.

And we are also suffering from entertainment overload.

Any movie or video you could ever want to see is instantly available to you.

Any song you've ever wanted to hear or buy, you can do so instantly.

The video games are as real as ever and as addictive as narcotics.

And then there's work.

Our work is always with us.

Many of us now do a good portion of our work from home.

And so our work has entered into our living rooms, our bedrooms and even our bathrooms.

The age we are living in has to be the most distracted age in all of human history.

If we are to pray, we have to battle though innumerable distractions- just to have peace and quiet.

Just bringing ourselves to pray is a battle in and of itself.

And so we need to recognize that prayer must be among our highest priorities.

It is so valuable and so essential that it cannot be neglected.

This means, practically, that prayer is something we have to prioritize.

We have to block other things out- physically and intentionally- just so we can pray.

Prayer must become a priority.

Other than Jesus, one of the best New Testament examples of prayer is Paul's friend Epaphras.

In Colossians 4:12, Paul writes the following:

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

“always struggling on your behalf in his prayers”

Do you struggle in prayer?

In order to struggle in prayer, we must first struggle to pray.

All of us must realize that, in this distracted age, the first skirmish in the battle of prayer is the battle to pray at all. So decide that you are going to pray. Set aside time so that you can have peace and quiet.

Jesus even tells us in Matthew 6:6:

Matthew 6:6 ... go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.

So how can you prioritize prayer this week?
What distractions do you need to turn off or throw out?
We must do whatever it takes because prayer must become a priority.

So, having seen that the battle of prayer begins with the battle to pray at all, let's not consider...

III. How to Pray

In Ephesians 6:18, Paul commands us to “[pray] at all times in the Spirit”
What does it mean to pray in the Spirit?

Now, to be sure, it does not mean praying in our own spirits.
It means praying by the enabling strength of God's Holy Spirit.

This is the element of prayer that strikes at the heart of our anti-supernaturalist age.
Paul is telling us that Christian prayer is something that should be empowered by the Living, Holy Spirit of God.

Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:26-27.

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. **27** And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

This means that the Spirit of God can be with you in prayer.
He prays with you and you can pray by his strength. It's a most beautiful and wonderful experience.
And make no mistake, it is an experience.
An experience born of prayer marked by dependence, repentance, devotion and faithfulness.

The Spirit longs for us to seek God's kingdom more than our own.
He longs for us to repent of our idols, our foolish wisdom, our self-dependence and our self-love.
He longs for us to cherish God's word and hope in his promises.
And as we come to God in prayer, willing to repent, willing to bow our will to his, willing to take Him at his word, the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

These are the longings of heaven- for God's kingdom to be realized now.
For the glory of God to be a present reality.
And for the knowledge of God to be in every mind and for the love of God to be in every heart.

Praying in the Spirit means praying with the power and yearning of the Holy Spirit.

And for us to do this, we have to cast down our idols, and devote ourselves to Him.
Or, as Paul puts it, we must put on the armor.

Praying in the Spirit is a relational activity.
It's packed with intimacy. And this is only logical because...

Christ is in us, we are in him. We are his bride.
God is our Father. We have His Spirit.
We belong to him. We are his children.

Therefore, it is only logical that in prayer, he would empower us by his Spirit.
That we would know intimacy with God through the Holy Spirit.

So let me ask you, are you familiar with this fellowship with God?
Do you know his presence and his power in your prayers?
It's available for every believer, this fellowship and power in prayer.
You just have to cast down your idols and pursue this intimacy in faith.

Oh, that we would long for this intimacy with God more than anything else on earth- to pray in the Spirit!

One of the best ways to enter into prayer in the Spirit is to pray God's word.
Dan advised us to do this a few weeks ago and his advice bears repeating.

Pray the word.
Marinate you mind and heart in God's word.
You can do this with the Psalms but you can also do this with every part of the word.
The Spirit wrote the Word and so, quite literally, it is His.
Pray His words and seek to meet him in Prayer.
Let him bring you into the presence of God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Pray His words with your heart and mind engaged.
And by this, you can know his nearness.
Praying in the Spirit is relational and praying the Word brings this out.

Paul writes experientially in Romans 8:15:

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” **16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

So pray in the Spirit. Pray Relationally. Pray God's Word into your soul.

This means we have to **drop the desire to impress in prayer.**
God is ever the only audience in prayer and he is impervious to being impressed.
Praying in the Spirit also means doing away with the formalities of prayer, the rituals, the forms, the aesthetics.

What we are most concerned with is connecting with God and praying His will.
There is nothing automatic about prayer.
There is no ritual that compels God to hear prayer.
He wants not a form. God wants your heart.

So be not overly concerned with the form of prayer or the beauty of it.
Concern yourself most with meeting him in prayer and praying his will.

Jude 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, **21** keep yourselves in the love of God...

Now, lastly, we will consider what we are to pray for.

IV. What to Pray For

Paul places no limits on the things for which we are to pray.
He writes in verse 18 that we are to “pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.”
This includes all types of prayer for all types of requests.

This is modeled in our worship service every week.
We have a prayer of invocation where we seek God’s presence among us in our worship.
It also a prayer of devotion.
We pray prayers of repentance, supplication and application.

Our liturgy is meant to be a cross-section of some of the types of prayers we can pray.
Of course there are other types of prayers but the point is that Paul is not requesting a specific type of prayer here.

It’s “all prayer and supplication.”
Yet he does direct us by example in what we are to pray for.

We are to pray primarily for people.
And while it is perfectly fitting to pray for ourselves, our prayers should not overly consumed with ourselves.

He tells us to “**keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.**”
This means we are to pray specifically for other believers.
And to do this well, we have to think specifically of the needs of certain believers that we have in mind.

We ought to lift them up in prayer and carefully consider what their needs might be.
This is such a loving ministry and we can engage in it anytime we pray.
It requires us to be thoughtful and sensitive.
And it builds relationship and love amongst the body of Christ.

Therefore, I urge you all to do this.
Make a list of people that are on your mind and pray for them specifically.
Meditate on their needs, even if they have not communicated them specifically to you.

In doing this, you are interceding for them to the father in a way that is similar to the way Jesus intercedes for us.

Hebrews 7:25 tells us that **Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us.**

He prays for you and for me all the time.
And as followers of him, we ought to pray specifically and thoughtfully for one another and for all the saints.

Secondly, Paul requests that the Ephesians pray for him.

He writes in verse 19:

19 and [pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

This means that those who minister the gospel should be especially the subject of our prayers.

So think of those ministers in your life and pray for them.

Pray for me, that I would follow Christ closely.
Pray for the pastors of other churches you know.
Pray for those who are in missions, that they would remain faithful and zealous.

You may not know it, but back in the United States, Nora and I are considered missionaries.
We have a handful of churches who keep up with us and pray for us.
And it is always so encouraging to visit these churches.
They ask us how the ministry here is going- they ask about YOU!
You are the fruit of their prayers!

And we are so thankful that they are devoted to praying for us.

The focus of Paul’s request for prayer for his ministry is very directed.
It’s all about the proclamation of the gospel.
Paul chief work is proclaiming the gospel.
Not serving in the community.
Not remembering the poor.
He would have them focus their prayers on his faithfulness to proclaim the gospel.

There is nothing more important than this.
Therefore, our prayers for those in ministry should be that “**words may be given to [them] in opening [their] mouths boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.**”

So, are you diligent to pray thoughtfully and specifically for others?
And do you pray regularly for those in ministry?

This we are to do with all perseverance. That is, all grit and devotion.
We are to give ourselves to prayer.

So people of God, “pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.”

Amen.