

Get the Most Out of Your Prayer Life

Ephesians 6:18-20

I want to thank Pastor Dan for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today. It is an extra blessing to be able to share God's Word with on my birthday. My original plan was to give the same message from last night, but then I decided to use the same passage, and write a whole new message. So if you came last night you do not have to worry about hearing the same thing. Today I want to talk to you about prayer. If we are going to talk about prayer it is probably a good idea to start with prayer, so let's pray.

Ephesians 6:18-20 says, "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 passage actually begins in verse 10. In verse 10 Paul begins by challenging believers to Put On The Whole Armor of God. How many pieces of Armor has God provided for us? If you have been worshipping with us on Saturday nights then you should know the answer to this question. The answer is 6. God has provided 6 separate pieces of Armor that all connect to make one awesome suit of Armor. The pieces are....

- The Belt of Truth
- The Breastplate of Righteousness
- The Shoes or Sandals of Peace
- The Shield of faith
- The Helmet of Salvation
- The Sword of the spirit

Paul uses this illustration of a Roman Soldier to help believers understand that they need to be prepared for a spiritual battle and that God provides protection that we can rely on in order to have victory. What is interesting is that this chapter doesn't end here. Paul could have stopped writing at this point and we would have been energized and excited thinking about the Armor that God provides his children. You know the sandals of peace are an awesome conversation starter. It is cool to think and talk about the shield of faith and the sword of the spirit. So why does Paul continue to write. Why does he go from talking about the remarkable armor to talking about prayer?

The reason he continues to write is because he wants to teach us another valuable lesson. He wants us to understand the importance of prayer. I am sure that wearing all the Armor is truly impressive, but there is a problem. The problem is that if that is all you have then you do not have enough. You see, the Armor of God is great for providing protection, which is great; we all need protection from the enemy. But we need more than protection to be victorious in our battle. A battle is not just about defense, it is also about offense. In the sports world there is an old saying. "Defense wins championships." While I agree with the basic premise of this saying, you still have to be able to score points. I don't know of any sport where you can win a championship by scoring 0 points. We need to be able to go on the offensive in our battle.

Not only do we need to go on the offensive in this battle, we need power. Like I said earlier Armor is great for protection, but it is not the greatest for providing power. Let me give you an example. Have any of you here today watched an American football game? When I lived in America I watched many football games. During the game you can often see a play where a player would get the ball and run. This player would be so big and strong that one defender was not able to make the tackle. I remember watching games where a running player had 4 or 5 other players hanging on trying to make the tackle. Now that I think about it, many of you may have probably never seen this, so maybe this video clip will help you understand what I am talking about. (Play video slide) American football is a very rough, physical sport. The players all wear a form of armor in their padding and helmets. Yet, as you saw in this video sometimes it is not enough to wear the armor. You see even though they are protected from head to toe, these players lacked one thing. They lacked the POWER to make the play.

Prayer is exactly what we need because Prayer is what gives us access to God. Access to God is where we get the power we need for the battle. It is God's empowerment that gives us victory over the spiritual battles that we will engage in.

Now let me ask you....HOW IS YOUR PRAYER LIFE? Do you feel like it is pretty strong? Do you feel like it is pretty good, but could use some work? Do you feel like it is almost non-existent? Regardless of the condition of your prayer life....this message is for you.

You see, Paul not only tells the church at Ephesus that they need to pray, but he gives some instructions on how they can Prayer more effectively. Guess what. Even after nearly 2,000 years these instructions apply to us. Paul begins these instructions in verse 18.

Great instructions make all the difference in the world. Have you ever bought a piece of furniture at Ikea or Nitori? We have bought several things from these stores over the years and let me tell you I am glad they gave us instructions. There are so many pieces that come in the box that without those instructions it would be very confusing to try and put the furniture together. If I did it without the instructions I would have a bookshelf without any shelves. OK, I know sometimes the instructions from these stores are not the greatest, but you get my point.

Just like these stores, Paul does us a huge favor in this text. He provides clear directions regarding prayer, so that we might discover the power that we need to experience victory in the heat of battle. Paul's instructions involve 3 steps.

Step 1: Don't Ever Hang Up on God.

It is interesting to take note that the "Frequency of our prayers" was a very common theme for Paul. Here in our passage Paul says, "Praying at all times." In other passages he says...

- Philippians 4:6 "But in **everything** let your requests be made known to God."
- Colossians 4:2 "**Devote** yourselves to prayer."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 "pray **without** ceasing."

For Paul this was not only a theme of his writing it was part of his life. Paul never told us to do something that he did not live as an example. How is it possible to "pray at all times?" Good question... but in order to understand this we have to define the term.

- To pray at all times means that we are God- Conscious.
- It means that we live in a constant awareness of His Presence.

You see, praying without ceasing is seeing things from God's viewpoint. When we see a hurt ask God to heal it. When we notice problems turn to God for a solution. Basically, it is depending on God through every area of life. Praying without ceasing does not mean we are constantly praying. God understands that we have to talk to other people. What it means is that we have a spirit of prayer. Praying without ceasing is knowing that we can stop at any moment of the day and talk with God. It is living in such a way that we never have to say "Lord, Come into my presence....because we have never left His presence."

Step 2: Don't Just Ask.

"With all prayer and supplication", in these five words Paul reminds us that prayer comes in several shapes. Supplication, intercession, thanksgiving, praise, honor, blessing, pleading, crying, confessing, etc... These are all forms of prayer. The believer who only focuses on one aspect of prayer is missing out on blessings. For example, if all a person does is ask God for things, then they are going to miss out on the blessings of expressing their love for God in thanksgiving and the joy of praying for another brother or sister in need. Did you know that praise is a great weapon for defeating Satan? The Bible says "That God inhabits the praises of His people." Therefore, if you want to invite God into a problem start praising Him in the midst of your storm and He will show up. One of my favorite worship songs of all time is "Blesses Be Your Name". It contains this powerful line, "Blessed be your name on the road marked with suffering though there is pain in the offering blessed be your name." I want to encourage everyone here today to begin practicing the various forms of prayer.

- ❖ Take the time to ask God to provide your needs.
- ❖ Take the time to Thank God for his blessings.
- ❖ Take the time to praise him and acknowledge his greatness.
- ❖ Take the time to intercede on behalf of someone else.
- ❖ Take the time to confess your sins.
- ❖ Take the time to ask for healing, both physical and spiritual.
- ❖ Take the time to yield to God's will in your life.

There is an easy acronym in English that you can use to remember these steps. It is called A.C.T.S... Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication.

As you apply each of these steps to your prayer life not only will you spend more time praying, but your prayers will develop more depth and substance. You will also gain the added benefit of feeling more fulfilled after praying.

Step 3: Stay Alert & Persistent.

Persistent is pretty easy to understand. It basically means to endure. It means to keep going. Just like the man in Luke 11:5-8 who kept banging on his neighbors door to get some bread to feed his unexpected guests. Another story of persistence that I really like is the healing of the blind man in Luke 18. Let's read this story, Luke 18:35-43,

³⁵ As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶ And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. ³⁷ They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."³⁸ And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ³⁹ And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁰ And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him,⁴¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight." ⁴² And Jesus said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." ⁴³ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God."

This blind man really wanted to be healed. He called out to Jesus, but the people standing there told him to be quiet. Did that stop this man? No, he called out even louder. I imagine the blind man started out in a normal voice, "Jesus over here, over here Jesus." Then as the people told him to be quiet, he raised his voice, "Jesus over here, over here Jesus." His goal was to keep calling until he had Jesus' attention. He kept calling out until Jesus stopped and asked what he wanted. That blind man received his sight that day because he was persistent. This passage reminds us to keep on praying, always persevere, and always endure. Because that is one thing that God is looking for in our prayers. God listens for constant, persistent prayers.

But what does it mean to be alert? Here is the point. We can't persevere in prayer and pray intelligently unless we are alert to the things that are going on. Many of us forget Peter's plea in 1 Peter 4:7 "be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." This verse (in my opinion) describes a believer who is alert to their surroundings so they can pray effectively. Let me ask you a few questions:

- Do you know what is going on in your home? What about with your wife? Do you pray for her faithfully? Do you pray for her spiritual growth and for God to bless her?
- Do you pray for your husband? Do you pray that he might be God's man in every sense of the word? Do you pray that he might make the right decisions and seek to be the spiritual leader in the home?
- Do you pray for your kids? Do you pray that God will build them up in the spirit? Do you pray for God to give them godly friends and remove negative influences? Do you pray that God will keep them from the evil one?
- What about your friends and neighbors? What about the people around you? Do you pray for their salvation? When someone shares a need do you really pray? Or do you simply say that you will?

I read this story this week. "I knew of a man who had stacks of notebooks on his shelves. Within these notebooks were prayer requests that he had made note of over several years. He wrote the request, and also documented the answers. This man has been doing this for about twenty years now and is in his 18 or 19th notebook. Talk about a man who is alert!"

As we conclude I want us to remember that prayer is the power behind the armor. Prayer is what enables us to stand firm in our faith. I know some of us here this morning are probably feeling like your prayer life is empty and lifeless. This morning I don't want you to be discouraged. I want you to be encouraged by the truth that this is a process. It takes time, effort, and work to grow in your prayer life. It can feel awkward when we first begin to pray. Unfortunately, this is why so many Christians are not experiencing victory; they have never gotten past the awkward stage. There is only one way to get past that awkward

stage and that is simply to pray. We have to take the time to be still before God, and share not only your requests but your thoughts and feelings. To grow in prayer, you must pray it is as simple as that. God wants to know you and have a personal relationship with you, take the time to get to know him today.