

Prayer: The Secret Empowerment in Spiritual Warfare

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Introduction: Open your Bible to the book of **Ephesians 6:18**. The title of our message is "Prayer: The Secret Empowerment in Spiritual Warfare".

We are about at the end of our study of spiritual warfare, and almost at the end of our study of the book of Ephesians. Most preachers on TV today and many in the pulpits of our land tell us the Christian Gospel is one of prosperity now. Paul had a very different message. Now is not the time for living for the delicious things of this life. Now is the time to be fighting. There is a serious war in the universe and whether you are aware of it or not, you are at the very center, the ground zero of the attack.

There was a reason God left you on this earth in this mess once you were saved. He left you in the battle to conform you to Christ and demonstrate His power IN you before the angelic and demonic beings of the universe. God demonstrates His grace and power in you by empowering you against the enemy of your soul. There are spiritual powers of wickedness that we fight against each day. Satan's schemes and plans for your life assault you every day.

You are guaranteed victory! **Philippians 1:6**, "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (ESV).

As you know, Paul gives the spiritual warrior's armor in Ephesians 6. Six pieces are named, and then he gives us the attitudes of warfare. It is an attitude of prayer.

Look at **Ephesians 6:18**, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching [keep alert] thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints".

[Prayer for Guidance]

I am calling this message "the secret empowerment of prayer in spiritual warfare" because prayer's power is hidden to most people. This is a self-evident fact since most people do not pray. Even those who walked with Jesus could not pray in the hour of trial because as Christ said, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak". We do not pray as we ought because we either do not know what it means to pray, or we lack the power to pray. We want to, but we cannot get motivated to pray.

I hope to teach us all to pray because the only way forward in victory and power in Christ at this moment is the same as it has always been: Spirit-empowered **praying**. Paul's command for all Christians to pray makes sense because **prayer is essential for our spiritual warfare**. We cannot be overcomers if we do not pray.

The outline is simple:

- The **when** of prayer: "always".
- The **what** of prayer: "with all prayer and supplication".
- The **how** of prayer: "in the Spirit".

Paul begins this passage by telling us to be strong in the Lord. He tells us to put on each piece of spiritual armor, and then in verse 18, Paul gives us the secret power behind spiritual warfare. It is prayer.

How can you be empowered to fight with all the spiritual armor of God? What is the secret? It is prayer. Now the moment we say that, we have all kinds of ideas of what prayer is, so I want to make it very simple for you leave here today equipped to pray. We go forward to war on our knees! How is it that you can go from being an almost prayerless person to a prayer warrior? You must pray. So let's first look at the when of prayer.

- I. **WHEN** are we told to pray? "Praying always..." We are to pray ALWAYS.

The word "always" in **Ephesians 6:18** literally means "in every season" or "every occasion". In other words, prayer is not something we resort to only at the moment of attack. It is not 'crisis praying'. The kind of praying that truly protects us from the schemes of the devil is that which is "in every season".

Paul said to "pray without ceasing" (**2 Thessalonians 5:17**). Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint" (**Luke 18:1**).

Who would dare to raise his hand anywhere in the world and say, "that's me, I've got that covered. I never faint. I pray always, without ceasing". No one can say that. The holiest of God's people fail at this. Many do not even believe "praying always" is possible, because they do not know what it means.

- A. ***So what does this mean to "pray always"?*** —To "pray without ceasing"? Does God really expect us to do this? Doesn't this contradict the fact that "if a man does "not work, neither should he eat" (**2 Thessalonians 3:10**)? We have jobs and responsibilities. How can we pray always and maintain my responsibilities.

1. ***Illustration:*** This was the question that came to a **group of ministers** in the 19th century who were discussing the text "Pray without ceasing". They asked this very question: "How can we pray always?" There were lots of ideas. But when they were done discussing this, no one was satisfied with what it meant. So, there was a little maid girl that came to give them some refreshments. They asked her: "Maybe you can tell us. You're young, but you've experienced the new birth." And they asked her what she thought. "Oh, sirs, that's not so difficult" she said. She explained, "When I arose this morning from bed, as I got dressed, I prayed, 'Lord cloth me today with the righteousness of Christ'. And when I came down to dust this room before you men came, I prayed 'Lord cleanse my heart of all the dust and dirt and filth of sin'. And when I set refreshments before you—food and drink—I prayed, 'Lord be Thou the water and the bread of life to me'. So sirs," she said, "I pray my way through the day".

2. **Explanation:** I believe that this is the answer. God's people have their regular times of private prayer. That's a different subject. You need to have those times in your prayer closet. But when we are praying always—praying our way through the day—there is a close contact between God and our souls—so close that we find ourselves spontaneously **praying throughout the day**. When ought we to pray? Always! Throughout the day.

None of us are praying too much. Worry, business, materialism, media—all these things are like weeds that choke the life out of our prayer life.

3. **Description:** Prayer is truly the breathing of the Christian. We never have to wonder if we should breathe. We are living so we are breathing. So it is with prayer. We are alive in Christ, so we are praying. It is the simple dependence of the soul on the Lord. It's often **not** elaborate or complicated at all. It's often just a sigh or a cry—"Lord help me! Lord be near to me! Lord cleanse me. Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me!" If you are a believer, you know what I mean. When things are right, you feel small and weak in yourself, but strong in God. And there are these intense, unseen inward sighs and cries and groans to God, like a lost child whose just found his daddy. But when we are not right with God, we are either **self-sufficient** or in a **panic**, and our prayer times are reduced to the times when we stop and formally pray. And our prayers are dry and dead. We lose the spirit of prayer, and we become either proud or panicked.

What Paul is saying here is **exactly this**: if you want to defeat the enemy, you need that close life with the Lord—that intimate childlike feeling in your soul—crying out to the Lord with sighs and cries and groans.

How little we do of this groaning! Above all the armor Paul tells us to put on so that we will not be taken by the devil's schemes, he says we are to be "praying always"! Can I ask you a question? What are you "always" doing? We are men and women branded for eternity. We have the Spirit's seal of ownership on us. Yet we often get caught the trap of that which is immediate, but of little eternal value.

- B. **A Christian who is not praying is out of his element as soon as he stops praying.** It's like telling any human being to stop breathing. It's like thrusting him under water for a long period of time. We Christians must breath spiritually. We must pray! If not, we feel like a bird out of the nest. We long to go back to our place of security. Christians suffer from great insecurity when they are not praying. But in the Spirit of prayer, we can face the most impossible circumstances with courage and a great sense of confidence. Prayer connects us to God's supernatural power. Prayer is that abiding in Christ (**John 15**)—it is a spirit of dependence on God. It is that walking, keeping in step with the Spirit's voice (**Galatians 5:16**).

Prayer is the Christian's spiritual breath! It is the climate control of our soul. **As air is to our lungs, so prayer is to our spiritual being** (Joel Beeke). Prayer prevents us from panic and pride. We are childlike and humble, but not panicked.

- “Men ought always to pray and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).
- “Continue instant in [Being Devoted to] prayer” (Romans 12:12)
- “...Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee...” (Psalm 50:15).
- We are told to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).
- “Call unto me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not” (Jeremiah 33:3).
- **James 5:16**, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”.

Prayer matters! You cannot come away from these words thinking it does not matter that you pray. Is your life saturated with prayer? If you don't pray, you can't be an asset to the kingdom of God.

Prayer matters! It avails much. It is the difference between victory and failure. Spiritual success always includes prayer. We must meditate on the Word, but if we are without prayer, we have no spiritual motivation or vision.

Illustration: Think of the Christian armor as a beautiful fancy car. It looks new, smells new, but if it doesn't have oil, it is useless. It won't run. You'll destroy the engine if you try to run it without oil. You see, you can wear all the Christian armor, but if you don't oil it all in prayer, it's useless

You can have all the right armor; you can do all the right things, but if you don't have the oil of Spirit-filled prayer, everything will break down. Perhaps God is disciplining you right now because of your pride. He's let you go for a little while without that intensity, and you long for it. You miss it. It's time for you now, even right now as I deliver this message, to cry out to Him in prayer. “O Lord teach me to pray!” “God, restore unto me the joy of my salvation!” And the Lord will do that. Everyone who cries to Him in childlike trust gets an answer. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13).

We need to pray always. God will always give us what we need according to His will. But “ye have not because ye ask not” (James 4:2). Begin a life of constant prayer right now! Now if you don't God has a way to bring to that kind of “practicing the presence of God”.

- C. ***You see, God often uses pressure and Satan's attacks to teach us to pray.*** He puts us in the vice grip of hardship and difficulty and trial until we are squeezed out of our miserable rotten self-sufficiency. And we cry out, “O God be merciful to me!” “O God cleanse me, let me bear fruit”.

God uses the very attacks of Satan to stir up our Spirit of prayer. We are made “strong in the power of His might” through the spirit of prayer, and then all of our battles work together for good. “All things work together for good to them who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”.

Isn't that amazing? Every single device that Satan uses to destroy the people of God, God will use to mature His own people. Think about that. It is comforting. We are to pray always. The spirit of prayer is the secret empowerment of spiritual warfare.

It's not just the praying that we do with our eyes closed, but the praying we do with our eyes open. It's the praying as we drive, work, eat. It is the dedication of our heart to God in everything. It is a meditation on the Word and our hearts response to God in prayer as we live.

So the WHEN of prayer is "always". It is the very breath of the Christian. It is the childlike crying out of the soul to God.

Now we come a very juicy part of the message. We've looked at the **WHEN** of prayer. Now we look at the **WHAT** of prayer.

II. We are told **WHAT** to pray. What are we to pray about? Paul says we are to "pray always with all prayer and supplication".

You might say, "I want to be a GREAT prayer warrior for God". But you feel inadequate. You feel it is an impossible goal.

The story goes that a group of tourists visiting a picturesque village saw an old man sitting by a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one of the visitors asked, "Were any great men born in this village?" Without looking up the old man replied, "No, only babies." The greatest men were once babies. The greatest saints were once toddlers in the things of the Spirit.

If you are a toddler in prayer, I want to tell you how to grow. It's very surprising how you grow in prayer.

Paul says we are to pray always "with all prayer and supplication".

A. Ok, we see first we are to **utilize all different types of praying**. Not just private, but also public. Not just praying for my needs, but interceding for the needs of others. I'm not just to pray to relieve my burdens—in prayer I am to praise God! I am to spend time meditating on WHO He is, and to be filled with the JOY of His presence. "The JOY of the Lord is my strength!" I'm to pray for cleansing from sin in repentance. "Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me!" I'm to pray for souls to be saved. "Lord give me utterance, give me boldness". I'm to pray always "with all types of prayer". In all seasons I am to pray.

Now understand, prayer does not mean that you always use words! Tears sometimes have a language that the Lord accepts more than words!

- **John Bunyan** put it this way on his death bed, "It is better when thou prayest to rather let thy heart be without words, than thy words without a heart". Some of our shortest prayers, like "Lord help me" are our most effectual prayer. God is not looking for eloquence or length, but sincerity!

- The what of prayer is to pray for every need. "Pray always with all prayer". There is nothing too small or too large to ask of the Lord if you see it as according to God's will. That doesn't mean we bring a grocery list to Him, but neither does it mean that we are afraid to ask anything of him, no matter how small or great.

Mary Windslow said, "Tell the Lord everything about you in prayer, as if He knew nothing about you yet knowing He knows all things about you" pray! Tell God everything. We do not tell Him what to do, but we release all things to His hands.

But now we the easiest thing about prayer, but the hardest to practice. What am I to pray?

- B. I am to pray with all prayer and **supplication**. This word "supplication" is filled with **agony**. Supplication always has reference to an urgency in prayer which is the result of a deeply burdened heart. We are talking about passionate, desirous, agonizing prayer. ***This is effectual fervent prayer that avails much!***

This kind of attitude in prayer is an agony because it is seeing yourself as a beggar. By the Spirit of God, you are made to feel your need of God, and you groan and cry like a child to your heavenly Father. Leonard Ravenhill said it best. He said, "God doesn't answer prayer. He answers *desperate* prayer! Your prayer life denotes how much you depend on your own ability...The more self-confidence you have, the less you pray. The less self-confidence you have, the more you *have* to pray."

1. ***Prayer is the language of the poor.*** We must see ourselves in utter spiritual poverty outside of the sweet presence of God. We must become childlike in our attitude in order to have a life of constant prayer. God hears the prayers of the "poor in spirit".

We must become poor and helpless in our own eyes. We must lose our concern of what others think of us. We must become desperate. In short, we must die. WE must enter into the sufferings of Christ and be crucified to all that we are and hope to be in this world and live as a humble child for Christ.

- **David** was a man of this supplicating prayer. Over and over again King David says, "Incline Thine ear, O Lord, and answer me; for I am afflicted and needy" (**Psalm 86:1**). And do you remember that one of the greatest psalms he wrote says, "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him..." (**Psalm 34:6**).
- When we read about **the apostle Paul** we are overwhelmed with his spiritual fervency, his pedigree, his intellectual brilliance. Yet he says he's that when he's **weak**, he is **strong**. He was always trying to prove to himself and to others that he was a nobody. He said in the first chapter of **1 Corinthians, verses 26 and following**, "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the

weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty...
29 That no flesh should glory in his presence".

We often think we have everything on this earth when we are satisfied in our flesh. But that is when our heart is hard and we are really poor. If you want to be rich in all that God has, you've got to be poor in spirit. "Blessed *are the poor in spirit*: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

2. ***To understand supplicating prayer, we must look at the life of Jesus.***

Hebrews 5:7 tells us how Christ prayed when He walked on earth. It says that He "in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared".

Christ goes forth conquering and to conquer. We are called to conquer with Christ. We must go forward on our knees!!

Luke has been called the Gospel of prayer.

- Matthew, Mark, and John tell us that the Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism. Luke records for us that *while Jesus was praying* that the Spirit descended on Him.
- The other evangelists say that Jesus chose 12 disciples - Luke says it was after He spent *a night in prayer* that He chose 12 disciples.
- The other evangelists say that Jesus died on a cross - Luke says that even when He was dying *Jesus was praying* for those who persecuted Him.
- The other evangelists say Jesus went on a mount and He was transfigured - Luke says it was *while He was praying* that He was transfigured. There's nothing more transfiguring than prayer.

If we are to understand supplication, we must look to the life of Jesus. "...in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (**Hebrews 5:7**). If Christ the perfect man, God in human flesh found it necessary to pray, how much more must we?!

Do you have that constant spirit of supplication, earnest, urgent, desirous prayer?

III. **HOW** can we pray as we ought to? We are to pray in the SPIRIT. Paul says if we are to have success on the spiritual battlefield we are to be "Praying always with all prayer and supplication **in the Spirit**, and watching [keep alert] thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (**Ephesians**

6:18). A Christian is to pray "in the Spirit". There really is no other way to pray.

A. But what does it mean to pray "in the Spirit"? It means to be alerted always to the presence of God in you. Your union with Christ through the Spirit. Paul says **Galatians 5:16**, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh". Literally, we are to "keep in step with the Spirit".

Illustration: When I was a child, I used to walk with my brother Scott who was 14 years older than me. I was about 4 foot tall at that time, and he was 6 foot six inches. I can remember those walks. All I saw were his huge long legs, and I would try to keep in step with him. Granted, I gave two steps for his one, but I kept pace with him.

Are you keeping pace with the Spirit of God. Are you yielding to Him, giving yourself to total surrender every moment?

B. Why is it so important to "pray in the Spirit"? We have to understand that prayer does not change God, prayer changes us.

Let us understand that God decrees all things. He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (**Ephesians 1:11**). What does that mean? It means nothing has changed in God's plan from the foundation of the world. Every second and every molecule has been planned. But we are not robots. God decrees all things, but for Christians, He sends His Spirit to work out His decree through them.

James tells us in **James 5:16**, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much". Prayer avails much, not because we are getting something out of God. God is changing us. Why does fervent prayer avail much?

C. Words are not necessary to pray effectually in the Spirit. Paul said in another place that "the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (**Romans 8:26-27**).

We don't have the power to pray, so we rely on the Spirit. How can you be empowered by God's Spirit—enlivened and quickened to pray? It is not difficult to understand, but it is very difficult to practice.

Conclusion: Are you praying always? Are you praying with "all prayer and supplication"? Do you have that spirit of unburdening your heart constantly to God? Are you praying "in the Spirit"? Are you walking "in the Spirit"? David said, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (**Psalms 16:11**). Are you practicing the presence of God?

This is the secret power in spiritual warfare. You can have all the armor on, but without prayer, you are a car without oil, a bird without wings, a ship on dry land!! Put on the whole armor of God! Arm yourself! But go forward on your knees! Go forward in the power of the Spirit and in the spirit of prayer!!

