

## EPHESIANS WEEK #16 – SJGC

Spiritual Warfare Part 3 - Prayer

Ephesians 6:18-24

### **PATTI**

The story is told that during WW2, an officer was briefing his men on how to take a certain objective. He demonstrated to them how they needed to hug the ground so as to stay below enemy fire. Then he said in conclusion, **“If you advance on your knees, you will always be safe.”**

In this chapter we heard Paul explain 2 weeks ago that we must be strong in the Lord because of the spiritual fight we’re engaged in against the forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Last week, we looked at the artillery or the weapons that we have been given by the Spirit of God to engage the fight.

And finally, tonight, we’ll explore the nature of the fight, which is to advance on our knees.

### **1. We fight for God against the enemy THROUGH PRAYER**

Paul often links the two words translated prayer and petition. In our text, the effect of Paul’s piling up these synonyms for prayer is to emphasize **the PRIORITY OF PRAYER in spiritual warfare** and the fact that there are **different kinds of prayer** that we are to use in the battle.

It’s no coincidence that The Lord’s Prayer, which we pray each week together at worship, gives us a helpful outline of these different kinds of prayer...

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9), leads us to worship as we pray for God’s glory.

“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10) points to prayer for mission, evangelism, and discipleship.

[“Give us this day our daily bread”](#) (Matt. 6:11)

is prayer for our personal needs.

[“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”](#) (Matt. 6:12), is confession of sins and prayer for our relationships.

[“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”](#) (Matt. 6:13) is prayer for holiness, both for others and for ourselves.

The prayers in the Psalms and in other Scriptures may give us other types of prayer.

But Paul’s point is that we fight for God against the enemy as we use all types of prayer.

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### **2. We fight for God against evil by praying AT ALL TIMES**

You may be thinking, “Come on, Paul, be realistic! I have to make a living! I have to go to school! I have to take care of my home and my family. How can I pray at all times?”

The phrase means literally, [“at every opportunity.”](#)

It’s the same idea as 1 Thessalonians 5:17, which says, [“Pray without ceasing.”](#)

The Greek word translated “without ceasing” was used to describe both a hacking cough and repeated military assaults. Both are intermittent but consistently repeated over a period of time. In the same way, we should pray often and repeatedly until we gain the thing for which we are praying.

To obey this exhortation means that, when we are tempted, we hold the temptation before God and ask for His help.

When we experience something good and beautiful, we immediately thank the Lord for it.

When we see evil around us, we pray that God will make it right, and be willing to be used

by Him to that end.

When we meet someone who does not know Christ,  
we pray for God to draw that person to Himself  
and to use us to be a faithful witness.

When we encounter trouble, we turn to God  
as our Deliverer.

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In other words, our life becomes a continually ascending prayer  
as we go through our normal day. We are communing  
with our heavenly Father as we encounter various  
circumstances, people, emotions, and choices.

Prayer isn't just rushing into God's presence  
as if you were rushing into the bank to get  
some needed funds and then not going back  
until you need more.

Prayer is going into the bank many times throughout the day  
because you're in love with the teller and enjoy being with Him.

Also, when we're in need, prayer is not to be our last resort:  
How many times in your life have you said (or thought)  
"We've done everything we can think of. Now, all we can do is pray!"

John Bunyan said, "You can do more than pray after you have prayed,  
but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed" (source unknown).  
Prayer should be the first thing that we think to do when we're aware of a need.

Also, prayer should not a mere formality before a meal or to open a meeting.

It's the way that we acknowledge our need and  
dependence on God and lay hold of His promises.

We should pray, of course, before meals and meetings,  
but that ritual can either be empty or full of meaning,  
depending on the intention we bring to it,  
sort of like kissing your spouse before leaving

the house in the morning for those who are married.

Martin Luther said, “As is the business of tailors  
to make clothes and cobblers to make shoes,  
so it is the business of Christians to pray”  
(continually, unceasingly).

## **JEFF**

### **3. We fight for God against evil by PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT**

What does it mean to “pray in the Spirit”? This phrase is mentioned both here and also in Jude 20, but it is often misunderstood by Christians as either praying in tongues or praying with emotion. Lutheran Christians aren’t against such expressions, of course, it’s just that they don’t add up to what Paul is talking about here.

#### **A. TO PRAY IN THE SPIRIT IS TO PRAY IN DEPENDENCE ON THE SPIRIT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOD’S WORD.**

Three comments on praying in the Spirit:

##### **(1). I CAN’T PRAY IN THE SPIRIT IF I HAVE UNCONFESSED SIN IN MY LIFE.**

Psalm 66:18 states,  
**“If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”**  
God knows our hearts. We can’t play games, thinking that we can disobey Him and then come and sweet talk Him into giving us what we want.

##### **(2). PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT IS TO PRAY ACCORDING TO GOD’S WILL AS REVEALED IN HIS WORD.**

Paul has just told us to take “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (6:17). The Spirit will never lead us to pray contrary to God’s will as revealed in the Bible.

One way of praying in the Spirit is to use the prayers in Scripture to direct your own requests.

We've studied two of Paul's prayers in Ephesians  
(Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21).

There are many other prayers in the Bible, too.  
All of God's commandments in Scripture can and should  
be turned into prayer for holiness in the lives of God's people,  
too, including your own life.

To pray in the Spirit is to pray according to God's will  
as revealed in His Word.

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#### **(3). TO PRAY IN THE SPIRIT IS TO PRAY UNDER HIS DIRECTION AND POWER.**

Occasionally, when I'm struggling to pray and  
finding it difficult to concentrate, and  
not sensing the Lord's presence,  
the Holy Spirit prompts me to pray something specific  
directing my thoughts and words and  
giving me power and freedom in prayer  
that I was lacking moments before.

When that happens, the Spirit is moving me along  
in prayer that originates WITH HIM.

Also, at times the Spirit puts the same request  
on my heart with a frequency and intensity that  
that I previously lacked.

Maybe it's on my prayer list and I mechanically went through the list.  
But then one item comes home to me with unusual force.  
I believe that this is, in part, what it means to pray in the Spirit.  
We should keep praying, even when we don't feel  
this movement or leadership of the Spirit.  
But we also should ask the Holy Spirit for His  
direction and power as we pray.

**So, fight for God by praying with all kinds of prayer, at all times, in the Spirit.**

#### **4. Fight for God by praying alertly with all perseverance.**

### A. PRAY ALERTLY!

Jesus told the disciples in the garden (Matt. 26:41),  
 “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation;  
 the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”  
 As you know, they promptly went to sleep!  
 But before I condemn them, I’ve got to admit that I’ve often done the same!

This word “be alert” ties in with the military analogy.  
 You’re a sentry on duty. You must watch for any signs  
 of infiltration by the enemy and go immediately to prayer.  
 Do you see a person who is suffering?  
 Pray that Satan might not get their eyes off the Lord  
 and devour them in their trial (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Do you see someone who is depressed or discouraged?  
 Pray that she will put her trust in God and His salvation.  
 Do you see a husband and wife who are having conflict? Pray!  
 Do you hear of church members at odds with one another?  
 The devil will tempt you to gossip about it.  
 But the Spirit wants you to be alert and pray!

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### B. PRAY WITH PERSEVERANCE

This is one of the aspects of prayer that I find most difficult.  
 Jesus told the parable of the widow who kept pestering  
 the hardhearted judge, until finally he relented  
 just to get her off his back.

Jesus assures us that God is not uncaring like that  
 unrighteous judge, but He will bring about justice  
 speedily for His elect who cry out to Him.

Jesus’ reason for telling that parable was,  
 “to show that at all times [we] ought to pray  
 and not to lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

Yet, Paul’s word about perseverance, not to mention our experience,  
 shows that Jesus’ promise of God answering speedily  
 must be interpreted by God’s view of time, not ours.

So, we fight for God against evil by praying with all kinds of prayer, at all times, in the Spirit, and by praying alertly with perseverance. And lastly,

### **5. We fight for God by praying for all the saints.**

#### A. PRAY FOR ALL THE SAINTS BECAUSE THEY ARE YOUR FELLOW SOLDIERS.

If you're on the battlefield and your fellow soldiers get shot, you're in big trouble! We're not Christians in isolation, but in fellowship with each other in the entire church!

As Paul has emphasized earlier in our study of Ephesians, we are one body in Christ. If one member hurts, the whole body hurts. Also, praying for your fellow soldiers in the battle will motivate you to love them and work out any relational conflicts.

It's difficult to pray for someone and still be at odds with them. Pick up a church directory and work your way through it, praying for each person. Even if you don't know the people, if you meet them there will be an instant connection, because you've been praying for them.  
Or, you can call and say, "I'm praying for you.  
Do you have any special requests?  
Could we arrange to meet at church this Sunday?"

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#### B. PRAY ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE ON THE FRONT LINES OF MINISTRY.

Paul asks for prayer for himself, that he will "make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (6:19-20).

Every Christian is in ministry, but evangelists, missionaries, pastors, teachers, and other Christian leaders are particularly targeted by the enemy.

When Paul mentions "the mystery of the gospel" in v. 19, he doesn't mean that it is a hidden secret, but rather that it is divinely revealed truth. It is not logical truth that anyone can deduce

on their own. Rather, God must open blind eyes to see it.  
So Paul asked for prayer for boldness as he  
proclaimed this revealed mystery.

When you read through the Book of Acts, you don't  
get the impression that Paul was lacking in boldness!  
In fact, he was in prison because he had boldly  
proclaimed the gospel to a mob that had attempted to  
kill him! When you read what he had endured for  
the sake of the gospel, it seems that nothing could stop him (2 Cor. 11:23-29).  
So why was he asking prayer for boldness in witness?

Maybe for two reasons. First, Paul was not a strong,  
naturally gifted communicator. The Corinthians had said of him,  
"His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence  
is unimpressive and his speech is contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10).

He says that he was with them "in weakness and in fear and  
in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). He knew that he was inadequate  
in himself, so he needed prayer for boldness (2 Cor. 3:5).

Second, Paul was about to go before Caesar, who would  
either acquit or condemn him. There would be the strong  
temptation to be diplomatic and to avoid talking to Caesar  
about his need for repentance from his sin in order to receive  
God's forgiveness in Christ.

Perhaps Satan tempted Paul with the thought, "Think of how  
many more you could reach if you get out of prison!  
Just play it safe when you go before Caesar and you'll  
have your freedom." But Paul wanted to proclaim the gospel  
boldly and clearly to Caesar. So he asked for prayer.

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I want to encourage you to please pray for Christian leaders  
to be fearless and uncompromising when it comes to the gospel.  
Pray for us and for Pastor Seth! Pray for Pastor Karen and your  
church staff and council.

When the great evangelist Charles Spurgeon was once asked

the secret of his great success, he could have surely pointed to many factors, he simply replied, "My people pray for me."

### C. PRAY FOR YOURSELF, THAT YOU WOULD BE BOLD AND CLEAR IN YOUR WITNESS TO JESUS.

It's amazing that Paul did not ask for prayer that he would be released from prison or for prayer for his health needs. Rather, he asked for prayer that he would proclaim the gospel boldly and not miss any opportunities.

While right and good to pray for your personal needs, Paul's example here, as well as the Lord's Prayer, teach us that our primary focus in prayer should be furthering of God's kingdom, not making ourselves more comfortable.

So make Paul's passion your passion, to pray that you will be used to proclaim the gospel to the lost with clarity and boldness.

### **PATTI**

The book of Ephesians began by lifting us up to the heavens, and ends by pulling us down to our knees. But before we do what our text has encouraged us to do, I want to let you know that we will be taking a break next week, so there won't be teaching posted on Wednesday evening.

The following week, however, we will be back with a new bible study that we're calling, "Living Beyond Yourself," where we'll explore the Fruit of the Spirit that is found in Galatians 5:13-26. We felt that it would be timely to study these 9 characteristics such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and goodness that God grows in believers who walk by the Spirit.

We'll begin this study then on October 21.

### PRAYER:

Father, thank you for opening our hearts and minds to the truth

of your Word for us in the book of Ephesians. I pray for my fellow prayer warriors in ambassadors for Christ that together, we may might fight well, pray well, and represent you and your Kingdom well to those around us, until you call us home. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We'll see you on October 21.