

Main Idea: In Ephesians 6:18-20, we learn that prayer serves a vital role as we seek to stand in our spiritual struggle. But not just generic prayer. We need to pray in three ways.

I. Pray with particulars (18a).

- A. Battle time prayer involves consistency.
 - 1. We live in the age of the Spirit.
 - 2. Praying ought to be as natural as breathing for the Christian.
- B. Battle time prayer involves communication.
 - 1. It doesn't mean you must always be on your knees.
 - 2. It means you are living your life with a God-consciousness.
- C. Battle time prayer involves cooperation.
 - 1. Praying in the Spirit means to pray in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. Praying in the Spirit is the same thing as praying in the name of Christ.

II. Pray with persistence (18b).

- A. This requires dependence.
 - Key: “Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for.”
(John Piper)
- B. This requires determination.
 - 1. It's not popular today to talk about spiritual discipline.
 - 2. It may not be popular, but it's absolutely essential.
- C. This requires the denial of self.
 - 1. We must refuse to focus on ourselves.
 - 2. We must choose to focus on God's agenda for His people.

III. Pray for people (19-20).

Implications: We are at war, so we must live and pray with a warfare mentality.

This morning we're concluding our series, “*The Christian and the Armor of God.*” Let me remind you why we launched this series. It's because we are engaged in a spiritual warfare. We have an enemy who hates the Living God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and the mission He is fulfilling right now in the world, rescuing hell-bound sinners and reconciling them to Himself. And he hates us too, those who have been rescued by Christ, and is seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). But our Savior has given us exactly what we need to stand in this battle. Armor. His own armor. And one more essential, that we'll see in today's text. Prayer. But not just generic prayer. A very specific kind of prayer. Wartime prayer.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 6:18-20

A few years ago, Sherry put up a bird feeder so we could watch the little creatures. Nothing much happened for a couple of weeks and then one day some beautiful yellow finches showed up. We enjoyed watching those spectacular, colorful creatures, and even talked about putting up another feeder to attract some other colorful creatures.

Then something happened. We were sitting on the porch watching the finches, when all the sudden some sparrows showed up, first a couple of them. Then four or five, then eventually wave after wave of sparrows, fifteen, twenty, and more.

I'll be honest. My first thought was to go over and shew away those pesky sparrows. They're messy and noisy. You can't fill them up, and they keep inviting their friends who are just as messy, noisy, uncolorful, and demanding.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

² For a previous look at this passage, see the series on “Living with a Warfare Mentality” at WBC in 2003, as well as “The Armor of God” in 2013.

And then, I recalled something that Jesus said. “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father (Matt 10:29).”

Interesting. Our God cares for sparrows. *Sparrows?* I’d never really thought about Jesus’ choice of birds before. Yellow finch, sure. Hummingbird, why not? They have color, and some personality. They give you some pleasure as you feed and watch them.

But Jesus didn’t say *yellow finch* or *hummingbird*. He said that God sees and cares about the uncolorful, messy, what-have-you-done-for-me-lately sparrow.³

Jesus’ choice of bird says so much to us about our God, doesn’t it? And how we view Him will affect how we view talking with Him. Which brings us to this morning’s subject. *Prayer.*

In Ephesians 6:10-18, we find General Paul giving last minute battle instructions to the army of Christian soldiers in Ephesus. Earlier in the letter, with great care he explained in chapters 1-3 the **resources** they have in Christ (“every spiritual blessing in heavenly places,” he says in 1:3; which is essentially the same thing as “the armor of God,” as he refers to it at the end of the letter). Then in chapters 4-6, he moved to **responsibilities**, and demonstrated the differences these spiritual blessings should make in the way Christ-followers live, and do church, and family, and work.

And then, as he finishes his letter, he offers a very specific exhortation. He says in Ephesians 6:10, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” We must not try to live the Christian life in our own strength. Why not? The reason is clear. We’re in a battle, a fierce spiritual battle with a clever, cunning enemy, and we lack the ability in and of ourselves to stand against this enemy.

But what we lack, God has supplied. Thus, this charge in verses 11-12, “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

So can we stand in this battle, or is our foe too great? Yes, we can stand, but first we must protect ourselves. How? By putting on the armor of God (14-17). Think of putting on the armor of God as a daily recognition and admission of your need for Christ. When you put on God’s armor, you are aligning yourself on the victory side, right next to Jesus Christ. Indeed, you are putting on Christ, for He is the armor.

So if we know Christ, this is ours. And if this is ours, this is what we must affirm and appropriate every day as we seek to fulfill our Christ-given mission. Paul details six pieces of armor: the belt of truth (14), the breastplate of righteousness (14), the gospel of peace boots (15), the faith shield (16), salvation’s helmet (17), and the Spirit’s sword which is the Word of God (18).

What we need, we have. And what we have, we need. Yes, we need the armor of God. Why? So we can stand against the evil one and his demonic hosts.

In the past couple of messages we’ve been learning about our armor. When it comes to our armor, we must know what we have. That’s the purpose of verses 10-17, to tell us what we have. But merely knowing what we have is not enough.

Obviously, we must put it on. And how do we do that? Essentially, Paul tells us how in verse 18. By praying. But not just generic prayer. We need to pray in three ways. One, pray with particulars. Two, pray with persistence. Three, pray for people.

³ This is from our western perspective, of course. In biblical times sparrows represented a small class of birds that ate grain and could provide a meal for the poor.

I. Pray with particulars (18a).

Notice the first part of verse 18 (ESV), “Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.”⁴ Is Paul saying that prayer is another piece of armor? No, it's more than that. It works in connection with the armor, and must accompany every piece of armor.

In the original text “praying” is a participle. It modifies the verb “stand” back in verse 14. We stand by praying. So this is battle-time praying, and since the word is plural, it indicates that prayer is not an activity of a few spiritual elites in the church, but something we all can and must do.

In his book, *The Fight*, John White writes, “Hell's legions are terrified of prayer. Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.” Prayer is how we appropriate what we have in Christ. Prayer is how we stand. It's ironic, yet true. We stand against the evil one by falling on our faces before God.

Though our text is brief, it's packed with relevant truth. It shows us that battle time prayer involves three particulars.

A. Battle time prayer involves consistency. “And pray in the Spirit *on all occasions*,” Paul exhorts (NIV). “Praying always,” is how the KJV begins the verse (literally, “in all times”).

It's significant that we see the word “all” four times (ESV): “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.” The first “all” emphasizes consistency. Pray at *all* times. Don't miss Paul's emphasis on consistency in prayer.

Some of you may have come out of backgrounds where you read out of a prayer book, or prayed prayers at certain times of the day. The Jewish people prayed at specified times. Remember Daniel? As a good Jew, he prayed three times a day.

But when Christ came, He established a new era. He sent His Spirit at Pentecost to indwell all who believe in Him. This means two things for us.

1. *We live in the age of the Spirit.* To put it another way, we live in the age of prayer, and do not pray merely at set times anymore. We are to pray at all times.

2. *Praying ought to be as natural as breathing for the Christian.* It was for Paul. He's already prayed twice in the letter of Ephesians (1:15-23 and 3:14-21; more about that in a moment). He certainly prayed for others as well, as his other letters constantly indicate (Phil 1:3-4 “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always. . .” Col 1:9 “. . . we do not cease to pray for you. . .” 1 Thes 1:2 “We give thanks to God always for you all” 2 Tim 1:3 “I thank God that without ceasing I have remembrance of you in my prayers night and day.”).

So Paul prayed a lot. He prayed continually and consistently. Do we? If we know Christ, prayer is as vital for us as is breathing. But for many of us, it's not. Why not? I think the answer is pretty basic. We've forgotten that we're at war.

One of the most helpful chapters on prayer I've ever read comes from the book by John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*. I've shared this with you before, but it's worth re-reading regularly.

Life is war. That's not all it is. But it is always that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a

⁴ In the NIV, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”

domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world. Prayer gives *us* the significance of front-line forces, and gives *God* the glory of a limitless Provider. The one who gives the power gets the glory.⁵

I'll return to Piper in a moment, but fix your thoughts on this image. *God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie*, NOT a *domestic intercom*. When does the switch occur? The short answer is, when we forget we're at war. So if our prayer life isn't marked by consistency, it's likely because we've lost sight of the fact that we are at war against an enemy who is too strong for us to handle on our own.

B. Battle time prayer involves communication. What kind of communication? "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions *with all kinds of prayers and requests.*" The ESV and KJV both read, "With all prayer and supplication."

Again, this is basic, yet vital to see. Prayer is communication. We are talking with a Person when we pray, indeed, with the triune God. We pray to our Heavenly Father, through the authority of the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Praying has nothing to do with formulas, and proper wording, and tone of voice. When someone says, "I can't pray in public because I don't know the right words to say," they're indicating they don't understand what God intends prayer to be. It's battle time communication, and the person we're communicating with is the living and personal God who created and saved us.

So what about posture? This instruction in verse 18 indicates there's variety.

1. *It doesn't mean you must always be on your knees.* That's only one kind of prayer. Paul says to pray with "all kinds of prayers."

2. *It means you are living your life with a God-consciousness.* Are we conscious that God is with us when we're driving to work, or sitting in class at school, or watching TV? He is, you know.

This is so key. Everything I see and experience in life provides an opportunity to pray. It's something I can share with my Heavenly Father. Think of prayer as a constant dialogue with the Person in the universe who loves me most, my best friend.

When I'm picked on at school, I tell my friend about it, "Lord, you know what I'm going through. Thank you for caring. Help me to honor you in the way I respond."

When I enjoy a great family time I express to my best friend, "Lord, thank you for my family. May Your purposes be accomplished with us."

When I read the news and see evil that shakes my soul, I pray, "O Lord, would You make that right?"

When I rub shoulders with an unsaved neighbor, I bring a request to the Lord, "He needs You. Would You cause Your kingdom to come in his life?"

If you are a Christian and you don't commune with God like that, you're missing out on one of the very purposes for which He saved you. God saved us so that He might walk with us, and we with Him, in perfect fellowship. 1 John 1:3 says, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

Take it a step further. Prayer involves communication, yes, but what kind? When we communicate with our best friend, do we say the same thing every time we have a conversation? Neither should we in prayer.

⁵ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 41.

Verse 18 says our communication in prayer should involve variety. “Pray... with all kinds of prayers and requests [‘supplication’ in the ESV, a term which refers to specific requests].” In other words, there are general prayers and specific prayers. There ought to be variety in our praying.

John MacArthur puts it this way, “There are different ways to pray. Some people think the only way to pray is on your knees. Some people think the only way you can pray is with your hands up. Others think you must have your hands folded. Some people think you have to pray out of a prayer book. Paul says, ‘Pray all the time with all kinds of prayers.’ You can pray in public or in private, with loud cries or quiet whispers. It can be deliberate or spontaneous. There can be prayers of request, thanksgiving, confession, and praise. You can be kneeling, standing, lifting up your hands, or lying prostrate. . . We’re to pray throughout the flow of life. . . Prayer is a way of life.”

Is it for you? Do you have variety in your prayer life? If not, let’s grow in this area. Or “grow up” might be a better way to think of it. When we’re two years old, we talk to our father one way, and it’s certainly special. But if we’re stilling using the same words at age twelve, or certainly age twenty-two, something’s off. It’s an indication we haven’t matured, that we don’t know the person very well with whom we’re communicating.

C. Battle time prayer involves cooperation. “Praying at all times *in the Spirit*,” says Paul. We find similar words in Jude 20, “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” What does it mean to pray “in the Spirit?” Is it something mystical? Is it related to speaking in tongues? No.

1. *Praying in the Spirit means to pray in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.*

2. *Praying in the Spirit is the same thing as praying in the name of Christ.* What we pray should be consistent with who Jesus is, and what His will is. To pray in the Spirit is to pray for those things which will please Christ, not merely ourselves. It also involves praying in the power of the Spirit, and not our own. Praying in the Spirit is simply making my prayers consistent with the mind and will of the Holy Spirit.

Remember, the Lord Jesus said He would send the Holy Spirit to be His substitute, resident helper in this age (John 14:16-17). Since the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, He helps God’s people to do those things that are Christ-like. This includes praying.

In Romans 8 Paul elaborates on the Spirit’s role in prayer by saying, Romans 8:15-16, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

So the Spirit gives us assurance and access to the Father. He also does this, according to Romans 8:26-27, “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.”

Paul says something similar in Galatians 4:6, “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”

The point is, prayer involves not only consistency and communication, but a beautiful cooperation. We pray *in the Spirit*, that is, with the help of the person of God the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we need more than instruction. We need examples, or a pattern to follow. Thankfully, when it comes to prayer, Paul gives us both in Ephesians. He has already modeled what he’s exhorting us to do. Earlier in Ephesians he (guided by the Holy

Spirit) took the time and effort and ink to actually record two of his own prayers. Let's read them, and learn from them, paying attention to the particulars of Paul's prayer.

His first prayer, Ephesians 1:15-20 – “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.”

What a meaningful prayer! So much more than merely saying, “Lord, bless the Ephesians today!” Then two chapters later Paul records his second prayer:

Ephesians 3:14-21 – “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

Brothers and sisters, this is what war-time praying sounds like, so let's learn from Paul. Let's resolve to pray these kinds of prayers, to pray with particulars.

I challenge you to set aside daily time for prayer. I challenge you to talk with the Lord throughout the day. I challenge you to take advantage of opportunities to pray with your brothers and sisters in organized church services (as we'll be doing this evening in our back to school special prayer meeting on zoom), and spontaneously as well.

II. Pray with persistence (18b).

Verse 18 continues, “To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.”⁶ “Keep alert” is actually a participle, just as “praying” was in the first part of the verse. That's why the KJV says, “And *watching* thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” We stand by praying, and we stand by being alert. Praying and being alert (or watching) go hand in hand.

The Lord Himself said the same thing, repeatedly. “Watch and pray lest you fall into temptation (Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38).”

Hence, the need for persistence. Persistent prayer requires three qualities.

A. This requires dependence. Dependence upon whom? The ESV begins with the clause, “To that end.” To what end? Paul seems to be taking us back to the admonition to *stand*. The KJV uses a different word, “And watching *thereunto* with all perseverance.” Thereunto also takes us back to this objective, to stand in the battle by putting on the armor of God and praying. The NIV says, “With this in mind.” With what in mind? Again, with what Paul just said in the previous clause, if not in the entire previous section. We are in spiritual warfare, with an enemy who wants to destroy us,

⁶ In the NIV, “With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

having received the Holy Spirit who has come to help us. With *this* in mind, with your mind fully engaged on these realities, keep alert.

So allow me to say it again. I'm convinced that the main reason we fail to pray the way Paul prayed is because we're not thinking about the things he thought about. We're not thinking about the fact that we are at war, with a mission to fulfill, and armor to put on by prayer. Listen to our brother, John Piper, again:

Most people show by their priorities and their casual approach to spiritual things that they believe we are at peacetime not wartime.

In wartime the newspapers carry headlines about how the troops are doing. In wartime families talk about the sons and daughters on the front lines and write to them and pray for them with heart-wrenching concern for their safety. In wartime we are on the alert. We are armed. We are vigilant. In wartime we spend money differently—there is austerity, not for its own sake, but because there are more strategic ways to spend money than on new tires at home. The war effort touches everybody. We call cut back. The luxury liner becomes a troop carrier.

Very few people think that we are in a war that is greater than World War II, or any imaginable nuclear war. Few reckon that Satan is a much worse enemy than any earthly foe, or realize that the conflict is not restricted to any one global theater, but is in every town and city in the world. Who considers that the casualties of this war do not merely lose an arm or an eye or an earthly life, but lose everything, even their own soul and enter a hell of everlasting torment?⁷

When we're calling these realities to mind, we'll be alert and pray. And we'll view prayer not, as Piper says, as an intercom in the den but a wartime walkie-talkie.

I can't say it any more clearly than Pastor John has. Let these words sink in: *Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for* [my italics]. Prayer is for the accomplishing of a wartime mission. It is as though the field commander (Jesus) called in the troops, gave them a crucial mission (go and bear fruit), handed each of them a personal transmitter coded to the frequency of the General's headquarters, and said, 'Comrades, the general has a mission for you. He aims to see it accomplished. And to that end he has authorized me to give each of you personal access to him through these transmitters. If you stay true to his mission and seek his victory first, he will always be as close as your transmitter, to give tactical advice and to send air cover when you need it.'

But what have millions of Christians done? We have stopped believing that we are in a war. No urgency, no watching, no vigilance. No strategic planning. Just easy peace and prosperity. And what did we do with the walkie talkie? We tried to rig it up as an intercom in our houses and cabins and boats and cars—not to call in fire power for conflict with a mortal enemy, but to ask for more comforts in the den.⁸

Let's be alert, fellow soldiers, let's be alert! This requires, first of all, a conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit, a constant calling out, "I need Thee every hour!"

B. This requires determination. "Be alert and *always keep on praying* ['with all perseverance' in the ESV and KJV]." Keep on. Persevere. We all battle the tendency to sleep when we should be watching. Remember Peter, James, and John in the Garden (Matt 26:36ff)? It takes determination to be alert in the battle.

The historian Edward Gibbon suggested that one of the reasons for the fall of Rome—get this—was the lack of discipline in the ranks or Rome's soldiers. Many soldiers

⁷ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 44.

⁸ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 46.

complained of the weight of the armor and stopped wearing all of it. You can guess what happened. As a result, many were injured or killed in battle.

Let's be frank.

1. *It's not popular today to talk about spiritual discipline.* We don't like to be told we "have to" do something. Things such as prayer, watching, and fasting are downplayed as "legalism." "Nobody can tell me I *have to* read my Bible, memorize Scripture, or go to prayer meeting," we're inclined to think. We'd rather do what we *want to* do, what we *feel* like doing.

Satan has infected the American church with a lazy approach to living for Christ. We have the attitude that the spiritual disciplines are essentially optional, kind of the icing on the cake. But they're not icing, and we're not talking about cake. We're talking about warfare, and armor. And the question is, do we want to stand in this battle?

2. *It may not be popular, but it's absolutely essential.* I know you struggle with this because I do, too. It's easy to neglect the spiritual disciplines of watching and praying. It's the tyranny of the urgent.

When Polish pianist Ignace Jan Paderewsky played before Queen Victoria, he won her enthusiastic approval. "Mr. Paderewsky," she exclaimed, "you are a genius." Paderewsky shook his head. "Perhaps, Your Majesty, but before that I was a drudge," he replied, alluding to the number of hours he spent practicing every day.⁹

Let's be clear. We don't watch and pray in order to earn God's favor, any more than we do *anything* to earn His favor. God saves sinners on the basis of His grace, not our merit. That's why He sent His only Son, Jesus, into the world, so that through His Son's merit, sinners like us could be rescued and restored to Him. This is the gospel, that Jesus lived a perfect life, then died as a substitute to pay the sinner's penalty for sin, whom God the Father raised from the dead, thus proving that His Son's atoning sacrifice satisfied His justice and is sufficient to save any sinner who will repent and trust in Jesus.

God saves sinners who believe Him and what He says. Period. We are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of ourselves. It is His gift. Have you received His gift?

When we pray persistently we're not adding to Christ's work. We're simply acknowledging again and again our utter dependence upon Him and His work. And when we don't pray, we're foolishly (and pride-fully) acting like we don't need Him.

This brings us to a third requirement for praying with persistence. Dependence, determination, and...

C. This requires the denial of self. "To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints."¹⁰ Paul uses a different word this time. Supplication, from the verb that means, "to ask, request, beg."

And for whom are we to ask, request, and beg God? For ourselves? Yes, thankfully, yes (as we're told in Philippians 4:6). But that's not what Paul says here. Here, he's telling us to make supplication *for all the saints*.

So let's answer this. If we're going to pray for all the saints, what must we do? This is profound. We must think about them, right? And to do that, we must deny ourselves, for self-focused, self-absorbed people don't pray for others.

In his book, *The Christian Soldier* (which is a commentary on Ephesians 6), Pastor Martin Lloyd Jones shares this pertinent illustration.

Before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, in Barcelona, Madrid and other places, there were psychological clinics with large numbers of neurotics undergoing drug

⁹ *Today in the Word*, August 3, 1993.

¹⁰ NIV, "With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

treatments and others attending regularly for psychoanalysis and such like. They had their personal problems, their worries, their anxieties, their temptations, having to go back week after week, month after month, to the clinics in order to be kept going. Then came the Civil War; and one of the first and most striking effects of that War was that it virtually emptied the psychological and psychiatric clinics. These neurotic people were suddenly cured by a greater anxiety, the anxiety about their whole position, whether their homes would still be there, whether their husbands would still be alive, whether their children would be killed. Their greater anxieties got rid of their lesser ones. In having to give attention to the bigger problems they forgot their own personal and somewhat petty problems.¹¹

To borrow a phrase from the Puritan, Thomas Chalmers, that's "the expulsive power of a new affection." Our problems seem big, even paralyzing, until we fix our gaze upon greater realities, chiefly, our beautiful Savior, and His cross, and His intent to use, those He has rescued, to rescue others who are yet perishing.

To put it another way, when we pray...

1. *We must refuse to focus on ourselves.* According to Ephesians 6:18...

2. *We must choose to focus on God's agenda for His people.*

"Well, is it ever appropriate to pray for personal matters?" you ask. Sure. We're to pray on *all* occasions with *all* kinds of prayers for *all* the saints. And the "all" includes us, and our personal needs. But the "all" includes a whole lot more than us. This is a call to pray with the big picture in mind. Or as Jesus put it, to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

One, pray with particulars. Two, pray with persistence.

III. Pray for people (19-20).

When we do pray for personal needs, there's a right way to do it. And Paul models it for us in the next two verses.

Verses 19-20, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

Paul was an apostle. Let that sink in. As an apostle he experienced things we'll never experience, like, seeing Jesus personally, having the ability to heal people and do other miracles, having a vision of heaven, and more. This is the Paul speaking here. An apostle, as well as a man in need who wasn't too proud to ask people to pray for him.

Paul needed prayer. Paul requested prayer. But when he asked the Ephesian church to pray for him, what were his requests?

I'm intrigued by what he *didn't* say. Such as, "Please ask God to get me out of this prison. I was put here on false charges." Or, "Pray for my sore leg to heal. These chains have rubbed it raw."

Nothing wrong with those requests. Paul is suffering unjustly, spending four years in prison, and he's done nothing wrong. But those are not the requests that he put on the church's prayer list. What was? He tells us right here. The prayer request that most consumed him, that he invited others to pray with him, was for *boldness in telling others about Jesus*.

"Pray also for me," he says. Pray for what? For "words," he says. What kind of words? Pray that words will come out of my mouth that "make known the mystery of the gospel."

¹¹ M. Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10 to 20*, p. 357.

What's this "mystery" he's talking about? The mystery of the gospel was a big deal to Paul. He just taught the Ephesians about this mystery back in chapter 3, and now he's asking them to pray for this mystery to go forth through his life and lips.

So what exactly is this mystery? Look back at Ephesians 3:1-13 and notice what he says, "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,³ how the **mystery** was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the **mystery** of Christ,⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.⁶ This **mystery** is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the **mystery** hidden for ages in God, who created all things,¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory."

Paul had two great ambitions in life. One, to know Christ. And two, to make Christ known. And those two requests shaped his life, and what he put on the prayer chain.

Please pray for freedom, not for me, but for the gospel. What a great perspective! He's in prison, but he sees himself as still being on the battlefield. He didn't pray, "Lord, get me out of here so I can serve you," but rather, "Lord, help me to be an effective ambassador for You right where You have placed me."

Wow. Can you imagine what would happen to the churches in America, to our church, if we prayed this kind of prayer fervently for each other? We all have platforms on which we're standing, divine providences. We have places He's given us to work, and go to school, and neighbors to do life with. We also have health challenges, and at times government officials who make life difficult for us (which is why Paul was in prison). So for what should we pray? For those challenges to go away? Let's learn from Paul.

"Lord, You know brother So-and-so is battling cancer, and sister So-and-so is in a tough family situation. We know You can make those situations better, and we ask for that, if it's Your will. But this is our top prayer request, and we know it's Your will. Please help our brother, and our sister, to face those challenges in such a way that people come to know You. Give them words, and boldness, as they interact with caregivers and family members. May people hear the gospel from their lips, and come to know You because of them."

Implications: We are at war, so we must live and pray with a warfare mentality.

We are at war. Jesus Christ died to redeem lost people. He gave His life on Calvary to rescue sinners from eternal condemnation. He rose again and told us to go and invite sinners to believe in Him and receive eternal life. If you are lost, you can be saved today. I invite you to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

But know this. When we share the good news we are invading enemy territory. Satan doesn't like it. If we're going to stand, we must pray and be alert. Simply put...

We must live and pray with a warfare mentality. Not a peacetime mentality, but a wartime mentality. In other words, let's keep our walkie-talkies turned on, and pray with particulars, pray with persistence, and pray for people.

*Lead on, O King eternal,
till sin's fierce war shall cease,
and holiness shall whisper
the sweet amen of peace.
For not with swords' loud clashing
or roll of stirring drums
with deeds of love and mercy
the heavenly kingdom comes.*

Closing Song: #483 "Lead On, O King Eternal"