

“All” In on Prayer

Introduction

The Text

- A. If you’ve been around Mercy Hill for a while now, you likely know: as a church, on the first Sunday of every new year, we enter into what we call a Week of Prayer together. It’s one of my favorite weeks on our calendar.
- B. And, on the front end of the week, one of the things I do to help us get started in this—to kick things off, to get the juices flowing a bit—is I preach a sermon on the subject of prayer.
 - 1. Before we give ourselves to it we want to get a biblical understanding of it in some fresh way. And so that’s what I hope to do for us again here this morning.
- C. As I was considering what I might take for my text this year, a simple verse in Ephesians stood out to me: [Eph. 6:18](#).
 - 1. It’s just that one verse that will be our focus, but I did want to read the verses around it here so that we have sufficient sense of the context—which will inevitably come to influence our interpretation and application, as it should.
 - 2. So let me begin with [Eph. 6:10](#) and we’ll read down to [v. 20](#). Paul is beginning to draw this magnificent epistle to a close and he does so in staggering fashion, writing, as we read . . .

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. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 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. (Eph. 6:10-20)

“All” In

- A. I’m titling this sermon “‘All’ In on Prayer.” I wonder if you have a sense as to why?
 - 1. Four times in this single verse Paul uses the word “all” with reference to prayer.

2. And when you set them alongside one another and consider the whole of what's being said here, it's very illuminating—we learn a lot about the subject.
- B. So Paul tells us we should be praying “with all prayer” “at all times” “with all perseverance” “for all the saints.”
1. There's our four: (1) All Prayer; (2) All Times; (3) All Perseverance; and (4) All Saints.
 - a. That's what it means to go “all” in on prayer.
 - b. And so that's what I want to consider with you for a little while here this morning. We'll look at them one at a time.

(1) All Prayer

“With All Prayer . . .”

- A. Paul says that we ought to be praying “with all prayer . . .”
- B. But, now, as we come to consider Paul's words here, a question that immediately arises is simply this: What in the world does praying “with all prayer” mean?
1. It seems a bit redundant, and, in that, confusing, doesn't it?
- C. Well, I think the riddle is unlocked when we realize there are many different forms of prayer.
1. If you've ever given yourself to a close reading of the Psalms, no doubt you've seen this.
 - a. Sometimes the psalmist's prayers take on the form of praise for who God is.
 - b. Other times it's more thanksgiving for what God has done.
 - c. Still in other places the psalmist is seemingly in the grip of despair and crying out for help, making requests.
 - d. Other times he's interceding for others, or confessing sin, and on it goes.
 - i. Sometimes prayer has a smile on its face.
 - ii. Other times it's streaked in tears.
 - iii. And there's everything in between, right?
 2. Whatever the case, the lesson drawn from all this is quite unmistakable: there's no one form for prayer—but there are, instead, many forms and many ways to pray.
- D. Over the years, people have used various acronyms to help us get a sense of the different forms of prayer we should be engaging in.

A while back, I gave you one of my own: A-S-K. It comes straight from the pattern Jesus gives us when he teaches us to pray in what's commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer ([Matt. 6:9-13](#)).

1. The A in our acronym stands for Adore.

- a. That's what comes out first in the Lord's Prayer: "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven . . .'" (v. 9).
 - b. Prayer should include an acknowledgment of and adoration for who God is and what he's like.
 - i. He's our Father and he's in heaven. He's good and he's great. He's imminent and he's transcendent. He's right here with us and he's infinitely above us.
 - c. So here's where prayer takes the form of praise, and thanksgiving, and things like this.
2. But then the S in our acronym stands for Surrender.
- a. This is perhaps an often forgotten part of prayer, but it comes out with a punch in the Lord's Prayer, when we carry on in it: "⁹Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (vv. 9-10).
 - b. In light of who God is—your Father in heaven—you are willing to let go of your name and your kingdom and your will; and instead you're desiring to see his name hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will done.
 - c. These are prayers of surrender. And they are so important.
 - i. As far as I can tell, you're not yet ready to request things of God if you're not yet ready to submit yourself to him.
 - ii. Until you pass through these prayers of surrender, you're approaching him as if you were the boss and he were your employee, as if you were the master and he were your servant, as if you were God and he were here to do your bidding.
 - d. Don't you see? We get it all backwards . . . until we move from adoration to surrender. Then, and only then, are we ready to move along with Jesus to the last part of the Lord's Prayer . . .
3. Here is where we come to the K in our acronym which stands for Knock.
- a. And it's what we might typically think of when we think of prayer. It's the idea of petitioning, requesting, asking for things, crying in God's presence . . . knocking on the door (cf. [Luke 11:9-10](#)).
 - b. In the case of the Lord's Prayer, we are taught to ask for Provision—"Give us this day our daily bread" (v. 11); Pardon—"and forgive us our debts" (v. 12); and Protection—"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (v. 13).

4. So, again, the lesson drawn from all this is quite unmistakable: there's no one form for prayer, but there are, instead, many forms and many ways to pray.
 - a. So when you pray you should pray "with all prayer . . ."
- E. But are you? Are you praying with "all prayer", or are you more beholden to one form over another?
1. Some of us, of course, are great at requesting things of God.
 - a. We're always praying for our needs, but we're never stopping to adore him, to thank him for provision already given. We just move right along to the next thing we need.
 - b. God is too low on our eyes. He's here to serve us and that is all. We ring our little bell and expect him to come when we call.
 - c. But we don't lay ourselves out before him with our faces in the dirt, silent, because he is in heaven and we are on earth.
 - i. We've got to go there sometimes. We need to pray with "all prayer".
 2. Others of us go in the opposite direction, perhaps.
 - a. We feel right at home adoring him, humbling ourselves before him, but we hesitate to ask for things.
 - b. Because he feels too holy, too big, too distant even. We're not sure he really cares about our little stuff. We don't want to bother him.
 - c. But he says, in no uncertain terms: "Bother me. Come, knock, keep knocking, don't hesitate. You have needs. I know this, and I'm happy to help" (cf. [Luke 11:5-13](#)).
 - i. We need to pray with "all prayer". So are you?

“. . . and Supplication”

- A. If you noticed, back in our verse, Paul doesn't just say that we should pray "with all prayer". He tags something else to the end of it: "with all prayer and supplication."
1. The Greek word translated "prayer" here can refer to prayer in a general sense, encompassing all its various forms.
 2. But this word translated "supplication" here narrows the scope a bit and focuses us in now on that form of prayer that arises especially out of a great sense of need. The word means "to plead" or "to beg" (L&N). There's a sense of urgency, a sense of desperation.
 - a. The first word, then, is prayer in standard garb.
 - b. The second word, now, is prayer dressed in a beggar's rags.
 - i. The emphasis with this is put on that "knocking" we were talking about. "I've got needs, God help!"
- B. And I think this is so important for us, especially here in Silicon Valley, because, it seems to me, a lot of us here are prone to believe we just don't need all that much help. After all, we're the makers of

the great technologies that fix so much of what seems to ail the human condition. So we think we can figure it out on our own.

1. We're self-accomplished, self-made, self-realized folks.
 2. We're not needy, we're needed. We're not beggars, we're brilliant. We're not impoverished, we're rich. We're not dressed in rags, I wear Armani (okay, so I got it at Nordstrom's Rack, but that's beside the point).
 3. But Paul is saying, spiritually, we are beggars—more needy than we could ever know. As Jesus puts it in the first beatitude: we are “poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3).
- C. Do you feel that? Do you want to know what you would do if you did? Pray . . . “with all prayer and supplication.” The reason we don't pray is we have no idea how needy we really are.
1. And this is actually going to flow right into the second “all” I wanted to discuss with you . . .

(2) All Times

Why “All Times”?

A. A lot of us pray “some” times. But Paul says we should be praying “at all times . . .” Why?

1. Well, there is much we could say at this point, but I'll give you two reasons . . .

Reason #1: Because We Are Engulfed in a Spiritual War

A. This, in part, is why I wanted to read the full context of our verse back in Eph. 6. You realize there, don't you, that the whole context is one of spiritual conflict and warfare.

B. Why do we need to pray at all times? Well, Paul tells us there in v. 13 it's because we are living in what he calls “the evil day”.

1. This is not a time to kick back and relax.
2. Yes, Jesus got victory at Calvary over Satan, sin, and death. But, if you know your WWII history, it was more like D-Day not V-day.

- a. He won the battle that ultimately turned the tide of the war.
- b. But the war still wages on until the last day.

- i. So until the last day, this is “the evil day”.

C. And beyond all of this, as Paul reminds us in v. 12: “[W]e do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

1. This is not a battle we can win in our own strength.

- a. If it were against flesh and blood, maybe we could fashion a weapon that might prevail.
 - b. But, seeing as it is spiritual forces that we are up against, we must instead, as Paul instructs us, “[p]ut on” (v. 11) or “take up” (v. 13) “the whole armor of God . . .”
- 2. With this he’s referring to all the resources we have now made available to us in Jesus.
 - a. And he proceeds to list them off for us: the **belt of truth**, the **breastplate of righteousness**, the **shoes of the gospel**, the **shield of faith**, the **helmet of salvation**, and, of course, the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God.
- D. “But wait a minute,” you say. “Of what purpose is prayer in this battle? That’s the whole point you’re trying to make here, isn’t it Nick? Why isn’t prayer here likened to some aspect of the Christian soldier’s armor?”
 - 1. Oh, well, don’t you see? Prayer isn’t likened to merely one part of it, because it is prayer, according to Paul, that activates and animates the whole of it.
 - a. It is by prayer that one takes up the whole armor of God.
 - b. It is not a mere piece of the armor—it is the way you put it all on!
- E. Two of my kids have their birthdays in December. It makes for a very crazy (and expensive!) month. But it’s fun :)
 - 1. And one of the things Levi wanted for his birthday, actually, was that I’d get my own account on Minecraft so I could play with them all in one of their worlds.
 - 2. So that’s what I did.
 - 3. And with all of the zombies and skeletons and creepers around one of the things I realized quite quickly, with their help of course, is that, if you are going to survive, you need armor.
 - 4. And so you go around and mine for copper, or iron, or diamond and when you get enough you can forge out your various pieces of armor.
 - 5. But here’s the thing: simply forging it won’t benefit you. It just sits there in your inventory.
 - 6. You have to click in and put it on.
- F. And I think that’s the idea here.
 - 1. Jesus has already made a way for us to have the whole armor of God.
 - 2. But that armor won’t benefit us one bit if we don’t take it up and put it on. And you do that by prayer.
 - a. So he brings that whole list to a close with the participle that seemingly wraps back around and conditions the whole thing:
 - i. “**fasten on**” the belt of truth; “**put on**” the breastplate of righteousness; “**put on**” the shoes of the gospel; “**take up**” the shield of faith; “**take**” the helmet of salvation; and the sword of the Spirit . . .

ii. And then, here it comes . . . “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 . . .” (v. 18).

b. As John Stott puts it: “Paul adds prayer [here in v. 18], not . . . because he thinks of prayer as another though unnamed weapon, but because it is to pervade all our spiritual warfare. Equipping ourselves with God’s armour is not a mechanical operation; it is itself an expression of our dependence on God, in other words of prayer.”

G. Don’t you see? Prayer is not identified as a mere piece of the armor here because prayer is the way you activate the whole of it!

1. This is how you get God’s truth around you;
 2. it’s how you get your feet on the firm foundation of the gospel;
 3. it’s how you reassure your heart of your righteous standing in Jesus;
 4. it’s how you guard your mind with a sense of assurance of your salvation;
 5. it’s how you fight for faith and extinguish the fiery arrows of the devil;
 6. it’s how you take up the Scripture as a sword and thrust it through his chest.
7. You’re taking the truths of God, his Word, his gospel, and you’re bringing it into the center of your being, putting it on . . . in and through prayer.

H. So, reason number one, why pray at “all times”?

1. Because we’re in a battle and it’s not a battle you can win with bullets or swords, or planes or tanks, or muscles or might.
2. You don’t have the resources in and of yourself for this. You need Jesus.

a. And, therefore, you need prayer . . . all the time. That’s the reason that comes out most clearly from the context.

I. But there is something more we could say . . .

Reason #2: Because We Are Created for an Intimate Relationship

A. I didn’t want to pass this up. The truth of the matter is that we should be praying at all times not just because we need help in the battle, but because we were created for communion with Christ—to know him, to open our hearts to him, to talk with him, to abide in him, to have relationship with him.

1. In fact, so far as I can tell, in the Scriptures, the Christian life is really conceived of as one long prayer to God through Christ.

B. That’s what it’s about. That’s why we pray at all times. Because we want to be with him at all times.

1. We don’t just “say our prayers” in the morning or before a meal or something and then go on from there and do our own thing. No!

2. Wherever we go, we want to go with him.
 - a. Oh sure, there may be more formal moments of prayer, where we're really focusing in and we've got our knees bent and eyes closed and all this.
 - b. But, in truth, our whole lives should be one long prayer walk—where no matter where we're going, no matter what we're doing, we're conversing, we're communing with him.
- C. We don't just pray at all times because there's a battle going on.
 1. Prayer doesn't stop after V-Day. Communion with Christ isn't done in the new heavens and new earth.
 2. Quite the opposite! It hits a higher gear, it reaches a new level, we're ushered deeper in.
 - a. So, yes, we are to be praying at all times because, currently, we're in a war.
 - b. But we're also to be praying at all times because that's the very point of our lives—to know God; to love God; to walk with him and talk with him.
- D. I found it so fascinating. I read the other day [1 Thess. 5:17-18](#) where Paul tells the church to [“¹⁷pray without ceasing,¹⁸ . . . for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”](#) And I love this. Because it pushes back on one of our most common mistakes with prayer.
 1. Often we pray so we can get a sense of God's will, right? Does he want me to take this job or that one? Does he want our kids to go to this school or that one? Should I go out with that boy or not?
 - a. We want his guidance, his will. And once we get it, we tend to stop praying and go out after it.
 2. But this text flips all of that on its head. Usually we're praying to get God's will, but here we see that it's God's will that we get praying!
 - a. Don't pray to get God's will for you and then run off from there.
 - b. Pray, pray, and then pray some more, even as you go, because whatever else he may will for you, that is God's will for you, that you pray without ceasing!
 - i. His will for you more than anything is that you develop and maintain that relationship with him, that sense of communion and conversation.

(3) All Perseverance

- A. We go on with Paul there in [v. 18](#) and find that we are also to be praying with [“all perseverance . . .”](#)
- B. It's a common refrain in the NT:
 1. So Paul writes in [Rom. 12:12](#): [“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”](#) It's the same root word. Be constant in it. Persevere in it.

2. And then again in [Col. 4:2](#) we read: “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” Again, it’s the same root word. Continue steadfastly in it. Persevere in it.
3. All of this is given positive expression in the early church, where we read time and again that they “devoted themselves to prayer.” And here again that word “devoted” is the same root word—they persevered in it (cf. [Acts 1:14](#); [2:42](#); [6:4](#)). Oh that we would be a church like that!

It’s Going to Be Hard

- A. And, of course, with this call to persevere in prayer we are reminded that keeping up with it is not always going to be easy. We’ll want to give up on it.
 1. If we never wanted to give up on it we wouldn’t have to be told to persevere in it. So it’s going to be hard.
- B. But why? Why is it so hard for us to persevere in this?
 1. Well, again, I can immediately think of at least a couple reasons on this point. The first is a bit more superficial. The second is an issue at a deeper more spiritual level.
- C. In the first place, it’s hard to pray with “all perseverance” because it’s hard for us to sit still and focus these days, isn’t it?
 1. We’re so easily distracted by all our devices and things. How quickly we begin in prayer and end on our phone.
 - a. I don’t know how it happens. I come into my office to pray and somehow I end up on social media, scrolling mindlessly through a news feed of some sort. Do you know what I mean? We start with a desire to devote ourselves to prayer, but with a little ping of our phones suddenly we’re flittering off into something else.
 - i. We don’t have the mental stamina to maintain a singular line of thought. We lose our focus. It’s hard to persevere in it.
- D. But then of course there’s the deeper, more spiritual, dilemma that’s often playing out in our hearts. And, put bluntly, it’s simply this: We don’t persevere in prayer because we don’t truly think of God as our only real option for guidance and help and salvation. He’s just one good option among many.
 1. Maybe he’s the first place we go. But if we tap on his door a couple times and nothing seems to be opening in the way we want it to, well we just move on to option B or C or D or down the line we go.
 2. If he doesn’t answer on my timing in the way I want him to, well then I’ll make it happen one way or another.

- a. Perhaps we can pray with “some” perseverance but pray with “all perseverance”?! That seems a bit much. We’ll go a distance with it, but will we go all the way to the end?

E. I have kind of a silly illustration for this point.

1. For Christmas I got Megan some new luggage (romantic, I know). But they are nice.
2. And when you first get the things, there’s this lock on the larger one that comes set to 0-0-0 and so you want to reset it and change the code.
3. Well, trying to be a good and helpful husband, I figured I’d set it up for her.
4. There was just one problem, there were really no instructions as to how one should go about doing this, so I looked it up online, thought I had it figured out, and clearly didn’t. So I put it to the numbers I wanted, thought I set it, then spun all the wheels to test it, only to realize that I had actually set it to whatever those numbers were I had just randomly spun to and now navigated away from.
5. In other words, here I have this new wonderful, shiny piece of luggage, and I have no idea how to get into it. I have no clue what the numbers are.
6. Now, the logical thinkers among us know that if there are three potential numbers with each dial going from 0 to 9 that means essentially there are 999 options.
7. So, beginning with 0-0-0 I proceeded to make my way through every single one.
8. An hour or more later, I’m in the 900s. And let me just tell you, I’m tempted to give up. I don’t want to persevere in this. I’m thinking of all my other options:
 - a. I got it from Costco, Costco takes back everything. Just return it. You don’t have to tell them you have no idea how to open it.
 - b. My kids were telling me they have a friend who can pick locks. I don’t what that means when you’re in Junior High, not sure I want to know, but maybe want his number. “Get Jimmy over here. I’m desperate.”
 - c. And, of course, if all else fails, I have a hammer in the garage. I’m going to get into this thing even if I have to break my way in.
9. So I’m tempted to bail out. I make my way through the 910s . . . then the 920s . . . then the 930s, 940s, 950s, 960s, 970s, 980s.
10. But the time I reach the 990s I have lost all hope. I turn to Megan like: “I’m sorry, I’m not going to get this thing open. I must have missed the number somewhere back in the 900s or something.”
11. 991, 992, 993, 994, 995 . . . and then as I turned to 999-999 (three off from the very last option) . . . the thing clicked open!

F. Moral of the story? Persevere in prayer, no matter how long it feels like it’s taking.

1. Don’t give up on God. Don’t go to option B or C or D.
2. Stay on option A. He’s the only one who can truly help and unlock things for you at the deepest level.
 - a. Pray “with all perseverance” . . . to the end!

(4) All Saints

- A. Last thing, very briefly here, Paul tells us to pray “for all the saints”
- B. In other words, we’re not just praying for ourselves.
 - 1. Sometimes we can get so consumed with our own issues, with our own suffering, with our own needs and requests and all this, that, though we may pray quite a bit, we come to find we’re really only praying for ourselves.
 - a. Prayer becomes the backdoor to a sort of sanctified self-centeredness, a baptized form of naval-gazing. We see ourselves and no one else.
 - 2. But Paul here says we ought to be “making supplication for all the saints”
 - a. It’s that word “pleading”, “begging” again—not just for you, but that God would come and help others, your brothers and sisters in the church.
- C. But then, did you notice, just beyond the boundary of our verse, at the beginning of v. 19 there, Paul adds this stunning little request: “and [pray] also for me”
 - 1. This is the great apostle asking that these young Christians pray, not just for themselves and for each other, but also for him. No one is beyond the need of prayer.
 - 2. You don’t graduate beyond the need of it. If anything, the further along you get in your Christian life, the more you come to realize just how badly you need it.
 - a. It’s the inverted maturation process of the children of God.
 - i. You don’t become less dependent on God. You become more so.
 - ii. You don’t pray less. You pray more.
 - 3. So Paul says to the Ephesian Christians: “and [pray] also for me” And, you know, I would say that to you as well.
 - a. It doesn’t matter that I’m your pastor. I’m supposed to be leading the way and helping you along in your discipleship to Jesus. I need your prayer too. (I’m so thankful that so many of you give yourself to that for me on a regular basis.)
 - b. I don’t care what my title is in the church. I don’t care if I went to seminary. I don’t care how many years of experience I have in ministry. I don’t care about any of that.
 - i. I am no better than anyone. I am no different than anyone.
 - ii. So “[pray] also for me”
- D. This is what we’re doing this week, right? Praying with one another for one another—“for all the saints”

Conclusion

- A. As we draw things to a close here, there's one last thing I wanted to bring out with the hopes of encouraging you in prayer, lightening your load a bit as you set out to do it.
- B. I wonder, perhaps as we've gone through this you've found yourself thinking: "I can't do this. I can't pray with all prayer at all times with all perseverance for all the saints. This is too much for me."

- 1. Maybe you're feeling more burdened than encouraged at this point.

- C. Well, there's one little bit I skipped over near the very front of [Eph. 6:18](#) that I think might come in to help at this point. Did you notice that? What does Paul say? "[P]raying at all times in the Spirit" All of this praying is done "in the Spirit".

What does that mean?

- 1. Well, you might be prone to read that as yet another thing you have to do in prayer. "I can't just pray, now I've got to pray in the Spirit somehow?!" It sounds like another burdensome task.
 - 2. But this isn't meant to place another burden on you, it's meant to take all the burdens off.

- a. Do you remember why Jesus said he was sending the Spirit? To help us (cf. [John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7](#)).

- b. This is what Paul picks up on in [Rom. 8:26-27](#) with regard to prayer in particular: "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."

- D. That's the idea here in [Eph. 6:18](#).

- 1. We can't do this.

- a. Jesus told his boys to stay awake and pray when they were in Gethsemane with him and they all, to the man, just fell asleep. They didn't have the strength to pray as they ought.
 - b. And we don't either, in and of ourselves.

- 2. But in the Spirit, we do. Because the Spirit is the Spirit of none other than Jesus Christ, the only faithful one.

- a. When everyone else fell asleep on the job, he was awake in the night.
 - b. Faithful, not just in prayer, but faithful unto death.

- i. Dying for my sin so he could come and make a home in my heart by the Spirit.

- ii. So he could renew me in his image, so he help me and you go “all” in on prayer!

E. He is here to help us in this. So . . . let’s pray!