

MBC - 4/25/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson  
***“Making Supplication for All the Saints”***  
Ephesians 6:18-20

Let's return to our study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which we will finish next Lord's Day

- Ephesians 6:18-20 <sup>18</sup>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, <sup>19</sup>and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

***Intro: Ps. 116 I love the Lord because He hears!***

Psalm 116:1-2

<sup>1</sup>I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice  
and my pleas for mercy.

<sup>2</sup>Because he inclined his ear to me,  
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

David overflowed with love for God because when he was in the depths, and cried out - God heard, from heaven - He bent down to listen to David! And David said, "Therefore, I will call on Him as long as I live!"

- Don't you love God because He hears your prayers? And He hears them when you are at your worst and your weakest: I think about how lame my praying can be: Think about how often your mind wanders - within seconds you're back at work solving some problem - on a beach somewhere - "Oh!, What was I praying about?" You yawn, scratch, fall asleep - while talking to the Creator of the universe! I think about how many times I've forgotten to pray for someone I *said* I would pray for. It's a wonder that God doesn't *punish* us for the way we pray - let alone bend down from heaven to answer!

And God has answered your prayers, hasn't He? When your prayers were few, His answers were many. When your prayers were weak, His answers were mighty. He doesn't criticize you for your poor prayers, He sends His Holy Spirit to help your weakness. And He pours out blessings - exceedingly, abundantly, beyond all you could ask or think!

How many times have you felt embarrassed that you were *surprised* that God answered your prayer??

One of my favorite stories in the book of Acts is that time that Peter had been thrown in jail, and Herod wanted to chop off his head. So the believers gathered to pray - "Oh Lord, set Peter free!" Remember what happened? An angel came and set Peter free! He went to the house where they were praying and a servant girl named Rhoda answered the door--"Peter! But, but, you're in jail!" She ran to tell the people who were praying--that Peter would be released from jail--and what did they say to Rhoda? "You are out of your mind, it couldn't be Peter, he's in jail--must be an angel." Meanwhile, Peter is still outside, knocking--"yoo hoo--prayer warriors, it's me!"

That's "The Power of Doubting Prayer!" Aren't you glad that God answers your prayers according to the greatness of His power, grace, and love, rather than according to your puny faith? Don't you love the Lord for that? Think how God has answered your poor prayers—

How many times He has brought physical healing to you or to a friend, or someone in this church--how many times? Some of you wouldn't be here this morning if the Lord hadn't heard the prayers of His people.

How many times have you felt His presence when you felt swallowed up in emotional darkness and depression.?

How many times has He brought along Christians who gave you encouragement, love, help, money, food—like a *lifeline* - just when you needed it?

\*And I want you to love the Lord this morning because you can pray to Him for others. It's amazing to think that the worldwide web is only about 30 years old - but you know how frustrated you are when you can't get online - or even when it's running slow! Try to just imagine if you couldn't pray to God - no connection. You are speaking, but no one is listening. And then you hear about a friend or family member with an urgent, crisis need - and you couldn't pray? Or you are in crisis, but no one could pray for you? It makes my heart race just to think about it.

But we can pray for each other! And the Lord will hear our voice and our pleas for mercy! I want you to leave here this morning more committed than ever to “making supplication for all the saints.” We're going to look at Paul's example and Paul's request.

## I. Paul's example.

### A. *Prayer for others and spiritual warfare.*

Turn back to our passage in Ephesians. We're still in the context of spiritual warfare when Paul tells us to pray for all the saints; those you like and those you don't, near and far, because we all need each other in this battle against Satan and his demons. And I think his tone here is intense and urgent: Souls are at stake. The mission of the church is at stake. The name of Jesus Christ is at stake. And we said that we need to stop seeing prayer as our private intercom for ordering up room service - and see it as our *wartime* walkie-talkie to keep us in constant with our Commander-and-Chief in the midst of battle! That's the way Paul saw prayer because that's the way Paul saw *life*. Look with me at what he wrote in—

- 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 <sup>3</sup>For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup>For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

We know what it looks like to wage war according to the flesh: guns - swords - maybe rocket launchers if they're available, right? But how you do warfare in the spiritual realm where none of those things have any impact? You pray! Whatever else you do, you pray. That is the *only* way you and I lay hold of divine power to destroy spiritual strongholds.

And look again at—

- Ephesians 6:12 <sup>12</sup>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.

How do you *wrestle* against an invisible, spiritual enemy? You can't swing a sword or throw a punch - there is only one way: you *pray*! Like Jacob *wrestled* with God in prayer - you plead,

you cry out, you remind God of His promises. How do you stand firm in this spiritual battle? You pray. How do you put on the whole armor of God? You pray. Prayer *is* the battle. If you aren't wrestling in prayer, you aren't fighting. Prayer is everything in spiritual warfare.

- If you're on the prayer chain you will get a link to email our state senator to veto AB 2943. I encourage you to do that, but more important, most important, is to pray! God is sovereign over the hearts of our leaders, so plead with our Father.

And if prayer is our most important weapon in spiritual warfare, it's also our most important *tool* in ministry. It's the #1 way we lay hold of the power of God to see souls saved and lives changed for Christ. I think we would be blown away if really grasped how much Paul prayed for others. I've always been stuck by what Paul said in—

- Colossians 1:28-2:3 [speaking of Jesus--] <sup>28</sup>Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup>For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. <sup>1</sup>For I want you to know how great a *struggle* [the word is *agonizomai*] I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face. . .

They'd never even met Paul! A man named Epaphras who was saved under Paul's jail ministry had taken the Gospel back to Colossae and planted that church. So how did Paul, in jail, toil and struggle and wrestle to present these believers mature in Christ? Through *prayer!* He groaned and pleaded for these dear saints - and he believed God would act.

So when Paul says, "keeping alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints," he's telling us all to wrestle for each other *in prayer* in this spiritual battle we are all in. Oh, we should see prayer as a duty, a job assignment from God. The person sitting right next to you could be struggling, teetering on the precipice of some temptation—maybe the prayers of another are keeping you from going over the edge right now! We sang this earlier—

Brethren, see poor sinners round you  
slumbering on the brink of woe;  
Death is coming, hell is moving  
can you bear to let them go?  
See our fathers and our mothers  
and our children sinking down;  
Brethren, **pray**, and holy manna  
will be showered all around.

### ***B. Prayer and out unity.***

Prayer binds us together. One of the reasons God brings pain and suffering to His children is so that we will pray for each other and are bound together in fellowship with each other. You might feel pretty cold towards someone else in this body - but you get the prayer chain and hear that they are in a crisis, so you pray. And what happens? That coldness melts away, and the love returns. Have you experienced that? Spurgeon: "I do not believe you can hate a man for whom you habitually pray. If you dislike any brother Christian, pray for him doubly, not only for his sake, but for your own."

And what does it do in your own heart when in your deepest darkness, your most intense pain - you know that your brothers and sisters are holding you up and remembering you before God's throne? It's really an indescribable peace.

- Janice and I experienced this recently. Our church family here was praying. We heard of people praying for Janice in other churches around the country, and even in Uganda, Spain, India, the Philippines. And it was a real, tangible comfort - it wasn't our imaginations. It was like hundreds or thousands of God's people were absorbing our concern and pain . . .
- I remember distinctly, Jason and I were in the Philippines, walking down a dusty road to see Lolong - the world's largest alligator! It felt like we were in the middle of nowhere, literally, on the other side of the world, and I was thinking - "How in the world are we ever going to get from here, back home again, safely?" And at that moment I had an overwhelming peace from God - in knowing that our church family was holding us up in prayer. And God was listening to those prayers.

And this binds us together, doesn't it? We saw this in a massive way through the Valley Fire, the Clayton Fire, and the Sonoma and Napa fires: hundreds of churches, hundreds of thousands of Christians all praying for each other - it brought us together in Christ, didn't it? *Prayer changes your relationship with those you pray for* - it changes them and it changes you. And that is God's purpose: we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, and we become one. And His purpose is that we all together, thank Him for the answers He gives—

- 2 Corinthians 1:11 <sup>11</sup>You also must help us by prayer, *so that* many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

And beloved, prayer is the *most important* way to love one another and to obey the command of—

- Philippians 2:4 <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

We look out for each other when we pray for them. We follow the Golden Rule when we pray for others: "Pray for others the way you desperately want then to pray for you."

"But is it wrong to pray for myself and my own needs?" No, God wants you to come to Him all the time, for everything. But the pattern I see in Scripture is to pray even more for the needs of others than yourself. Paul did. From what we read in the Gospels, Jesus did. Remember, Paul is in jail when he writes this, and he still doesn't pray for himself here - he asks others to pray for him! I think that's amazing.

"But I'm worried that if I spend most of my praying on others, my own needs won't be met." Well now, think about that: Would you rather have one person praying for you - you - or the whole body of Christ? If we are all praying for each other, we'll all be covered, right?

It reminds me of that story about the man who went to heaven and was ushered into a huge banquet room filled with people, and food piled high on all the tables--he couldn't believe his eyes, he'd never seen such a feast in his life on earth, and he couldn't wait to dig in. So he sat down, put his napkin on his lap and picked up his knife and fork, but the handles were 10' long! He sat there for a minute trying to figure it out, and finally said to the person next to him, "What is the deal with this silverware? I can't reach my own mouth with these things!" The saint next to him said, "Oh that! In heaven--we *feed each other!*"

And while we're here on earth, we need to *pray* for each other.

We could say a lot about how Paul prayed for others, but the main thing we see is—

### ***C. The priority of praying for spiritual needs.***

Overwhelmingly, Paul prayed for people’s *spiritual* needs. That they would grow in faith, hope, and love. We’ve already see this earlier in this letter. As the Holy Spirit guided his pen, he could have asked for anything for these people he loved in Ephesus, but what did he ask God for?—

- Ephesians 1:16-19 <sup>16</sup>I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup>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, <sup>18</sup>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, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. . .

Two chapters later, Paul prayed again—

- Ephesians 3:16-19 <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and *to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

I’m sure Paul prayed for sick people, and brother so-and-so who just lost his job, but he *prioritized* spiritual needs. I.e., that which is *eternal* over that which is *temporal*.

- When I first came to MBC - 28 years ago next week! - the first book I preached through was Ephesians, and I remember coming to this passage and telling the folks that we need to put the spiritual needs first. I said, “Sometimes our prayer meetings can fall into a rut of only praying for brother so-and-so’s liver problem, and sister so-and-so’s heart, and this gall bladder issue, and this kidney issue - I said it can turn into a regular *organ recital!*” And the next Wednesday at our prayer meeting, I heard: “And Father heal brother so-and-so’s liver, and sister so-and-so’s gall bladder . . .” It’s really hard to change the way we pray!

And again, I’m not saying that we stop praying for our aches and pains and car troubles - but in our praying for others, we need to learn to pray *past the temporal situation to the eternal good that God wants to work in their lives through the temporal situation.*

- “Father, You know how my Aunt has been in such awful pain, Oh, if it would bring You glory, O God, heal her miraculously and show off Your power! But if it will bring you more glory, stay close to her through her pain, oh, use it to draw her closer to Christ than she has ever been! Use it as a testimony of Your grace to others!”

When I hear on the news about some mass shooting, or bombing - This is how I pray: “Oh Father, bring Jesus and the Gospel into this situation. Raise up your people to speak of the hope we have in Christ - display Your grace and mercy.”

Think of this as “praying below the surface.” That’s what Paul did, and I believe he learned it from Jesus. When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, in the Lord’s Prayer, there are 6 pe-

titions—6 requests from God - remember I said that prayer is mostly asking God for stuff? Think about these 6 petitions—

That God's name would be holy in our lives.  
 That His kingdom would come - that He would reign and rule over all the earth.  
 That His will would be done in our lives.  
 That He would provide our daily bread.  
 That He would forgive us our sins.  
 That He would keep us from temptation.

Only one of these deals with our physical, temporal needs - the prayer for daily bread - the other 5 requests are for our *spiritual* needs - heart issues - our relationship with God which is eternal. So maybe our requests to God should concern the spiritual over the physical by a ratio of 5 to 1.

- And while we are on the Lord's prayer, you can't pray it the way Jesus gave it, just for yourself, can you? Because it's not a pray for *me* and *my*, but for *us* and *our*: "Our Father. . . give us. . . forgive us . . .keep us. . ."

When Janice's dear friend, Bev, back in Colorado, heard about Janice's cancer, she prayed that God would heal her - which He has! - and she said that she also prayed through Ps.103 and put Janice's name in the Psalm! That was so encouraging. And what a loving thing to do for a friend. Along with Paul's prayers in Eph. 1:15-23 and 3:14-21, I want to give you some ways you can pray for the spiritual needs of others. And you can put their names into these passages as you pray—

#### **1.) Pray for purity—**

- 1 Thessalonians 5:23 <sup>23</sup>Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **2.) Pray for unity—**

- Romans 15:5-6 <sup>5</sup>May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **3.) Pray for discerning, fruitful love—**

- Philippians 1:9-11 <sup>9</sup>And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup>so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup>filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

#### **4.) Pray for filling and spilling—**

- Romans 15:13 (NIV) <sup>13</sup>May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Get into the habit of praying below the surface for others. Pray for their physical needs, and also, *pray past the temporal situation to the eternal good that God wants to work in their lives through their temporal situations.*

## II. Paul's request.

Paul is such a good teacher! He instructs his flock in Ephesus to pray for others, then he gives them the opportunity to apply what he just said—

- Ephesians 6:19-20 <sup>19</sup>and also [pray] for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

What is he asking for? It's not really about him, is it? He wants the boldness and clarity to proclaim the gospel so that others will be saved. I'll talk more about this next week. But two points here: Shepherds need to pray for their sheep, and sheep need to pray for their shepherds.

### A. *Shepherds need to pray for their sheep.*

You have the right to expect that of your shepherd. I'm reading through 1 Samuel. The people foolishly asked God to give them a king - God was their king - but they wanted to be like the other nations. They wanted a charismatic figurehead. They got Saul. What a disaster. After Samuel rebukes them for this foolishness we read this—

- 1 Samuel 12:19 <sup>19</sup>And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king."

They desperately wanted Samuel to pray to God for them. And this was his response—

- 1 Samuel 12:23 <sup>23</sup>Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should *sin* against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.

Oh, it's a *sin* for a shepherd not to pray for his sheep. God holds them accountable to pray for those under your charge. We have no idea of the dangers that the flock faces that can only be averted by our prayers.

- How *many* times did Moses stand in the gap and intercede for the people of Israel before God? Many! And his intercession literally stayed God's hand from destroying them.

Shortly after the birth of the church at Pentecost, the honeymoon was over and reality set in: The Gk. widows felt that they were being discriminated against in favor of the Hebrew widows in the distribution of food for these ladies. It was a real problem that had to be dealt with. But we can't miss the wisdom and the spiritual priority of the Apostles—

- Acts 6:3-4 <sup>3</sup>Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup>But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

The word *devote* means 'to continue steadfastly.' The #1 job of any spiritual leader is prayer and the Word - pray for the saints; study hard to preach and teach the saints. #1. For anyone who thinks that isn't work - believe me, it is if you do it steadfastly. And it is the most important work of all, because we are in a spiritual war, and we wrestle not against flesh and blood - the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly. Apart from prayer and the Word, there is no ministry.

### ***B. Sheep need to pray for their shepherds.***

*“Making supplication for all the saints - and also for me. Also, for me!”* And I ask the same of my church family: Please, pray for me. Pray that I would be faithful in the Word and prayer for your sakes. Pray for my walk with Jesus. Pray for my marriage. Pray that I would serve you out of love that issues from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith. I believe with all my heart what that great Scottish preacher, Robert Murray M’Cheyne said, *“The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness.”*

Almost 200 years ago a preacher named Gardiner Spring wrote on praying for your pastor. Listen, for my sake, please listen—

Let the thought sink deep into the heart of every church, that their minister will be such a minister as their prayers make him. If nothing short of Omnipotent grace can make a Christian, nothing less will make a faithful and successful minister of the Gospel!

If a people are looking for rich sermons from their minister, their prayers must supply him with the needed material. If they expect powerful and successful sermons, their prayers must make him a blessing to the souls of men! Would they have him come to them with a pounding heart, a burning eye, and a glowing tongue, and with sermons bathed in tears and filled with prayer? If so, their prayers must urge him to pray, and their tears inspire his heart.

It is in their own closets that the people of God most effectively challenge their beloved ministers to take heed to the ministry they have received from the Lord Jesus. For who and what are the ministers themselves? Frail men, fallible, sinning men, exposed to every snare, to temptation in every form. And, from the post they occupy, they are an easier target for the fiery darts of the foe. They are not trite victims the great Adversary is seeking, when he would wound and cripple Christ's ministers. One such victim is worth more to the kingdom of darkness than a number of common men. And for this very reason, their temptations are probably more subtle and severe than those encountered by ordinary Christians. If this subtle Deceiver fails to destroy them, he cunningly aims at neutralizing their influence by quenching the fervor of their piety, lulling them into negligence, and doing all in his power to render their work burdensome.

How perilous is the condition of that minister then, whose heart is not encouraged, whose hands are not strengthened, and who is not upheld by the prayers of his people! Nothing gives a people so much interest in their minister, as to pray for him. They will love him more, respect him more, attend more cheerfully, and gain more profit from his ministry, the more they commend him to God in their prayers.

We have 6 men in our church whom the Spirit has raised up to serve and shepherd, and lead in this church. Two elders, Rudi and myself, and 4 Deacons: Erroll, Jason, Dustin, and Ryan. I’d like you men to stand up right now.

Men, I want you to look around you at this church family. These are your brothers and sisters whom God has called you serve. I charge you this morning before God to be men who are steadfast in prayer and the Word! They need you to be that for them - above anything else you do for them. *And far be it that you would sin against God by ceasing to pray for them.*



And I want the rest of you to look at these men. They need your prayers. And you need to pray for them for the sake of your own spiritual health and the future of this church. If you have not been praying for them, start this morning.

You men can sit, but I want you to pray for this flock, and I want this flock to pray for me and for you - let's take a few minutes to do that now, silently.