

MBC - 4/15/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson  
**"Come as You Are"**  
Ephesians 6:18

- Ephesians 6:18 <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,

Janice wasn't feeling well last Sunday and had to leave before my sermon. So when I got home she asked how the sermon went. I told her about Joshua and Daniel, and then she asked, "What did you want our people to know about prayer when they left?"

Good question! Made me stop and think. I wanted us to leave here seeing prayer in the context of spiritual warfare. Prayer is connecting and communicating with our Father right in the midst of wrestling against the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. It's our wartime time walkie-talkie to keep us in contact with heaven while we're fighting here on earth. And remember we said that prayer isn't just preparation for the battle, prayer is the battle. Our prayers to God can actually have an effect on angels and demons. That's wild.

So if you left here saying to yourself, "If all of this is true, then I really need to be praying more!" - that was my point. And my point this morning is just as simply. Let's look at the passage again—

- Ephesians 6:18 <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,

Thousands of sermons have been preached on this passage with the title, "The Four All's of Prayer:." At all times, with all prayer and supplication, with all perseverance, for all the saints. So what is *Paul's* main point about prayer here? "Pray! Just do it! Don't get hung up on rules and proper procedures, right words and correct form - just do it, a lot of it, all the time!"

### **I. At all times.**

Now think: If that's how God tells us to pray, then He must mean for prayer to be something that is so natural, down-to-earth, and practical, that you can do it in your pajamas, or in your blue jeans, driving your car, bouncing a baby on your knee, pouring concrete, in church on Sunday, and at on work on Monday.

If there were a lot of rules and restrictions, then we couldn't do it 'at all times.' And in the context here, it has to mean this because our spiritual warfare is going on constantly, right? So we have to be able to cry out to God constantly. With all different kinds of prayer. About everything. Let's break it down—

#### ***A. We can pray for everything.***

To pray at all times means the same thing as praying without ceasing in 1Thess.5:17. It means to live in a state of God consciousness, where everything we see, and everything we experience *prompts* us to pray to our heavenly Father. This is what it looks like to pray at all times—

- A temptation comes along, and you cry out to God to give you strength to resist and put your mind on the things above. Then you see an amazing field of yellow mustard, or a blazing sunset and you take a minute to thank God and give Him praise for His beauty and His handiwork. You get home and you thank God for your home and your family. You hear about Syria using nerve gas on women and children and pray that God will soon punish evil, and have mercy on the victims. You meet someone who doesn't know Christ and you pray that God to draw that person to Himself and help you to be a faithful witness. You feel anger or impatience or bitterness welling up inside you - and you ask God to fill you the Holy Spirit before you say something stupid.

Last week I said that the Christian life should be like breathing: we constantly *inhale* God's Word, and we constantly *exhale* prayer. Nothing is too big to pray about, and nothing is too small to pray about. No detail is too small to bring to your heavenly Father.

We tend to create God in our own image: we get maxed out and stressed out by all the details of life, so we think that if we burden Him about piddly little things, He's going to get maxed out - like He won't be able to juggle all of these requests! But the mind of God is infinite. He never runs out of disc space! He manages every atom in the universe, as well as all the stars and galaxies - so He can handle every prayer of all of His children, all at the same time, without it diminishing His power or decreasing His care! If it's important to you, it's important to your heavenly Father. And it's often the little cares of life that wear the heart out. That's why we read—

- Philippians 4:6 . . . do not be anxious about anything, but in *everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
- Hasn't God proven to you, over and over, that He is concerned about the most trivial things that bother you? How many times has He answered very prayer about where you left your cell phone? For help finding your keys? Right? He knows the number of hairs on your head - it honors Him as your loving, all-sufficient Father when you go to Him about the smallest things. Everything means that.

And praying at all times means that—

### ***B. We can pray any time.***

David said this—

- Psalm 119:147 <sup>147</sup>I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words.
- Psalm 119:62 <sup>62</sup>At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules.
- Psalm 55:17 <sup>17</sup>Evening and morning and at *noon* I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.

David prayed all day long, and at any time in any place. But praying any time doesn't preclude having set times to pray. Daniel prayed 3 times a day, didn't he? Jesus had a habit of praying early in the morning. If you leave all your praying up to *spontaneity*, there are going to be times when realize that you haven't prayed for a long time. Isn't that true? So it's a good discipline to have regular, set times to check in with heaven - and then pray throughout the day besides.

### ***C. We can pray everywhere.***

Now if you have set times to pray, you need set places to pray, but if we're told to pray at all times, that must mean that we can pray anywhere: No location is more holy or appropriate than any other location for prayer. Jonah prayed a killer prayer at the bottom of the sea, from the belly of a sea creature!

Jesus seemed to love the Mt. of Olives as a place to pray. But He also cried out to God while hanging, naked and bleeding on the cross.

- I do most of my praying while I'm walking - eyes open. Many times Janice and I pray while we're in the car: I say, "I'll drive, you pray, and we're both praying with our eyes open, looking down the road."

But one of my favorite examples of prayer has to do with Nehemiah. Do you remember how the book of Nehemiah begins? He was the cupbearer for the King of Persia when he heard the news about Jerusalem, in a shambles, and he was devastated. So it says that he prayed and fasted for 4 months before going to the king to ask if he could return to Jerusalem and help rebuild the walls of the city. Nehemiah knew how to pray for a long time, but I love what we read about when he appears before the king to make his request—

- Nehemiah 2:4-5 <sup>4</sup>Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>And I said to the king, . . .

So in between the king's question and his response, Nehemiah prayed a split second prayer, in his own head, while standing there, looking the king in the eye! And God answered Nehemiah's request!

\*Isn't it good to know that God will hear you when you pray to Him: in the middle of taking that test; when you are on the phone trying to counsel and comfort someone in crisis; in mid-sentence as you are sharing the Gospel with a friend? Anytime and everywhere. And I love it when folks want to stop and pray even in public.

#### ***D. We can pray in any posture or position.***

In Scripture we read of people praying while standing up, lying down, on their knees, face down to the ground, eyes open, eyes closed, hands folded or arms outstretched. I've read that I should never pray if I'm slouched down in a chair, or wearing my baseball hat. And I agree that my attitude might be reflected by my posture - that's something I need to ask myself. But God is concerned about my heart condition, not my body position, or that I use fancy, religious sounding words. Maybe you've heard about the prayer of a man named Cyrus Brown?

"THE PROPER way for a man to pray,"  
Said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,  
"And the only proper attitude,  
Is down upon his knees."

"No, I should say the way to pray,"  
Said Reverend Doctor Wise,  
"Is standing straight, with outstretched arms,  
And rapt and upturned eyes."

"Oh no; no, no," said Elder Slow,

“Such posture is too proud:  
A man should pray with eyes fast closed  
And head contritely bowed.”

“It seems to me his hands should be  
Austerely clasped in front,  
With both thumbs pointing toward the ground,”  
Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.

“Las’ year I fell in Hodgkin’s well  
Head first,” said Cyrus Brown,  
“With both my heels a-stickin’ up,  
My head a-p’inting down;

“An’ I made a prayer right then an’ there—  
Best prayer I ever said,  
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed,  
A-standing on my head.”

But don’t miss Paul’s point: Your Father wants you to pray, about everything, any time, any place, wherever you are.

I’ll never forget hearing someone say, “Oh Christian, don’t have the audacity to barge into God’s holy presence without preparing your heart first.” Well that sounded very spiritual, and I was convicted for a long time after hearing that. And it just about killed my prayer life.

Yes, prayer should be reverent and serious - we are talking to almighty God! But we’re also talking to our Father. So we can pray anywhere, anytime, *naturally and spontaneously*.

- I’ve read that Abraham Lincoln’s son, Tad, would barge into cabinet meetings at the White House to ask his father some trivial question - and Lincoln would always stop to listen to his son. President Lincoln was a lousy disciplinarian! His son should have used the interrupt rule! But we are never interrupting our Heavenly Father!

And as far as the idea that I have to have my heart all cleaned up before I approach God in prayer, that doesn’t square with praying at all times, because my heart isn’t cleaned up at all times - is yours? And I still need to pray. I’m inclined to think that I should come as I am and ask God to clean up my heart as I pray—

Come out of sadness from wherever you’ve been.  
Come, broken-hearted let rescue begin,  
Come find your mercy, O sinner, come kneel,  
Earth has no sorrow that Heaven can’t heal.  
So lay down your hurt, lay down your heart.  
Come as you are.

## II.) In the Spirit.

We are to pray at all times, whenever, wherever, and for whatever we pray, *in the Spirit*. Before we see what this means, unfortunately we have to clear up a *wrong* interpretation of this passage: it doesn’t mean *speaking in tongues* = *glossalalia*, which is what some of our charismatic friends say. How do we know?

1.) Because Scripture never says that! There are only 3 places in the NT that mention praying in the Spirit: here, Jude 20, and in 1 Cor.14 where praying in the spirit (small 's') is our own human spirit, not the Holy Spirit. And even in that section which talks about the miraculous gift of speaking in unlearned human languages, Paul says that not all had the gift. So here in Eph.6:18, praying in the Spirit can't mean this because not all had this gift, and Paul clearly says that we are *all* to pray *all* the time in the Holy Spirit.

Common sense tells us that Paul wasn't telling us to pray all time in tongues! Did Jesus do this? Did Jesus teach us to pray the Lord's prayer in an unlearned language? As a matter of fact, Jesus said this about prayer—

- Matthew 6:7 <sup>7</sup>“And when you pray, do not heap up *empty phrases* as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.
- The Gk. word for “empty phrases” is *battalogo*, which means repetitious babbling - have you ever heard a person speak in tongues? That is *battalogo*. Jesus said, that is what the pagans do. His disciples are to pray intelligently, with their minds sharp and engaged, not on auto-pilot.

So back to reality: what does it mean for you and me to *always* pray “*in the Holy Spirit.*” I don't think Paul meant for this to be hard to understand. He means that we are to pray “*by means of,*” or “*with the help of,*” or “*connected to,*” the Holy Spirit. Or going back to Eph. 5:18, “*while we are filled with,*” the Holy Spirit. So we are to pray at all times, under the Spirit's control, and guidance, and with His help. He is our Helper when we pray.

Picture the Holy Spirit taking you by the hand, bringing you before the throne of God to talk to your Father. Paul said that in—

- Galatians 4:6 <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

God gave us the Holy Spirit to bring us to Him and cry out, “Daddy!” He helps us *experience* and *express* our relationship with Him. This is very personal stuff.

And let me expand on this. To pray in the Spirit, means that we—

#### ***A. Come to the Triune God—***

Praying in the Spirit reminds us that we worship a Triune God, and the normal pattern for prayer is praying to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit—

Jesus taught us to pray this way, “Our *Father*, who is in *heaven.*” He was saying, “Remember that you are coming to talk to your *Father* - but He's not an earthly Father, He is also Almighty, infinite *God* in heaven. This is Who you get to talk to! The Holy Spirit brings you into the presence of One who Has fatherly love and heavenly power.

- And we come *through* the Son. We have to, or we can't come at all because Jesus said that “no one come to the Father except through Me.” Eph.2:18 says that it's through Christ that we have access to the Father. His death took down the curtain that kept us out - remember our Easter message? So coming to the Father through the Son means we *always* remember - we only come by the blood.

It really is the same thing as praying “in Jesus’ name.” You can’t get in on your own, you point to Jesus. Your name is on His account because He redeemed you by His blood.

- When I want to get into my storage unit, I have to type a code into a keypad so that the security gate will open and let me in. I have no right, on my own, to approach God in prayer. If I try to type in my own name and come to God on my own merit - the gate stays shut. But when I come on the basis of God’s Son, and His merit, the gates of heaven open up!

So in prayer, we come to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. Look with me at—

- Eph.2:18 For through Him (Jesus) we both (Jews, Gentile, anyone who trusts in Christ) have access *in* one Spirit to the Father.

The word “access” here is a special word: *prosagogen*. In that day, if you wanted an audience with a king, the person who led you to the king was called the *prosagogeis*. There was no access to the king unless he conducted you into his presence. The Holy Spirit Himself is our *prosagogeis*! He brings us in.

So Jesus takes away the barrier of your sins with His own blood, then the Holy Spirit takes you by the hand and brings you to your Father to hear your prayers! Does it sound to you like the entire Trinity wants God’s children to pray?

- And think about what this is saying to us about prayer: It’s so good, but we so easily forget it: When you pray, it is one *person - on earth*, speaking to another *Person - in heaven*. It’s a personal conversation between two Persons who love each other. It’s not reading a report at a board meeting; it’s not calling in your prescription; it’s not giving a speech. And it’s even more than just a conversation: it’s communion, it’s fellowship. If you are a Christian, when you pray, you are having a conversation with God, a supernatural Person, who loves you infinitely, and knows you completely. Jesus said, He knows what you need even before you ask - *so prayer isn’t about supplying information, it’s about expressing relationship*.

And the Holy Spirit does more than just bring us into the presence of God when we pray, He actually helps us to pray! Some of you know what passage I’m referring to, but let’s all turn there—

- Romans 8:26-27 <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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.

What a precious passage, and I’m not going to re-preach this sermon, but it sends a pretty clear message: we’re *weak*! Don’t hold out any false hope that you will ever be anything other than weak. Because you won’t. And there is no place we sense our weakness more than when we are the most desperate to pray.

### ***B. Come in your weakness.***

Isn’t that when you feel just how weak and helpless you are? You aren’t strong enough, wise enough, godly enough to handle what you are going through. And on top of it, you might be physically exhausted and emotionally drained. Your thoughts are scattered and your mind is

distracted. You want to pray and you need to pray, but you're weak! How often are you in that place?

- But God's promise is that *this is precisely when* the Holy Spirit takes us by the hand just like that angel grabbed the hand of lingering Lot - and He brings us to our Father, and then He stays with us and groans along with us as we pray, and intercedes for us according to the will of God! Wow - that's deserves a whole sermon, doesn't it!

--But he doesn't do all of this once we get ourselves all put together and we are finally strong enough to come to God without His help - and we would never say it - but in our own righteousness - No! Right in the middle of our weakness, and sinfulness, and shame. Think about what this passage is saying: *The Spirit helps us when we come as we are.*

- And I can let you in on one of the secrets of the universe - if you've been a Christian for awhile, you already know it: God orchestrates His universe precisely to put you in places of weakness, need, and desperation. God is the one who brings you to your knees, so that you will come to Him and cry out "Abba, Father!" And have sweet communion with Him - and find that He is everything you need, and that "His grace is enough!" What is sweeter than discovering that?

One place in Scripture we hear Jesus Himself cry out, "*Abba, Father!*" Was it a sunny Spring day, surrounded by flowers on a Galilean hillside? No, it was the Garden of Gethsamane, when He was sweating blood in prayer before being crucified. But He was never closer to His Father.

- Thank God for anything that drives you to Him in prayer. And I'll take it even further: God would never tempt you to sin, or cause you to sin, but He will allow your sin to be exposed to drive you to Him for mercy and love. Spurgeon said this - and the world would never understand this, but a Christian does. He said: "I do not know, beloved, when I am more perfectly happy than when I am weeping for sin at the foot of the cross."

This isn't coming to God in prayer as you *should* be, as you would *like* to be - it's coming just as you are; "weak and heavy-laden, bruised and broken by the Fall." And my brothers and sisters, if you wait till you are better - you will never come at all.

God brings you to the place of weakness so that you will pray. It's not to keep you away from Him, but to drive you to Him in prayer and communion with Him. "*And you will seek Me and find Me - when you search for Me with all your heart!*"

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Two men went to pray - one a respected Pharisee, the other a despised tax collector. One got all dressed up - the other came just the way he was—

- Luke 18:10-14 (Message) The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: 'Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.' <sup>13</sup>"Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, 'God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.'" <sup>14</sup>Jesus commented, "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God."

So lay down your burdens.  
Lay down your shame.

All who are broken,  
Lift up your face.  
*Oh wanderer come home,  
You're not too far.  
So lay down your hurt,  
Lay down your heart,  
Come as you are.*

\* \* \*

Come Ye Sinners.