

We are at war. "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." Eugene Peterson says it this way, **"This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the devil and all his angels."** God provides powerful weapons that are effective in spiritual warfare. Paul uses 6 pieces of armor corresponding to those worn by a Roman soldier. This morning we have organized our service to illustrate how to put this armor on - through prayer. Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesians by revealing his secret weapon - prayer. Prayer is the recognition that this invisible war is not our war, it is God's. In order to fight God's war, we need God's weapons. When we pray we acknowledge that God, by His grace, has made available to us the character of Christ. Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Faith, Salvation, the Word of God are all ineffective if we don't take the time to appropriate them through prayer.

Eph. 6:18 says, ***"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."*** The word "all" is used 4 times emphasizing four very important characteristics of effective prayer.

1. Pray in all ways. The psalmist did. Psalm 4 acknowledges God at the end of the day. Psalm 5 is a request at the beginning of a new day. Psalm 6 is a lament psalm of David in the aftermath of his failures. Psalm 7 is labeled a "shiggaion" or poem written with immense feeling as David feels the pressure of being under attack. Psalm 8 is a prayer of praise as David is inspired by the thought of the creative power of God. Psalm 9 is a prayer of thanksgiving during a time of great joy. Psalm 10 is a plea for God to avenge the oppressed by destroying the wicked.

Eph. 5:15-21 contains another example of ways we can pray to God. Where the Spirit is present we will sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord, offer up our thanksgiving in prayer and submit to one another as an act of worship.

2. Pray at all times. The word is kairos not chronos. "Chronos" would mean "pray every second of every hour." But kairos is not clock time but opportunity time. Pray at every opportunity. Take advantage of the high speed internet connection we have with the Creator of the universe. This is similar to what Paul said in 1 Thes. 5:17, that we should pray without ceasing. This doesn't mean that we should always be on our knees praying, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It means rather, that we should maintain an attitude of prayer like a high school student maintains their text messages. It is constant.

Elsewhere in 1 Thes. Paul says, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers." 1:2

"And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God." 2:13

Constantly is the "when," "in the Spirit" is the how. "Pray at all times in the Spirit." Pray in a way that is consistent with the nature and purpose of God.

If you're not sure how to pray - use scripture since the word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Eph. 1:18-19; 3:16-19

3. Pray with all perseverance. Jesus emphasized this quality of persistence in prayer when he told the story of the widow in Luke 18:2-8. This is one parable that is accompanied with the main point in v. 1, "that we ought always to pray and not give up."

4. Pray for all the saints. One way to practice this is to pray in concentric circles:
Self - Family - Friends and church family - Co-workers - National concerns
International concerns

Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission. Until we believe there is an invisible, spiritual war, we cannot appreciate what prayer is for. Prayer is our secret weapon. Prayer is the means by which we call in close air support.

"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 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 is the communication with headquarters by which the weapons of warfare are deployed according to the will of God. That's the connection between the weapons and prayer in Ephesians 6. Prayer is for war." John Piper

Those who are not stunned with the reality that there is an intense battle raging for the souls of all people will have no urgency, no watching, no vigilance, no strategic planning.

And what will they do with their walkie-talkie? They'll just use it as an intercom, not to call in fire power for conflict with a mortal enemy, but to ask the maid to bring another glass of tea and some snacks.

Pray to the Lord and ask Him to give you 20:20 vision (2 Chron. 20:20). When the Moabites and the Ammonites joined forces to defeat the people of Judah, the Bible says, "Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah assembled to seek help from the LORD; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD." vv. 3-4.

"Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshiping the LORD. ¹⁹ And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

²⁰ And they rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. And when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed." ²¹ And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say,

"Give thanks to the LORD,
for his steadfast love endures forever."

And do you know what happened? "And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed." v. 22

The moral of the story? We face a powerful enemy. Our situation would be hopeless except for the fact that we have a more powerful Commander who provides powerful weapons to His Spirit-empowered people who offer up more persistent powerful prayers. So pray - in all ways, at all times, with all perseverance, for all people. Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing." Another way of saying that is, "There are a lot of things you can do AFTER you pray but you can do NOTHING before you pray."

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