

Sermon Series: Protecting our Faith

## The Weapon of Prayer and Encouragement

### Ephesians 6:18-20

*18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. 19 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, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. 21 Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. 22 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.*

Perhaps this week you have stood on a battlefield.

You didn't have to make a special journey to get there.

The battlefield was not marked with a historic monument.

If you were to page through all of the history books, you could never find this battlefield listed.

As a matter of fact, no battles had ever been fought on this battlefield before.

But one was about to be fought. And you were the one about to fight it.

The battle to which I am referring to is the battle Satan brings to every genuine Christian believer.

The battlefield is simply when we decide we are going to do something for God. We're going to live for God.

We've made a commitment and the enemy has already met in his hideous headquarters with his demons to strategize to war against us.

You see – when we become believers/soldiers of the Cross, we must be equipped for this battle.

We must stand ready to fight, clothed in **the full armor of God.**

We must have the **belt of truth** about our waist.

We must have the **breastplate of righteousness.**

Our feet must be shod with the **preparation of the gospel of peace.**

We must take up the **shield of faith** and put on the **helmet of salvation.**

In our hand, we must carry the **Sword of the Spirit,** which is the Word of God.

**Believer friend, listen to me - Wearing the full armor of God is vital, but to stand in the battlefield with nothing but this armor will not be enough.**

**We must have the full armor of God, but we must have something more.**

We must have a strategy.

We must have a plan.

We must have an additional weapon.

I'm going to ask Pastor Derek to bring Stephen Jacobs back up and demonstrate to you the Armor of God and the Blanket and Weapon of Prayer.

This is the **Weapon of prayer.** You see there is no stopping between verses 17 and 18.

*17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

**The weapon of prayer will make the difference between victory and defeat in your life.**

**To go forth clothed in the best armor, even with the best intentions, and to neglect prayer will bring certain defeat.**

It is like an army going forth into battle with no battle plan.

**We must fight and that is certain.**

But we must know more than that.

**We must know how we must fight.**

**One man said, “He makes us strong in Him and leads us to pray, but to pray for His agenda and not ours. He does not make you strong for your own benefit, but to fight for His kingdom! We are so self-centered that we only pray with real earnest when we are in trouble or really need something.**

**Prayer is the lifeline and strength of a soldier fighting for Jesus and His kingdom. Remember where we find this passage – putting on armor and fighting the schemes of the devil. God tells us where we are to concentrate our efforts as a warrior.”**

That's why we must pray.

**Prayer is the weapon Satan fears the most.**

**I. With All Prayer**

*“With all prayer and petition . . .” (6:18a)*

In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian came upon forces of hell where his sword was useless.

As Christian pondered the situation, the text says **“that he was forced to put up his sword, and betake to himself another weapon, called `All-Prayer.”**

In using this weapon of **“All-Prayer,”** we must be aware of the variety of prayer available to us.

**There are many types of prayer for us to pray.**

**Prayers of confession** because we have sinned.

**Prayers of thanksgiving** because we are grateful.

**Prayers of adoration and praise** because we want to worship God.

**Prayers of intercession** because others need our prayers.

**Prayers of petition** for ourselves because of some need in our lives.

So, we see different prayers address different situations.

If prayer is to be an effective weapon for us as believers, then we must learn to refine our skill in using prayer through regular praying.

And we've got to become familiar with this weapon.

All too often people simply concentrate on **petition prayer. Always asking God for something for themselves.**

But we must take time to praise Him.

We must enter into His presence with thanksgiving and praise.

This kind of prayer can take the form of speech or song. **Songs of praise directed to God are really prayers.**

Prayer can be spoken, sung, and even expressed without words.

## **A. At All Times**

**... pray at all times ... (6:18b)**

How often should we pray?

We need to be praying "**at all times.**"

It is important for us to see the need for continual prayer.

You can wake up in the morning praying before you ever get out of bed. You can wake up in the early hours praying.

When is it time to pray? Always! When you're driving somewhere. When you working.

There is never a time when we do not need to pray.

**In the early church, we see that prayer was a way of life.**

Acts 1:14 says, "*These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*"

In Acts 2:42 we read, "*And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*"

Paul writes in Thessalonians that we are to "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

**But how is it possible to pray continually?**

Well, it is not possible if by that we mean a verbally expressed prayer. We can't do that!

We must work, talk to others, eat, and sleep.

But if prayer is viewed as an attitude of constant devotion to and communion with God, **then it is possible to pray without ceasing.**

Believer friend, listen, **If the attitude of your heart is toward God, then He will be the center of your existence.**

In every situation and circumstance, you'll find yourself naturally discussing it with God.

He will be your first thought, not your last.

You will run to Him for counsel, rather to everyone else but Him.

This is not to say that we will not have times of regular prayer.

We will. But our hearts will always be stayed towards God.

John Wesley wrote of the person who experiences this kind of prayer.

**“His heart is ever lifted up to God, at all times and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lay down or**

**rise up, God is in all his thoughts; he walks with God continually, having the loving eye of his mind still fixed upon Him, and everywhere “seeing Him that is invisible.”**

Whatever your profession and whatever your circumstance in life, you can experience this kind of continual prayer.

As a business professional, housewife, student, young mother, or single --- everyone can experience it.

Your life and mine can have this upward look.

It is a state of being.

## **B. In The Spirit**

**... pray at all times in the Spirit ... (6:18c)**

The power of effective prayer is found in the Spirit of God.

We are exhorted to pray **in the Spirit.**

By this we understand that all prayer ought to be **Spirit-directed.**

**The Holy Spirit is the author of all effective prayer.**

In Romans 8:26-27 we read, *“And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He (Jesus) who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the*

*Spirit is, because He (Jesus) intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”*

When we do not understand how to pray, it is the Spirit who enables us to pray effectively.

There have been many times when I did not know how to pray.

It is very simple to just say, *“Thy will be done.”*

Many times, however, the Spirit will enable us to do more than that.

If we’ll wait on Him, He may reveal to us exactly how to pray for a certain situation.

He may speak to our minds and reveals exactly how He wants us to pray.

Romans 8, there is still another prayer described.

At times, no words will do, whether known or unknown. During these times the Spirit prays through us, *“with groanings too deep for words.”*

At these times we must simply wait in silence before God as the Spirit communes with the Father.

The point is this --- all prayer must be led by the Spirit.

For us to pray effectively we must maintain our walk with God and our fellowship with the Spirit.

The secret of the Christian life is a relationship with Christ.

The Spirit empowers the Christian life and prayer.

### **C. With All Perseverance**

**... and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition . . . (6:18d)**

If the weapon of prayer is to be used effectively, it must be used persistently.

**We are in a continual warfare.**

For prayer to be effective, we cannot afford to let up.

We must **be on the alert.**

**We must pray, pray, and pray again.**

Jesus emphasized the importance of persistent prayer.

In fact, He told a story in Luke 18 to illustrate this point. The reason for that story was *“to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.”*

Toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount He encouraged all of us to be persistent in our praying when He said, *“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.”*

These three verbs are all **present imperatives.**

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He is really saying, “*Ask, and keep on asking; seek, and keep on seeking; knock, and keep on knocking.*”

There is an ascending order of intensity to these verbs.

One begins by asking.

But seeking is more than simply asking.

It involves action.

Seeking is going after something.

And knocking involves more than simply asking or seeking.

The picture here is of someone pounding on a door.

There is no doubt that Jesus intended to graphically illustrate the importance of persistence and perseverance in prayer.

We should never quit praying until we get either a yes or a no response.

God can certainly tell us “No!”

In that situation we stop praying about it and give it to Him.

God can also give us a yes; He can answer our prayer.

Then you can also quit praying.

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But when we hear neither a yes nor a no, then we should keep praying.

God may be using our persistence in prayer to accomplish His will.

He may be doing something in you, or in someone else.

I’ve asked Kathleen Paugh to come forward to share a testimony at this point of my sermon. Let’s listen to how God spoke to her while she prayed for a certain situation in her life.

George Muehller of Bristol prayed for two friends for over fifty years.

He was asked whether He really believed that God would bring salvation to these men.

He replied, “Do you think God would have kept me praying all these years if He did not intend to save them?”

And they were both converted.

One shortly before, the other after Muehller’s death.

In His sovereign will, God uses persistent prayer.

#### **D. For All Saints**

... **with all perseverance and petition** *for all the saints*  
... (6:18e)

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Prayer can be effective, not only for you, but also for others.

In fact, one of the primary uses of prayer should be intercessory prayer.

Intercessory prayer is prayer for others.

We are called to pray **for all the saints**.

Just think of it.

Your prayers can have a direct effect on others. Nothing excites me more than when I hear people from this church say, “Pastor, we pray for you daily.”

You see your prayers can bless people you’re praying for.

Your prayers can lift them up.

Your prayers can impact their lives for Christ.

Your prayers can encourage them.

Your prayers can keep them from falling.

Your prayers can fend off the attack of the enemy.

Your prayers can impact situations on a global scale as we pray for our missionaries around the world.

There is no place in this world where your prayers cannot touch lives.

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**What an awesome privilege we have!**

Of course, the obvious reason we are to pray **for all the saints** is that the **saints** are **engaged in combat**.

Praying for one another is simply watching over one another.

**As we intercede for one another, we engage in the very ministry which Jesus is performing even now.**

He is at the right hand of God interceding for the saints.

The devil, on the other hand, is accusing the saints before God.

I know some feel uncomfortable about what I’m going to say, but, sometimes believers enter into the ministry of the Devil rather than the ministry of Christ.

They become accusers of the brethren.

When they do, they are following Satan. What do I base that upon?

Christ could say to Peter, “***Get thee behind Me Satan.***”

We should become intercessors on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ when there are issues you can’t understand.

This is what intercessory prayer does for us.

The importance of prayer cannot be overstated.

We are in a spiritual battle, and so are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This spiritual battle must be fought on the spiritual plane. ***“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”***

If we are to win this battle, we must pray.

Do you pray? Do you *really* pray?

Most of us do not pray as we know we should.

And there is one very good reason.

John Piper described it in his book *Desiring God*:

**Unless I'm badly mistaken, one of the main reasons so many of God's children don't have a significant life of prayer is not so much that we don't want to, but that we don't plan to. If you want to take a four week vacation, you don't just get up one summer morning and say, “Hey, let's go today!” You won't have anything ready. You won't know where to go. Nothing has been planned.**

But that is how many of us treat prayer.

We get up day after day and realize that significant times of prayer should be part of our life, but nothing is ever ready.

We don't know where to go.

Nothing has been planned. No time. No place. No procedure.

And we all know the opposite of planning is not a wonderful flow of deep, spontaneous experiences in prayer.

The opposite of planning is the rut.

If you don't plan a vacation you will probably stay home and watch T.V.!

The natural unplanned flow of spiritual life sinks to the lowest ebb of vitality.

**There is a race to be run and a fight to be fought.**

If you want renewal in your life of prayer. You must plan to see it.

Therefore, my simple exhortation is this: let us take time this very day to rethink our priorities and how prayer fits in.

Make some new resolve a new commitment.

Try some new venture with God.

Set a time. Set a place. Do it on purpose!

Choose a portion of Scripture to guide you.

Don't be tyrannized by the press of being busy.

We all need mid-course corrections.

Make this a day of turning to prayer --- for the glory of God and for the fullness of your joy.

May God give us the grace to take up the weapon of prayer, and to use it!

Now – the next thing we must do in this Battle is to

## II. Encouraging Others

*"21 Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. 22 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.*

(Ephesians 6:21-22)

### **Life can be discouraging. Would you agree?**

We live in a society that can chew people up and spit them out.

It simply amazes me how insensitive people can be this way even in the Body of Christ by their actions and words against fellow believers.

In our high-tech age we have forgotten how to be high-touch.

At work people are eager to climb the corporate ladder and are often selfish and cold intent on getting that promotion. You know – they can stab you in the back.

We exalt as virtues things which are not virtuous.

**Attitudes like pride, selfishness, and greed are portrayed as desirable characteristics.**

And all of this can be terribly discouraging to us.

Someone has described our society as a rat-race.

While that may be fine for rats, what about the rest of us?

Others have described us as a dog-eat-dog society.

The point is this that if we're not filled with the Spirit of God there is a blatant disregard for others.

It is truer today than ever before. And the church is not exempt from this.

And folks, listen to me that is further away from true holiness which Jesus commanded we have.

**What we need is some encouragement. People don't need our criticism.**

We need people who are encouragers.

There certainly are times when I need encouragement.

Don't ever feel that I don't appreciate encouragement – and don't ever stop giving encouragement to others, because we all need it.

I'm sure that you will admit that there are times when you need encouragement.

Indeed, **there are probably few times when we do not need encouragement.**

As I study the life of the apostle Paul, I am struck with the fact that he was an encourager.

Paul could certainly speak in a straight forward and blunt manner.

He did not shy away from speaking the truth to someone, even when that truth was harsh and hard to take.

But at his heart Paul was very much an encourager of others.

**At the core of his being, he desired to build people up, not tear them down.**

As we come to the closing words of the book of Ephesians, we see Paul doing what we all need to do for one another.

We see him wishing the very best that God has to offer on others.

Paul expresses his heart-felt desire that the peace, love, faith, and grace of God be fully realized by these Christians in Ephesus.

Paul gives us an example of how we should encourage others.

What is it that you desire for others?

Do you rejoice when others succeed?

Do you truly desire to see God's best be realized in the lives of other people?

We all need the love of others and sometimes there is a risk in this.

Maybe you heard about the guy who fell in love with an opera singer.

He hardly knew her, since his only view of the singer was through binoculars --- from the third balcony.

But he was convinced he could live “happily ever after, married to a voice like that.”

He scarcely noticed she was considerably older than he.

Nor did he care that she walked with a limp.

Her soprano voice would take them through whatever might come.

After a whirlwind romance and a hurry-up ceremony, they were off for their honeymoon together.

She began to prepare for their first night together.

As he watched, his chin dropped to his chest.

She plucked out her glass eye and popped it into a container on the nightstand.

She pulled off her wig, ripped off her false eyelashes, yanked out her dentures, unstrapped her artificial leg, and

smiled at him as she slipped off her glasses that hid her hearing aid.

Stunned and horrified, he gasped, “For goodness sake, woman, sing, sing, SING!”

Is there someone you know who needs love today?

Why don't we stop right now and pray for that person.

Pray that he or she would receive true **love**.

Pray also that you will be able to show true **love**.

The best way we can be an encouraging person to others is to desire God's best for them.

We should not only desire that, but we should pray for one another that God would bless us and build us up.

We should carefully consider one another with a view to building up one another in Christ.

Life is tough enough without our adding to the discouragement.

In order to protect our Faith, there are several things we have to do.

1. We have to be aware of the Spiritual Warfare that comes in Trials and Hardships.
2. We have to be equipped with the Armor of God.
3. We must Pray persistently
4. We must be encouragers of those in the Body of Christ.