Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Praying at All Times
Scripture: Ephesians 6:18-24
Code: 1962

This morning we come to the 6th chapter of Ephesians for the last time, because we're going to be finishing our study of this marvelous book. I understand, as I mentioned last week, that this is about message 62 or 63 in our study of Ephesians and I feel again, as I always do when I close a book, even though we've been well over a year studying this book, we haven't really begun to plumb all of the riches and the depths that are here.

But God has really changed our lives as we've studied. God has done some marvelous things. As I look back on the themes in the Book of Ephesians, we've been through probably, in this book in the last year plus, the most exciting time of our church. God has confronted us in many ways with many new thoughts, done some dramatic things in our midst, and it doesn't really come to an end now because we simply take all that we've learned, all that God has planted in our hearts, and begin to apply it here on out as we live our lives to His glory.

So we don't leave the Book of Ephesians. We simply take what we've learned and begin to let it move through us to the glory of God as we live in this world. But we come this morning to the last section of the book and we're going to take this section as one unit this morning, and I want you to listen as I read verses 18 to 24.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that in this I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

"But that ye may also know my affairs, *and* how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know our affairs, and *that* he might comfort your hearts.

"Peace *be* to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen."

In 1671 was born in Germany a man named Johann Burchard Freystein. He wrote the following words to an old hymn:

“Rise, my soul, to watch and pray, from thy sleep awaken/Be not by the evil day unawares or taken/For the foe, well we know, oft his harvest reapeth/While the Christian sleepeth. Watch against the devil’s snares lest asleep he find thee/For indeed no pains he spares to deceive and blind thee/Satan’s prey oft are they who secure are sleeping/And no watch are keeping. But while watching, also pray to the Lord unceasing/He will free thee, be thy Stay, strength and faith increasing/O Lord, bless in distress and let nothing swerve me/From the will to serve Thee.”

Over 100 years ago, Charlotte Elliott wrote the words for another hymn:

“Christian! seek not yet repose/Cast thy dreams of ease away/Thou art in the midst of foes/Watch and pray. Principalities and powers/Mustering their unseen array/Wait for thy unguarded hours/Watch and pray. Watch, as if on that alone/Hung the issue of the day/Pray that help may be sent down/Watch and pray.”

Both of these hymns point out the reality that victory over Satan, victory over his hosts, victory in the warfare with which we are engaged involves a tremendous commitment to prayer. That’s what both hymn writers are saying, and that is precisely what the apostle Paul is saying in chapter 6, verse 18. Now he has already discussed the warfare in chapter 6, verses 10 to 13, and he has discussed very clearly the armor in verses 14 to 17. And now he brings on to bear the theme of prayer. And verse 18 begins “praying always.”

Now prayer, then, becomes the closing theme in the letter of Ephesians. It is not mentioned as a part of the Christian’s armor because it’s more than that. The armor ended in verse 17 and prayer is in addition to that, and more, prayer is in concert with that. So the apostle Paul is not saying in addition to these things, add prayer, but rather, woven into this is prayer.

All the while, we are attending to the belt of truthfulness, and the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of the gospel of peace, and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit. All the while, we are engaged with those elements; the shield of faith. We are, at the same time, involved in prayer. “Praying always,” all through the procedure of arming ourselves, all through the demands of the battle, all through whether it’s the heat of the war or a lull, we are engaged in prayer.

Prayer is the very air we breathe. I remember reading about the kind of animal that lives in the dark places of the sea, down deep in the sea. It’s neither fish nor fowl, really, but it lives there and it can stay there in the darkness for some period of time, but then it must ascend all the way to the surface and gasp air, and then go back again.

And so the believer, all the while in his life, in all the vicissitudes, and all times of his life, must ascend, as it were, to the throne of God to breathe the air of prayer. And then, and then alone, can he

be able to exist in the darkness of the world about him. And that's exactly what Paul is saying here. Prayer is like our breath. I've told you before that it's like breathing. You don't have to think to breathe because the air exerts pressure on your lungs and forces you to breathe. And so as a believer, not to pray is to hold your breath spiritually, and the results are all bad.

All the while you live the Christian life. All the time you put on the armor. All the time you fight, you are breathing and breathing and breathing, as it were, in prayer. Prayer pervades all of that.

I think in reading *Pilgrim's Progress* of how God gives to Christian, in that wonderful allegory, a weapon called "All Prayer," and the instruction that when everything else fails, this will cause you to be able to defeat all the fiends that come in the valley of the shadow. But prayer is really more than Bunyan sees it there. It's more than an additional weapon. It is the atmosphere in which all our living occurs; all our fighting and all our arming ourselves. It is pervasive in that sense.

Now the fact that it is climactic in the Book of Ephesians is planned by God's Holy Spirit. It is not by accident. Our Lord urged men always "to pray, and not to faint," in Luke 18:1, and He knows that in the battle, when it gets hot, you can faint. You can get weary. You can give up. You can abandon the fight if you don't pray. You really only have two alternatives. You either pray or faint. There's no middle ground.

And so in the warfare that He's just talked about, prayer becomes vital, but it's more than just that context. The reason prayer comes here is because it fits the ending of the total book. The whole letter of Ephesians comes to a climax, and a peak, and a pinnacle at this point. It's as if prayer is like the musical crescendo in the great anthem of praise that is the Book of Ephesians.

Now let me show you why I say that. If you go back in Ephesians, you will find, as we have in the time we've studied it, that this book, probably more than any other book in the entire Bible, presents the resources of a believer. In my mind, I don't see any other book matching it in stature as far as a delineation of the resources that are ours in being in Christ. It is incomparable in that sense. It is a long cataloging of all that is ours as Christians.

What Peter says in one simple phrase – and we have all things that pertain to life in godliness; what Colossians 2 says in that simple phrase, "You are complete in Him," is really magnified and exploded to its fullest in the Book of Ephesians. All our completeness is here. All our resources are here. And the key to that is chapter 1, verse 3, "blessed with all spiritual blessings and the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." And then he goes on to delineate them for six chapters. It's a monumental cataloging of all that is ours in Christ, and it lifts us to great heights.

It starts us, as it were, in the heavenlies. We start in the glories and we stay there for the whole book until finally we come to chapter 6:18, and God demands that we fall on our knees. And prayer, then,

becomes the key – now mark it - to appropriating the resources. They're all there, and they are all ours in Christ, but we cannot simply float around in the glory, as it were. We have to come to the reality of being on our knees before God so that these things can be implemented in our lives.

And so the book that begins in the heavenlies ends on its knees as Paul calls us to prayer. Now, you might think in a book with such tremendous resources, prayer wouldn't be very necessary. What would be to pray for? For example, listen. According to chapter 1, verse 3, we are super blessed. According to chapter 1, verse 4 to 6, we are super loved. According to chapter 1, verse 7, we are forgiven and redeemed. Chapter 1, verse 8, says we are given wisdom. Chapter 1, verse 11 says we are made rich. Chapter 1, verse 13 says we are secure, sealed with the Spirit. Chapter 2, verses 4 to 6, we are alive with new life. Chapter 2, verse 7, we are the objects of eternal grace. Chapter 2, verse 10, we are God's masterpiece. Again, chapter 2, verse 10, we are called to a life of good works which God will do through us. Chapter 2, verses 13 to 18, we are one with God and with every other Christian. Chapter 2, verse 19, we are members of God's intimate family. Chapter 2, verse 22, we are the very habitation of the Holy Spirit. Chapter 3, verse 20, we are powerful beyond our own imagination. Chapter 3:21, we are able to glorify God.

What an incredible definition of a human being. Amazing what God has done for us beyond anything we can even imagine. When you move from there into the 4th chapter, it just keeps going. In chapter 4, verse 3, we are told we possess the living Spirit of God in us. In chapter 4, verses 4 to 6, we are members of the Body of Christ. In chapter 4, verses 11 to 13, we have received gifts and gifted men to perfect us to do the work of the ministry. In chapter 4, verses 20 to 24, we have Jesus Christ to teach us to walk a new life.

In chapter 5, verses 1 and 2, we have received the love of God so that we can walk in love. In chapter 5, verse 8, we have received God's very light so that we dwell in light. In chapter 5, verses 15 to 17, we have received the wisdom and the truth of God so that we can walk wisely in the world. In chapter 5, verse 18, we have received the power of the fullness of the Spirit of God. In chapter 5, verses 21, through chapter 6, verse 9, we have received the resources to make every human relationship all the God ever intended it to be. Finally, in chapter 6, verses 10 to 17, we have received invulnerable, invincible, fantastic, powerful armor against which Satan is hapless and helpless if we use it, climaxing itself in the sword of the Spirit, the magnificent weapon of the Word of God, which is in the hand of every believer.

Now that's a tremendous picture. That's all what it is to be a Christian. Now, by the time you've gotten all of that in your head, and you recognize your exalted position in Christ, and you see the resources for effective Christian living, and you know you lack nothing, you immediately, then, face a problem and the problem is what you might call a kind of doctrine legalism. A problem may be defined in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Let him that thinketh he stand take heed lest he - " what? " - fall." You can actually become what I would call a "spiritual atheist."

In other words, you have a full belief in God, you just don't need Him. And I suppose this would be one of the grave dangers in a church like ours. We are so adequate. We have so much knowledge. We have so much information. We have so many resources. We understand our position. We know our gifts. We've seen God's blessing. We've had so much success and very little failure, and so it's easy for us to just move along and not really acknowledge God at all. We can fall into a terrible sin of feeling we're adequate and losing the sense of dependence on God.

I guess we should pray as one brother prayed, that God would give us enough success to know He's there and enough failure to desperately need Him. We have so many things going for us in our society, in our church, in our lives. We've seen such tremendous blessing of God that it's easy to become smug and reduce everything to the how-to's, and the gimmicks, and the programs, and the methods. We've got it all, and we've done it all, and it's all great. You know, maybe our marriage is working out, our kids are good, everything's fine at the church. It's all wonderful. And we become spiritual atheists. We just tune God out. And that kind of passionate, deep longing, yearning, earnest prayer that God calls from our hearts just isn't there.

We have some dear friends, Pedro and Lilian Marevus, with whom we have visited many times when they were in the States, and with whom we've shared much rich fellowship while we were ministering in Nicaragua. In the last week or so in the terrible fighting and slaughter that's gone on in Nicaragua, these dear people have had to flee the country; gather what they could and get out. He has a little plant where they made cosmetics. Had his own business. And the government demanded, of course, that he use it to produce some kind of ammunition and the rebels said if he did, they'd kill them all. And so he was trapped and they had to flee for their lives. And I very seriously doubt whether they had much trouble thinking of something to pray about. They've lost everything. Everything. Their home, everything. They must rebuild again. Their children are being educated in the United States. I understand they'll have to bring them all home because they have no money to support them anymore.

But we get along so well sometimes that we lose the perspective, and I think sometimes if we lose it, God may just bring things into our lives to help us get it back. And that's what Paul is saying. You've got it all, but it still all depends on Him. It's kind of like a football coach. A professional football player has mastered his techniques. By the time he gets into the professional football ranks, he knows what he's doing. He knows exactly what he's doing. He understands how to play his position. He understands football. He's trained. He has the skills and the equipment, the talent, the whole thing.

And yet that great, big hulking man who has mastered the form of profession that he's in, who knows the whole thing inside and out, has to listen to a little guy on the sidelines with a clipboard telling him every move to make. I've heard from some of the men on the Dallas Cowboys that it's a typical speech that Tom Landry gives after a game when Dallas loses. He walks into the locker room and

says this to them. “Gentlemen, I told you how to win the game. You didn’t do what I told you, so you lost.” And he turns around and leaves.

Now you can have all the talent, and all the resources, and all the training, and all of the innate ability, but if you don’t do it the way God directs it to be done, you lose. That’s essentially what Paul is saying. Don’t think that because you have all these resources, and you have all this history of success, and you have all of this being in Christ that you can become a spiritual atheist and live as if you didn’t need God. It can’t be done.

The armor is not mechanical and the armor is not magical. It needs God. God infuses into the armor and God infuses into our resources His power and His energy. So there is the latent danger that Christians who have a knowledge of doctrine, and some kind of a history of success, and a fairly effective grip on practical spiritual principals can become satisfied, and they don’t need a heart-rending passionate constant prayer. And that’s a tragedy. And that’s why the epistle that begins in the heavenlies ends on its knees, because all of that is dependent on prayer.

Maybe you look at your life and you say, “You know, I know so much.” Some of you people, some of you young people, some of you people in seminary, and some of you people that have come out of seminary, you look at your life and you say, “I know so much, but I don’t see too much happening.” Well, you think the armor, or you think your resources are either magical or mechanical, and they’re not. They’re dependent on prayer. The soul of man moving in the presence of God.

Now that’s what Paul wants us to see, so let’s look at it. We’re going to cover all of these verses, believe it or not. Somebody came up to me after I did it in the first service and their mouth was hanging open. They said, “I didn’t think you could cover that many verses. I’m shocked.” We will. We’re going to skip the last four.

First of all, I want you to see the general instruction in verse 18. The general instruction, verse 18. You’ll notice that there are four “alls”. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Now here you have the four alls of prayer. Four times “all” is emphasized. This is go great. Each piece put on with prayer. Prayer pervades all that we are and that we do. It is the all-encompassing element of our lives. That’s why I say it is the air we breathe. There’s no time in our lives when we should not be in prayer.

Let’s look first of all at the frequency of prayer. We’ll take these alls one at a time. The frequency of prayer, verse 18. “Praying always.” When are we to pray? Always. Now some of you have come out of backgrounds where you’ve prayed reading out of a prayer book or where you prayed at a certain, set time. You know, the Jewish people used to pray at certain times. And even in the Book of Acts when the early church met, they met for “the prayers” it says. That was really a holdover from their Judaism, the set times of the day for the prayers.

But the New Testament, the new covenant and the birth of the Church brought a new era, and that is that there is to be an always character to prayer. We are not praying at the set times any more. We are praying at all times, on every occasion, at every time. Jesus gave us indication this was coming when he said in Luke 21:36, “Watch ye and therefore, and pray always.” And the early apostles said it in Acts 6:4, “We will give ourselves continually to prayer.” Continually. Not only to those prescribed prayers, but to all prayer.

It was said of Cornelius in Acts 10, “He was a devout *man*, and prayed to God always.” In Romans 12:12 it says, “Continue diligent in prayer.” In Colossians 4:2, “Continue in prayer.” In Philippians 4:6, “In every thing by prayer.” And summing it up in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without - ” what? “ - ceasing.” Second Timothy 1:3, the apostle Paul indicated that he did that. To Timothy he wrote, “Without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.” We have to pray always. In Acts 12, we find the church praying constantly, and even though their prayer was somewhat weak in faith, God answered so that there is a pattern of praying at all times.

I used to wonder what this meant because my life was filled with so many things, there was seemingly no way I could pray at all times. And obviously you can’t run around with a little book reading prayers all through the day, you know? You go to Israel and you see those Jewish people genuflect in front of the Wailing Wall and go on hour after hour through their prayers. You may have been from a background of the Catholic church where you run through a series of beads again, and again, and again, and again, time, after time, after time.

None of those things is what is meant by “praying always.” It isn’t just walking around mumbling certain formulas, vain repetition. It is simply living your life in God consciousness. It is that your whole life rises before God in communion and communication. I can look at my own life and I used to wonder how you could pray always, and now I find very few times in my life when I’m not conscious of God. Everything I see and everything I experience in my life simply becomes a prayer. That is, it’s something I share with my best friend. It’s something that instantly is communicated with God.

If I am tempted, immediately I find that temptation becomes a prayer. “Lord, You know what I’m going through. Help me in this.” If I see something good, my first thought is, “God, You’re the source of every good and perfect gift. Thank You for that.” If I see something evil I say, “O God, that evil should reign,” or, “O God, make it right.” If I see somebody without Jesus Christ, and I have occasion to meet them, my first response is always, “O God, it’s so sad that they don’t know You. Draw them to Yourself.” If I see trouble, I say, “God, You’re the deliverer.”

In other words, life becomes an ascending prayer. All of its thoughts, and all of its deeds, and all of its circumstances become a cause or a point of communication with God. That’s the way to live, see? That’s what it means to set your affections on things above. That’s what it means to think about

Christ, to have His conscious presence in your mind so that everything becomes a prayer; all your life and all your thoughts.

And I guess that's really the whole point of the Christian life, you see? You see, the reason God saved you was for fellowship. Did you know that? He saved you for fellowship. That's what 1 John says. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." Why do you declare the gospel? "That you also may have fellowship with us: and our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

God saved you for fellowship. He wants your fellowship, and there's no greater expression of fellowship than prayer. That's when you commune with God. And if you've been saved and you don't commune with him, you're denying Him the purpose for which He saved you. You're denying Him the purpose for which He redeemed you. You're saved to enter into fellowship with Him, and so we are to continually pray.

The root word in Colossians 4:2, "to continue in prayer" is the root *kartere*. It means "to be steadfast, to be constant." It's used of Moses when it says "he endured" in Hebrews 11:27. The term is used in its intensity in Colossians with a preposition added to the front of it. It means "to be intense, to hang in there in constant prayer."

The idea is not just some kind of easygoing, once-in-awhile drop in a prayer to the Lord, but a whole life of strong, persevering, struggling over deep issues. And you know, it's just a way of life when your heart is open to God. Earnest, strong, courageous, persistent prayer. Holding on and not letting go until you're blessed.

You know how our Lord Jesus gives two illustrations in Luke 11 and Luke 18? He talks in one portion about the unjust judge and the woman kept coming, and begging, and begging, and begging, and finally the unjust judge did what she wanted. And the Lord is saying if an unjust judge will give something to a persistent lady, what do you think a just God will give to His own child if he persists?

And later on, remember the guy bangs, and bangs, and bangs on the door and the man says, "This store is closed. Go to bed. I'm in bed and my wife and kids. I'm not getting out." He bangs and bangs and finally the guy says, "Okay," and he gives him the bread. What Jesus is saying is if a sleeping man who's tucked in and asleep will come down and give bread to somebody banging on his door, what do you think a loving Father will give to His son who has a need?

And the point in both of them is they kept persisting and they got what they wanted, and God is saying if you're persistent and faithful in your prayers, and you pray with importunity, that He'll hear and answer. And so life is to be a constant exercise of prayer. Oh beloved, you can know so much and never think about God. All you ever think about is the things that you've learned. And the whole

purpose of what you have learned is to draw you into the presence of God. We'll see more about that in a minute. First of all, the frequency of prayer, always – always. Whatever you see in life ascends to God in a prayer because the communion is so open. By the way, the word "fellowship" is the word "communion."

Secondly, we see not only the frequency of prayer, but the second "all" shows us the variety of prayer. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication." "All prayer and supplication." The word "prayer," a simple word, just generally means "requests." *Proseuch*, "prayer" in general. Conversation. The word supplication, *desis*, it means "a specific." So there are general, the general area of prayer. We pray more generally. We pray specifically.

But notice we are with "all prayer and all supplication" to be praying at all times. What does he mean by "all prayer and all supplication"? Simply all kinds. That's all. There's all different ways to pray. Some people think the only way you can pray is on your knees. Some people think the only way you can pray is with your hands up. Others think you have to have your hands folded like this or like this. Some people think that you've got to pray out of a prayer book or you've got to have the prayers told to you.

Listen, he says pray all the time with all kinds of prayers. And by the way, if you're going to be praying all the time, you're going to have to have all kinds, because you're never going to be in the same position. You can pray public or private. You can pray verbal or silent, loud cries or quiet whispers, deliberate and planned or spontaneous. There can be requests or thanksgiving, confessions and humiliations. Praise. You can be kneeling, standing, lifting up hands, lying prostrate. He's simply saying pray all the time in all ways.

And that's a good indication that he means just pray through the whole flow of life. I sometimes - well usually every night - I'll kneel and pray with our children, and we kneel. Melinda lies down. The rest of us kneel. And we pray. Then I'll go to bed sometimes and I'll lie in bed and my head will just look up and I'll just pray, and I find myself waking up in the morning never having said an amen.

I pray when I'm walking. I remember when I was in college and I was learning how to preach, they used to take us out in a car. Five of us would pile in a car, and we'd go in and they'd drive us to different bus depots in cities and make us preach. And they'd take me to the Greyhound depot and they'd say, "Here's your depot. You preach. We'll be back in two hours." I'd preach a sermon and then take a 15-minute break and go witness, and then go preach another sermon.

And so that's kind of a frightening thing for a young guy. I'll tell you, it's still frightening. I wouldn't do it now. But anyway, all the way up there we'd pray. We'd be praying driving the car. I remember the first time we did this I thought it was kind of strange. The guy driving prayed and he wouldn't close his eyes. The more I thought about it the better I liked it, obviously. Living testimony to the fact that that's

a good way to pray if you happen to be driving.

But anyway, you can pray driving a car. In fact, Bill Clutterham told me this morning that his wife can always tell when he's praying driving because his speed gets slower and slower and slower and slower. The closer he gets to God, the more sensitive he is to the speed limit.

But anyway, you can pray at all times, and in all circumstances, and whatever situation you're in, and that is exactly what Paul is saying. Don't you ever, having counted on all of the infinite resources that are yours in Christ, think for a moment that you're not every moment dependent upon the power of God, because you are. Let everything become a prayer.

And so does Paul say to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:8, "I will that men pray every where." If you study the prayers of the Bible, you'll find there were all kinds of prayers and all kinds of positions at all kinds of times. It's a way of life. A soldier is praying at all times so that whenever the battle comes, even if it's a surprise attack, he is ready. He has the kind of a life that's opened up to God totally.

Listen, I remember going to a pastor's conference with some of the staff and a guy got up and he preached on the fact that we ought to pray in the morning. And I mean he preached, "We are to pray in the morning." And he went to every passage like I did this morning, Psalm 63, "Early will I seek thee, O God," and he went to the guys who prayed in the morning, and here they were in the morning, and we are to pray in the morning. It was a great sermon.

And all the time he was preaching I kept looking up all the scriptures that talked about praying in the evening, and at noon, and so forth, and so on. I mean he had a good point. We are to pray in the morning, but not to the exclusion of any other time. Even Psalm 55:17 says, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray." And Daniel prayed three times a day. And of Jesus, Luke 6:12 says, "He continued all night in prayer." And 1 Timothy 5:5 says the widows "prayed night and day." It is a way of life.

Prayer, in a sense, beloved, is more important than knowledge, and that's a good word for us here. In a sense, it's a more important element than knowledge. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "Our ultimate position as Christians is tested by the character of our prayer life." You may have a lot of knowledge. You may be a seminary student, or a seminary graduate, or a minister, a pastor, a missionary, a Bible teacher, but your prayer life will be a monitor on how really deep your knowledge of God and your relationship to Him is.

Why do I say that? For this reason; listen. Theology – listen – is ultimately the knowledge of God, right? Theology is the knowledge of God. So the more theology I know, the more I know about God. And the more I know about God, the more I ought to be driven, as the Psalmist said, to follow close behind him. And if I say I have all this knowledge, but I am not driven to be in his presence all my

waking hours, then it's questionable the affect that knowledge has had on my life.

It is that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent that I study. It is that I want to learn the word that I may know God. The more I know Him, the more I want to be in His presence. And if you know all of that, but you don't hunger and thirst to be in His presence, and your life is not an open communication line to him every waking moment, then it's questionable that your theology has had the proper effect. We see, then, that we are to pray at all times, all kinds of prayers, as our lives are open to God.

As I said, He wants us to know Him because fellowship is the end result. Do you have that fellowship? Is your life a constant prayer? Oh, what a cleansing thing that is. Thirdly, we see not only the frequency of prayer, and the kinds of prayer, the variety of prayer, but the manner of prayer, thirdly. He says, "Watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication."

In other words, we are to watch with all perseverance. And again you see the idea of perseverance meaning to stick to it, to stay at it, to hang in there, to continue, to persevere. Pray continuously while watching. Prayer is to be alert to the issues, alert to what's happening. Jesus said, "Watch and pray," many times. First Peter 4:7, "Watch unto prayer." You can't pray properly unless you see what's going on. When you come to the place where your heart is filled with prayer, it'll be because you see so many things going on.

I was praying even with my wife last night. We were talking about the fact that it's hard nowadays to pray, not because you don't know what to pray for, but because there's so much you don't know what to put your arms around. You know, we live in a day of tremendous communication. I get mail from radio listeners, tape listeners, people in mission fields, from all over the place. The church is so large. There's so many needs. The prayer sheet that comes out on Wednesday night just boggles my mind.

There's so many things that sometimes I just say, "Lord God, I don't even know what to say to you other than read the prayer list." I mean I can't – I used to try to keep a prayer list and write things down, and it just became – it's just monstrous. I still do that, but it's just monstrous. I can't even begin. Listen, if I prayed without ceasing, I couldn't pray for all of the things that are in my heart to pray for.

But I have to keep watching and I have to be alert so that I can see the needful things. I want to pray specifically, because then God answers specifically, and then I give him specific glory. That's John 14:13 and 14, "You ask anything in my name, and I'll do it, that the Father may be glorified." You see, God answers prayer to put His power on display. If you don't pray specifically, then He can't display himself.

I told you one time about Marcy. She used to pray when she was little, "God, bless the whole, wide world." And I'd always say, "Marcy, you can't pray that. God can't do that. He can't go – zap. World,

now do you feel better? That's too big. You need to pray about specifics." And our children have become well-adapted to that, and now we pray for specifics, and God answers with specifics, and we give Him glory.

Watch. Be alert. You know what's going on with the people around you? By the way, the term "watch" tells us a little bit, also, that we're looking out rather than in. We know our own problems. That's not where we need to spend our time in prayer. What we need to spend our time in prayer is with other people. Looking out, watching, seeing their needs. And I'll tell you what kills this. Selfishness.

Frankly, I'll give you a simple illustration. Most of us never really get serious about prayer until something happens in our own lives that's troublesome. We are ten times more intense about our own problems than we are about anybody else's, and that shows the self-centeredness that we have to live with.

Can you lose yourself in the needs of others like the dear apostle Paul? Could you say, "I prayed for you night and day with tears"? Have you ever prayed for anybody night and day with tears? You may have wept a few over your own troubles, but I doubt whether many of us have done that over somebody else's. That shows the self-centeredness of the human heart, even a regenerate believer. We are to *proskartersis*. That is be persevering, intense, continuing steadfastly, watching and praying, being alert to the needs of others.

And by the way, I could add here, get past the physical. You know, we pray for Aunt Martha's rheumatism, somebody's heart problems, and somebody's broken leg, and somebody's surgery, and I don't mind all of that, but frankly, folks, on my prayer list, those things come at the bottom. What I'm concerned about is the spiritual battle, is the warfare, and are the believers winning the battle? The physical, in a sense, though it is material, is immaterial. What gets my heart anxious is somebody who's not seeing victory in their life. Somebody who's not seeing God do His mighty work. Somebody who doesn't know what that he has to see the release of the power of the Spirit of God. That's what concerns my heart.

I am praying for the advance of the Kingdom of God and the lives of His people. I am praying for souls to be won to Jesus Christ. It's very hard for me to put at the top of my list the physical, all though I realize that that's a need, and it has a tremendous affect upon our spiritual lives, that comes secondary.

What Paul is saying is this. Look, here is the war, and it is about the war that you must pray. It's not easy for you to fight the battle, so I pray for you. I pray now and then for people's physical things, but more than that I pray that God will give you victory. I pray that you'll win the battle against the enemy. I don't really care what happens to my physical body or yours, as long as we gain a victory for the glory of God, amen? That's the battle. That's the issue. So we concentrate on the thing that is most

needful. And so Paul, here, when he gives a prayer request, he doesn't say, "Oh, pray for me. I'm in jail. Oh, pray for me. I have this chain on that's just rubbing me raw. Pray for my right leg." No.

What he says is, "Pray for me that boldness may be given unto me, that I may have utterance to speak the mystery of the gospel." In other words, pray for me so when Satan tempts me to shut my mouth I'll win out over temptation and I'll speak the gospel. Pray that I'll win the battle.

Oh, beloved, we're to get involved in supplicating for each other persistently while we watch and see what the needs are. Do you really know the needs of the people around you? Do you know the spiritual needs of your spouse, of your children, of your friends, of your neighbors, of the people in your Bible study, people that you know? Do you really pray for them as they fight the battle? Sometimes all we ever do is pray when the disaster comes and maybe a little preventative prayer could have helped.

So we see the frequency of prayer, always; the variety of prayer, all prayer and supplication; the matter of prayer, watching all perseverance; and finally the indirect objects of prayer. "Praying always for all saints," it says at the end of verse 18.

This has been led into by our last point. We're to pray for each other. You know, it doesn't tell us to pray for ourselves. That isn't the priority. I just have a personal commitment in my own life and I don't want to push it off on anybody, but I don't pray for myself. I can hardly encompass all the things that are needful, and I've never found the need to pray for me. I realize that I have needs, and I do ask the Lord about sinful things, and I do confess things in my life, but as far as concentrating on me, I am rather obedient at this point. I trust the Scripture and praying for others rather than myself. I get covered because others pray for me.

Oh, it's so wonderful when we get ourselves to pray for others. I met a guy one time. He said to me, he said, "You know, you're ministry has blessed me. I'm going to put you on my prayer list for six months." I thought that's funny. What do I have to do to get a year? But then as I began to think about it, I thought well that's a commitment he's made. Bless his heart for that commitment. He'll pray for me, and I wound up praying for him, because all the six months I knew he was praying for me I felt responsible to pray for him, because if anything happened to him he'd stop praying for me, see?

So this is the way the body grows into love. This is the way we become one, when we don't have to wait for our own trouble to pray, but when we're lost in the needs of others. So we learn to pray by praying for others. This is the body's prayer life. The apostle Paul illustrates it so well. He always prayed for everybody else. First Samuel 12:23, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

Don’t worry about you. You pray for somebody else, somebody else prays for you, and everybody gets covered, right? When one part of the physical body is ill, the rest of the body compensates directly and indirectly, and so it is in prayer. Pray for each other. A sick finger can’t help itself. The rest of the body has to pump new life into that finger, that wounded one. That part of your anatomy that’s injured or whatever has to be supported by all the rest. It can’t support itself in its weakness. And so it is that we must pray for each other, to be concerned about that.

You know that before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in Barcelona and Madrid and other parts of Spain, there were psychological clinics that had arisen all over the land of Spain and they had large numbers of neurotics, according to historians. And these neurotics were undergoing a series of treatments for their neuroses. They were attended regularly by psychiatrists, and so forth, and there were lots of outpatients. This one historian said, interestingly enough, they did a psychological and sociological study of the affects of the Spanish Civil War, and all these people had personal problems, and worries, and anxieties, and temptations, and they were involved in psychiatry and psychoanalysis and all this.

As soon as the civil war came, one of the first and most striking effects of the war was that it virtually emptied all psychological and psychiatric clinics in Spain. How interesting. One writer said that these neurotic people were suddenly cured by a greater anxiety. The anxiety about their whole life, whether their homes would still be there, whether their husbands would be alive, whether their children would be killed. Their greater anxieties got rid of the lesser ones. In having to give attention to the bigger problem, they forgot their own petty problems.

You want to be a healthy person? Then lose yourselves in the real things that matter, the spiritual battles of other people. Lose yourselves in consuming prayer for the kingdom of God and you won’t have trouble with your little petty anxiety.

I understand the same thing happened in Britain during the second World War. A greater fear drove out a lesser fear. I think it’s needful for us to learn that. One of the reasons we have such a sick, basket-case society, people running around with all kinds of psycho-induced aches, and pains, and problems, is simply because we are so totally self-centered.

Really, I am a – I consider myself to be somewhat patient. I use the “somewhat” just because some people might argue with that. But you know, one thing that’s hard for me to tolerate is people who are just totally consumed with all their own problems because it’s such a manifestation of self-centeredness. But it’s so foreign to the concept of the Christian life. We should be so lost in the needs of others that self vanishes. Let your little anxieties give way to greater ones, the spiritual battles of others.

Well, there's one final thought in this verse 18 and it's this. When you've said it all, the frequency of prayer, always; the variety of prayer, all prayer; the manner of prayer, watching so you know the needs with all perseverance; the indirect objects of prayer, all saints. But the pervasive thought is in the middle of the verse. We're to pray "in the Spirit," in the Spirit.

Now please, beloved, this does not have anything to do with speaking in tongues. Every time I hear that, it just – it's like rubbing fingernails on a blackboard to me. He is not talking about – you cannot introduce tongues into this verse. In Jude 20 it says, "Praying in the Holy Spirit." It is not talking about some ecstasy. It is not talking about some ecstatic language. Praying in the Spirit is the same as praying in the name of Christ. It is praying in consistency with who He is and what His will is.

Learn to pray in concert with the Spirit. Make your prayers a duet with the One who ever intercedes for you. You know that Romans 8:26 says, "we know not what to pray for as we ought: but the spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." And God "knows the mind of the Spirit," and He hears and answers.

Listen, all the while you live the Christian life, the Spirit of God within you prays on your behalf, and He always prays the right prayer, and He always gets the right answer. So that verse 28 says, "All things work together for - " what " - for good." That's not an accident. That's because the Spirit is praying. And praying in the Spirit is simply lining up your own prayer consistent with the mind and the will of the Spirit.

You say, "How do you do that?" By simply walking in the fullness of the Spirit. As your life is filled with the Spirit, as you walk in the Spirit, in obedience to the Spirit, as you are walking close behind the Lord, as you are constantly communing his presence, the Spirit of God will govern your thoughts so that your prayers will be in harmony with the Spirit of God. That's praying in the Spirit. What a tremendous thing it is to know that I can join my prayers with the Spirit of God, that I can cry from the depths of my heart because of the in-dwelling Spirit of the Father, "Abba Father," and know that God hears and answers.

So the one over all pervasive qualification in our prayers is that we are to pray "in the Spirit." In fact, Zechariah 12:10 calls the Holy Spirit the "spirit of supplication," the spirit of supplication. It's no different than praying in Jesus' name. In fact, the Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of His Son," the Spirit of His Son.

And so, beloved, we're to pray. Our lives are to be open, commune. And you know something? This is such a healing thing. Oh, what a healing thing it is. So the frequency, the variety, the manner, the indirect objects all work to God's glory and to our joy as we pray.

Then Paul closes with a specific illustration. I'll just read it to you. It's simple. You want something specific to pray for? Verse 19, pray "for me." What should I pray for, Paul? "That utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that in this I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." He says, "I'm the illustration. Pray for me. Not my physical needs, but my battle, my warfare. Pray that God will allow me to be bold, and courageous, and straightforward, and give me an utterance."

Now this is the pattern, beloved. The warfare was there. Paul was facing the enemy nose-to-nose, eyeball-to-eyeball as he was a prisoner in Rome. Ambassadors had diplomatic immunity, but not this ambassador. He was chained and there he was. And he says, "Oh, the battle is tough. You know, sometimes I want to quit. Sometimes I feel I'm losing my courage. Pray for me that God will give me utterance."

I'm gonna ride his coattails. I'm telling you, pray for the preacher. People say, "Why do we need to pray for you guys? Pray for Paul? Who needs to pray for Paul? I mean, he's got it all together. We've got to pray for the people on the periphery." You just remember that if the guy in the lead falls, a whole lot of people are going with him.

And Paul was knowledgeable about the fact that the rest were as strong as their leader was and their pattern, "Pray for me," he says, "That I may have boldness in utterance. And in my boldness maybe I'll gather some of the others around me and they, too, will have boldness." And you know when he wrote the Philippian letter after this, he wrote and he said, "Oh," he said, "What's happened to me in jail has given greater boldness to others." See? So as they prayed for him, he became a stronger example, and it helped others. "Pray for me," he says.

And the point I want you to get is he wanted them to pray for a spiritual battle to be won, that he wouldn't lose his courage and his boldness. You say, "Well, you know, I'd like to pray for other people, but I don't have any information." And that's why Paul added verse 21 and 22. He says, "But that you also may know my affairs, *and* how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things."

I don't expect you to pray for me if you don't have any information, so I'm gonna send my good friend Tychicus. By the way, a dear friend of Paul's mentioned five times in the New Testament, who is the one who delivers the letter of Ephesians, and also brings word about Paul. They were worried and concerned. They didn't know what was going on in his life. They didn't know how it was in prison. They wanted to hear.

He says, "I'm sending him so he can give you all this information so you can really pray intelligently." Verse 22, "I have sent him to you for the same purpose, that you might know our affairs, and *that* he might comfort your hearts." He'll tell you I'm doing well, and he'll tell you where the battle lies, and you

can pray.

Listen, beloved, if we're going to pray, let's pray about spiritual things, and let's open up our lives to each other so we have something to pray about, right? We have to communicate, we've got to share the struggle, share the battle, share the victories, so we can carry each other's cares. What a lesson on prayer. We are to be God-conscious, selfless, watchful, Holy Spirit-filled, persistent, bold people seeking only God's glory in our prayers.

And I believe as we live that kind of life and pray those kind of prayers, that we'll be more and more fitted into the image of Jesus Christ. And as we pray for each other, the body will be built up and He'll be glorified, and that's the climax to the letter.

Paul closes with a benediction to which I add nothing. "Peace *be* to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen." Let's pray.

A saint of God many years ago prayed this prayer. I want to make it our prayer this morning.

"O Lord, in prayer I launch far out into the eternal world, and on that broad ocean my soul triumphs over all evils on the shores of mortality. Time, with its amusements and cruel disappointments never appears so inconsiderate as then. In prayer, O God, I see myself as nothing. I find my heart going after Thee with intensity and long with vehement thirst to live with Thee. Blessed be the strong winds of the Spirit that speed my on my way to the new Jerusalem. In prayer, all things here below vanish and nothing seems important but holiness of heart and the salvation of others. In prayer, all my worldly cares and fears and anxieties disappear and are as little insignificance as a puff of wind.

"In prayer, my soul inwardly exalts with thoughts of what Thou art doing for Thy church, and I long that Thou shouldest get Thyself a great name from sinners returning to Thee. In prayer, I am lifted above the frowns and flatteries of life to taste the heavenly joys. Entering into the eternal world, I can give myself to Thee with all my heart forever. In prayer, I can place all my concerns in Thy hands to be entirely at Thy disposal, having no will or interest of my own. In prayer, I can intercede for my friends, ministers, sinners, the church, Thy kingdom with greatest freedom, brightest hope as a son to his Father and as a lover to His Beloved. And so, O God, help me to pray always and never to cease."

Father, may I add to that prayer my own. That we would be people of prayer, never smug, never content, never self-satisfied, knowing that all our knowledge and all the past record of Your blessing is but to lead us to the fullness of fellowship that comes when our life is open communication with You. Oh, may we follow close behind Thee, so living as if our very life were offered as a prayer. And we thank You, in Christ's name, for such a purpose. Amen.

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