

PRAYING YOUR WAY TO VICTORY

Ephesians 6:18

Good morning! Today, we come to the last part of our message series. We've been looking at how to live with power beyond ourselves. We talked about the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of Christ to overcome sin, the power of God being with for us, notice that's the Trinity, and today, we're going to look at a kind of power which is our direct link to the Godhead. Today, I'm going to talk about prayer. I'm going to talk how to be victorious in life through prayer.

Let's read together Ephesians 6:18 on which this message is based on. *“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 Lord's people.”*

This verse comes on the heels of the series of verses we have termed as the “Full Armor of God.” Now, the reason most people don't consider this last item to be part of the spiritual armor is because Paul doesn't have a parallel piece of armor from the soldier's armor to compare this weapon with.

It's not because they didn't have other weapons—they did. Besides the sword, the soldiers also had spears and their bows with quivers full of arrows. Then there were other weapons in Roman warfare, like the battering ram and the catapult. Sometimes horses could be trained to use their hooves as a weapon.

But Paul doesn't compare any of these to this last weapon he wants to talk about because none of them come even close to the power and precision and effectiveness of this last weapon. So since Paul doesn't give us a piece of battle gear to equate this to, maybe we could call it our Secret Weapon.

You know how armies and militaries are—always trying to get the upper hand against their enemies by creating and designing new and improved weapons. Well, this weapon is the Secret Weapon God has given to us to fight enemy forces.

This weapon is something that the enemy does not have, that the enemy cannot stop, that the enemy cannot thwart. There is no defense for this type of weapon.

But if Paul were writing the book of Ephesians today, and comparing our pieces of spiritual armor to the types of armor and weapons used in modern warfare, I think that he would have a very ready illustration of what this secret weapon is.

This weapon began to be used in the Korean and Vietnam wars. We saw it used in Desert Storm with Gulf War I and with the war in Afghanistan. Currently, we see this weapon being used in Syria against ISIS. This weapon is the perfect example of this last piece of spiritual armor.

What is it?

Air support. I'm not a soldier, but I've watched enough war movies to know what happens when a platoon is under heavy fire and Pastor Dave and our soldiers here can confirm this. When a platoon is under heavy fire...they call in air support. They get on their radio, and give the coordinates of where they need some bombs dropped, and as quickly as possible, jets fly over and drop bombs onto the coordinates. This technology has developed over the years. In Vietnam, they sometimes ran into the problem of wrong coordinates, or the bombs not being dropped accurately enough, and so many U.S. soldiers ended up dying from friendly fire. In the Gulf War, however, they had these laser guided precision bombs and missiles, which we were all amazed at then. The enemies were all shocked and we were in awe as we watched on TV the war that unfolded before our eyes.

I think that if Paul was writing today, he would use this as his illustration here when he wrote Ephesians 6:18. Paul, if he were writing today, would have written to us about the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Word of God, and finally, in verse 18, the air support of prayer, or maybe we could say, the laser-guided smart bombs of prayer. Obviously, this last one I've come up with doesn't really fit in with the Roman Soldier imagery...but the point is that prayer is vitally important to spiritual warfare which Christians are engaged in.

C. S. Lewis wrote in his book *Mere Christianity* that this world is enemy-occupied territory and that Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. And it is primarily through prayer that much of this sabotage takes place. Prayer is how we spiritually fight back against the enemy. He says, “*Prayer is fundamentally a warfare activity.*”

With this in mind, it is sometimes humorous to see some people’s idea of prayer closets. They have the dim lighting and the cushioned seats with the padded kneelers. There is soft music playing above, the oak doors and stained glass window, a little counter for your Bible and pencils. The cup holder for your latte.

But prayer is warfare activity. A Prayer closet should be a foxhole! With sandbags and bullet shells. We are at war! Prayer is not chatting on the phone with God, it is the frantic radio calls of a platoon under heavy fire calling for air support. God! Send in help! We need your intervention, and we need it now, or we are not going to survive!

And it is often helpful to band together with other Christians in this. When the pioneers headed west, they would always situate their wagons into a circle to give them better protection. We should do that as well in prayer. We are in a war and we need to pray like it.

We see this by looking again at the verse we just read. “*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 Lord’s people.*”

From this text we learn five things we can do to be victorious in Spiritual Warfare. Let’s take them one at a time as you follow along in your Bible and with your notes.

To be victorious in spiritual warfare

1. I must pray in God’s will.

Ephesians 6:18 starts with where the effectiveness of prayer really lies—praying in the Spirit.

What does that mean? Some groups interpret that to mean that this kind of praying is praying in tongues. But that is not what it means. I checked Biblegateway.com and all versions of the Bible I saw, except for one, have the word Spirit capitalized. Thus, scholars agree that this refers to the Holy Spirit.

I think that, in context, it means that if you are praying in the Spirit, you are praying according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. And, if you are praying in that manner, then you are praying according to the will of God. And if you are praying according to the will of God, then you can be certain that every single thing you pray for will be given to you.

This is what 1 John 5:14-15 says. *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him.”*

The question is, how do you know the will of God? The answer is, first of all, if you have a personal relationship with his Son Jesus. That is why Jesus says, *“My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”* (John 16:23) This doesn't mean that if we just tack on the magical words “In Jesus name we pray” to the end of our prayer that whatever we pray for we will get. It just means that we acknowledge that Jesus is our Lord and Savior and that we are praying to the Father through Jesus. Thus, the only way that God will hear your prayers is if you have trusted in Jesus as someone who died for your sins, who was buried and rose from the dead. Later on in this message, I'll share with you how to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Now, not only should you have Jesus in your life to know the will of God. You must walk daily with Jesus. That's why the Bible says, *“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* (Psalm 37:4) Walking closely with Jesus, abiding in him, being obedient, is the key to victory. Jesus, in fact, says, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”* (John 15:7)

Prayer is an aspect of omnipotence that God has granted to us. The more we pray in the spirit, or according to the will of God, the more is accomplished. This is the incredible and unbelievable power of prayer. Prayer is our pipe-line to the power of God! Someone has said that “Prayer moves the hand that moves the world.” Remember when God answered the prayer of Joshua and held the sun still for an extra day? These are the sorts of things that can happen when we pray. There truly is power in prayer.

I must pray in the Spirit. Then, the second thing I can do to be victorious in spiritual warfare is this.

2. I must pray at all times

Ephesians 6:18 continues with, “*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions...*”

That we should be praying always reminds us of what Paul says in 1 Thess. 5:17 (KJV), 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 always be maintaining an attitude of prayer. And if you’ve ever tried to do this, it’s difficult to do, isn’t it? It’s always a struggle. There are so many things competing for our attention. But I myself try to develop the habit of being in a state of conscious communication with God while I go about my day. When I walk or drive back and forth to work, I thank God for the song of the birds, or the sun in the sky. As I eat my lunch, I thank him for the way the food tastes. Especially if it is sinigang followed with turon prepared by my wife, I rejoice with thanksgiving. As I prepare my messages and do my paperwork, I pray for clarity of thought and a wise use of my time. As I spend time with my family, I thank God that I have a wonderful wife and three beautiful children, and, of course, an industrious mother-in-law, my most favorite mother-in-law.

Many times during the day in the office, I find that some good Christian music playing in the background can help me maintain this spirit of prayer. I may be typing away on the computer and simultaneously singing the words of the song to God. Singing is a form of prayer, you know.

In fact, if you struggle with praying always, one of the best ways to get into the habit of it, is to play Christian worship music as much as possible. In your car. At your desk at work. As you prepare supper, or wash dishes. You don't have to have it on very loud, just in the background so that the words and the music get into your mind. Soon, you will find yourself singing the songs as you go about your day, and as you sing them, you are, in a sense, praising God and praying the words to Him.

Now, I am not nearly as good at this as I have just made myself out to sound. In fact, I would say that despite the descriptions I just gave you, most of the time, I am not in an attitude of prayer. It is difficult to maintain, but it is a goal we should all nevertheless pursue.

For that is what Paul calls us to. The first aspect of warfare praying is that we should be praying always. It should be all-occasions prayer not occasional prayer. For what reason? Because we are engaged in war with the enemy of mankind, the Devil and his cohorts. You see, ever since you became a Christian, you have become a target of the enemy. He has put these concentric circles around you with you as the bull's-eye and every moment of the day, he sends his fiery darts against you. The reason he misses is because you prayed. And if he hits you, because you didn't pray. Well, I know I'm trying to simplify things but your victory over your circumstances all boils down to what kind of prayer life you have. The more you pray, the more power you have. The less you pray, the less power you have. An old saying goes, "Seven days without prayer makes one weak."

The third thing I can do to be victorious in spiritual warfare is

3. I must pray for all things. (**Ephesians 6:18c**)

Paul says "*with all kinds of prayers and requests.*"

What Paul is trying to say is for us to pray for general and specific needs. To put it simply, Paul says that spiritual warfare prayer means that we have to pray for all things!

I know that seems obvious to us, but some folks have wrong and false ideas about prayer.

I know a man who believes that since God knows everything, and since the Bible says that God knows what we need before we even ask him (Matt 6:8), we don't need to pray for anything. And this man doesn't pray for things. He never asks God for anything. He just trusts God to supply for his needs and to take care of him. C. S. Lewis wrote an excellent article called "Work and Prayer" which every Christian who is interested in prayer should read, and his basic point is that prayer is just like work, in that we use it to accomplish things. Without work, we should not expect anything to get accomplished, and so also, without prayer, we should not expect anything to get accomplished. Furthermore, the two work hand in hand. God wants us to ask Him for things. God tells us to ask Him for things.

Why? Well, one reason is that it gives God pleasure to give to us the things we ask for. When children have birthdays, I imagine that all of us try to give good gifts to our children, some of them were asked for, and some were not. Maybe your children made up a wish list. And you get joy out of both, and your children get joy out of both, but I would say that by far the most pleasure comes when we give something to a loved one which they have asked for, which they have dreamt about for months.

And furthermore, I would say that there are many, many things God will not do for us, and will not give to us unless we ask Him. It is not because He doesn't know what we want, or doesn't know what we need, but He wants us to express our dependence upon Him. He wants us to come to Him and share our needs and our desires. And unless we are willing to humble ourselves and ask Him for some of these things, he will not give them to us.

So those are a few of the things I would say to the person who doesn't bring their prayers and petitions to God, because "God already knows what I need."

But there is a second class of people who don't bring their prayer requests to God for a far different reason.

This second class of people seem to think that their needs and their requests are too insignificant to bother God with. These people seem to have a little hierarchy of prayer requests in their mind about what makes a prayer large or small. And they only feel that they can go to God with the big prayer requests.

Maybe they wait until their “small” requests become “big” requests. You know how it goes. “Well, this has blown up in my face. I guess I’ll take it to God now and see if he can fix it.” Sometimes, their prayers reveal what they think about God, because they say things like, “God, this is a big one. I really need your help on this one. If you help me out on this one, I promise I’ll never come to you again.”

Sometimes in prayer, we are told that there are no small requests. But I think it is exactly the opposite. When it comes to praying to God, there are no large requests. They’re all small and simple to Him. He’s infinite. He’s immense. He’s omnipotent. Asking Him to have the sun stand still for a day, as Joshua did, takes just as much of God’s power as asking Him to help us drive safely to work.

And besides this, when viewed from the perspective that all of our prayer requests are small to God, this puts us in the correct mind frame of completely trusting and relying on God to work it out.

We don’t come to God saying “Here’s another big one for you, God. See if you can handle this one.” No, we come to him and say, “Thank you, God, for being so powerful and wise that you can figure a way out of this situation that has got me stumped. Thank you for being the God you are. Thank you for being so powerful and loving as to take the time and help me out with this tiny little petition.”

Do you see the difference that makes? We must bring our prayers and petitions to God if we want Him to work on them. Especially in spiritual warfare.

So, to be victorious in spiritual warfare, I must pray in the Spirit. I must pray always, I must pray for all things, and fourthly,

4. I must persevere in prayer.

The latter part of verse 18 says, “keep on praying.”

This element of prayer has been one of the most difficult for me personally. Sometimes I feel that that I pray the same thing over and over, day after day, and never seem to get anywhere. I'm sure you have the same experience. Paul says keep on praying anyway.

So why are we supposed to keep praying? Why are we supposed to be persistent in our prayer? What is the difference between praying something one time and one hundred times?

Well, let me just share with you a little of what I have learned so far. First of all, some go to Luke 18 as a principle for persevering in prayer. There, Jesus tells a parable about widow who is trying to get justice from an unjust judge. She was only able to finally get what she wanted because she constantly badgered him.

Jesus tells some strange parables and this is one of them. But, of course, Jesus is not saying that God is unjust. Far from it, He is very just. In fact, Jesus is trying to contrast them. If an unjust judge, can be badgered by persistence, why can't God who is fair and just and loving and compassionate be able to listen and heed the plea of his child in need?

Let me illustrate this in another way. I heard about the story of a guy who was running an errand, and he tuned to a Christian radio station so he could catch a few minutes of a sermon. And the pastor who was preaching, I don't know who it was, said that sometimes, God doesn't answer our prayers right away, because He wants us to keep talking to Him. He knows, as we all do from our own experience, that our most faithful and fervent times of prayer are when we need God to act.

But when God finally does answer our request, we might spend a few more days in prayers, but as the need wanes, so does our time in prayer. I'm sure you have seen this happen in your life as I have seen it happen in mine.

I don't know if that is why God delays in answering prayer sometimes, but that is a possibility, even though I cannot find Scripture to back up this idea.

But I think that there is another possibility which, in my mind, makes more sense, and which has Biblical proof for support.

Do you remember in Daniel 10 when Daniel prays three times a day for 21 days for a particular prayer request, and after persevering for so long in prayer, he finally gets his answer. The angel who brought him the answer, however, basically tells Daniel that the prayer was answered on the first day, but that because of wicked forces, the angel could not get through for three weeks. This passage seems to teach that what goes on in the spiritual realm may significantly affect how, when and even whether or not God can answer any given prayer. It implies that it is only because of persevering prayer that the angel was finally able to get through with Daniel's answer. Persevering in prayer is required for some prayers to get through—especially since we are in spiritual warfare.

You cannot think you are going to win a battle by going out and swinging your sword only once and then sitting down and saying, "Well, I swung my sword, but I didn't get victory, so I guess I'll just give up."

No! Keep swinging. Keep standing. Keep fighting. Keep praying.

A woman had stayed at a hotel, and when she got home, she realized that she had left her diamond earrings on the bedside stand. So she called the hotel and got the manager on the phone and asked him to go and look for them.

He went to the room, found the diamond earrings, and immediately went to put them in the safe, and then returned to the phone to tell her the good news but when he picked back up the phone to tell her, she had grown impatient of waiting and had hung up!

How many of our prayers which we think God has never answered, were actually answered, but now they are sitting in a safe in heaven, just waiting for us to persevere in prayer?

Sometimes, we just need to hang on and pray. Sometimes, God is working to answer our prayer, but we give up too soon. Spiritual warfare prayer requires us to keep on praying. That is the fourth thing to do. Let's move on to the fifth and final. The fifth thing we can do to be victorious in spiritual warfare is

5. I must pray for all believers.

At the end of verse 18, he tell us to be “*praying for all the Lord’s people.*” Paul, obviously, refers to Christians. We fail in this in so many ways. Sometimes, it seems that we spend much of our time praying for unbelievers that they might become Christians. And I think that is a good idea, but it should not be a priority in our prayers. If you want a person to become a Christian, witness to them, rather than pray for them. And if you are going to pray for them, make sure you are part of the answer to your prayers.

Some of us have a different struggle though. While we do spend most of our time praying for believers, we just spend it praying for one of them—ourselves. Sometimes, it seems all we ever do is pray for ourselves. My sickness, my injury, my job, my finances, my marriage, my car, my dog.

But notice that Paul calls us to pray for the Lord’s people. And although you are one of God’s people, if you are a Christian, Paul means you are to pray for all Christians other than yourself.

I read about a young girl who said, “Lord, I am not going to pray for myself today; I am going to pray for others.” And so she began to pray. Then, she prayed for her mother. And, at the end of the prayer, she added, “And give my mother a handsome and rich son-in-law!” Somehow or another, we always end up sneaking ourselves in there.

It is important for us to pray for one another. By doing so, we are helping each other to be protected from the enemy. We are helping each other to be encouraged as we continue to fight against discouragements, depression, diseases, crisis, problems, anxieties, and so forth. You see, when our brothers and sisters experience victory through prayer, we ourselves are encouraged. And we are strengthened and we continue to fight and advance together against the enemy. Our motto should be like the motto of the Golden State Warriors, “Strength in Numbers.” That’s why at the end of our messages, Pastor Dave, Barry, myself, we always encourage all of you to raise your hand, or stand,

or come to the front because we would like to heed God's command through Paul to keep on praying for all the Lord's people. And even after the service, you can come to any of us or any Christian around here to pray for you. There is strength in numbers.

Prayer is powerful warfare activity. It is what God has given to us to make use of His power in this battle we are in.

In 1990, a movie came out called "Navy SEALs". In it, a platoon of Navy SEALs set out to locate and destroy a newly-formed terrorist group. Each SEAL has his specialty. One of the guys is a sniper, but his gun is a special type of gun. It's this huge gun with giant bullets which can blow holes through concrete walls. His scope has a night-vision, heat-sensitive scope so that he can shoot at night and see the heat images of enemies hiding behind walls.

This gun also has such a long range that the sniper can set up his position way away from where all the action is and get a big-picture view of the whole area. From where he is situated, he is able to help any member of his team who is in danger.

And the other members of the SEAL team often call on him for help. When they are under fire by enemies they could not see, they often call on this guy to help them out. And do you know what they called this important member of their team? They called him "God." When they were under fire, they would get on their radio and say, "God, I need some help." And he would send it.

That is exactly the way prayer works in spiritual battle. Next time you are facing a dire situation, call out to God for help, and He will send it.