

Ephesians #08: Ephesians 6:18a

Ephesians

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Bible Text: Ephesians 6:18
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With God's help we wish to consider with you two messages on the weapon of prayer. Our text is Ephesians 6:18.

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

This afternoon we hope to limit ourselves by the first half, just these words, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." With God's help, our theme will be incessant prayer as the grand secret in the art of Christian warfare. In the first place, the whens of prayer, praying always; second, the what of prayer, with all prayer and supplication; and thirdly, the how of prayer, in the Spirit. That's incessant prayer, the grand secret in the art of Christian warfare: the when of prayer; the what of prayer; the how of prayer.

The story has often been told, dear congregation, of a number of ministers who gathered in a parsonage some generations ago in the hot Scottish Highlands to discuss the meaning, the definition of prayer, and as they gathered and groped with what prayer really was, they began to realize that more and more prayer was a very complex thing, prayer was something that could not be neatly packaged and defined in the brief compass of limited human vocabulary. And as they were going about discussing, one of the ministers noticed the maid who came and brought them coffee and refreshments and said to her, "Perhaps this young maiden will tell us what prayer is," and she said, "Prayer? Well, sir," she said, "I can't put it into words but I can say that prayer is my life, my breath." And that minister said to her, "But when do you pray?" And she said, "Well, sir, I pray all the time. As I go about and I clean this furniture and I see the dirt and the dust and wipe it clean, I pray that the Lord may wipe my heart clean through the blood of Jesus. And as I open the drapes and I see the sun shine through, I pray that the Son of righteousness may arise with healing in his wings and heal my soul. When I go to get you men refreshments, I pray that Jesus Christ may be my food and my meat and my drink. Sir, prayer is my very life so I can't say what it is."

Oh, dear congregation, indeed this young maiden girl was very close to the truth, was she not? True prayer is the breath of the soul. True prayer is something that must be a

lifestyle rather than to be fit and neatly packaged definitions. True prayer as a lifestyle is a great weapon. It is the grand secret in the art of Christian warfare. It is the weapon of all weapons. A prayerful lifestyle is a lifestyle of which the apostle admonishes in 1 Thessalonians 5, "Pray without ceasing." The spirit of prayer is the spirit of life. Its breath is to the natural love, so prayer is to spiritual love, and it is this that the apostle recognizes when he comes to the climax of his pieces of Christian armor and therefore he says, "Pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit."

Do you see what Paul is saying here? He is saying that all these pieces of armor that we have considered to date avail us not much power, perhaps no power if we miss the vital link and the functioning arm of every one of those pieces and that vital link is the power of prayer. What good is the shield, the breastplate, the sword, the shod feet, the helmet of hope if not dipped in the dippings of prayer? My friends, the most beautiful pieces of Christian armor even when they may be worn and even when we may attempt to work them, avail us little if they are not bathed throughout with the power and the gift of prayer. Where prayer is missing, where the life and the breath of the soul is missing, then the donning of the Christian armor is not much more than David's attempt to don the strange armor of Saul which was not fit for him. The life of it is missing. The power of it is missing. The secret of it is missing when prayer is missing. Therefore John Bunyan was not far off when he said the greatest weapon in the storehouse of God is the weapon of prayer. And indeed this is true and it might also be suitable to add to that that prayer is also the motivating power behind all the other weapons. In one sense, prayer is not a weapon, it is not a tangible weapon you can hold in your hand, in that sense, Bunyan's definition is not effectual, but when you consider it as the motivating power behind all weapons, when you consider it to be the energy that moves the others, then you see that prayer is indeed the greatest of Christian weaponry.

So the apostle admonishes to seek a lifestyle of prayer. "Pray always," he says. The when of prayer is an exclusive when, it is always. There are no exceptions. There are no things, there are no places, there are no times when the soul is not called to a spirit of prayer. That is biblical, my friends, in many places. Luke 18, which we have read to you, "men ought always to pray and not to faint." 1 Thessalonians 5 we have mentioned but what about Romans 12, "continuing instant in prayer." In Jeremiah 33, "call unto me." Psalm 50, "call upon me."

Prayer, is it your life, my friend? Are you too like the little maiden girl as you go about your work throughout the day, do you know those silent prayers, those sighings and groanings that arise to God? Sometimes perhaps you don't even bother to clothe them in the midst of your business or your lawful calling with the clothing of human words, but you feel your sighs and your groans go out to God, you long to have touched the hem of his garment day by day with the wordlessness of felt prayer. Oh, I do think that we do wrong and we do injustice to God when we always think that prayer is a massive word. We do better, my friends, to think of prayer as communion with God, and when we realize in whose presence we stand, we won't have to clothe everything with most beautiful forms of human vocabulary, particularly not in our private prayers. Sometimes the very simple word "Lord" says more than everything else we can add to it. Lord. Lord.

Lord. Do you know, my friends, that spirit of prayer that goes with you? A life of prayer by which you breathe, by which you receive inhalation and exhalation for your spiritual lungs? Is prayer the grand secret by which the door of the throne of grace and the channels of communion between God and you by grace are kept open? Does this describe your life, praying always with all prayer?

What a beautiful, what a beautiful description. Praying always. You see, Paul is telling us here that there is a great temptation, a great danger in the Christian life and that danger is to try to maintain personal Christendom without the channel God has provided, without the channel of communication of prayer. There is a great danger that we will aim for these pieces of Christian armor in a mechanical fashion and we will aim to be clothed with them, that we will wrestle to exercise them, but Paul is saying here in conclusion none of this may be done mechanically or magically. The armor we need in every piece, indeed, or Paul wouldn't have been at such great pains to describe each piece from head to toe, but the power of them, the influence of them, the living relationship of them, the real and effectual use of them, everything will be utterly defeated. We may fail fully clothed with the Christian armor when we fail to bring our needs to the throne of God.

One of our forefathers once said, "Pray and work. Work and pray." And indeed how true this is too, and this is, I believe, what Paul is saying here. He's saying don't just pray and spend your time as a monk or as a nun might do in a cloister of some sort, and keep yourself from the world or from being salt in the earth. No, you need to be salt in the earth and you need more than prayer, you need to be clothed with the whole Christian armor, but don't think on the other side that you can go out and work in society, that you can go out clothed in the Christian armor, and that the armor in itself will protect you. You will have no strength to use it if your strength is not dipped in the power of incessant prayer.

Work and pray. Pray and work. And though we need our stated times of prayer, my friends, the best kinds of prayers in a normal day for God's child are those that come in the midst of the means, in the midst of daily forms of labor, those sighs and those tokens of fellowship. Oh, a child of God can feel when he has that fellowship with the Lord and when that is missing over a period of time and he feels his prayer life reduced to the mere stated times, he feels that the very life of his soul is being swept away, he is missing the when of prayer.

Pray always. And prayer doesn't mean words that I said, or doesn't mean to be constantly on our knees, but to pray always means from all angles and in all events and throughout the day in all circumstances, to feel an underlying need that goes with us through the day for the presence and fellowship, the help and dependency of our souls upon God.

Praying always. Do you see how prayer is the vital link? Prayer is like the nerve system that runs through the spiritual body and functions and touches all the pieces of armor with which the Christian soldier is adorned, and so the command is a very pertinent one, it is a lifestyle command. Pray always.

But then the apostle says to us not only the when of prayer but also the what of prayer. "Pray always," is a good command, but we may well ask, "What must we pray?" "Pray always," he answers, "with all prayer and supplication." Now at first glance that may appear contradictory to you. When you consider these words, my friends, it seems like the apostle is repeating himself three times, after all, what is prayer but supplication and what is supplication but prayer? There is an intimate connection. Perhaps prayer is broader than supplication but certainly they are very close and so he is actually saying pray always with prayer and supplication or with prayer and prayer. He is saying pray with prayer. How shall I pray? What shall I pray? Well, the what is to pray with prayer.

Now you might say, "Why does he say this? Why such a repetition?" Well, because the apostle knew his own heart and he knew how easy it was to pray much and not to pray in his prayers. He knew how much prayerless praying could come from his heart and ascend to the throne of God and he said, "Ephesians, you need your times of prayer, you need to pray always, but you need to pray in your prayers. You need prayer as the breath of your life but you need to actually do that breathing. You need to receive the grace to do that true praying. You need to pray in your prayers."

You look in the marginal notes of James 5, as you recall when we considered the history of Elijah, and we read there that Elijah prayed in his prayers. It came from the heart, and my friend, that's what true prayer comes from, it comes from the heart. It comes from the center, from the core of being of the believer. It comes from the depths of the inner man. True prayer is born in the womb of the soul. True prayer comes from the innermost core. It comes with whole-hearted petitioning. Samuel Rutherford once said a dumb beggar gets more when he can't talk than when he can. Tears have a tongue and a grammar and a language that the Lord can understand better than words. You see, "It is better," said John Bunyan, "when thou prayest rather let thou heart be without words than thy words without heart."

The Lord is not looking for elegance. The Lord is not looking for length. The Lord is not looking for human reasoning. The Lord is looking for the heart, for praying in prayer, for unbosoming and unburdening of the heart before his presence. And oh, how sweet it is when God's child may lay everything before him, may lay not only the pieces of Christian weaponry and say, "Lord, teach me how to use them," but may bear all his soul and bear all his sins and tell the Lord everything and say, "Lord, here I am. Have mercy upon me."

That's praying with prayer and when we do that, my friends, then this what of prayer also knows no boundaries. As the when of prayer is always, so the what of prayer when prayed from the heart becomes everything. There is nothing too large, there is nothing too small to ask of the Lord. I can still remember visiting a farmer several years ago, a number of years ago whose barn burned down and I'll never forget what he said to me as we stood beside the ashes of his barn. I commented to him what fresh work he had for prayer and he said to me, "Oh, but I wouldn't pray to the Lord for something like this. The Lord is so great, the Lord wouldn't bother with my little barn." And, "Oh," I said, "my friend, you are wrong. The Lord is indeed very great but he is a great God who has

come also very low and he is willing to help in the smallest of these. Acknowledge me in all thy ways and I shall direct all thy paths." There is nothing for which the needy heart may not spread out its needs before the Lord. The needs of the body. The needs of the soul. The needs of family. The needs of church. The needs of the coming of his kingdom. The needs of government in nations. The needs of protection against nations and against enemies internal and external. All these things you may bring to the Lord in prayer.

Yes, you are called to bring to the Lord in prayer your whole life, all your sins and your shortcomings. I told you before I believe on that wonderful book, *Life in Jesus*" by Mary Winslow, and how she said to her son, "Tell the Lord everything about you as if he knew nothing about you, yet knowing that he knows all things," and that, my friends, is the best definition I know of the what of prayer. Tell the Lord everything as if he knew nothing yet with the confidence and holy familiarity, knowing that he knows everything and then the best thing to do is to leave it in his hands. We are so foolish, my friends, we may feel our needs but we don't even know what a good solution will be, and we err so often in our prayers because in the what of prayer we think we have to tell the Lord what to do, and then we miss the whole point of the what of prayer, the what of prayer is to bring our heart to him and to spread everything open before him and to follow his leadership. True prayer is not saying, "Lord, I want thee to lead me this way," and to try to pull the Lord behind us but true prayer is a struggle and a wrestling to bring our will under God's will and to follow behind him.

There was a man who once came to one of our forefathers and said, "What's the sense of prayer, God knows everything. And as the tree is fixed and firm, why pray?" And that forefather answered, "Well, not only because God delights to work through prayer and God delights to hear prayer, but prayer is especially for you that your will may be bent and molded to follow behind God in prayer." Prayer, my friends, isn't for God, prayer is God's gift for us, that we may be molded and shaped after the patterning of his image-making that we may learn holy submission to the grand art and secret of prayer.

Prayer is God's way to make his child soft and pliable in his hands and in that process we often don't know when we are faced with difficulties and needs what the best solution would even be. Isn't that what Paul wrote to the Romans when he says, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities but we know not what we should pray for as we ought." We don't know. The great Moses did not know what he should pray for when he was asked to enter Canaan, and so it was also the disciples when they asked for fire from heaven to come upon the Samaritans, they didn't know what they were asking for. And again, neither did Paul know what to pray for when he pleaded with the Lord three times to have the thorn in his flesh removed. He didn't realize he needed that thorn and he truly prayed in his prayer when the Lord made him willing to abandon that request. My friends, the what of prayer is also very much a frame of mind, a matter of heart. It is a shaping of the person to come under God.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication. You know, I'm afraid we view prayer very wrongly sometimes. There are some people that view it only as thanksgiving. That's wrong, of course. Thanksgiving is the chief part of prayer but there's more to prayer than

thanksgiving. Some people view prayer only as expressing our needs. That's wrong too. Prayer is to be confession of need but it's to be more than that. Prayer is confession, supplication, thanksgiving, but all of these things to bring the soul to a place before God's footstool of submission. Prayer is God's great means to make us be what we are before him and to let God be God. And dear child of God, is that not the beauty of prayer? Are not the best prayers of your life those in which you can say, "Thy will be done"? Are not the best prayers of your life those in which God is exalted and you are abased? In which God becomes God and you become a sinner at his feet, unworthy and yet pleading for his faith that he may have mercy upon you? Is not this praying with prayer that you may be shaped and molded and brought under him?

So my friends, this all can only take place, only take place by the Spirit, in the Spirit. We can't do it from our own side. We can't do it in our own strength and our very prayerlessness, the very great curse of prayerlessness that rests upon this age and that also afflicts the church and torments God's people for that is the great sin of our times, I believe in the lives of God's children the prayerlessness of their prayers, does this not all show us how desperately we need the Spirit to pray and to groan within us groanings that cannot be uttered? Oh, indeed when we compare ourselves to a former age and generation then we have much cause for humiliation when it comes to prayer.

I often thought of John Welsh, John Knox's son-in-law, of whom his wife said that he prayed 7-8 hours every single day and kept his robe beside his bed at night and could never make it through a night without getting up and going to his prayer room and pouring out his soul before the Lord. And often his wife later wrote, often she would hear him as he groaned and wrestled, "Lord, give me Scotland. Wilt thou not give me Scotland?" He was agonizing, you see, taking the kingdom of heaven by violence, praying that God may revive the whole land with the power of his word. And such interceders, such wrestlers we have dire need of in the church of God today. Oh, my friends, one true wrestler at the throne of grace for the church of God is worth hundreds of non-wrestlers in the midst of Zion's ranks.

Oh, what need we have for those who truly pray in their prayers and what need we have to smite upon our own breasts and say, "O God." Do you know what it means to pray in your prayers? Is Satan bothered by your prayers or does he rest content beside your formality and your dutifulness in prayer because he recognizes that the spirit of it, the life of it, the breath of it, the vitality of it, the power of it is not there? Have you too found prayer to be the grand secret in the art of Christian warfare? Are you telling the Lord everything, also your sins, or are you trying to hide things from him? That's a futile task, you know. David said, "I own my transgressions." And oh, that's a wonderful thing. "I own my transgressions before thee." And when we own our sinnership in God's presence, my friends, blessing is on its way. Indeed, there is blessing in owning our sinnership. There is a blessing in becoming a lost sinner before the Lord that despite the tears and groans of a child of God, he would not trade for all the pleasures of the world. But also that blessing serves as a pathway to additional and to greater blessing and this all takes place by the Spirit.

The what and the when of prayer are rooted in the how of prayer and Paul says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." But that's our third thought and we will sing first from Psalter 115, stanzas 1, 2 and 3. "As pants the hart for streams of living water, So longs my soul, O living God, for Thee," and what follows 1, 2 and 3 of 115.

"As pants the hart for streams of living water,
So longs my soul, O living God, for Thee;
I thirst for Thee, for Thee my heart is yearning;
When shall I come Thy gracious face to see?"

O Lord my God, o'erwhelmed in deep affliction,
Far from Thy rest, to Thee I lift my soul;
Deep calls to deep and storms of trouble thunder,
While o'er my head the waves and billows roll.

Thou wilt command Thy servant's consolation,
Thy loving-kindness yet shall cheer my day,
And in the night Thy song shall be my comfort;
God of my life, to Thee I still will pray."

Romans 8 we read that the Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. In 1 Corinthians 14:15, "I will pray with the Spirit and with understanding also." And in Jude verse 20, "praying in the Holy Ghost," is an expression very much akin to our text "supplication in the Spirit."

For all true prayer, my friends, all three divine persons of the Holy Trinity are involved. The Father is the giver, the decreer, the hearer, the answerer of prayer. The Son is the one who takes the groanings of the believer and the Spirit into the heavenly places and salts the imperfections of the believer's prayers and groans with his own salted sufferings and merits and thereby makes the prayers acceptable to his Father not only but brings those prayers to him with his own high priestly prayer that their prayers may be wrapped up in the high priestly prayers of Jesus and be presented as acceptable and as effectual in his high priestly mediatorial prayerfulness for his name's sake. And the Holy Spirit is the one who on earth does the working of true prayer in the breast, in the heart of the believer. Christ prays for his people in heaven, the Spirit prays within his people on earth. The Spirit helpeth our infirmities.

So you see, my friends, there is something very beautiful about the how of true prayer, the how of true prayer is through the free grace gift canal of a Triune God, the giving Father, the pleading praying Son, the interceding groaning Spirit. And here the apostle mentions only the Spirit because he is dealing with what is going on in the believer's heart and the need the believer has to present prayers to the throne of God, and thus he speaks of supplication in the Spirit. Prayer that misses the breath of the Spirit is a dead smelling incense. It is a stench in God's nostrils. But prayer in the Spirit which is channeled through the blood of Christ is a sweet smelling incense in his sight and therefore the dire need to have the Spirit in prayer.

Now the great blessing of God's gospel grace is that God is not stingy with his Holy Spirit in prayer but God delights to give his Spirit, he delights to work through prayer in the hearts of sinners and to send his Spirit to accompany that prayer and to work out that prayer and form and mold that prayer on the anvil of his affliction or in the furnace of conviction of sin, or even in times of prosperity and joy. God is able, you see, to turn all his providential events into channels and needs for prayer and he is able too to send that Spirit to assist and to bring that prayer to fruition, to bring that prayer back to the throne of grace. And so prayer is a beautiful cycle. It comes from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit to the believer and back through the believer in Spirit with the Son and back to the Father.

Pray in the Spirit. We need, my friends, the sovereign grace of God to pray. Now that does not mean, however, that the picture Paul wants to paint here is one that allows us to retire and rest until we feel the movement of the Spirit in our breast and then we begin to pray. No, then we fall into the error of Quakerism and mysticism. No, Paul says wrestle to pray and groan that you may pray, and wrestle in your wrestlings for the wrestlings of the Spirit. Wait and pray for the Spirit but pray on even when you don't feel the Spirit for the Spirit may come even as you pray.

You've heard, no doubt, many times that famous quote of the Puritan Thomas Brooks who said, "How many times I bowed my knees and when I began to pray it was dead inside, but as I continued to pray, the Spirit began to move and I felt life in my soul and by the time I had finished praying, it was as if I had tasted the kisses of his mouth." That's what Paul means, not to just pray in a dead letter and be content with it, or not to avoid praying altogether if the Spirit is missing, but to get down and pray and ask God for the Spirit, that the Spirit may come and help us in our prayer, in all our infirmities. And that's what Paul was speaking of in Romans 8. He's a helper who guides. He assists in the wrestling process. He leads the believer on. You see, the believer is very rich, my friends, because he has a praying intercessor in heaven and he has a praying intercessor in his heart, Christ in heaven and the Holy Spirit in his soul.

How does the Holy Spirit then perform that task? Well, many of our forefathers have used a similar example, an example of a small boy at the helm of a ship learning under his father's tutelage how to steer that ship. The boy takes hold of the steering wheel. He begins to steer but the father is close beside him. He knows that if he doesn't help his son, the boat will crash on the sand banks or the rocks or in a swift current. So what does he do? What does the father do? Does he push his son aside and say, "Let go of the wheel, your father only can do it"? No, but he puts his son's hands on the wheel and when the waters may be very calm, he may let him go a bit on his own, but most of the time as he begins to teach him especially, he puts his hands near his son's hands and he guides the wheel with his son's hands, and as he turns the wheel, his son's hands also turn and so through the Spirit's wrestlings in the son, the son begins to wrestle, as it were, in a spiritual sense. And maybe sometimes the father has to sit so low that he clasps his very hands directly on top of the hands of his son and that way takes full control, but there are

other times where he lets his hands go by the side. But all these different ways, you see, he is indeed steering the course but the son also is at the wheel.

So my friends, our best prayers are those in which the Spirit grips our heart even as we ourselves are at the wheel of prayer, and he steers our hearts and he guides our course and makes us to follow the course that he has charted for our best welfare. He helps our infirmities and God knows how many infirmities we have in prayer. Oh, my friend, I think every child of God sitting here today will agree with me that most of our prayers are not even worthy of the name. Oh, what failures we are in prayer. How many sand banks of self-love, how many rocks of carnal desires, how many swift currents of spiritual pride we encounter when we take the wheel in our own hands and think we can pray without the Spirit. And what a great miracle of grace it is when the Spirit comes back and teaches us again to pray, that the Spirit doesn't thrust us away and say, "No, you cannot pray and you shall not pray." But oh, how fatherly the Spirit deals with us and dwells within us, dwells amidst all our perversity and all our corruption and all our waywardness, dwells amidst all our prayerlessness, and he puts our hands on the wheel of prayer, he stoops down to our knees like a father standing beside his boy, and he helps us to do what we can't do ourselves. The Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Oh, my friends, how can I describe it to you. You can better feel it and experience it than describe it, but there are times where the believer may believe even if he misses a personal knowledge of the Trinity and the third person, he may believe that the Holy Spirit is dwelling in him because he feels his movements as he grabs hold of the wheel of prayer. Oh, there are times where he spoils that prayer as soon as he gets up and he gives credit back to himself, but there are other times where he can't deny the Spirit has been in it, the Spirit has caused me to pray in my prayers.

Now says, Paul, this what of prayer, to pray with all prayer, this when of prayer, to pray always, and this how of prayer, to pray in the Spirit forms a tremendous power to all the other pieces of Christian weaponry. When the true believer is clothed from head to foot and is in the spirit of prayer, he is able through the Spirit's strength for Christ's sake to challenge the devil himself and this is, after all, Paul's goal with the Ephesian believer. He says, "When you have all these things, having done all, stand in the strength of the Lord, clothed with the helmet of hope, clothed with shod feet, with the breastplate of faith, the shield of faith, with your loins girt about with truth, and praying always in the Spirit. Go forward in the strength of the Lord God making mention of his righteousness even of his only."

My friends, the thermometer of prayer is the thermometer that gauges our spiritual condition. When our prayer life is cold and unbreathing then spiritual life is frozen and in sad condition, but when prayer is warmed from a breathing heart, the soul is warmed and close to God. Dear child of God, may I ask you with tender rebukes perhaps what is your prayer life like? Do you not have need to return and to pray once more, "O Holy Spirit, groan within me groanings which are unutterable." And unconverted among us, maybe you think when you hear of this true prayer and of what you are missing, maybe you

think that you are cold and not to pray, but then you are also wrong. You are commanded to pray. Did you ever realize that when you are unconverted, you are not excused from any command of God? "Acknowledge me in all thy ways," that comes to all men. "Command ye me," the Lord says in one place in the prophets. "Thus saith the Lord, the holy one of Israel and his maker, ask of me things to come concerning my Son and concerning the works of my hands, command ye me." That's an amazing statement. It shows how God delights in prayer and, my friend, when you can truly pray then you must come in prayer, you must tell the Lord that, and that must be also for God's people, how many times the child of God has to come and with groanings groan for a groan to groan, groan for a prayer to pray, groan for a sigh to sigh. "Lord, teach me to pray." Even the disciples, they had been with Jesus for a few years already and they said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Prayer is the grand secret of the Christian warfare but prayer is a task in which we constantly need the guidance and instruction of the Spirit. Prayer is not something we can accomplish and lay it to one side and say, "Now, now we can pray." Prayer is breath. You can't breathe this breath for your next breath. You need a fresh gift of God with every breath. You need a fresh token of the Spirit for every breath of prayer. But that doesn't mean we ever excuse ourselves for our prayerlessness. It's our fault through and through and through when we don't and when we can't pray. And we have no excuse, my friend, because the Lord invites you to come to his throne to teach you the art of prayer. Will you not go to him and say, "Lord, here is a dead sinner. Here is a prayerless sinner and I know I'm missing the one thing needful but I ask of thee, Lord, thou hast said acknowledge me, oh, I ask of thee and I acknowledge thee, teach me how to pray. Work in me true prayer." You see, just don't leave the Lord alone. Come back to him and say, "Lord, save me from my prayerlessness. Save me from myself and let me in too on this grand secret in the art of Christian warfare so that I too may know what it means to take the kingdom of heaven by violence."

Oh, what a wonderful experience that is. Katie Luther said of her husband Martin, Martin Luther, that there were three times during the height of the Reformation that he came down from his study and he cried out, "Vici, vici," in Latin which means, "I have conquered. I have conquered." And that conquering, my friends, is through submission, is through humility and through surrender. When did Jacob conquer? When was his name changed to Israel? "Because thou hast might with God and hath prevailed." When did Jacob really prevail? When he said his name was Jacob. You remember when he wrestled with the angel and the angel asked him his name? The angel knew his name. The angel was Christ and why did he ask Jacob his name then? Well, my friend, Jacob had been asked his name once before in his life, you remember when he stood beside the bed of his father Isaac and his father said, "What is thy name?" And he said, "My name is Esau." A pleasant name. Jacob, you know, means deceiver. Jacob is a horrible name but now when he wrestled with the angel, the angel said, "What is thy name?" And Jacob said, "My name is Jacob." Oh, when he became what he was before God and God said, "Thy name shall no more be Jacob, thy name shall be Israel meaning one who prevails with God," that's the beauty of prayer. Through surrender lies victory. Through death comes life.

Through poverty comes riches. Through mourning comes joy. Through hunger comes thirst quenched.

My friend, bring your poverty to the Lord. Bring your prayerlessness to the Lord. Tell him you are Jacob. Ask him to teach you that you are Jacob. Ask him to strip you of all your excuses, also the excuses of your prayerlessness. Ask him to make you guilty in his sight and to teach you through that guilt to pray. Pray with the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray." Pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. Amen.

Gracious God, bless the few words that have been spoken and teach us the poverty of our prayers and our need for thy Spirit within to guide us in prayer. O Holy Spirit, come against our natural inclinations and give us those holy groanings and wrestlings for thy blessing. Bring us into prayer and breathe through us the life of prayer and put our hands on the steering wheel of the helm of prayer. Oh, steer us and guide us, chart our course through the channel of prayer. O gracious Triune God, be pleased to give us true prayers through the great praying high priest who alone who can take our poor petitions and make them acceptable in thy sight, O God. Lord, do for us also in prayer what we cannot do for ourselves and let it be our strength and our power and the motivating engine of our lives to spur all the pieces of Christian armor into movement and into fruition. We ask all these things with the pardoning of our many sins in Jesus' name alone. Amen.