

The Armor of God Pt 7 - Powered By Prayer

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Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Bible Text: Ephesians 6:10-18; Nehemiah 4
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Open your Bibles to the sixth chapter of Ephesians. We come this morning to our concluding message on the, our series on spiritual warfare. This is our seventh and final message on the armor of God. Each of our previous six messages concerned a particular piece of armor beginning with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and then last Sunday finishing up the armor with the sword of the Spirit. So six pieces of armor, six messages, but we'll see Paul wraps up his discussion of the Christian armor by calling the soldier of Christ to prayer.

It's interesting, prayer is not a piece of armor. He doesn't give prayer a designation from the Roman panoply, the whole armor of the Roman soldier. He makes it something separate and distinct, kind of a concluding, a way of wrapping up this exhortation to spiritual warfare, and we see that prayer is not a piece of armor but it plays an essential role, it is fundamental, it is essential, and actually it plays an undergirding role in support of all of the pieces of armor.

The title of the message this morning is "The Armor of God," the armor of God, "Powered by Prayer." Powered by prayer, and I believe that the idea that Paul, the emphasis with which he, we'll see as we look at the words of the text, the emphasis he places on prayer, the urgency of his exhortation tells us that the armor of God is completely useless without prayer. As important and essential as each piece of armor are and we've seen that as we have looked each week at these various pieces of armor, Paul is saying that without prayer they are of no effect.

It's interesting when we read it in a moment, look, he begins the exhortation, this passage 6:10 with the exhortation to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Our first week in this passage, we talked about the fact that that phrase "strength of His might" also occurs another time in the epistle to the Ephesians in chapter 1 when Paul is describing, he's praying that the eyes of the hearts of the people he's writing to in Ephesus might be enlightened that they might understand what is the hope of his calling, what is the riches of his inheritance, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe. The surpassing greatness of his power. He wants us to understand this incredible power that has been given to us and that is available to us through Christ, and he uses the phrase "the strength of His might" in that description which takes several

verses at the end of chapter 1 where he says this power is essentially like the strength of his might which he demonstrated in raising Jesus from the dead and seating him far above all rule and authority and power, and seating him at the right hand of God. The same power that reached into the grave and lifted Jesus out of the grave and took him all the way, as it were, from the clutches, as it were, I mean, the physical body of Christ was in the grave as a result of the curse of sin, and now the body of Christ taken out of the grave from the curse of sin and lifted all the way to the right hand of the majesty on high. That same power is available to you and me, and that is the strength of his might.

So when he says, that's what he says in Ephesians 1, then when he says in the passage we're about to read "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might," he's wanting us to lay hold of that power, and so he then tells us the exhortations, the imperatives in the passage are be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Take up the whole armor of God. He repeats that exhortation twice. He says, "stand firm therefore." So be strong in the Lord, take up the armor, and stand. That's basically the thrust of the passage and prayer, this participial phrase that we're gonna be looking at in verse 18 is basically saying how you do it, how you stand, how this all happens. It's as you're praying, as you are praying at all times in the Spirit.

Prayer is truly the power. There's a sense in which, you know, you could have a really awesome tool. I'm thinking now of a power tool, you know, some of you guys really, you love your tools. I like my tools, I don't love them. I'm not that good with them so they're not that precious to me, but I do appreciate having the right tool. You know, a chainsaw. It's amazing what a chainsaw can do, right? But if the chainsaw doesn't have fuel, it's worthless. If a power saw is not plugged in, it is just an attractive adornment to your tool shelf. If it's not plugged in, it will not accomplish anything and there's a sense in which we might use this, have this metaphor in mind, as essential as each piece of armor is and Paul makes this so clear, every piece of armor is essential, if we are not bathing our lives in prayer and our experience and our circumstances in prayer, it's like essentially an empty suit of armor. You know, if you walked into some castle, you've probably seen maybe somewhere you've been, somewhere where you saw a suit of armor certainly on tv, you see a suit of armor in a castle or something, you can imagine walking around the corner and seeing that suit of armor and you didn't know it was going to be there, it'd be a little bit arresting. Like, "Whoa!" But, "Oh, it's just an empty suit of armor. There's nothing for me to be afraid of." Our armor can be just like that without prayer, just a shell, no power, no effectiveness, no ability to stand.

So we come today to the thing that powers the armor of God. The armor of God powered by prayer, Ephesians 6:10-18.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to

resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we come to You this morning aware of our great need of grace and therefore we come as You've told us in prayer. We, Lord, we are delighted that You are a God who answers prayer; that You're a God who commands us to pray and always to pray and not to lose heart, told to pray without ceasing. And so we come this morning, Lord, asking just like the disciples asked the Lord Jesus, Lord, teach us to pray. Teach us to pray. Make us people who understand the urgency and importance of prayer. Make us people who love to commune with You even more each day as each day passes. Make us people who lay hold of the power that raised Christ from the dead so that Your glory might be made known and that our lives might be a worthy testimony. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, so the armor of God powered by prayer. We're gonna look at this subject under four points this morning, four questions essentially to help us follow the flow of the text and the first is: what are we called to do? What are we called to do? And of course, the answer is pray. That's our first point. What are we called to do? We are called to pray and prayer is the means by which we lay hold of God's power. This is true throughout the Scriptures and I want you to see the connection with what has gone before is seen in the sentence structure that this is a part of the discussion. It's not a piece of armor. It's not designated as a piece of armor. It's not designated to be associated with a particular piece, part of the body like all of the others, the shoes of preparedness, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation. No, it's something that's all-encompassing but it is connected clearly through the flow of the text. It's this is watered down a little bit in the NASB and I'm disappointed in that. They usually get this right. It's clearer in the ESV and the King James and that is that when you read in verse 18, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit," I'm reading the New American Standard Bible, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times," it sounds like an imperative command. It's actually not an imperative command. In the Greek, it is a participle. It's one of the verbs with "ing" on the end. Literally in Greek it reads, "With all prayer and petition praying at all times." And participles are related to main verbs and so this participle is related to the previous main verb, take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, praying is the idea. And that imperative taking the sword of the Spirit, the helmet of salvation, was

connected with the previous one about taking up the whole armor of God. So the idea is take up the whole armor of God praying with all prayer and petition at all times in the Spirit, so that taking up the armor of God by means of prayer is the idea. And like I said, the ESV and the King James, they translate it with that participle, but even if you didn't have that, I mean, you look at the NASB the way it flows right out of that is "sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times." It even seems to flow there but it definitely does in the original.

So the connection, praying, prayer is the way we, in a sense, it's the way we put on the armor. I mean, how do you put on the armor but with prayer? Each of the pieces of armor is put on with prayer. In fact, that's one of the we sang standing on the promises but another familiar hymn, stand up, stand up for Jesus has a line in it, "Take up the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer." So each piece you put on praying. I mean, in a sense when we were taking on the armor of God, we've seen we're really putting on the sense of all that we have in Christ. It's about our union with Jesus. We've seen that he wore the armor of God in his role as Messiah.

This was prophesied in Isaiah. I've mentioned a couple different times through the series that five of the six pieces of armor are found in the prophesy of Isaiah. Chapter 59, verse 17, you read in chapter 59 the Lord looks and there's the need for his people to be defended, his city to be defended, and he laments that there's no one who is there to lead out into battle and so the Lord himself takes up the role of moving into battle. This is picturing that the Messiah is going to be God himself, Yahweh himself. Jesus, the God-man. And what does he do in Isaiah 59:17, he takes the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit and moves into battle. Back in chapter 11, verse 5, he girds his belt, on the belt of faithfulness is how it reads in most translations, but in the Hebrew faithfulness and truth is the same word. So he girds on the belt of truth. It's the Lord. It's the anointed one girding on the belt of truth, taking up the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, and when he comes, that's what he does, he lives a life of spiritual warfare. He came to destroy the works of the devil. He came to bind the strongman and to plunder his house. That's why Jesus came and he is the mighty warrior of God and he wore the armor and now and in light of all that he's done, Paul says you and I are to put on the armor of God on a daily basis as we build the kingdom. Remember we're talking about we build and we fight. We're fighting a spiritual enemy, not human enemies. Spiritual enemies. But as we build one another up, we're trying to build a people and we fight Satan and his kingdom, but as we build we find we have to be ready to fight.

So we take up this armor and you take up each piece of armor in an attitude of prayer remembering who you are in Christ. The belt of truth, you put on the belt of truth. Submitting, remember we talked about submitting to the word of God as your final authority. This is how you gird up your loins and prepare to move into battle. You are submitted to the word of God more than anything else. Whatever God says, that settles it.

So the belt of truth. You put on the breastplate of righteousness, that is, the righteousness of Christ, his perfect sacrifice. Again, you do that in prayer. "Lord, thank You that You have saved me, that You've given me this perfect righteousness and so that's who I am in

Christ." And so it's in communion with God that you put, and each piece of armor is that way. So you put on each piece with prayer but you also as we move into battle, you continue through prayer to draw on the power of God to enable you to stand. You don't think because I've got my armor on, I don't need any help. Look at the armor I've got. Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. So prayer is that ultimate dependence upon God. We're called to pray and the urgency of prayer in the passage is clear because of how emphatic Paul is in his words. I mean, like I said, the key verb in verse 18 is actually praying at all times, but he has this introduction, "With all prayer and petition praying."

Sometimes I like to as I'm reading the text, think about, well, he could have left this out. I've read some books in the last couple of years on writing because I'm doing my doctoral work and so we're required to read some books on writing, and essentially the books on writing basically, this is the main thing they say, less is more when it comes to words. Always try to cut down your words, whatever's extraneous, get rid of it. Now I think there's a really good point to that but that's not always accurate. I mean, you read some really great stuff and you're like, "Man, I'm glad that Dickens didn't do that, or Churchill didn't think that." When you read a Spurgeon sermon, you're glad he didn't try to just say in the bare-bones way that he could have when he flourishes and shares the glory of what he's sharing, right?

So there's balance but, okay, less is more sometimes. Paul could've started this sentence, he could've said, "And take the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance for all the saints." I left out some words and I basically told you the same exact main point. Be praying at all times with perseverance for at all times in the Spirit for everybody, but he added some words in. He said, he didn't just start off saying praying at all times, he said praying at all times with all prayer and petition. Praying, it's like while you're praying, pray. I think it's really kind of a Hebrewism, Hebraism. There is a Hebrew mode of emphasis called the infinitive absolute where you take a verb and then you put an infinitive of the same verb beside it, and it's like, you know, to speak, he spoke, and it means he said forcefully is what it means. But you put these two words together, I think that's what he's doing. To pray, he prayed. Or he's telling us to pray, pray. It's emphatic. And he adds the word "petition" in and he brings it again, again at the end of the verse when I just said it a moment ago, I said, pray at all times in the Spirit and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance for all the saints. I left out "and petition." He says "and petition" again. Two times prayer. Two times petition. He really wants to make it clear that we are supposed to be praying and petitioning God.

These two words, prayer, the word prayer translated prayer or pray in the text is a general term, the common word used for communion with God, to have a conversation with God. It's a general term and it entails all the various parts of prayer. Sometimes you'll hear this is a helpful designation, if you haven't heard of this, this is helpful to understand a way to pray, an outline for prayer is sometimes given as ACTS. Have you heard of that? ACTS, a-c-t-s. You begin with adoration, then move to confession, then move to thanksgiving, then move to supplication, petitions. So ACTS. Those are four major parts of prayer and

that's a pretty good summary. Another way of praying I think is a really effective way as well is to pray through the Lord's Prayer and use it as a guide, an outline for your prayer. Not just praying the Lord's Prayer but, you know, "Our Father which art in heaven," and you praise God for who he is as your Father. "Hallowed be Your name. Lord, I want Your name to be revered in my life. I praise You for who You are. I praise Your name, the name of Christ, that You're the God who saves, that You're the...." You know, this kind of thing and then you move all the way through that.

Well, anyway, so you have a comprehensive description of prayer in the Lord's Prayer because he gets to supplications later on, specific requests, you know, "Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." And so you have a comprehensive description of prayer. This is what the word "prayer" means, it means all the things that are involved in prayer, be about that continually, always adoring and confessing and thanksgiving and supplicating. But the word "petition" is actually just a part of prayer. It's a synonym for supplication in the ACTS thing. If you use petition, it would be ACTP, it would kind of mess up your acronym, right? A-c-t-p doesn't sound as good as a-c-t-s. But it's the same idea, it's a request, a specific need taken to the throne of God.

So he says, "With all prayer and petition." What are we called to do? We're called to have our lives saturated with prayer and petition. The idea is the emphasis of Paul after these laying out this armor and telling us, "Listen, you want to be strong in the Lord? How can you be strong in the Lord unless you pray?" Prayer is how you lay hold of the power of God and the problem for us is prayer to people who cannot see the spiritual world, we cannot see what's going on in history and what God is doing, and we can't see how hearts are changing, how the Spirit is blinding people, we don't have eyes to see that. We just see people in front of us and very often prayer seems like a very small thing to be doing. We, many of us struggle with wanting to get to it, just get to it. Let's get to acts. Let's do something about it. And we are supposed to do something about it, we are supposed to be people of action but we're to be people of prayer first. Action without prayer is presumption. Prayer is what lays hold of the hand of God.

I love the way Spurgeon said, described it, the idea that it seems insignificant and small and yet its inestimable power. This is what Spurgeon said, "Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the hand of Omnipotence." Slender nerve. Think about how small some of your nerves are and if that nerve is severed, something just doesn't work anymore. Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the mighty hand of God. God has chosen to use our prayers. I mean, God could've done it without our prayers. We would think, "Lord, why don't You just do it without our prayers? Just do what You need to do." That's our prayer in the morning, "Just do what You need to do. Amen." That's not how he wants us to pray. He wants us to wrestle with him over all of the particulars, to pray for individual people as we're gonna see as we read the passage.

So prayer and petition. How will you stand against the attacks, the spiritual attacks in your life if you don't pray? That's the force of this. How could you possibly go into battle without praying? Being at war requires that we have power. I mean, imagine being at war

with no ammunition, being at war with no air power that you can call in, being at war with no artillery. No, in warfare what happens, you think about it, you know, they call in air support and say, "Listen, there's an enemy right there," and then the air support comes in and the missiles or the bombs are delivered and the enemy is taken out, and that happens when somebody contacts someone else that has the ability to authorize that. So prayer is us calling in that kind of support and to not do it is the height of foolishness.

Now what's interesting too is Jesus did this. You know, we talked about last week how it was amazing in looking at Jesus and battling Satan in the temptations, remember he used the sword of the Spirit. He didn't use the glory of his person. No, as man he had memorized the word of God and he used individual verses to defeat the attacks of the enemy. In the same way, Jesus lived a life of perfect humanity and he was a man of prayer.

I want you to see this. Look with me and how much difference it makes. Turn to Luke's Gospel. Luke really highlights this part. I mean, all of the Gospels show there are times where Jesus is praying but Luke seems to really home in on that particular aspect. It's one of the reasons we have four Gospels, is so the Lord can give us four vantage points. It's like four different artists looking at four different angles of the glorious Savior and so you get something rich from each one. So Luke gives us this angle, turn to chapter 5, verses 15 and 16. Early in his ministry it says this, "But the news about Him," about Jesus, "But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." Jesus would leave the ministry sometimes and slip away to pray. It's a counter-intuitive thing for many of us. There are people with needs and yet Jesus is slipping away to pray. He's saying, "If I'm not rightly connected to the Father, if I'm not as the man, Christ Jesus, walking in obedience to My Father, connected intimately with Him, I have nothing to give."

And you see this continued, turn with me to chapter 6 and what you'll see is prayer and how Luke points out how it brings about advances in the Gospel, and this is one of the things I think about the armor of God and one of the reasons it's here at the end of the armor, remember how we mentioned there's six pieces and that the sixth piece is a defensive and offensive piece? You know, you have just the defensive pieces from the beginning, you know, starting with the belt of truth all the way down and you finally get to the sword of the Spirit and it's where you have a defensive weapon but also an offensive weapon, right? And I think prayer, then, takes that offensive weapon to the next level and actually begins driving back the enemy. I think that's why it's here. It's still not a piece of armor, it's something more encompassing than that but it is that which brings the power of God to bear in a way that will drive Satan back. We're not just standing now, we're taking ground.

Look at how he describes this, chapter 6, verse 12, "It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." I mean, just really reflect on that, that Jesus spent a whole night in prayer. Why would he need it? Yet he did, and if he did, how much more do we? But look what happens after that. He spends

the whole night in prayer, "And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles." He's in prayer with God so he will know the 12 that he needs to set apart to the great work of carrying the message to the end of the earth.

Look at chapter 9, verse 18. Luke 9:18. There we read in verse 18 of chapter 9, "And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him," he's praying alone, then the disciples come up, "and He questioned them, saying, 'Who do the people say that I am?'" And what we're gonna see is they say Elijah, some say a prophet. They basically don't know and then Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was prayer that led to Peter then having his eyes opened to see who Jesus really was. Jesus is praying and then look what happens, the advance of the Gospel.

Look at verse 28 of chapter 9, just 10 verses down, "Some eight days later after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to," what? "To pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming." This is the Transfiguration. While he is praying, God, then, unveils his glory, his majesty, his divine brilliance and beauty is now exhibited after he prays, as he's praying.

Chapter 11, verse 1, "It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'"

So the Lord Jesus Christ did not go into battle without prayer. He continually prayed therefore we must be people of prayer. What are we called to do? We are called to pray. The armor of God is powered by prayer. So that's the first point. What are we called to do? We're called to pray. Secondly, when are we called to do it? When are we called to pray? Back to our verse, chapter 6 of Ephesians in verse 18. When? A couple of points here we need to look at to help us with "when." The first thing, it's obvious, is the phrase "at all times, pray at all times." That's when. Should I pray now? Prayer is always a good time apparently. Pray at all times, in fact, I mentioned earlier 1 Thessalonians 5 says pray without ceasing. Pray and just don't stop praying. Your whole life should be, we should aspire that our whole life would be lived out in communion with God. Coram Deo, before the face of God, continually talking with him, praising him, thanking him, in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. As we go through life remembering, as we encounter something difficult, "Lord, thank You for this challenge. Lord, give me help to understand what to do. Help me in this circumstance to be loving and kind. Help me to die to myself. I want to have a certain attitude, a response. Help me, Lord." You see, that's what he wants us to do. It's to be praying at all times.

So when are we called to pray? At all times, and it's interesting, in fact, the word that Paul uses for time here in verse 18, it's one of two Greek words that are translated that English word "time," this is the word *kairos*, not the normal word *chronos*. *Chronos* we get chronology from it. That's the normal word that just speaks of time as basically, you know, moments on a clock. You know, the ticking of a clock. *Chronos*. That's chronological. *Kairos* actually conveys the idea of opportune times and it doesn't mean

pray at all times, it means pray at, it doesn't mean so much pray without ceasing, that's said somewhere else. This is saying at every time you encounter something, pray. It's almost like it would be maybe translated "each" would be better, "each and every." Pray each and every time. Each and every time you need and you're reminded of your need of prayer, be praying. Whenever you encounter something, be praying. Whenever you sense that there's warfare going on, be praying. And when is there warfare going on? Almost all the time.

So at all times. The second thing about this is the tense of the verb "pray at all times." I said that was a participle, really it would be better translated praying, it's actually a Greek present participle and the present tense in Greek is not so much about the time of action like it is in English. We say past, present, future tenses, right? Past tense, that's past time. Future tense, future time. Present tense, present time. In Greek it's a little different. It's more not about the time of action but the kind of action and the Greek present has the idea of ongoing and continuous action. So Paul uses it when he says, "With all prayer and petition praying at all times," he's emphasizing it's to be a continuous continuous activity.

So you're to be continually in a mindset of dependence upon God and as you encounter circumstances, you're to turn it into prayer. To me it's so awesome how this connected to Nehemiah. I wish I were, you know, I find myself often, have you ever had this experience that you, some of you may, are really good at puns, I'm good at puns accidentally. Have you ever had that happen to you? You're like, you know, you say something and you just realize, "I just did a pun. That was really good. I wasn't even thinking about it." I think the brain somehow is doing something and, you know, you just, you somehow make a connection. Anyway, I thought somebody might give me an amen there. Nobody ever experienced that? Anyway. Pray for me, then, because I have experienced that.

But in this situation, Nehemiah 4 to me connected so well with Ephesians 6 as I've said before in previous messages, that they're building and they have to fight, right, in Nehemiah? They're building the wall and they have to fight because they're building God's kingdom and that's essentially what Paul is saying in Ephesians 6 and Nehemiah says, "Hey, take up your weapon along with your trowel." And what's really cool, though, is Nehemiah is a great example of this point I'm just talking about. Pray at all times. When Paul ends up the discussion of the armor with prayer and he says pray at all times, have a continuous attitude of prayer and when you encounter a particular circumstance, every opportune moment, pray.

Turn back to Nehemiah for a minute and that's Nehemiah 4, we'll start there and I'm gonna show you how this is happening throughout the book of Nehemiah. Ten different times in the book of Nehemiah you will find Nehemiah stop in the middle almost in the middle of a sentence and start praying, and he tells us what his prayer is. Some of these, I'm sure, were silent to the Lord, not out loud. Some of them were out loud. And some of them are, as he's reflecting and telling you something that's happened, he just feels the need as he's telling you about something that happened in the past or that he learned

about, "I've gotta pray," and he starts praying. It's like this circumstance calls for prayer and he does it. You see, he's praying at all times.

Nehemiah 4, the first few verses tell about the opposition of Sanballat, when he heard about the wall, became furious, verse 1, angry with the Jews, mocked them. He insults the Jews in his presence and Tobiah the Ammonite, verse 3, also jumps on and they're having this just, it's not in Nehemiah's presence, he hears about this from someone. They may have sent somebody to tell him directly, we talked about this, or he may have just heard from someone that happened to hear it, this discussion where they're trashing the people of God. And when Nehemiah is recounting it now, as he tells us in verse 3, "Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, 'Even what they are building--if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!'" Now what I would be tempted to do at this point if I were telling people like Nehemiah's telling them what happened, I would be tempted to say, "Hey, but we know the theology. We have sound doctrine. We know God is on the throne." I would move into preaching. Nehemiah moved into praying. He says even if a fox would jump on it, he would break their stone wall down. "Hear, O our God, how we are despised!" He goes immediately to God and verses 4 and 5 are his prayer. "Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity."

The same thing happens in verse 8 and 9, "All of them," now after they're continuing to build, they had a mind to work, verse 6. Sanballat, Tobiah, they hear, Ammonites, Arabs hear about it, the Ashdodites. They're really upset about it. They became very angry, verse 7, "All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. But," what? "We prayed to our God." And they also took action, but they prayed. They didn't immediately take action. That's what we would probably want to do, is we would set up the guard but Nehemiah prayed and set up the guard. A lot of times it's either/or. Some people tend to want to pray, some people tend to want to set up the guard. The message is from Nehemiah, do both but start with prayer. But just don't end with prayer, start with prayer and then move on to taking up your weapon.

We saw this actually in chapter 2 as well. Well, in chapter 1 we're given Nehemiah's wonderful prayer of repentance and brokenness for the people in chapter 1, verses 5 to 11 when he confesses the sins of the people, but in chapter 2 when he goes in to talk to the king, he's been fasting and praying and preparing to go talk to the king and he's gonna, remember he's gonna let his face be sad which was a possible death sentence to be sad in the presence of the king. The king's got enough to worry about without you bringing your petty problems into his presence. Persian and Babylonian kings were known to kill any servants that bothered them in that way and Nehemiah decides he's gonna be sad in his presence, he's gonna let him know, he's gonna risk his life, and he does and the king said to him, verse 2, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid," Nehemiah said. "I said to the king, 'Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs,'" this is Nehemiah 2:3, "when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" Now this is unbelievable what's happened. This is the answer to all

that prayer and fasting he's been doing. So what would you request? I would have thought he would have just told him what he requested. "Your prayer has been answered, Nehemiah." But what does he say? "So I prayed to the God of heaven." He stops and prays. Now I'm sure he didn't make the king wait long. This was a quick prayer. But he's saying, "I did not just go on and voice what I said. I prayed to the God of heaven, 'Lord, help me say this correctly. Bless it.'" And that prayer then was answered. He then goes on and the king gives him what he requests.

You can go all the way through the book of Nehemiah and see this again and again and again. Chapter 6, verse 9. Well, basically there are people telling him that he should come and meet them, and he knows they're trying to lure him into a trap. Verse 9, "For all of them were trying to frighten us," this is talking about the people that are sending him messages, Sanballat, Tobiah, working through the Jews to try to discourage him. "They think we will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands." You see, he just can't help but he just goes into prayer. That's what you and I should be like. We should be people who commune with God regularly and then as we go through life, we're continually stopping and asking for his help and the armor of God is powered that way.

How are we to do it? When are we to do it? At all times, continually. Third point: how are we to pray? We looked at what are called to do, and when are we called to pray, now we look at, thirdly, how are we to pray and our verse in Ephesians 6 has much to say about this as well. "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit." That's the first thing we're gonna look at under this third point, the first sub point, "in the Spirit." Pray, praying in the Spirit. Praying at all times in the Spirit.

Now what does this mean? It doesn't mean praying in tongues. Just in context, you read Ephesians, there's nothing about tongues in the book of Ephesians. It means praying with the help of the Spirit. The idea partly, we're gonna see this even more than that, but is in Romans 8:26-27. The Apostle Paul says the Spirit helps us in our weakness for we don't know how to pray as we ought. But when you don't know what to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. We have the Spirit continually interceding for us and the Spirit helps us to pray. Sometimes he just groans for us and all we can do is groan, and what's happening is even as you're just sitting there groaning, it's the Spirit speaking through and alongside you, groaning with you to God and the Spirit knows the mind of the Father and the Spirit knows how to pray. So when you've got the Spirit's help, you have got excellent help in getting the ear of God.

So he says pray in the Spirit. That is, pray with an attitude of dependence upon the Spirit, not an independent attitude. There's a sense of reliance upon the Holy Spirit. That's what it means to pray in the Spirit with the help of the Spirit. But also just in this book, there's several times the phrase "in the Spirit, or with the Spirit" is used in Ephesians itself and what I want us to look at for a moment is Ephesians 5:18, just one chapter back from our passage when we read the command, "do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for

all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." Be filled with the Spirit.

So the idea is be filled with the Spirit. It's interesting, he makes it a contrast between drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit, then, is apparently to be under the influence of the Spirit. And compare this. In Acts 2, remember when it says in Acts 2:4 they were all filled with the Spirit, that's the Pentecost when the Spirit falls upon God's people, what did the Jews think was wrong with them? Remember what they said? "Hey, why are these guys drunk?" And Peter says, "They're not drunk. Hey, it's only the third hour. Nobody's drunk. This is what was prophesied by the prophet Joel, the Spirit of God has come upon us." But it was the Spirit, when the Spirit, you're filled with the Spirit, you are under the control, the influence of the Spirit. There's a sense of joy and happiness. This is one of the things you can look at your life and say, "Am I walking in the Spirit? Am I full of the Spirit?" There should be joy in your life. If you are not, if you are a joyless Christian, you are not a Spirit-filled Christian at this moment. I mean, we all find ourselves getting discouraged. We look at other things, so we're not depending upon the Spirit, we're not filled with the Spirit, we're filled with thoughts about what's wrong in our lives, what's wrong with the world, and we're grumbling and complaining.

And I think there's some ways to be filled with the Spirit. Let me just give you this as a homework assignment, compare Colossians 3:16 with Ephesians 5:18. There's an imperative in Colossians 3:16 that is followed by some participles, and there is the same way in Ephesians 5:18, there's a command that begins and followed by some participles, and the participles in Colossians 3:16 and 17 and the participles in Ephesians 5:18 to 21 are almost identical. So in Colossians 3 it doesn't say be filled with the Spirit, it says let the word of Christ dwell richly within you. So part of being filled with the Spirit or apparently the means to being filled with the Spirit is the same thing as letting the word of Christ dwell richly within you.

You abide in the word. It makes sense, doesn't it? What is the word? It's the sword of the Spirit. And so you abide in the word, you're making your mind, saturating your mind with the things of God, the word of God. That's part of what it means to be filled with the Spirit. And then also the things that flow out of it, I think, actually continue to help you be filled with the Spirit. When you're speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, when you're singing to the Lord, making melody in your heart to God, that's helping to continue the filling, and you're always giving thanks for all things. I said earlier you are a joyless Christian when you're looking around at all that's wrong in your life, all that's wrong with the world. You're a joyless Christian. When do you become a joyful Spirit-filled Christian that somebody might think is drunk? When you're thinking about the wonder of all God is doing and you're looking at his word and you're glorying in Christ in spite of the fact that the world, your life may be feeling like it's heading to hell but in reality you know that's not true. You put on the armor of God. You know the promises of God, that he's working out his perfect plan, that his salvation, you've got an enlarged perspective, the helmet of salvation. You know that he's leading you from

blessing to deeper blessing, from joy to greater joy. It's only improving every moment, every day. It's just that I don't see it.

And when you start dwelling on that, and you're letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly in Colossians 3:16, this is actually a plural "you," it's y'all. It's in the Greek actually. It says y'all in the Greek. No, it does say you plural. Let the word of Christ dwell in you as a group. It doesn't just mean sitting around meditating. That's part of it. Yes, that's important but that's not what Colossians 3:16 is saying. Other verses say that. Colossians 3:16 is saying let the word of Christ dwell in you as a group richly, the people around you, the believers around you. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another. You see, you're speaking the word, you're speaking the truth in love among each other, and as you're doing that, that's the same thing as being filled with the Spirit, and if you're doing that, then you're praying and you're praying in the Spirit, and there is no telling what God is gonna do.

But that's what, this is the calling that we have, we are to pray, not just pray mealy-mouthed prayers of what we think we want. So often we just pray for relief and it's okay to pray for relief as part of your prayer when you're hurting, but that's not where you start. That's not where you should end. You start with the glory of God. Like Jesus said, "Pray in this way, 'Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come. Lord, use this circumstance that You're using in my life, I want Your name to be magnified in the way I respond to this incredibly difficult circumstance that feels like it's going to kill me. May Your name be exalted. May Your kingdom come in my life through this. May You make me submit more joyfully to Jesus through this trial. May Your will be done. May I live out what You want me to be. May I look like Jesus and walk like Jesus.'" And when you start praying like that, that's praying in the Spirit. When you're just praying, "Lord, give me relief. Lord, give me relief. Lord, give me relief," you're not praying in Jesus' name.

The Scripture talks about anything you ask in my name, you will have it. In his name means in accordance with his character and his purposes. It doesn't just mean a magic formula just to say, "Whatever I pray, in Jesus' name." Magic. The Bible is not about magic. Magic, listen, magic is you are in control. So that's the lie of satanism too, you are in control. You do something and something happens. You do something and something happens. You're in control. That is the lie from the pit of hell and it smells like smoke. That's not reality. The way God works, he's on the throne, he decides what he's gonna do, and we get in line with his will and we submit to it, and when you do that, you will have joy and you will have his blessing, and even you will have his power. It comes as you humble yourself under his mighty hand, not as you seek to have a mighty hand.

So we're to pray in the Spirit but not only that, he says with all perseverance. With all perseverance. Be on the alert with all perseverance and petition. So we're to continue as we're petitioning to have perseverance. This verb, I mean this adjective, or it's a noun, I'm sorry, perseverance is a noun. It means strength. It comes from a verb which means to be strong toward something. Like there's a wind blowing and you brace yourself up against the wind. You stand against it. It's actually like stand against but it's a different, the different etymology but the idea is pray and pray against those things that work against

prayer. Pray with perseverance, determination. You could say praying in the Spirit is praying with dependence, praying with perseverance is praying with determination. So it's determined dependence. How are we to pray? We're to pray like that.

Now the fourth question. So we've looked at what are we called to do, when are we called to pray, how are we called to pray, now we look at why are we called to pray? Three sub points here. Why are we called to pray? I mean, there's other reasons but the passage gives us, I think, three real obvious ones. We are called to pray because we need to be awakened. You could say it maybe better, we need vigilance. This is the first sub point. We need to pray because we need vigilance. It's in the passage as you look at this. When he says with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit and with this in view, be on the alert.

Be on the alert translates actually a Greek verb which is watching. It's translated different ways in different passages. Let's see, the New American Standard, here we have, of course, says with this in view, be on the alert. The NIV says with this in mind, be alert. The ESV says to that end, keep alert. And the King James says and watching there unto. They're all trying to say, they're trying to translate the idea that it says be praying continually and you have this purpose clause unto this, and the idea is be praying continually unto watching, unto keeping vigilant. And the word for keeping vigilant or watching or being alert, be on the alert, is a word which means to have your eyes open and to keep your eyes open when you're supposed to be sleeping. When you're normally asleep, you're awake and you're doing it because you're staying awake for a reason. You are holding a vigil.

You're being vigilant. It's like you're a soldier in the army and you would like to sleep but there's an attack that's supposed to come any minute. You know what you do? You stay awake. And what he's saying, what Paul is saying is one of the benefits of prayer, one of the reasons we're supposed to pray regularly and continually is because we tend to fall asleep. We tend to be just distracted and just preoccupied, numbed. It's like, you know, when you wake up, you wake somebody up in the morning and you're, maybe you're, I don't know, just pick your circumstance, you've got a reason you've got to get up and you're up early, maybe your spouse isn't up, and so you're waking them up and you know they want to be up. They're the one, in fact, that told you, "We've gotta get up and we've gotta do this, whatever." Okay? And so it's even what's happening is more important to them than it is to you. I mean, you know, if you're a loving spouse, it should be equally important but sometimes you have to work at that. But anyway, so the issue is it's more that they want to be wakened and you're awake and you know they need to be awake and you're like, "Hey, it's actually we're late now. It's later than you thought and I know how important it is to you." But you wake them up and they're like, "What? Huh? Uh, no, I want to sleep." And like, "No, you don't!" If you could see with reality, if you could come to your senses, you want to get moving right now.

Well, now think about that in war. There's somebody who is coming to attack you, to kill you, it's time to wake up, and what he's saying is there's something about being fallen people though we have new hearts by faith in Christ, trusting in the finished work of

Jesus, his death in your place, his resurrection, you come to know him by faith resting in Christ alone, and yet you still have the old man and the old man is tempted to sleep spiritually. We just don't see reality. When you're asleep, you don't know what's going on around you. When you're asleep, you don't realize that the enemy is doing something. You don't know that the person is breaking into your car in your driveway. You don't have any idea about that because you're asleep, and so what he's saying is that as we're praying with this in view, with this in mind, to that end, the idea is that the Greek actually says you're praying to this purpose, so that you will also in praying continually, you will now be continually alert. You will see things as they are. You will see the reality and the stakes that are there. You will see that the attacks that are happening. If you're not awake, you won't even know that the enemy is just carrying off stuff all around. I mean, it's like they're just robbing your house blind and you're just, you know, we are obviously walking through. Almost like agree, "Hey, how are you doing? Good to see you this morning." Walking around in your house. This isn't a great illustration. Maybe you're really... Ah, forget it.

The point is, it takes the grace of God to make you and me aware of the stakes that are involved in so many things that happen every single day, and because we are prone to sleep and because we don't pray, we miss opportunities to stand against the tide of the enemy attack. And so he comes in our family, our church, our relationships, and he wreaks havoc and Paul is saying this is why I'm telling you with all prayer and petition be praying at all times in the Spirit to this end, that you will be then being alert, and then keep on persevering as you're now alert and you see what's happening, then keep persevering in prayer and specifically requesting what needs to be requested from God to deal with the circumstances that you now have eyes to see, and you are now a faithful soldier of Christ. You're making a difference. You're holding the piece of the line that he's given to you when you pray.

But that's the first thing, we need vigilance. So there are three things. Why are we to pray? 1. This is number 4, number 4, why are we to pray? A., was we need vigilance. Let me just mention a few verses too. Look at Ephesians 5, I think, let's see, you can look at that right now, verse 14. For this reason it says awake sleeper and arise from the dead, Christ will shine on you. Romans 13:11 talks about waking up. Isaiah 52:1 and 51:17 talk about our tendency to fall asleep and God is saying, basically rousing us, "Wake up! Wake up!" 1 Peter 5:8, be sober, be vigilant. Why? Because the devil is like a roaring lion. There is a lion on the loose. Don't lay down and sleep on the ground. Wake up!

So that's the first point, we need vigilance. The second sub point, 4B, why are we to pray? Our brothers and sisters need vigilance. He says in verse 18 be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. That's the fourth "all" in that verse, with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. About all prayer. We need to pray for everyone. We need to pray for missionaries on the field. We need to pray for other people in the body of Christ. We need to be, if we were sober and vigilant, if we're really awake, we're seeing what's happening, we should be praying and we're praying. We need to be praying for John MacArthur and the church at Grace Community. You may have heard

last night there was a decision that they reversed the previous decision but now they've said that if they meet, they're in danger of being arrested. This morning they're going to be worshipping in a couple of hours probably, you know, Pacific time. We need to pray for them. We need to pray for everybody that we can think of. He said we need to pray because all of our brothers and sisters are just like us, they tend to be asleep on the job and so we need to pray for one another.

Thirdly, third sub point. We don't just need to pray, we need to pray for vigilance, we need to pray for our brothers and sisters because they need vigilance but we also need to pray for boldness and clarity with the Gospel. It's interesting, Paul in verse 19 and 20, after he's telling them to pray for yourselves and your own needs, pray for everybody else, he says pray for me. The Apostle Paul, this spiritual giant, says please pray for me. He knows that his ministry is powered by prayer and he knows he needs prayer. He says that utterance may be given to me, that I may have clarity in the opening of my mouth. I may know what to say to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel. He wants clarity and he wants boldness, and so we all need boldness and clarity as well but Paul asked for that as an example to us and he really, he was saying, "I need, as I'm a prisoner in chains, the fact that I succeeded yesterday and the day before doesn't mean I'm gonna succeed tomorrow. I need you to pray for me that I will have the words I need to say and I will say them the way I need to say them for the glory of God."

And so you and I, we need the same thing and it's wonderful, this ends up the armor discussion. At the beginning, we're taking the hits, we're building one another up and we're taking the hits, as it were, right? We're putting on this defensive armor, the belt, the breastplate, the shoes, the shield, the helmet, and then the sword, and now we have something a little bit offensive, and then we have prayer that undergirds all of this and helps us put it on, but prayer now as he's saying, he's talking about the powerful advancement of the kingdom now. "I pray that boldness and clarity will be given to me in the proclamation of the mystery of the gospel, that which is hidden and in the dark will become evident and in the light to all people and they will see the glory of God's way of salvation." Paul's saying and as we learn to stand against the attacks and we have God's mind and we're praying like we should pray, we're praying, "Lord, help me be clear on the way I speak and enunciate the Gospel. Help me be bold in the way I proclaim it, the idea of boldness is to have freedom with words, to not be restrained, to let them come freely."

But when you proclaim the Gospel, what are you doing? You are unleashing the power of God. Romans 1:16, Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." The power of God, the Gospel, the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ is the nuclear bomb of God. It is the same power that created the world out of nothing is being unleashed when you proclaim the Gospel, and so Paul says, "Pray that I will be bold and clear," and he's basically saying, "You need to do the same thing. All of us as Christians need to be bold and clear in the proclamation of the Gospel and as we do, the power of God is unleashed and we go from being on defense to being on offense." Remember when Jesus, he describes the Gospel? I mentioned earlier, remember Peter prayed, I mean Jesus prayed and Peter said, "You are

the Christ, the Son of the living God." Remember what Jesus said to him? "I tell you, Simon bar Jonah, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father who is in heaven, and upon this rock, that is, upon this proclamation that you've just made, I will build My church and," what? "The gates of hell will not prevail against it." I don't know about you, but when I first heard that and it took me a while to see this, it seems like hell will not prevail against this. I feel like hell's always attacking me and it is a lot, right? We have to stand against. What's he saying? The gates of hell. He's talking about that Gospel proclamation will smash the gates of hell. You're taking Satan's kingdom and you're knocking it down when you preach the Gospel. You've gone from defense to offense in the proclamation of the Gospel. The nuclear power of God is unleashed and Satan is being driven back. That's what we're called to do and that comes through prayer.

As we surround all of this with prayer, God unleashes his power and that's something to be excited about. It doesn't matter what's happening in the world really comparatively. God's in control of all of it anyway. Pray about it, yeah, but get off of that and get back onto the Gospel. May the Lord help us do that.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the calling that You've given us, Lord, the calling that gives us strength and stability to stand against the tide that comes against us in our lives, the circumstances, the challenges, and you have allowed us to as Christians now, Your people, to still dwell in this world that is decaying and dying, to have in our own bodies still sin, indwelling sin, and our physical bodies will have to be done away, will have to be replaced with glorified bodies. And so we even in ourselves feel the tension, feel the difficulty, but Lord, help us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Lord, make us mighty in the Spirit because You make us humble and dependent as little children. In the same way that salvation comes to those who know they can't save themselves, they can do nothing but just cry out for mercy, Lord, in the same way Your power of sanctifying grace comes the same way to those who know they can do nothing but who through prayer lay hold of the throne of God. Lord, make Your people, make Your people more faithful soldiers all around the world. We pray that You'll do that at Providence. We pray that You'll do that all over America. We pray that You'll do that at Grace Community Church today, that You'll bless John MacArthur as he preaches, you'll bless the saints that gather there, that You'll restrain the evil one and, Lord, that You might continue to make the Gospel sound forth mightily through their ministry and all around the world, every brother and sister in Christ around the world, every place today that is going to open the word of God and lift up Jesus, may Your power be present, may Your glory be made known, and may Your will be done. We pray this that Jesus might be delighted, lifted up and delighted in by more and more people, all to the praise of His name we pray. Amen.