

Prayer: The Believer's Secret Weapon

Text: Ephesians 6:18-20 (also Colossians 4:2-4)

Introduction:

1. Prayer is as vital to the Christian soldier in the battle as all the other pieces of armor. In fact, it is arguably the key piece of the soldier's armor as without it, the other pieces are largely powerless. "Put on the Gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer."
2. Prayer is the most powerful weapon in the Christian's arsenal. A soldier can have superb equipment but without strength and energy to use it, it will help him little. Prayer is what links the believer with the strength of God (Vs. 10). "He is but a soldier in semblance (appearance) who wears arms without the courage and the strength to use them." (Expositors Bible)
3. In this message we will study this great exhortation on prayer as well as a brief overview of the conclusion the Epistle.
4. To use the weapon of prayer effectively we need the following four qualities:

The first quality we need is...

I. Persistence in Prayer (Vs. 18a)

A. Regularity – "praying always"

1. The idea is "in all seasons". This does not mean "always saying prayers" as we are not heard for our "much speaking" (Matt. 6:7) but that our prayers are constant and regular. "...continuing instant in prayer." (Rom. 12:12) It means "always be in communion with the Lord. Keep the receiver off the hook!" (Wiersbe)
2. "At no time dare we break contact with God. The enemy watches for prayerlessness in our lives and then takes advantage." (Strauss)
3. We are exhorted to "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). The phrase "without ceasing" means "constantly, repeatedly" and was used of the Jewish Historian Josephus to describe the "the constant pounding of a battering ram against a city wall."
4. Ravenhill (Why Revival Tarries):

"No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying...Poverty-stricken as the Church is today in many things, she is most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few prayers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere."

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5. Praying always in all places (e.g., at home, at church, at work)
Praying always at all times (morning, throughout the day, evening, wakeful hours at night).
6. Praying always with “all prayer” (every kind of prayer. e.g., intercessory, thanksgiving, petition).
7. Praying with ‘supplication’. The word means “petition, request, entreaty. It comes from the root word meaning “to plead, beg”. “For the most part in the N.T. it refers to specific petitions made to God.” (Hoehner)

B. Importunity – “with all perseverance” (Vs. 18c)

1. ‘perseverance’ = “to give constant attention or care to a thing” (Expositors). It means “constancy, diligence, persistence.” The word was used to describe someone who “diligently remained at his work.” In simple terms it means “to stick to it and don’t quit!”
2. The Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-7) encourages us in this important aspect of persistent praying (See also Luke 11:8-13).
3. Rom. 12:12 “...continuing **instant** in prayer;” The word ‘instant’ means “to be earnest towards, to persevere” (Strong). It means “Pressing; urgent; importunate; earnest.”
4. Note: This persistence in prayer is not required to force the hand of an unwilling God. “Prayer is not getting man’s will done in heaven; it is getting God’s will done on earth.” (Robert Law) Often God has a purpose He is working in us during that time of waiting. Waiting refines our prayers and also causes us to search our hearts.
5. E.M. Bounds:

“Without continuance the prayer may go unanswered. Importunity is made up of the ability to hold on, to press on, to wait with unrelaxed and unrelaxable grasp, restless desire and restful patience. Importunate prayer is not an incident, but the main thing, not a performance but a passion, not a need but a necessity. Prayer in its highest form and grandest success assumes the attitude of a wrestler with God. It is the contest, trial and victory of faith; **a victory not secured from an enemy, but from Him who tries our faith that He may enlarge it: that tests our strength to make us stronger...** There is neither encouragement nor room in Bible religion for feeble desires, listless efforts, lazy attitudes; all must be strenuous, urgent, ardent. Inflamed desires, impassions, unwearied insistence delight Heaven. God would have His children incorrigibly in earnest and persistently bold in their efforts...Our whole being must be in our praying; like John Know, we must say and feel, “Give me Scotland, or I die.” (Purpose in Prayer P. 46)

6. Illustration: The example of the early church
 - a. Acts 1:14 “These all **continued** with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”
 - b. Acts 2:42 “And they **continued steadfastly** in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Corporate prayer in focus in this verse.

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- c. Acts 6:4 “But we will give ourselves **continually to prayer**, and to the ministry of the Word.” Testimony of the Apostles.
- d. Acts 12:5 “Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made **without ceasing** of the church unto God for him.” Their prayers unlocked the prison gates for Peter!

The second quality we need is...

II. Power in Prayer (Vs. 18b)

A. The Spirit's Enabling – power

1. Jude 1:20 “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, **praying in the Holy Ghost.**”
2. Romans 8:26-27 “Likewise **the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities**: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”
 - a. ‘helpeth’ = means to lend a hand together with, to take hold with another, to come to the aid of someone. Same word used of Martha in Luke 10:40 where she desires ‘help’ from Mary.
 - b. ‘infirmities’ = weaknesses (note plural. They are many in number!).
 - c. “we know not” = specific weakness in view. In our trials and struggles, we so often are ignorant of how we are to pray. Sometimes the Lord has to say to us as He did to James and John, “Ye know not what ye ask.” (Matt. 20:22)
3. Challenge: If we are grieving the Holy Spirit in our lives through carnal and worldly living, then that will have a devastating impact on our prayer lives (Eph. 4:30).

B. The Spirit's Leading – direction

Our prayers can be energized from one of two sources:

1. From Self – these will not be answered (James 4:3).
2. From the Spirit – these will be answered as they will be in line with God's will as revealed in the Word of God (1 John 5:14).

The third quality we need is...

III. Perception in Prayer (Vs. 18c)

A. To be Watchful is to be Awake

1. ‘watch’ = means to be awake, alert, vigilant.

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2. Matthew 26:41 – Christ exhorted Peter, James and John to “watch and pray” Instead of heeding this command, they slept (Matt. 26:43).
3. Our hearts and minds need to be engaged when we pray. This can be a challenge in both personal prayer times and in church prayer meetings. How often we battle wandering thoughts when we try to pray.
4. John Phillips writes, “In prayer we battle wandering thoughts. My prayer for Aunt Susie reminds me of her cat. Thoughts of the cat remind me that Jim said there was a mouse in his office. That reminds me to get a mousetrap at the hardware store. The hardware store reminds me of the camera shop next-door and the roll of film I took in to be developed, and so on. Several minutes later I realize that I haven’t been praying; I have been daydreaming. The enemy has been busy.”

B. To be Watchful is to be Alert

1. Remember the context is spiritual warfare. This is military language! The soldier must be on the alert for the movements of the enemy. If you are not alert, you will not see the dangers and thus see no need to pray. Our prayerlessness is connected to spiritual sleepiness.
2. This speaks of a prayer life that is coupled with a spirit of discernment as to where the enemy is moving. When we learn to be watchful for the enemy, then we can meet his advances with the weapon of prayer. “Watching sights the enemy; praying fights the enemy”. (Phillips)
3. Illustration: Nehemiah 4:7-9 “But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. **Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.**”
4. The presence of a watchman in battle is a deterrent to the enemy. But when there are no watchmen on the wall, he will quickly exploit this to his advantage with devastating effect.

The fourth quality we need is...

IV. Purpose in Prayer (Vs. 18d-20)

Not only are we instructed when to pray and how to pray, we are also instructed for whom we should pray.

A. Pray for God’s People (Vs. 18d)

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1. While we are to pray for the lost (Rom. 10:1; 1 Tim. 2:1-8), there is an even stronger emphasis in the N.T. upon praying for believers. Every day is “All Saints Day”! We are to pray for our fellow soldiers in the battle.
2. The high priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus (John 17) and the prayers of the Apostle Paul (e.g., Eph. 1:15-23; 2:14-19; Col. 1:9-14) are wonderful examples of the sort of things we should be praying for each other. The emphasis is not upon the carnal and the temporal. Our prayers tend to be centered around people’s health and wealth, the physical and the financial.

B. Pray for God’s Preachers (Vs. 19-20)

1. The Appeal for Prayer (Vs. 19a)
 - a. “And for me” = don’t lose the impact of these words. Who is speaking? This is the great Apostle Paul but he needs the prayers of ordinary people! Paul evidently believed in the power of intercessory prayer.
 - b. Challenge: If Paul needed the prayers of God’s people for the success of his Gospel ministry, how much more do we!
2. The Aim for Prayer (Vs. 19b-20)

There are two needs Paul wants them to pray for and each minister of the Gospel has these same two needs:

 - a. **Utterance** – the words to speak
 - i. ‘utterance’ = comes from Greek word ‘logos’ (word).
 - ii. “may be given unto me” = Paul views this as something that is given to him by God. “They must intreat on Paul’s behalf that the word he utters may be God’s and not his own.” (Expositors)
 - iii. “to make known the mystery of the Gospel” = the specific word of utterance Paul has in mind. He needs God’s help to unveil the riches of the Gospel.
 - iv. “for which I am an ambassador in bonds” = Paul is a prisoner in Rome, chained in a prison cell. And yet he still views himself as God’s ambassador for the Gospel. He asks not for deliverance from prison but for God’s enablement that he might be a dynamic witness.
 - b. **Uction** – the boldness to speak.
 - i. ‘ambassador’ = “An ambassador is one through whom a sovereign speaks” (Hodge). Even in prison, Paul was still Christ’s ambassador.
 - ii. “that I may open my mouth boldly...that therein I may speak boldly” (Vs. 19 & 20)
 - iii. ‘boldly’ means to have “freedom in speaking; unreservedness in speech”. To have boldness is to have liberty. 2 Thess. 3:1 “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that

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the word of the Lord may have **free course**, and be glorified, even as it is with you.” Note: “free course” comes from the Greek word “to run” and was used of runners in a race course. The picture is of the Word of God moving swiftly and powerfully.

- iv. ‘boldly’ means to have confidence in speaking. Boldness is not brashness nor is it self-confidence. It is a Divinely given ability to speak the Word of God plainly and unashamedly.

c. Illustration: The ministry of C.H. Spurgeon

Spurgeon wrote the following in his autobiography: “When I came to New Park Street Chapel, it was but a mere handful of people to whom I first preached, yet I can never forget how earnestly they prayed. Sometimes they seemed to plead as though they could really see the Angel of the covenant present with them, and as if they must have a blessing from Him. More than once, we were all so awe-struck with the solemnity of the meeting, that we sat silent for some moments while the Lord’s power appeared to overshadow us; and all I could do on such occasions was to pronounce the Benediction, and say, “Dear friends, we have had the Spirit of God here very manifestly tonight; let us go home, and take care not to lose His gracious influences.” Then down came the blessing; the house was filled with hearers, and many souls were saved. I always give all the glory to God, but I do not forget that He gave me the privilege of ministering from the first to a praying people. We had prayer-meetings in New Park Street that moved our very souls. Every man seemed like a crusader besieging the New Jerusalem, each on appeared determined to storm the Celestial City by the might of intercession, and soon the blessing came upon us in such abundance that we had not room to receive it.”

A.T. Pierson, who ministered at the Tabernacle during Spurgeon’s last illness, said, “This Metropolitan Tabernacle is a house of prayer most emphatically ... prayer is almost ceaselessly going up. When one meeting is not in progress, another is. ... There are prayer meetings before preaching, and others after preaching. ... No marvel that Mr. Spurgeon’s preaching has been so blessed. He himself attributes it mainly to the prevailing prayers of his people”

V. Paul’s Parting Words (Vs. 21-24)

There is a...

A. Conclusion (Vs. 21-22)

1. Tychicus’ Description (Vs. 21a)
 - a. A beloved brother in the Lord – Tychicus was a native of Asia (Acts 20:4), possibly Ephesus, but most importantly he was a brother in Christ. How precious is the family of God. So deep are the bonds we share in Christ that it is not uncommon for a Christian brother to be closer than a blood brother. In the Christian church the older men are like fathers, the older women like mothers, the young men like brothers and the young women like sisters.
 - b. A faithful minister in the Lord – the word ‘minister’ means servant. We don’t know a lot about Tychicus but what the Bible does reveal is that he was a faithful servant of the Lord. He carried 5 letters for the Apostle (Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, 2 Timothy & Titus) and relieved Timothy (2 Tim. 4:12) and likely Titus (Tit. 3:12). He was one of those dear

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brothers, available to help the preacher do his job! Paul wouldn't be the preacher he needs to be without faithful men like Tychicus to help him. God calls some men to pioneer the work and lead out in front but he calls others into a ministry of support to such men. Both roles are of equal importance in the work of God. How we need more men like Tychicus in the local church! Men who are faithful, dependable and available.

2. Tychicus' Mission (Vs. 21b-22)

a. To inform the saints

- i. Historical snapshot: "Until this time papyri letters were sent by a relay of several messengers. However, in the first century, Augustus changed the Roman postal system from relays by messengers to a single messenger who would personally deliver the letter. Therefore, the delivery by Tychicus was in keeping with this newer method for the delivery of messages, enabling the recipients to receive first-hand information about the sender from the messenger, as indeed was the case here." (Hoehner)
- ii. 'affairs' = lit. "the things concerning me". Tychicus would bring news to the church concerning Paul's situation. Paul was a knowable man who was happy to share details of his personal trial with the saints.
- iii. Be a real and knowable Christian. This doesn't mean there won't be some things in your life that must be kept personal but some people won't let you into their lives at all. The door is shut and bolted if not on their actual homes, in their approach to the brethren in the local church.
- iv. While we are not to complain as Christians, we are to share one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).

b. To comfort the saints

- i. 'hearts' = the seat of the emotions. The brethren at Ephesus were likely concerned about Paul's welfare and an encouraging report from Tychicus would help lift their spirits. They were probably suffering persecution for their faith and experiencing distress of heart. The letter from Paul, packed with spiritual truth would encourage and strengthen them in their faith.
- ii. 'comfort' = to come alongside, to encourage. Same word used as title of the Holy Spirit who is the Comforter.

B. Benediction (Vs. 23-24)

1. Peace to the brethren (Vs. 23)
2. Grace to the brethren (Vs. 24)

Conclusion: Have you grown tired and weary of prayer? Press on to victory and keep on praying! Do you pray for God's servants? Do you pray for your pastor?