

ARMOR OF GOD PT. 9

“How to Pray for a Saint”

Eph.6:18b

Why is it so important to pray for one another? Will God fail to protect my brother from Satan just because I failed to pray? How important are specifics in prayer? Is it enough to simply say, “God, you know what ___ needs, please meet his needs”? Or are the prayers more effective if we know specifically what the ask for?

Ephesians 6:18 With all prayer and petition praying on all occasions in the Spirit, and regarding this, being alert in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints.

Six Marks of Warfare Praying

Last week we began looking at the 6 marks of warfare praying that the Lord gives us in v.18.

1.0: All Prayer (Every kind of Prayer)

There is to be a richness and a depth and variety to our prayers. We should be utilizing all the various different kinds of prayers.

2.0: All Occasions

The second mark of true warfare praying is to pray on all occasions or opportunities. Don't pass up chances to pray.

3.0: In the Spirit

That simply refers to prayer that is enabled by the Spirit. You pray in such a way as to be energized by the Spirit when

1. you pray in faith;
2. you pray in accordance with Scripture.

The rest of the passage has to do with one specific kind of prayer that Paul wants to focus in on: Intercession. The last phrase in the verse (**concerning all the saints**) refers to everything in the second half of the verse.

... regarding this, being alert in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints.

In other words, in our prayers for all the saints we need to be alert in all perseverance and petition. So the title of today's sermon is:

“How to pray for a saint”

4.0: Alertness

Right at the middle point of v.18 is the phrase the NIV translates **with this in mind**.

That phrase literally means **and with reference to this**, and I'm convinced it refers back to the first part of the verse. With reference to prayer that is multifaceted, constant and in the Spirit, we are to be alert.

The word for **alert** literally means “to lie awake at night,” and it was used for staying awake in order to keep guard or to watch for some particular threat. There is a reason why, when you read through the NT, you see over and over the Lord telling us,

- watch
- be vigilant
- be careful

- be on your guard
- look out
- be alert
- wake up
- pay attention
- be sober minded
- put on armor.

There are real, serious threats out there that are not obvious. There is no need to warn people against obvious threats that they can see are dangerous. But when there is something deadly, but it doesn't seem dangerous, that's when there is a need for warnings. So when we read through the NT and see warning after warning after warning, "Be on the look out! Be on guard! Watch out!" etc. we can be sure that there are some serious threats out there, and there is an important relationship between being on guard against those threats, and prayer. There are some key connections in Scripture between those two things. The reason we need to pray with ALL watchfulness is because there are several aspects of the relationship between prayer and watchfulness.

4.1: Watchful in order to pray

For one thing, you need to be spiritually alert and watchful in order to pray in the first place.

1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

If you're not clear minded and alert, you won't be able to pray. When we fix our eyes on this world we get so nearsighted and blinded to the realities of heaven that we lose our drive to pray. Without an acute sensitivity to spiritual things, you won't be able to pray because you won't see the need.

4.2: Alert praying

But just because you are praying, that doesn't necessarily mean you are being alert or watchful spiritually. *It is possible to pray without alertness.* That's what we do when we get focused on the world. If there is nothing about God's Kingdom in your prayers, you are praying without alertness to spiritual things. That's praying with a dull mind, because you don't even perceive reality. It's praying in a fog. It's being asleep, rather than being awake. So we need to be alert so we can pray, and we need to pray in an alert way.

4.3: The danger

Satan and his armies are waiting for you to fall asleep. They are constantly watching for your unguarded hours. It's like you're in combat, and you find yourself in a jungle surrounded by the enemy. You can't see them, but you know they are hiding all around you. They are waiting for you to just nod off, or let your guard down, and the second you do that they will attack. And so you know that you have to stay alert and vigilant until your commander returns. That's how Scripture describes our situation; we are facing threats that are so dangerous and yet so subtle that we have to have both prayer and alert watchfulness in order to be safe. Jesus listed four categories of those threats in Luke 21:

Luke 21:34-36 "Be careful, (lit. "watch" or "be on your guard") or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. 35 For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be always on the watch (that's our word – alert), and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

There are four sets of dangers the Lord warns against in that passage, and all 4 of them require both prayer and watchfulness:

1. Sinful Distractions

34 Be on your guard or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness

One of the great threats we need to be on the alert against are temptations to sin.

Mt.26:41 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

2. Non-sinful things of this world that threaten to weigh you down.

34 Be on your guard or your hearts will be weighed down with ... the anxieties of life

Trying to figure out when to refinance your house, or when to change jobs, getting your shrubs trimmed, and your insurance paid, and driver’s license renewed –all those things are a serious threat and a deadly danger to your spiritual life, and the only way to avoid being destroyed by them is both prayer and watchful alertness.

“Why? What’s so threatening about those things?” They are a threat for exactly the reason Jesus said in v.34, because they weigh down your heart and they just bog you down spiritually. They are like a trailer hooked up to the back of your vehicle. As soon as you hit some mud or something, you’re stuck.

The normal cares of our earthly lives constantly threaten to dominate our thinking and take over our hearts altogether. It’s SO hard to keep your mind set on things above, and our earthly responsibilities are what always threaten to drag our hearts and minds down to this earth.

The Bible pictures the world as being in spiritual darkness – completely unaware and insensitive to spiritual realities. In contrast to that, we are to live as those who are in the light – people who can clearly see what’s going on.

- **Eph 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light**
- **1 Thess 5:4-8 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.**

We are in a war, and so we need to maintain a constant state of readiness. We are in the last days. Things are getting serious. The stakes are getting higher and higher. We cannot afford to be in a fog regarding spiritual realities, and so we need both watchfulness and prayer. We need both if we are going to be protected against both sinful distractions and non-sinful distractions.

Then there’s a third category Jesus mentioned.

3. The Great Tribulation

Luke 21:36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.

That’s talking about the coming Great Tribulation. If you are not alert and watchful and on your guard now, when the Tribulation comes you won’t make it. And that brings us to the 4th danger in that passage:

4. Being found asleep

The 4th danger is the Second Coming itself, if you are found sleeping when He returns. The Second Coming is the greatest reality there is, and nothing should generate more joy and hope and anticipation for the Christian than that. However, it’s also a danger because if He returns and finds you asleep, there will be a price to pay. Mark 13 is the same context – the end times.

Mark 13:33-37 Be on guard! Be alert! (that’s our same word) You do not know when that time will come. 34 It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. 35 "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back — whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

We know what the return of the master represents – that’s the Second Coming. But think about this - what does the threat of the thief represent? What does it mean that you are to guard your master’s house? In this parable Jesus is characterizing your Christian life as a guard duty, where it is your responsibility to protect the rest of the house from danger. That is the most natural meaning of this word – to stand on guard duty to protect others from a threat.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch (same word) over you as men who must give an account.

The reason the Bible calls church members to be submissive to the leaders in the church is because those leaders stand on guard duty over you. It is our job as church leaders to stand guard to protect you against spiritual threats, and we do so as men who are going to have to give an account to the Lord for how well we guarded and protected you. So all that gives you some background on this term.

With that in mind, let’s go back to Eph.6.

With reference to [this all-out prayer in the Spirit] being on guard duty in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints.

Does this mean we are to pray with alertness to spiritual realities? Yes. But more than that it means we are to be on guard concerning all the saints in our prayers. You need to be especially vigilant in praying for those people sitting around you right now, because it is your God-given responsibility to protect them from danger through prayer. In a war, soldiers are protected by other soldiers; you don’t provide your own cover. It’s your responsibility to be on guard for us, and you do that in prayer.

There are people sitting around you who are about to be ambushed. The guy right in front of you. That lady a couple rows behind you. That kid you watched walk out to children’s church. He may be at this very moment right in the cross hairs of the enemy’s big guns, and you’re the only one who can step in. No one else is thinking about that person right now – the Holy Spirit just brought him to your heart. The enemy has his sights set on them, and you need to be alert enough to see that and take serious action – all-out prayer in the Spirit on behalf of that person.

“Surely God isn’t going to let him get shot. Surely if I don’t pray God will just protect him anyway, right?”

If that were the case, why would Paul be so urgent about all-out prayer for the saints? Let me ask you, does God ever allow a saint to get blasted by a shot from the enemy? Of course He does. And it may very well be His perfect plan to allow that person to get hammered if you fail to pray, but to protect him if you do pray.

Standing on guard and praying for one another is crucial. And it’s like physically defending someone - you can be good at it or not so good at it. If you are a bodyguard, you would want to get really good at your job, right? You would want to learn some kind of martial arts, know what the threats are, etc. It’s the same with standing on guard to protect a saint. If you are going to protect a particular saint from temptations, if you’re going to be any good at that, you’re going to have to know the guy well enough to know what kinds of temptations he is susceptible to. You’re going to need to know what time a day he’s likely to face those. You’re going to need to know a lot about his family situation, his devotional life, his circumstances at work. That’s what it means to be on guard. If you’re going to protect him against the threat of the worries of life, then you’re going to have to know what kinds of worries he’s facing. Imagine that you spend your energy praying for him to be protected from being weighed down by worrying about finances, and it turns out he’s not worried about finances, but he is very worried about his physical health. But you don’t know that, so that doesn’t enter your prayers at all. What good is that?

“Why does it have to be so specific? Can’t I just pray, ‘Lord, please protect him from attack’ and then leave it up to God to figure out where the needs are?” Yes, you could do that. If you want to pray generally instead of specifically, you can do that. In fact, if you want to do that, why specifically mention protection? Why not just pray, “Lord, do whatever’s best for him”? For that matter, why even specify that person? Why not just say, “Lord, do whatever’s best for everyone”? Just think of the time we could save if, instead of praying specifically, we just reminded God to do what’s best once a day.

The problem is that's not how Scripture teaches us to pray. God wants us to pray about specifics. When Jesus went out and prayed for hours and hours, what do you suppose He was saying? Do you think He was just saying, “God, do what's best and bless everyone” over and over? No, in order for it to last all night long He must have had a lot of specific things He was praying about.

God wants specifics, not because He doesn't already know what's on your mind, but because He loves you and wants relational interaction with you. The closer you are with someone, the more specific you are when you talk. An acquaintance asks how you're doing, you say “fine.” But if your best friend asks the same thing and you talk for a half hour. So being specific is part of relational intimacy. And beyond that, God knows it's in our best interests to pray specifically. The more specific our requests, the more obvious it is when God answers, *and* the more we are reminded of our need of divine grace and help in that specific area.

So all that to say if we are going to be any good at our job of standing guard for one another, we are going to have to get to know each other. That's why the leadership has been working so hard over the past months at building the small group ministry, and we have a lot of work left to do. But in the mean time I how each of you realize that if you're waiting for us to come up with the ideal system before you begin obeying the one-another commands, then you are wasting precious time. You can't afford to wait around for us. If you are not involved in at least one significant friendship in this church outside of your family --the type of friendship where you confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, and you sharpen each other like iron sharpens iron, and you challenge each other and hold each other accountable and teach and admonish one another --if you are not in a relationship like that there are a lot of commands in the NT that you are disobeying. Don't wait for us to come up with some magic program before you pursue that. Just find someone and say, “Hey, let's get together once a week and check up on each other's walk with the Lord.” And if the person says, “No thanks,” ask someone else. This is critical, because this is how we love each other.

Sometimes prayer is almost a synonym for love in Scripture.

Matt 5:44 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

Telling us to pray for them is just another way of telling us to love them. Let me ask you this – is love important? Isn't that the greatest commandment? Love God and love your neighbor? Love is doing what's in the other person's best interests. And nothing is more in their best interests than praying for God to bless them. One of the wonderful things about love is that the more you love, the less God has to send suffering into your life. Since the best thing that could ever happen to us is to be driven to desperate dependence upon God, then you would think the ideal situation would be for God to send constant disasters into our lives. But the more love we have the less He needs to do that, because we will suffer along with those who are having disasters. I don't always need a constant disaster in my life because so many of you have so many disasters that if I just love you as I should, that's going to keep me desperately dependent upon God and broken before Him and crying out to Him in neediness.

There always has to be some amount of pain and weakness in the body in order for us to know we need a Doctor. But that pain doesn't always have to be in every body part. It doesn't always have to be in the wrist or the knee.; it can be in the elbow or the neck. No matter where it is, the whole body feels it and goes to the Doctor.

So it stands to reason that the more you grow and progress in love and praying for the saints, the less God will need to send suffering into your life. That's not to suggest that all suffering is a result of a lack of love or lack of prayer; God has other purposes for suffering as well. But it is to say that in some cases, when you isolate yourself from everyone emotionally, so you aren't touched with our pain, it may be that God will have to inflict you with pain of your own.

It's ironic, because usually the reason people isolate themselves from the body is so they can avoid being hurt, and then the result is God has to allow more hurt into their lives than He would have had they been in fellowship. And if all this isn't particularly motivating to you, think about this –We know that God answers prayer, right? We know that if we pray in the Spirit, God will be responsive. Every single prayer in the book of Acts was answered “yes” by God. God prefers to do things in answer to prayer. When God announced to Job's friends that He was not going to punish them, he told them that He would overlook what they had done, and that He was planning on doing so in response to the prayers of Job for them.

Job 42:8 My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly.

So do you believe that God will respond to earnest prayers for someone’s protection? If so, doesn’t it follow logically that if you fail to pray, they won’t be protected? If you aren’t motivated to do the hard work of getting to know people well enough to really pray for them, then it may help to spend some time thinking about the harm that could befall them if you fail to pray. Because if we are going to say that prayer really does protect people from serious harm, then we also have to say that the lack of prayer will result in them suffering serious harm. We can’t have it both ways – if there are real benefits that come from prayer, then where prayer is lacking those benefits will also be lacking. I guess it’s that principle that has had the biggest impact on me over the past two weeks. I already knew that prayer worked. I believed that with all my heart. What I didn’t seem to realize was the obvious corollary to that, if prayer works, then prayerlessness doesn’t work. Prayer didn’t seem all that urgent to me, and now I realize it was because, in the back of my mind, I was thinking that if I didn’t pray, God would go ahead and do those things that I would pray for anyway. But He won’t. If He did, then prayer would be meaningless.

So how do you pray for a saint? You pray as one who is standing guard against dangerous enemies who want to destroy that saint. Pray for strength against temptation, protection against deception and error and deliverance from foolishness. That’s the first principle.

Secondly, when you pray for a saint, pray persistently.

5.0: All Perseverance & Petition

being on guard in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints.

You don’t often read a parable where the writer tells you the purpose of the parable in the very first verse, but that happens in Lk.18.

Luke 18:1-14 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

We all know His idea of “quickly and our idea of “quickly” are very different,¹ but the point of the parable is that if an unjust judge will respond to persistence, how much more will a loving heavenly Father?

God will respond as quickly as He possibly can without spoiling His perfect plan for you.

In Luke 11, right after Jesus taught them the Lord’s Prayer, He told another parable about persistence. Luke 11:5-13

Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, 6 because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

7 "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, though he will not get up

¹ We think God responding “quickly” would mean that you wouldn’t have to cry out to Him day and night. You would just cry out to Him for a few minutes during the day, and He would respond. But the kind of “quickly” He has in mind is referring to the Second Coming.

and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

If a neighbor who has already said "no" will eventually get out of bed and wake up his family in the middle of the night in response to persistence, how much more will a loving heavenly Father? God wants to give us the things we ask for, but only response to prayer, and especially in response to persistent prayer.

Why do you suppose that is? Why does God require arduous, persistent prayer? Why not just give whatever answer right away? Well, for one thing, if He did that there would be no way for us to distinguish the important from the trivial. Prayers for the salvation of a loved one would be on the same level as prayers that God would let you make it to the gas station before running out of gas.

Knowing how important various things are to you is valuable information. I might have myself convinced that the ministry of the local church is supremely important, and my getting a promotion at work is much less important, but if I pray three times harder and three times as much for the promotion than I do for the ministry of the church, the real priorities of my heart are revealed. So, persistence helpful for examining the condition of your own heart.

Persistence is also helpful when you want to express to God that something is especially important. If something is super important to me, and I just really, really want it, I can express that to God by praying ten times longer and more passionately for that thing than for anything else. We express the passions of our heart by our persistence in prayer. That's why it's so important to God that we be persistent.

Jesus taught two full parables just to make that point. And more than that, when He built His Church, He made them so they were more characterized by prayer than anything else.

- **Acts 1:14 They all joined together *constantly* in prayer**
- **Acts 2:42 They *devoted* themselves to ... prayer.**

In Acts 6:4 the Apostles appointed the Seven so to take care of the widows so they could give their full time **to prayer and the ministry of the word.**²

- **Acts 10:2 Cornelius gave generously to those in need and prayed to God *regularly*.**
- **Acts 12:5 the church was *earnestly* praying to God for (Peter).**
- **Rom 1:9-10 God ... is my witness how *constantly* I remember you 10 in my prayers *at all times***
- **Eph.1:16 I have *not stopped* giving thanks for you,**
- **Col 1:9 since the day we heard about you, we have *not stopped* praying for you**
- **1 Thess 1:2 We *always* thank God for all of you**
- **1 Thess 2:13 And we also thank God *continually***
- **1 Thess 3:10 *Night and day* we pray most earnestly**
- **2 Timothy 1:3 *night and day* I constantly remember you in my prayers.**

² That's an incredibly convicting passage for me, because it means since I am on staff full time for the church, it means I should spend so much time in prayer that a person who worked a job could never spend that much time.

That’s the way Jesus was, that’s the way the early Church was and that’s the way Paul was, and that’s the way we are commanded to be.

- **Col.4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer**
- **Ro.12:12 Be ... faithful in prayer.**
- **1 Thess.5:17 pray continually**
- **Eph.6:18 Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all prayers...and with all perseverance keep on praying for all the saints.**

If that person that God expects you to be praying for is going to be able to stand firm in this war, then you are going to have to be on guard, alert and vigilant, and you’re going to have to pray *constantly* and *persistently* for him.

Then he adds one more “all” for good measure at the end of v.18.

6.0: For all the saints

regarding this, standing guard in all perseverance and petition concerning All the saints.

Now, that doesn’t mean you have to pray for every single Christian. That would be impossible. Fairly often in Scripture the word “all” means “all kinds.” It doesn’t mean “all without exception”; it means “all without distinction.” The point is that there shouldn’t be any category of Christian who is outside the bounds of your prayers. You should pray for your friends, and for the people who get on your nerves. You should pray for the attractive people and the unattractive people. I think the point is there should be no favoritism in our prayers. Is it appropriate to pray more for those closer to you? Of course. You have more responsibility to pray for those the Lord has placed around you than for others, but we should never use favoritism in our love.

Favoritism is when you favor someone for invalid reasons (like attractiveness, wealth, intelligence, etc.) We can’t pray for every individual, but we should never exclude someone from our prayers because of what kind of person he is, or because we don’t particularly like him.

Problems in the church due to prayerlessness

I want to close this morning by returning to that principle that if prayer works then prayerlessness doesn’t work.

If prayer is this important – so important that it’s worth not doing all the things you have to set aside in order to find time to pray, (Because, let’s face it – whatever time you spend praying is going to have to come from somewhere. There are a lot of wonderful, important things you could be doing with that time instead.) if it’s worth sacrificing those things, if prayer is that crucial in the battle, if it’s so important that we must put on the armor with all out prayer,

- every kind of prayer
- every opportunity for prayer,

and if the power of the Holy Spirit is necessary to put on that armor; if prayer is that important in this war, then what does that tell us about the casualties we suffer in various battles? Isn’t it logical to conclude that many of the problems we have in the church are due to prayerlessness?

If it’s really true that God will bless us in response to prayer, then, where there is not a blessing, shouldn’t we assume it may be because of prayerlessness in that area? This would be a good thing for us to think about next time we have a complaint about the church – or someone in the church.

Think about the complaints you have. Could it be that God has ordained that the solution to that problem will come only through your earnest prayers? Is the problem is persisting because, instead of praying, earnestly you are complaining? If you see some glaring weakness in some area of ministry -- maybe there is a person in the church who gets on your nerves, and every time you see him you have negative thoughts about him, and in your mind you’re saying, “Yes, I am critical about these things, but rightly so. These are real problems!” -- when that happens, maybe the best response would be to double check your prayer life. Maybe the best response would be to say,

“The elders are doing a terrible job in this area – I wonder if I have spent enough time praying for them?”

Or, “That ministry in our church is not up to par at all – I wonder if God’s allowing it to fall apart because I’ve been so lackadaisical in my prayer for that ministry, and for the people involved.” Or “That guy drives me crazy – he’s uncommitted, unfaithful, unreliable...” “She’s a gossip, a complainer, she’s selfish, she doesn’t seem to care about spiritual things – I wonder if she is like that because I have sinned against God by failing to pray for her?”

Why aren’t more souls being saved at Creekside? Is it because we don’t have enough programs, or is it because we only have about 10% of our church at prayer meeting? Or because our prayer meeting is an hour instead of two hours? Or because we are so casual and lax instead of earnest and desperate? I wonder what this church would be like if every time someone had a complaint, instead of leaving or complaining or gossiping, they got on their face and cried out to God and fasted and beseeched Him persistently with loud cries and tears. “Lord, *please* restore this ministry! *Please* give some wisdom and leadership ability to Darrell!” “We so desperately need You Lord. People’s souls are at stake – *please* help us!!!”

If there is a significant problem somewhere in the Kingdom of God, and I haven’t poured out my soul in desperate prayer about that thing, then what business do I have complaining about it?

This has been a very convicting principle for me this week. If I hear some brother in Christ on the radio who is not doing a good job interpreting God’s Word, instead of beating him up in my mind, or thinking, “That would be a good sermon illustration about error”, why don’t I fall to my knees in desperate prayer and say, “Oh God – Your Word is not being honored. Only You have the power to reverse this situation. Please bring this dear brother to a greater understanding of Your Word so he might faithfully preach it to Your glory.”

If prayer works, then maybe when things aren’t working, we should ask if there’s a lack of prayer.

James 1:22-25 explains how to do that, and that passage shows us that the key has to do with memory. The only way to become a doer of the word is to make sure you don’t forget it. So I want to urge you – don’t leave this building this morning until you’ve made specific plans for exactly what steps you’re going to take to reach your goal of changing your prayer life. I promise your prayer life will not change significantly just from hearing a sermon. Makes some plans. Here’s one idea – how about making a commitment to start coming faithfully to Sunday night prayer? It’s only an hour twice a month. Corporate prayer is the missing ingredient in so many of our prayer lives. Why not do it? I realize a lot of you can’t come on Sunday nights. You may have other commitments, or live too far away, but I have to believe there are a bunch of you who are like me. There are plenty of times when I come home from church and I’m dead tired, or I get started on some project, or I’m doing something enjoyable, and if I weren’t the pastor I probably just wouldn’t go. We just get comfortable in our living room and we forget this is a war. We forget about the power of God that’s available in prayer. We forget how important it is. We forget we are lacking in corporate prayer. We forget how much is riding on whether or not we are faithful to pray in the Spirit with all kinds of prayers on all occasions, on all opportunities. We forget that we are called to be awake and alert and to stand guard with all perseverance, praying for all the saints.

If you’re resisting, just ask yourself why? What’s the big disaster that’s going to happen in your life if you commit to start coming on Sunday nights? What terrible thing is going to happen if you commit to double your time or double your intensity of your daily prayer time? Just do it. Make the decision, make a specific plan, find someone to hold you accountable, and brace yourself for blessing from heaven beyond anything you ever dreamed.

Benediction:

Ps 20:1-5 May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. 2 May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion. 4 May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. 5 May the LORD grant all your requests.

Review question:

What does it mean to be alert?

To be aware of spiritual realities and to be on guard duty to protect other believers through prayer.

Discussion Questions:

1. What specific changes do you plan to make in your prayer life?
2. Are you faithfully committed to corporate prayer? Why or why not?
3. Do you have a close enough relationship with someone outside your family in this church with whom you can fulfill the one-another commands (the ones that require close friendship)?