



**SERIES TITLE: EPHESIANS 6:18-24 | SERMON TITLE: PRAY ALWAYS**

**MATTHEW SMART | FEBRUARY 2, 2020**

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All right, faith family. If you'll turn with me to Ephesians, and chapter 6, we'll begin reading in a few moments from verse 18. Ephesians chapter 6, beginning in verse 18 in a few moments. I've entitled my message "Pray Always." We have reached the conclusion of our study of the book of Ephesians.

I want to remind you of the great blessings that we have seen as we have walked through this book together. We can contemplate the breathtaking list of blessings of being a child of God. You know, if you think about it, there's really no other book in the Bible that unpacks all the blessings of a believer like Ephesians.

And Paul really begins the book like this, Ephesians 1:3, that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. In 1:4 and 5, Paul reminds us that we are chosen, predestined, and adopted as God's children. In chapter 1, verses 6 through 8, that we are lavished with grace. Verse 7, we are redeemed and have experienced his forgiveness. Verse 9, we are given the mystery of his will. In chapter 1 and verse 11, Paul reminds us that we have received an inheritance. In chapter 1, verses 13 and 14, Paul reminds us that we've been sealed by the Holy Spirit. In chapter 2, verses 4 through 5, Paul reminds us that we've been greatly loved by God. He reminds us in 5 through 6 that we are His workmanship, verse 10, created in Christ Jesus for good works. In chapter 2 and verse 14, we are given God's own peace. In chapter 2, verses 13 through 19, we are made one with Christ. In verse 19, we are made citizens of God's kingdom and members of His family. In chapter 2, verses 20 through 22, we are God's own temple, the dwelling place of His Spirit.

In chapter 3 now, in verse 12, we are given boldness and access to God. In chapter 3, in verse 20, we are given spiritual power. In chapter 4 now, in verse 3, we experience the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In chapter 4, and verse 7, we are uniquely and personally gifted by Christ. In chapter 4, verses 11 and 12, we are blessed with spiritual leaders to equip us to do the work of ministry. In chapter 4, in verse 24, we are given a new self in God's holy likeness. In chapter 5, in verse 8, we are made light. In chapter 5, in verse 18, we are offered the fullness of the Spirit. In chapter 5:21 through chapter 6:9, we are given instructions and resources to make all our relationships with others what God intends them to be. In chapter 6:10-17, we saw this last week,

that the saints are given the full armor of God to make us invincible against Satan and the demonic forces.

Brethren, as we launch into this section about prayer, we want to do so with this in mind, that Paul realizes that the great temptation and danger a church can face could be the people of God saying, “You know, I have everything I need,” and that’s the truth, but saying, “you know, I’m satisfied now.” Or even walking with a sense of spiritual arrogance, “I’ve got this.” That would be a major case of missing the point. We don’t have this. And so Paul is teaching them now about prayer and reminding them that we have a secret, powerful weapon, and that is prayer. The great blessings described to us in Ephesians are to remind us that we can never say as followers of Christ, “I’m good, I’ve got this, I’m self-satisfied.”

But because of all these heavenly blessings, we can realize that we must live with further help from God. We’re reminded that God’s armor that we studied last week is not mechanical. We don’t simply take hold of it one day and make it our own and then walk in our own strength and power, but rather, and we recognize that we don’t automatically produce results. There is a connection between the armor of God that we studied and prayer. Prayer is not a part of the armor of God, but prayer is how we use the armor. So let’s begin now, and let’s pick up where we left off last week in verse 18:

*praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Brethren, again, the child of God has a secret and powerful weapon, and that is prayer, and we are to use that anytime, anyplace, any struggle, any hill, any valley, every time of life. In these final verses, Paul is giving believers some general instructions about prayer, and we saw in verse 18 the word “all” being used four times. These four “all’s” introduce five points of emphasis regarding prayer. First of all, we see that we should use a variety of prayer, a variety of prayer, praying at all times. We should use a variety of prayer, with all prayers and petitions. Brethren, this includes publicly and privately. This includes low cries, loud yells, whispers, deliberately planned or spontaneous, standing, kneeling, seating. The Old and New Testament do not give us a prescription of how we are to pray in those kinds of ways. We are just told that “I want men in



every place to pray.” That’s what Paul tells Timothy. We are commanded to pray. Every place and every time is a time for prayer. Brethren, I encourage us to take every available time to pray.

And of course, prayer is to be a priority for the Christian, a priority. And I wonder if you have a plan for your prayer life. Do you ever think about your prayer life? You know, we make times for the things that are valuable and important for us. We need to plan. In my 25 years of being a believer, it’s been my habit to pray as I study the Scriptures, okay? And so I like to pray with a pen in my hand. And a lot of times, I’ll write out little prayers in the margin of my Bible, and I’ll build upon them. I especially made that a habit as I read through the Psalms. Nothing has helped my spiritual walk and prayer life as much as reading the Psalms. They are God’s inspired prayer book. They pump prayers. So I would encourage you to be a person who is continually reading through the Psalms and praying through them. They will inspire your prayer life. Now, that habit has led me to go through a lot of Bibles and that might not be the way you want to do things, but journaling can be another way that you do this. Have a journal with you, and as you’re studying the Scripture, pray. One of the things this is going to do for you is it’s going to help you make personal, deep application of Scripture. You’re going to be reading the Bible and you’re going to be asking yourself, am I following this pattern? Am I sinning in this manner? Am I neglecting this in my walk with Jesus? And this will increase and help your prayer life.

I would just say another thing that’s been interesting about using my Bible to help me journal is I have sort of a catalog of my life, at least my Christian life. So I can find the Bible I had primarily in college, and I can see in my freshman year how I was reading through the book of Mark and I came to Mark chapter 4, and there I am a freshman and lonely and struggling my first semester in college. And I came across a story of Jesus with his disciples as they’re crossing the sea, and the storm came up and they woke up Jesus. And I kind of thought about my own life and how I had sort of segregated Christ from my everyday life, and I was making application in the way that I prayed. I still can go back and look at that. Or I can go back to 4/16/09 when my Sophia was born, and I put in the margin of my Bible a prayer as I was reading through Romans. It gives you sort of a way to remember where you’ve been and track where you’re going. Also, since I’m a proponent of family legacy, it gives your children and grandchildren, and who knows, maybe your great-grandchildren, something to look back upon one day. Grandfather, grandmother, they walked with the Lord. So I would commend that and give that to you as something to consider.



So we want to pray. We want to have a plan. And also, brethren, we want to follow the biblical pattern. Follow the biblical pattern. We are encouraged to pray always. We see throughout the Bible there are prayers of adoration. Sometimes we rush to petitions. We forget the prayers of adoration. Again, this is one of the ways that reading through the Psalms can help us. How often do we see that the Psalms bleed praise throughout the Psalms! So we read the Psalms, and they pump our prayer and praise life. The prayer of confession is sometimes forgotten, that as we are praying the Lord is bringing to mind sin and things that we need to confess, and we bring these things before Him. Thanksgiving is a vital part of prayer. Again, we don't just run to supplication. Remember, we are to thank God from whom all blessings flow. And of course, the prayer of supplication, where we come to our Father as His beloved children and we plead for some cause. We want to be faithful brothers and sisters to pray privately.

Be praying privately, but also be praying publicly. I want to encourage the men of the church to be praying publicly. Lead your families in this way. Be involved in small groups. You know, we have a Wednesday night prayer service. This is a great time for ladies to get with ladies and pray, for men to get with men and pray. I would encourage you to come and to pray. God is doing things when we pray. Prayer changes things. It does not change God, but prayer does change things. When God has an end, He has a means. His appointed means is prayer. Don't neglect the means. Gather with God's people and pray. Brethren, our Lord has made so many great promises concerning prayer. How else are you going to move mountains? How do you move mountains of unbelief? How do you move mountains of spiritual apathy? How do you move mountains of cultural change and shift? God's people gather together, and we move mountains together. Do you think of prayer like that?

The problem so often, brethren, is we don't always think of prayer like that. What do we do on Wednesday nights when we gather? We move mountains, that's what we do. I want to encourage you to gather with God's people and pray at all times. We see this modeled all throughout the Bible, don't we? But one instance is the saints in Jerusalem. They continually devoted themselves to prayer. Do you recognize that? That's acts 2:42. Paul told Timothy that he prayed for him night and day. We are told to pray without ceasing. This is the power of prayer.

Now, Paul also says that we are to pray in the Spirit, praying at all times in the Spirit. This is not speaking in tongues. This is not anything mystical or ecstatic. It is praying in the name of the Lord Jesus, in His name and according to His will. To pray in the Spirit is to pray in concert with

the Holy Spirit. So think about this, brethren. Paul talks about this in Romans chapter 8. The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is because He intercedes for the saints, according to the will of God. So brethren, the Holy Spirit continually prays for us. For us to pray rightly, we join our prayers to His will. We know His will as we read the Scriptures together, and we fill up our minds with the Scriptures, and our desires begin to come in line with the Scriptures. This is how we pray in the Spirit.

I want to encourage us to be persistent in prayer, to be persistent in prayer. We see this again in verse 18, “praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.” Brethren, we want to pray with perseverance. We are not just shooting arrows into the sky. We are praying to our Father, who loves us. I think we all know what it’s like to struggle to concentrate. Do you ever pray and you have trouble concentrating and you’re easily distracted? I think we can probably all understand that. Be reminded that Paul says to be on alert. Be alert. Persevere. Remember our Lord as He talked to His sleepy, sad, worried disciples: Keep watch and pray. This is also how we are to live. Keep watch and pray. Or Paul’s words to the church in Colosse, devote yourself to prayer.

I think if we’re honest, we tend to get more serious about our prayer life when we go through times and seasons of trial and struggle. But the truth, brethren, is we should live like that because there’s not a moment of this life that you’re not in a war. That’s exactly what Paul taught in the previous passage. We face an enemy who hates us. He is depicted as a roaring lion, seeking whom he can devour. Brethren, we are not ignorant of his schemes. We fight against him, not by carnal means, but spiritual means. We make war with him when we put on the armor through prayer. Be reminded in this regard, brethren, that we don’t just pray for physical needs. And be reminded that the greatest problems that all people face are spiritual.

When you read through the New Testament, you cannot miss it. This is the great priority of the New Testament: victory over temptation, forgiveness and cleansing of sin, open doors to share the gospel, for believers to have greater dependence upon Christ. Again, when you read through the Bible, you’re not going to miss that this is the priority; spiritual things. For example, if you’ll turn with me to Colossians chapter 1. So Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, chapter 1 and verse 9, and let me read how Paul is praying for the church in Colosse. Now, we saw examples of the



same kind of thing in Ephesians, but I want to show you another example out of Colossians. Colossians 1:9:

*And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Brethren, this is an example of the Apostle Paul's prayers. He is praying for spiritual blessings. We see this over and over and over again in the New Testament. So when we pray, remember, we don't just want to focus on physical things. That's immediate, we can see that, and there's certainly a place for that, absolutely. But don't forget that the greatest concern of the Bible is not physical things, but is spiritual things. So brethren, when you're praying for each other, you want to be praying for the spiritual well-being of your brothers and sisters in Christ. You want to pray they grow in grace. You want to pray for hurting marriages. You want to pray for straying children, that they would be saved and brought back into God's fold. You want to pray for the spiritual well-being of God's people.

I also want to encourage you to pray specifically. The special object of Paul's prayer is for all the saints. Brethren, there's a special boldness that we have when we pray for the blood-bought people of God. So when you're praying, I want to encourage you, be praying for your brothers and sisters in Christ. When you read through the New Testament, you cannot miss that we are likened to a family, okay? How do you pray for family? You pray for family because you know them, because you love them. You know their struggles, you know their trials, you know their troubles. Brethren, this presupposes a degree of vulnerability, that you're willing to share your life with other people. That was Paul's attitude. Do you remember this from 1 Thessalonians? He wanted to share not only the gospel with them, but his own life. Paul likened himself to a mother to her children, and to a father to his children. I just want to encourage us to be thinking of each other in these familial type of ways. That helps with our praying. We pray as family. We love each other. We want to build each other up. We want to encourage. We want to

specifically pray for all the saints. It's the greatest thing we can do for each other as brothers and sisters is pray for each other. Pray that we grow spiritually. It's one of the ways that we walk by faith. We can't always see the results. And so we walk by faith, knowing that as we pray, we are moving mountains. The Lord will show it over time. So when one member walks through some kind of trial, they're hurting, they're struggling, we're praying for them. Brethren, there was a situation where Samuel told the people, "Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you." We always want to be praying for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

You know, I think it's really easy sometimes in our prayer life to get caught in patterns where we're only praying for ourselves. When we pray for others, it is good for us. It cures self-centeredness. It takes our eyes off ourselves. It reminds us that we are part of a family. We're not just lone rangers, walking through life. God has given us a faith family, and so we pray for them. It strengthens our own soul when we pray for each other, because it is a ministry. It is a vital ministry. It is intercession. It also encourages others. Many of you know what it's like to be encouraged by somebody saying, "Brother, sister, I'm praying for you; I know what you're going through but you're not going through it alone; I'm praying for you." It encourages other people.

Now, in verses 19 and 20, Paul specifically asks for prayers for boldness. Verse 19, "And also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." Brethren, think about the Apostle Paul. He could pray for his raw ankles and wrists, for living with chains, shackles. He could've asked, "Pray that I get out of here. I really hate Roman prisons. They stink and the food is terrible and they're rude to me." What does Paul plead for? Paul pleads for boldness. Can you think of anybody more bold than Paul? Brethren, think of the humility and vulnerability of Paul. Think about that for a minute. I think our default mode is to be prideful, and we think, "I don't want other people to know my struggles," or "I don't want to look small in front of them," or "They might think less of me." Like, are you saying, Paul, that you're timid? Think about the humility and vulnerability of the Apostle Paul, who prays for boldness.

Paul is an ambassador in chains. You know, ordinarily, an ambassador who always speaks for a great king does not find himself in chains. That was never the king's plan. But it was King Jesus's plan for Paul. In Acts chapter 9 at Paul's conversion, he was told that "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name." Brethren, Paul understands he's here for a reason, and he doesn't want to waste it. He doesn't want to waste an opportunity. His wrists

hurt, his ankles hurt, and the food is terrible, and Roman soldiers, no doubt, do stink. But that is not his main concern. He's praying for boldness in these chains. He knows he is right where the King of Glory would have him to be, and he asks for prayer to be bold. Brethren, the Lord used those prayers and moved mountains. We know that, because shortly after writing the book of Ephesians, Paul writes in the book of Philippians, "My circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have been encouraged to speak the word of God without fear." The Lord does move mountains. You don't always see it immediately. It doesn't always look the way you think it's going to look, but God answers prayers. Paul was looking for an avenue to share the gospel.

I just want to end our time with helping you think through the gospel. It's always a concern of mine that God's people might have trouble articulating the gospel. Think about this for a moment. If a Roman soldier who came from a completely pagan, polytheistic background were to ask Paul, "Paul, what is your religious message," what do you think Paul would say? Well, Paul is an ambassador of Christ. Paul is a man with a message. It's good news in light of bad news. It is the shining diamond of glorious news in the black velvet darkness of sin. The good news is that God will forgive sin, that God will deliver His people from the power of sin. God does give His people eternal hope. The bad news is that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The good news is that God sent His Son. He is truly God and truly man. He lived a perfect life. We have not. We talk about His active obedience, He never sinned, and His passive obedience, He went to a cross and He died in the place of sinners. And God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. The problem, Roman guard, is we're not righteous. We've all sinned.

The good news is you can have the righteousness of Christ. We must turn away from sin and self and pride and trust in the finished, perfect work of Jesus, who died for sinners and rose again and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Brethren, whatever message you get right in life, make sure you get the gospel message right. The gospel is not go to church. The gospel is not get your life right. The gospel is not, you know, you grew up in America so by default you're okay. The gospel is not a message about you. The gospel is a message about Jesus, who died for sinners, rose again, and the gospel call is to repent and believe.



Brethren, I'm just going to read this final passage for us, the remainder of the book, so we can close this book out this morning. This is now Ephesians 6 in verse 21:

*So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.*

And here is the closing words of encouragement to them and to us:

*Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.*

Amen and amen. Father, we pray that You would take these encouragements this morning for prayer and that they would fill our minds. I need encouragement in prayer, we all need encouragement in prayer, so help us, Lord, to pray always at all times for all the saints, every circumstance, every hill, every valley, every trial, struggle, pain, hurt, disappointment, every joy. Help us to walk in adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Help us not to grow weary. Help us to persevere, be alert and persevere. Help us, we pray, as we study the Scriptures. Fill our minds with the truths of the Word of God, to pray according to the will of God, pray in the Spirit. And we pray, Lord, that we'd see ourselves as you've called us to be, as your beloved children, as a people who pray and thus move mountains. We ask these things in Christ's name, amen.