

Praying In The Spirit

Message #7 in the series "Finding Victory in a No-Win World"

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Well, good morning, everybody. I am David Woolverton. Grace and peace to all of us as we delve into the word of God today. So, let's prepare our hearts as we go before the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to be present with us as we open up His word. Let's pray together.

Lord God, open us up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Teach us, Lord, what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this Father, we pray in Jesus' name and all God's people said, Amen.

So, I have to make a confession before you. I am lost without my phone. Maybe you are, too. The reality is my whole life now is linked to my phone. The calendar upon which I live and breathe and do all of my work is right here. Yeah, it's it goes with me wherever I go. The connecting points with my wife, with my family, they're all rooted in this phone. It goes with me wherever I go. Dare I say it? It's in the car with me. It's in my office. It's in my home. It's next to my bed at night. It even goes with me when I go into the bathroom. Admit it, most of us, that's true, right for us as well. It didn't happen quickly. It happened progressively. I remember a long, long time ago, the very first cell phone that I had. Maybe this was true for you as well. The very first cell phone that I had, I got from a company called PCS One and it was a sizable phone and I kept it in the car and left it in the car because it was for emergencies only. I paid \$19.95 a month for 20 minutes of free calls. Can you imagine that? Anything above the 20 minutes was like some obnoxious fee, like 60 cents a minute. And so, I if I ever needed it, I pulled it out, turned the power on, made my quick call, turn the power off to preserve both the battery and the off chance that I would somehow trigger some kind of call and lose all of that money. That's how I survived, and I was clearly paper trained when it came to my calendar. I had this big binder; a huge calendar went with me wherever I went. Now everything is in the palm of my hand. I can communicate with friends who are across the United States. I can make phone calls across the world. I can touch a button and have information downloaded to me within seconds or minutes from anywhere about anything. Right? But that's not the way it was for major parts of our history.

We're in a message series that we're calling Finding Victory in a No-Win World and what we're doing is we're tracking with the Apostle Paul in the letter of Ephesians Chapter 6, just ten verses of scripture from 10 through 20 and we're looking at how we are to prepare ourselves to be in battle, spiritual battle. But communication is really critical when you're facing battle, right? We learned that the hard way in our culture and it started for us in the modern era, back in World War I. World War I, World War II. These were the times when communication needs became very obvious. There were times when all we had, all the military had to communicate orders from the commander in chief and the generals and the admirals was the use of flags. And then they started introducing their version of cell phones, radios, and hand radios. Can you imagine holding one of those in your pocket for a portable phone? And then there were other kinds of flags and then they developed a Morse code and

then additional ways of trying to communicate. Why was that so important? It is because when you are facing battle, when you are in the battlefield, you needed to hear what the orders from the commander in chief were for you. And they learned the hard way many times in World War I and World War II specifically, that orders could be missed or misheard. And when you mishear orders from your commander, you ended up putting yourself and your troops in jeopardy.

That metaphor becomes important for us as we delve into this one verse of scripture today, as we bring to a close today and next Sunday to this incredible passage of scripture. Paul the Apostle is trying to equip us with everything that we need, he says, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand in the midst of the wrestling match with the devil." And today, we're going to talk about why communication becomes so important for Paul and for us in that battle. So very specific verse of scripture, it's from verse 18 of Chapter 6, this is what it says in the New Revised Standard Version, says,

**"Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints."
[Ephesians 6:18 NRSV]**

OK, so like I've done in prior weeks, I like to kind of look at multiple translations of this verse of scripture and this passage of scripture in particular. And so, what I did is I found one that's more literal to the original language of the Greek in the New Testament and that comes from the New American Standard Bible. Look at this translation from the NASB for this verse, it says,

**"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."
[Ephesians 6:18 NASB].**

For all the saints, why is this important? Why is it important for us to focus in on prayer? Very specifically, it is this, the best way to wrestle with the devil is a consistent life of prayer. When it comes right down to it, we got to keep the communication with our commander in chief open because when we don't, then the orders of the one who's in charge telling us what to do and how to do it, they will be missed, and we will be left on our own. Sometimes when we're left on our own, we don't fare very well in the ongoing spiritual battle that comes our way. So, prayer, the consistency of prayer, keeps the communication lines open so that we can hear directly from our commander in chief the orders that He has for us. Now, for many of us, prayer actually becomes the arena of the battle.

As we've been talking about, and as Paul is describing this ongoing spiritual battle that we're to be engaged in is not always visible to us, we see the evidence of it. But we don't always see our enemy. We need to tune in and the way we tune in is through prayer. And so, prayer becomes the arena for many of us where the battle takes place. And the enemy, Satan, really wants us to avoid prayer for that very reason. He wants us to disconnect from our power source, and if we disconnect from prayer, then we're lost. You know, the other thing about my phone that I absolutely love now, is there's GPS on here. You know, for the longest time in ministry, I've been in ministry for 34 plus years now. And, you know, early on and in ministry, I'm talking about for 20 years as I started out, whenever I would go somewhere, to go visit a person in their home or go to a nursing home that was new to me, I'd break out my atlas, ya know, the big book of maps. Right? Do you remember those? I

had them in the car. I used them all the time. And it meant that if I was using a map and I was trying to find my way around and I was in the car by myself, I had to keep pulling off the road to check where I'm going and what road and if I missed it, you know, it was a nightmare. So, what did I do? I got married. So, my wife tells me where to go all the time, right? So, she has this innate ability, she is my GPS individual, but when I'm not lucky enough to have my wife in the car, I tune in to this. This voice tells me where to go all the time. And they have the ability to give you multiple options many times for what's the fastest way to get to your destination or what's the least expensive if you want to avoid tolls. It will tell you. It figures it all out because the view that this has, it's from the satellites that are orbiting our Earth. So, they have a view that is bigger than what I have on the road. It can even tell me how long it's going to take me to get to my destination. It can tell me what obstacles I'm going to face, what traffic will look like. Right? We take for granted what our phones can do. That is what prayer is for the Apostle Paul. That's what prayer is for each and every one of us. A direct link to the Holy Spirit, that's God in us equipping us to face the battles that come our way.

That's what I want to go after today with you. Just one verse of scripture very briefly dissecting it so that you can be encouraged and empowered. To wrestle with the devil when it's your time. Let's dive into that verse of scripture and very particularly, let's look at a few words. Notice it says "with every prayer and request, pray at all times in the spirit. And with this in view, be alert with all perseverance and every request for all the Saints." You know, one of the reasons why I wanted to use this particular translation is the literal nature of how it translates from the Greek and what you see is actually what you get in that original language. Notice, for example, how many times the word every and how many times the word all appears. Every and all together. There are five references in one verse. Paul is trying to make a point here. He's trying to engage us on the reality that this is urgent. It's urgent. Really urgent. And prayer because of the nature of the battle that we face, prayer becomes an essential tool for the believer. Take it one step further notice, also another word, "be alert." It's one word in Greek. "Be alert." Why is that important? If this is truly urgent, there's a reason for the urgency. Paul the Apostle writes in 1 Corinthians Chapter 16, he says,

"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." [1 Corinthians 16:13 NIV].

Very important words, Paul is using not only Paul, but the Apostle Peter in Chapter 5 of his first letter writes,

"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings." [1 Peter 5:8-9 NIV].

Do you have that image in your mind? Powerful words that Peter is reminding us. Well, one more from the Apostle Paul Colossians Chapter 4. He says,

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." [Colossians 4:2 NIV].

Being alert becomes an important part of what our role is, why he's about to share, why look, be alert with all perseverance and every request for all the Saints, not only back then, but today. Do you know what he's talking about? He's talking about us. We who are followers of Jesus, we who are believers, we who have said yes to Jesus were incorporated not only into the family of God, but by virtue of what Jesus did on the cross, by shedding blood on the cross. He made us holy. Holy. We are saints of Almighty God. Now, I don't know about you, but especially on Monday morning, when I wake up and look in the mirror, I don't look really saintly. You know, that's the harsh reality. I look at myself and I go, I don't see a saint. I definitely see a sinner. I don't see a saint. But from God's vantage point, God sees us through the blood of the cross. And he sees saints. Why is this important? Combine the urgency of being alert with prayer and with prayer for all the Saints. Notice a few things. You and I, by prayer, we become a lifeline in battle every time we pray for another believer. Every time we pray for somebody else who we know is going through a struggle, who is on the battlefield every time we pray, we are a lifeline for that person. Can you imagine that? A lifeline. You are a lifeline for somebody else in battle every time you pray. That's the urgency. The urgency reminds us that we are never alone in the battlefield. We are never alone. So that reminds me of two words that I think we banter back and forth all the time. Sympathy and empathy. Both are good words, you know, both help us to be with other individuals as they're going through their journey of battle. But when we're a lifeline, one I believe is a little bit more important than the other. Let me define, very quickly, both. You know, sympathy really is feeling sadness or pity for another person without necessarily connecting personally with their particular emotional situation. So, we can send sympathy cards, and that's a good thing we can say to them, "I'm sharing my sympathies with you at the loss of your loved one." All very important, but if we want to take it one step further, that's where empathy kicks in. What is empathy? Empathy is connecting with another person because of a shared emotional experience. You're able to walk in their shoes because you have experienced similar emotions, even if the specific situation is different. The power of being able to walk in another person's shoes begins to connect us with the reality of their life journey. It doesn't mean that we lose ourselves in their situation. It means we connect with their situation because we've been in similar types of circumstances. When you say, "Hey, I really understand what you're going through when you describe the loss of your parent because I lost my parent." Now you're empathizing with them. The situations may be different. But if you connect on an emotional level with where you anticipate somebody else is, you're more equipped to be a lifeline for them.

What does this look like in prayer so modeled this in terms of sympathy, prayers and empathy prayers. A sympathy prayer might look like this, "Lord, I pray for George. He needs your help to get out of the situation he's in. Send someone to help him. And Lord, thank You that it's not as bad as it could be." Again, sympathy, wonderful. It's very appropriate. That's good. Let's go one step better. Prayer within empathy might sound like this, "Lord, I pray for George. I'm not exactly sure how to help him, but I want to. I know what it's like to feel isolated and alone, feeling like no one cares. Father, give me opportunities this week to reach out to him and protect him, Lord from being consumed by his negative thoughts." How do I know that he might be experiencing negative thoughts because when I was in a situation, that's what I did. Empathy connects us to the heart of the other individual within their circumstances. We don't lose the sense that we're different from them, that it's their situation, not mine. Empathy is not codependency. There are clear boundaries. But it's a willingness to step into the battle with another person rather than standing on the sidelines of the battle and simply praying for them. That's what Paul is getting at.

One more thing that he says in this verse, that's also very powerful. He uses the phrase, "pray in the Spirit." Hmm. What does that mean? Well, first and foremost, I really think it connects us to the wonderful truth that the spirit is the strength and our weakness. So, the spirit of God is that power source whenever we're facing difficult situations and that power source becomes an important link that we share with every other believer who is facing battle in this particular moment. All right, so what does that look like? In Jude, the New Testament book that many of us have not really studied, it's a shame because the Book of Jude is really powerful. So, one of the smallest books of our entire Bible, and it's one of the best profound statements of what God is doing, not just in the moment, but what He has in mind that's yet to come. Jude, or specifically, what's more literal, it should be the letter of Judah, because this is about Judah writing to the church, and Judah is the brother of James, who's the brother of Jesus. That's how he references the connection in the opening of this book. So, Judah is the brother of Jesus, and he's writing these words, and this is what he says to the church,

"But you dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." [Jude 1:17-19 NIV].

There's that phrase "praying in the Holy Spirit." Again, Paul in Romans Chapter 8, he writes this,

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." [Romans 8:26-27 NIV].

Hmm. The Holy Spirit knows our hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit equips us to pray when we don't even have the words to pray. So, what is this praying in the Spirit, anyway? For me, praying in the Spirit, is prayer that first connects us to the heart of God. And what is the heart of God? In very quick terms, we know that God is the champion of the weak. He's a supporter passionately of the poor and the broken hearted and the widow. So, we know the heart of God. The heart of God goes after those who are often disenfranchised, those who are lost. He's the GPS showing them how to get home. Praying, in the spirit is prayer that also connects us to the mission of God. The mission of God in very simple terms is the transformation of the world. Nothing short of that will do. The heart of Jesus is that He died for the sins of the whole world. Your sins and mine and nothing short of the transformation of that world will do. That's the mission of God and praying in the Spirit also connects us to the people of God. Guess what? That's the church. And here in Ephesians 6, verse 18, that's what Paul is getting at. We are bound together each and every time we wrestle with the devil, every time that there's a beating from the enemy trying to lure us into fighting a war. Paul says, "Remember who you are and remember whose you are, that you never are called on to that wrestling mat alone." That God is there. He's already won the victory, and He has called all of us to do that same lifeline connection that He's doing with one another.

So, praying in the Spirit, what does that look like for us in practical terms? Praying in the Spirit first is seeking God's best for the situation. No matter what it is that's going on, we are seeking God's best, not our best, and this is so critical even in our day today, right? It's

seeking God's best, not what we want. What does God want in that situation? It is seeking God's best for the other person or persons that are involved. Now, note this, it is seeking the best for the other person. That's what scripture teaches us to put the other person ahead of ourselves. So, praying in the Spirit is putting their needs ahead of our own. Praying in the Spirit is also seeking God's direction, you know, as we described at the beginning of this message. Communication is important. Our commander in chief needs to give us direction, but sometimes we're not listening and sometimes we are listening. But there's so much noise that prevents us from hearing. But we need to seek the heart of God, the direction of God. We also, in praying in the Spirit, we are surrendering to Jesus's Lordship, and we are acknowledging Jesus's victory in the battle. He's already won. And so, we're acknowledging that, and as we are acknowledging it, we are confessing trust in God's plan and purpose each and every time we say in effect, I trust you. I trust you. I trust you to be Lord over this situation and Lord over my life and Lord over the other person's life. I trust that your plan is good. Lord, align my life to your will and your purposes in this situation and help me to be fully present as a lifeline for the other individual. And we're praying in the Spirit as being thankful, in advance, for the fact that God indeed will provide. And the reality is each and every one of us, if we are truly wanting to grow spiritually, every step that we take to advance ourselves in our growing intimate connection with the Lord of Life, every single one of us will be invited to the wrestling match with the devil. And when we are invited, we need to get on to that mat and stand our ground because we know who we are in Christ, and we know the heart of the God who has called us to that new life that He has given to us by virtue of the Cross of Christ. And when we do that in confidence, we need to be the lifeline for one another making sure that no one ever feels alone in battle.

So maybe for you, this message is touching a chord in terms of how to move your prayer from sympathy to empathy. I can guarantee you when you do that, when you start connecting with the plight of another individual because of having been through emotional situations similar even if they're different, your ability to tune in to the needs of the other people in the battlefield, will inevitably draw you to your knees in prayer for them in a powerful way. Never underestimate. Never underestimate. Never underestimate what you're giving in prayer to your sisters and brothers in faith. And if you've ever been on the receiving end of someone else's prayer, that has equipped you to navigate through very difficult times, you know what I'm talking about? Let's be those who are equipped to pray in the Spirit at all times for all supplications and you will see the amazing power of the Holy Spirit work in and through you like never before. Let's pray.

What God? What do you need us to see? What do you need us to hear? What do you need us to know? And what do you need us to do? We are your servants. In Jesus name. And all God's people said. Amen.