

Prayer and the Spiritual Battle

Ephesians 6:18-24

April 30th, 2017

Carson – What do we need most in Western Christendom? Greater sexual purity? Church planting? Disciplined Biblical thinking? Financial integrity and generosity? All good but the one thing we most urgently need in Western Christendom is a deeper knowledge of God. We need to know God better. We are a culture of the spiritually stunted. One of the foundational steps in knowing God, and one of the basic demonstrations that we do know God, is prayer – spiritual, persistent, biblically minded prayer. “We have learned to organize, build institutions, publish books, insert ourselves into the media, develop evangelistic strategies, and administer discipleship programs, but we have forgotten how to pray.”

In the closing portion of Paul’s letter to Ephesians, we learn something about how to pray. In fact, we learn at least 7 things about prayer that are simple but for many would greatly improve the manner and frequency of their prayer. More of a “how to” section than a “why” section.

On the tail end of this section on spiritual warfare and the armor of God.

1. Seven qualities of an effective pattern of prayer (6:18-22)
 - a. At all *times* (v. 18a)
 - i. Notice the repetition of all – all prayer, all times, all perseverance, all saints
 - ii. Regular part of a believer’s life lived in relationship with God.
 - iii. Bible includes examples and exhortations of a wide variety of prayer
 - Confession (Psalm 51; Nehemiah 1:6-7)
 - Thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6)
 - Adoration/worship (Nehemiah 1:5)
 - Requests/Supplication (Nehemiah 1:11)
 - When anxious (Philippians 4:6)
 - When tempted (Luke 22:40, 46)
 - When suffering (James 5:13)
 - When cheerful (James 5:13)
 - When sick/discouraged (James 5:14-15)
 - In adversity (Acts 16:25)
 - For daily needs (Matthew 6:11)
 - Corporately (1 Kings 8:22ff)
 - Privately (Mt 6:5-6; Matthew 14:23)
 - As a church (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 12:1-12)
 - Early in the morning (Mark 1:35)
 - As leaders (Acts 6:4)
 - For leaders (1 Timothy 2:1ff)

For salvation of the lost (Romans 10:1)

- iv. It's always appropriate to pray. Sometimes we need to do more than pray. But it's always appropriate to pray.
 - v. Notice it isn't regimented as "twice per day" or "for a minimum of 1 hour per day"
 1. Amount and frequency of prayer surely will flex with different seasons of life. A young mom of twins will find it harder to carve out chunks of time for prayer than an empty nester.
- b. In the ***Spirit*** (v. 18b)
- i. **Jude 1:20** But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,
 1. We are to pray in step with the desires of the Spirit, informed by the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit when we are weary
 - ii. **Romans 8:26-27** In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words;²⁷ 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*.
 1. The Spirit Himself intercedes for us when we do not know how to pray.
- c. With ***alertness*** (v. 18c)
- i. Not mechanically without awareness of particular needs.
 - ii. Security training – white (relaxed, unaware of your environment, robbery occurring next door and oblivious), yellow (still relaxed but aware of your environment and potential threats), orange (notice something odd, considering how to respond), continues through red, gray, and black.
 1. Spiritually, when it comes to prayer, many believers are always in condition "white" – oblivious to needs
 - iii. Literally to be awake or watchful with a diligent concern.
 1. If you are in any kind of leadership or position of responsibility, how alert are you to the needs of those you are responsible for?
 - a. Your children?
 - b. The kids in your SS class?
 - c. The people that attend your Bible study?
 - d. Your employees?
- d. With ***perseverance*** (v. 18d)
- i. Perseverance – not giving up.
 - ii. Two parables of Christ with the same point – be persistent in prayer
 - iii. **Luke 11:5-10**
 1. Is God like the friend who says, "don't bother me!" No! The point is persistence.

iv. **Luke 18:1-8**

1. Is God like the unrighteous judge who only gives justice because He's bothered? Of course not! The point again is persistence. "Pray and do not lose heart."
2. Carson, page 31 –
 - a. If a boy asks his father for several things, all within the father's power to give, the father may ***give him one of them right away***, ***delay*** giving him another, ***decline*** to give him a third, and ***set up a condition*** for a fourth. The child is not assured of receiving something because he has used the right incantation: that would be magic. The father may decline to give something because he knows it is not in the child's best interests. He may delay giving something else ***because he knows that so many requests from his young son are temporary and whimsical***. . . But above all, the wise father is more interested in a relationship with his son than in merely giving him things. Giving him things constitutes part of that relationship but certainly not all of it. . . Often the son will talk with his father not to obtain something, or even to find out something, but simply because he likes to be with him.
3. As we persevere in prayer, our prayers become focused, our motives perhaps are purified.
4. I've been a Christian for 20 years. There are some people I've been praying for for 20 years for them to come to Christ. I'll keep praying.

e. For all the ***saints*** (v. 18e)

- i. Special target of prayer – all the saints – not merely all people everywhere, although we are told to pray for those outside of Christ as well.
 1. **Matthew 5:44** But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
 2. **Galatians 6:10** So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.
- ii. Are there people who know you well enough at this church to pray for you? Do you know others well enough to pray for them? You won't know everyone, but there should be a core.
- iii. An aspect of pulling out of depression can be turning attention to the needs of others. Of course more complicated than merely that but many find that as they turn their attention from self and their own sorrows to the needs of others, whether in prayer or service, that their mood improves as well.

f. For specific ***gospel*** needs (vv. 19-20)

- i. Paul often asks prayer for himself and the progress of the gospel
 1. **2 Thessalonians 3:1-2** Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you; ² and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.
 2. **2 Corinthians 1:8-11** For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so

that we despaired even of life; ⁹ indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; ¹⁰ who delivered us from so great a *peril of death*, and will deliver *us*, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, ¹¹ you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through *the prayers of many*.

- ii. He asks for the words to say and boldness to say it even as he is an ambassador in chains
 - 1. Contrast between prestige of being an ambassador and the reality of life in chains in a prison
 - 2. Boldness is repeated, assumed to be the norm we should strive for (“as I ought to speak”), and clearly something he feels like he lacks.

g. With ***information*** (vv. 21-22)

- i. They have an evident and appropriate concern for Paul
- ii. Paul sends Tychicus to carry the letter from prison and report on his well being
 - 1. With Paul in Macedonia in Acts 20
 - 2. Also mentioned in the Colossian letter which was probably carried during the same imprisonment Col 4:7
 - 3. Sent by Paul back to Ephesus in 2 Tim 4:12 near the end of Paul’s life
 - 4. Mentioned in Titus 3:12 as one that might be sent by Paul to Titus in Crete
- iii. How do you pray strategically and intentionally if you don’t have information?
 - 1. Who are the missionaries UBC supports? What can you pray about for them? 10% of what you give at UBC goes directly to missions, including ongoing monthly support and special onetime support. Newsletters are available in the resource center bulletin board. You can also sign up to receive newsletters from them.
 - a. Dan & Mam Rutledge: UBC WWM
 - b. Kevin & DeAn Pettit: ABWE
 - c. Dan & Rachel Powell: Grace Ministries International
 - d. Chuck & Connie Mathias: Tentmakers
 - e. Jerry and Angie Berheim: Awana
 - f. Mike & Julie Kelly: CRU
 - g. Steve & Melissa Millermon: InFaith
 - h. Bob & Susette Smith: CEF
 - i. Devadoss & Pushpa: BBCM
 - 2. Maybe you won’t follow all of them. But you could choose one whose ministry resonates with you, sign up for their email, and pray. You may have other missionaries that you support – great!

2. A Benediction in Four Key Words (6:23-24)

What we wish for people says a lot about us. It indicates what we value as much as what we want for them – a good job, health, educational success, marriage. We desire for others that we love our own ideal of happiness. (Hughes)

What does the apostle Paul desire for his beloved Ephesians?

a. **Peace**

- i. He began the letter with grace and peace
 1. **Ephesians 1:2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ii. Christ is our peace with God and man
 1. **Ephesians 2:13-14** But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one* and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,
 2. **Ephesians 4:3** being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

b. **Love**

- i. Love used 14 times in Ephesians
- ii. **Colossians 3:14** Beyond all these things *put on love*, which is the perfect bond of unity.

c. **Faith**

- i. Practical day-to-day faith – belief and trust. Believe what is revealed about God in the scriptures and what is said about us. Trust – trusting God on the basis of what we believe.
- ii. Hughes - Ease back and rest on what you believe. Put your whole weight on it.

d. **Grace**

- i. God's freely given kindness and favor
- ii. Given to us in Christ (1:6)
- iii. The basis of our forgiveness (1:7)
- iv. The sole means of our salvation (2:8)
- v. Can be given to others through our appropriate words (4:29)

3. Life Application

D-day illustration – in the war but not in the battle

They carried the same weapons as every other soldier. They had the same mission. But their weapons were leaning against the wall as their portion of the mission went unfulfilled.

Partially adapted from Carson *Spiritual Reformation*

a. Make a **plan** to pray.

- i. When? Where? How can you make it so that you are consistent and relatively uninterrupted?
- ii. Carson – It is better to pray often with brevity than rarely but at length.

b. Adopt practical ways to impede mental **drift**.

- i. Pray out loud

- ii. Write down prayers
- iii. Pray over scriptures
- iv. Have a written or digital prayer list in front of you
- c. Develop a **system** for your prayer lists.
 - i. Referring to the supplication/requests aspect of praying
 - ii. Develop categories
 - 1. Family
 - 2. Church body
 - 3. Missionaries
 - 4. Lost
 - 5. Ministries
 - 6. Character qualities in yourself that you would like to see the Lord develop
 - iii. Options for keeping track
 - 1. App – PrayerMate
 - a. If you aren't sure what an app is but you think it might be short for appetizer, stick with a paper list.
 - 2. List kept tucked in your bible
 - 3. Folder that you keep track of prayer letters from missionaries that you cycle through praying for and replace as new letters come in
- d. Tie as many requests as possible to **scripture**
 - i. Carson pg 31 of a child coming before a father with 3 requests. Father may grant one right away, say no on another, and wait on a third.
 - ii. Prayer is not magic.