

Praying on the Armour of God  
Ephesians 6:18-20  
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, June 27, 2021

That's how old our church is, it's about six years old. So all these things are things that we've done in that period of time. But here's a list of them: Sunday school, youth ministry, young ladies Bible study, ladies Bible study men's Bible study, Vacation Bible School (where we did not lose one child—all the children made it back to their home safe and sound), youth camp, family camp, a men's conference, family conference, church agape picnic, picnic lunches, care groups, Christmas banquets, Good Friday service with Prairie Chapel and Mission Bible Church. We also did a pastor swap last fall as well with Grace Church on 99. But all that to say, the Lord has done a lot of things in the life of our church this past several years. And we just want to thank him for that. And I just hope that's an encouragement to you. Sometimes when you're when you're sweating in a tent together—George Whitfield called it the holy sweat—you can forget all the good stuff. And those are some wonderful things that God has done.

So with that said, speaking of the church this morning, I want to invite you to open your Bibles to a book that talks about that, that says a lot about the church. And that is the book of Ephesians. So if you would please open your Bibles with me to the book of Ephesians. And as you're doing that, this morning we're coming to the end of an era here at Grace Fellowship. We're coming to the end of an epic because we're coming to the end of the book of Ephesians. This is the end of one of the longest running series that we've ever done as a church. This is not the actual end of it. We're going to do one more sermon next week. But this is the last verse-by-verse study that we're going to do in the book. And if you would just read Ephesians six, verse 10 with me. This will be the passage we're going to study. Paul writes, and he says,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

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, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

We'll end the reading there, but just to say a few words about that, if you've been with us for a while, you'll know that the book of Ephesians has been a very rich study for us as a church. It's been a very deep one because it's taught us so much. And for example, just by a quick review, it's shown us that we're blessed. If you look back in Ephesians, one, verse three, there it tells us this in the very first words of the book. It says,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

And you notice as you read that, that the word "blessed" is written three times in there for emphasis. It shows up over and over again to say that this is what you are now as a Christian. This is what you have become. You're blessed, you're privileged. It may not always seem like that, at times. It may not always feel that way when you're fighting your sin and fighting the world and fighting the devil and so forth. But it's a fact. And then if you look

down in chapter two, verse four, Paul goes on and says, not only are you blessed, but you've experienced this as well. It says, actually, if you look in the end of verse five,

God has made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly places.

So not only have you been blessed, you've been raised. Not only are you privileged, you have been seated in the heavenlies with Christ, so that nothing can touch you now. Nothing can harm you in any way. It's been said that there's nothing greater than the heavenlies. There's nothing higher than that. And this is where your salvation is now. This is where your soul is placed, which is a theme that's repeated all throughout the book because chapter four says that you become a new man now. You're a new creature in Christ. And chapter five says you're a child of God as well, and you're a bride of Christ, and you're part of his body. And then in chapter six, to get to our passage for this morning, to round all of that off, Paul goes even further in that. And he says, now, not only has God done those things, but he's given you a way to protect it. He's given you a way to guard your blessings. And that is with his armor. God has given you a way to keep your salvation safe, to keep your soul safe. And that is with the armor that we just read about.

I was talking to someone from our church the other day who said, it's so encouraging to read this here. It's so encouraging to see what it says because we often feel so exposed in the Christian life, right? We often feel so vulnerable and weak, because there's so much evil in the world today and so many bad things. But the reality is that we're not. We're not exposed, we're not weak, because we have all of this. And it will keep us safe from harm. And after describing that to you, Paul finishes it this way. If you look in verse 18, this is how he finishes his discussion of the armor of God. He says,

With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the spirit.

I'll walk you through that passage in a moment, and I'll show you what it says. But just to say a few words about it here. When you first read this verse it sounds a little strange. But the main idea is found in the word prayer, because that's what this is about. Because after describing the armor to you, Paul says, this is how you get it now. This is how you put the armor on. You do it by praying for it. You do it by praying for it and asking the Lord for help. You don't get all these blessings—the sword of the Spirit, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation—you don't get that by being a good person. You don't get that by doing a bunch of good deeds. You don't get that by paying money to the church and going on a mission trip and that sort of thing. You do it in prayer. This is a spiritual battle. And so you go to spiritual resources. And prayer is the greatest one that you have. You ask the Lord for help.

And to show you the importance of this, Paul says you need to do this at all times. That means you need to pray every day. You need to do it every chance you get. And he says you need to pray at all times in the spirit. And with this in view, be on the alert. That means you need to be awake in your prayer life. You need to be alive in that. You don't need to go to sleep when you pray. That's not the idea. And you also need to persevere, which means you need to continue in it. But the point is that this is how you put the armor on now. This is what you do with it. You need to pray.

And I mention this and I bring it up because I think if we're honest about it, most of us don't do a very good job of this, do we? You ask a Christian, what are your two greatest struggles, and they're gonna say evangelism and prayer, right? Every time. In fact, we seem to have time to do everything else but this. We're able to do everything else but pray because we can get people to serve and sing and listen to sermons around here. That's not a problem. Our folks love to do that. We can get them to read and study and open the Bible with us and see what it says. But we can't get them to pray. Matter of fact, you say the words “prayer service”, and you get a ghost town around here. I mean, people just head for the hills. I don't know where they go. It's like pulling teeth. And it's not just a problem in our church. They've done research on this. And they've discovered that nearly 20% of Canadians say

they pray every day, which sounds kind of high to me. But that was the numbers that I found. They say they do it all the time. But 30% never do. They never pray at all. Which is sad. It's so tragic. But it's even sadder because if I asked some of you, how often do you pray? You might say the same thing. If I ask some of you, how often do you talk to God? You might give the same answer. And the tragedy with that is this: God has given you something to help you in the Christian life. He's given you a resource to help you fight your sin, but you just have to use it. You just have to take advantage of it. In fact, some of you this morning might be struggling with sin just for the simple reason that you're not praying about it. You have to take that seriously today.

You know, I've told you before that in the 1600s the Puritan William Gurnall preached a series of sermons on the armor of God. It took him several years to get through. It took them a long time, like a good Puritan, you know, when he was in it forever. And when he finished they published his sermons into a book that was three volumes long. It was 1200 pages, and 300 of them were devoted to this topic. They were devoted to the subject of prayer. Because it is that important in the Christian life. Prayer is that essential. And we need to see it that way today.

It's been said that when you study the art of warfare, one thing you notice is that in order for an army to be successful, it has to keep in contact with its commander. It has to keep in contact with its leadership. Otherwise, everything will devolve into chaos. It's the same way with us in the Christian life. You need to be in contact with God in this battle. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

So if you're taking notes this morning, in Ephesians six, we're going to look at four principles for prayer from this passage. That's our outline for today. That's what this is about. If you're taking notes, in Ephesians six, verses 18 and 20, we're going to look at four principles from prayer from this passage. And I'm giving this to you to encourage you. I just want to tell you that this is not meant to be a discouraging sermon. Sometimes I think we can beat people up on these subjects, and prayer is one of those we could beat each other up all day. But that's not the intention here. My goal is to help you see how important this is in the fight with sin. And so there's four principles for prayer from this passage.

The first one is that you need to pray at all times and in different ways. So the first and second principle for prayer in this passage on armor is that you need to pray at all times. And you need to pray in different ways, which means that your prayer life needs to be lively. It needs to have some variety to it. You shouldn't say the same things all the time when you talk to God. It shouldn't be repetitive and redundant. You know, I've heard some people pray and they bow their heads. And I can almost tell you what they're going to say before they say it. I've heard them say it so many times. That's not the idea here. That's not how you honor God with this. I won't over all this again for the sake of time. But as you go back over this passage, one thing that jumps out at you is how spiritual this is, how supernatural the passage is. If you notice, Paul says in verse 11, he says,

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

And I don't have to tell you that that's a very spiritual thing there. It's very supernatural. Because the devil is a supernatural creature. So to defeat him, you don't need a sword of metal, you need a sword of the Spirit, right? And to defeat him, you don't need a breastplate of iron, you need something that's much greater than that, which is what this text is about. Then he says in verse 12, he says,

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness.

So there is even more spiritual in the passage, because he says, This is not of flesh and blood. So the idea here is to fight this battle, you need spiritual resources, you need spiritual help. And the greatest one you have is prayer. When Paul says, and he says it this way, in verse 18, he says,

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the spirit.

And just to say a few words about that, the word for prayer here is the Greek word *proseuchomai*. It means to pray or to pray fervently, to pray passionately about something because it doesn't mean to just do it halfheartedly or just do it haphazardly. It means to do it with the sincerity of your heart. Do it because you mean it. And then he says as well, he mentions the word petitions here. And that's a Greek word *deēsis*, which means to do it in a humble manner. Do it with your head bowed and your eyes closed kind of thing. You don't just pray arrogantly and proudly. You do it with a humble, contrite heart before the Lord. And just so you can see the importance of this, Paul says you need to do this with all prayers. That means all kinds of prayers, all different types. And he says you should do it at all times, which means every possible moment, every chance you get.

But the idea here is that your prayer has to have some variety to it. This is important as well, and we need to talk about this because it's so common for people to forget this today because they pray. They do go to the Lord for help. But they don't do it all the time as this text says, you know what I mean? They don't do it every day. They only pray when times are bad. They say "Lord, if you get me through this, I will..." such and such, right? "Lord, if you help me out during this trial, give me my job back I will, you know, give a million dollars to the church or become a monk," that sort of thing. That's not what this is talking about here. That's not the right way to pray. Or on the flip side of this, other people do a good job of this. They pray all the time. But they do it with the same words. They do it with the same routine. They say, God is great, God is good. Thank you, Lord for this food. And that's it. That's not what this is talking about either. There's nothing sincere about that. There's nothing with a full heart about that. That's a very hollow prayer. Paul says you shouldn't do that as a Christian. You shouldn't pray like that. Because it needs to be more, because God is a person. He's a living, breathing being. So you need to treat him that way. You know, if you think about it, you wouldn't talk to your spouse like that, at least I hope you wouldn't. You wouldn't say the same thing to them all the time. "Honey, I love you. Goodbye." Next day, "Honey, I love you. Goodbye." "Honey, I love you. Goodbye." And that's it. There's no relationship with that. There's no thought put into that. Same way with your prayer life.

Let me say it this way: you can't offer dead prayers to a living God. You can't offer flat prayers to a living God, they've got to have some life in them. They've gotta have some vitality. You serve a living God, and you need to pray that way. In fact, when you study the history of cults, one thing you notice is that they all do this. Cults and false religions, they all repeat their prayers. They just recite them over and over again. So for instance, if you go to a mosque, and you visit the Muslims, and you see them pray five times a day, facing Mecca, you don't even really have to know what they're saying. Because they'll say it over and over again. They may not even know what they're saying, because it's an Arabic. Because they're praying to a different god, they're praying to a dead God. They don't need living prayers to do it. Same way, if you go visit the Hindus and you listen to them chant and hum and that sort of thing. They do it to the point, they're in a trance, their mind is totally gone. Because they have that kind of God. They have a god that's not really interested in what's going on in their lives, they have a god that doesn't really care what's happening in their world. So they just mindlessly repeat stuff. You don't have that kind of God. You have a God who loves you. You have a God who cares. You have a God who wants to know what's going on in your life. Therefore, Paul says, you have to pray that way.

It takes a lot more work to do it this way, doesn't it? It takes a lot more work to mean your prayers and to think about them and put your heart into them. But that's what this is saying here. In fact, when you read the Bible, and you come to a book like Psalms, that's what you see there. David doesn't repeat his prayers in the book of Psalms. He doesn't just say the same thing over and over again. He has some variety to it. Because that's how we're supposed to pray.

In my studies, this week, I came across a story of the time a woman went to the preacher Andrew Murray and said that she couldn't pray. She was very bad at it. She said, "I don't know what to say. I fumble my words." And so Andrew Murray said, "Well, let me tell you what to do. Don't tell me that; go home and tell that to God and see what happens." So she did. She went home, came back the next day, and she said, "It worked!" She said, "I prayed for an hour that night." Because that's what this is about, friends. All the Lord wants you to do is open

your heart to Him when you pray. He just wants you to talk to him. And he will listen to you even when you don't know what to say. Which brings us to another point to talk about this morning, brings us to another principle for prayer in this passage. The first one is that you need to pray at all times and in different ways. Which means your prayer life needs to be lively, it needs to have some kind of pep to it. Not the same thing all the time. You can tell how healthy a church is by how well the people pray right? By how heartfelt it is. No one wants to go to a church where the prayers are all frozen.

That brings us to another point to talk about, another principle for prayer in this passage, and that is that you need to be on the alert as well when you pray. We've already said a few words about this. But a third principle for prayer is that you need to be on the alert, which means you need to be diligent in your prayer life. You need to be wide awake. If you look in verse 17, Paul writes, and he says this. He says,

Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert.

If you notice, the word spirit is repeated a couple of times there in this passage. It's mentioned in verse 17, when it talks about taking up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And what that means there is that this is what God has given to help you in the battle. This is what he's given to help you fight it. He's given you His Word. And in order to take advantage of that, verse 18 says, "Pray at all times in the spirit," which means this is how you should pray: you should pray according to the Word of God. You should pray according to the things that are written in this book. And in order to do that, he says, you should be on the alert. The word alert here is an interesting word in Greek, because it could be translated "sleepless", or "restless". Your prayers should have a certain restlessness to them. Not because you're anxious or because you're worried, but because you don't give God any rest. You don't give God any break.

You guys remember the story Jesus told of the woman who wanted justice from the judge, and she didn't get it. So she kept going back, you remember that? And she kept going back and she kept going back. That's how you should pray. That's what this word means. You should keep praying and praying and praying. You should keep talking and talking and talking to God. Most of us don't think of prayer like this. Because if we were truly honest, we would admit this. We're often very fatalistic in our prayers. We're very deterministic. Because we say, since God is sovereign, what's the point in praying like this? Since he's in control, what's the point in asking him, because he's gonna do what he wants anyway? But the answer is, you should do this because God tells you to. You should pray this way because he hears you. In fact, I looked it up this week, and I came across some passages on this. And let me just read some of these to you some passages on how the Lord hears our prayers. First Peter three, verse 12, says,

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.

And that passage there is very insightful because the idea of the eyes of the Lord being on the righteous means he's looking at the righteous, he's watching you. And then his ears being tuned in, the idea there is that he's actually interested in what you have to say. God actually wants to hear your prayers. Some of you don't even want to hear what the other person has to say in this room. Some of you aren't interested in that. But God is interested in you. He wants to hear what you're going to tell him. First John five, verse 14 also says,

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything, according to His will, he hears us.

So now John says we can be confident in this. We can be sure that he hears us if we pray according to His will. That's a sure thing. Some people have asked me, "Why doesn't God hear my prayers?" Well, if you're praying according to His will, he will do that. If you're praying according to His will, He will answer. That's what that passage says. Psalm 50 verse 15 says,

Call upon the Lord in the day of trouble, and he will rescue you. He will hear your cry.

And there's the note of confidence again, the note of assurance. But the point is that God listens to our prayers, which is why we need to do this. And this is how it works with the armor of God. This is how it ties into this passage. If you're struggling with anger this morning, this is what you need to do. You need to ask God to help you with your anger. That's the connection here. That's the tie in. If you struggle with lust, if you struggle with the sin of adultery, you need to do the same thing. Don't just talk to an accountability partner about that; you need to talk to God. If you struggle with pride, ask him for help with pride. If you struggle with anxiety, ask him for help with anxiety. If you struggle with doubt, ask him for help with that. But whatever you do, you need to ask. When you help people in counseling and talk to them about their sin, you always have to give them this assignment. You have to tell them to pray. Don't come back here unless you've prayed about this. Because I can't do anything about it. You got to go to God. That's what it means to pray according to His will. You can't get lazy in this. You can't get apathetic, can't just say, "This is just a little sin. It's no big deal." You need to pray by being alert.

And that brings us to one more point to consider this morning. One more principle from prayer in this passage. Just to review these other ones, the first and second one is that you need to pray at all times and pray in different ways. Which means your prayer life should be lively. They need to be dynamic. And then also, thirdly, you need to be on the alert as well. You need to be diligent when you pray. I didn't tell you this story, but my grandfather was in World War Two. And he said, they often said that there's no atheists in a foxhole. Everybody believes in God when they're in the middle of a battle. Everyone calls out to him, even the worst, hardened sinner. That's where you are in the Christian life, you're in a battle, and you need to pray that way. And it brings us to one more principle for prayer in this passage, one more point to talk about. And that is this, you need to pray for others as well. Just to round this off with what he's saying here.

The fourth principle for prayer in this passage is that you need to pray for others, which means you need to consider them as well when you pray, so that your prayers are not one sided. And if you read all the text here, Paul says this starting in verse 18, he 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, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

As you go on in the passage here, you can tell that Paul is getting personal here, because he goes from talking about prayer in general to talking about himself. He gets very specific and gives you an example from his own personal life. And he says, pray on my behalf. Pray for all the saints and then pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth. For the sake of time, we can't go into everything that he says here. But suffice it to say, this is quite a prayer request, because if you remember the circumstances, Paul was in prison as he wrote this. He was locked up in jail. And he doesn't ask to be let out here. He doesn't ask to be freed. Instead, he asks for the Lord to make him bold in proclaiming the gospel. I think it's quite a statement here that a man like Paul would ask for a prayer for boldness. I often think of Paul as being fearless. He was bulletproof and Superman. But apparently there were times when he was scared too. There were times when he was afraid. So he asked for that here. And he does that to remind the Ephesians that even though they can't come to him in prison, even though they can't come to him in jail, there is something they can do for him. There is a way they can help him. And they can pray for him. They can go to the Lord on his behalf. And I might add that it's the same way for us today. It's the same way for you and me, because there's a lot of people you can't get to today. There's a lot of people you can't help, but you can pray for them. You can ask the Lord to come to their aid.

In fact, I did some research on it this week. And just to show the importance of this, according to the latest statistics last year alone, something like 90,000 Christians were killed worldwide. 90,000 of them. And if you

break that down, it comes to about 250 per day. So what that means is that by the time our service is finished today, by the time our day is over, by the time it's finished, 250 Christians will have died somewhere. It's staggering to think about, especially if you live in a comfortable place like we do. And what Paul is saying here, the principle he's giving us is that in times like that, when you hear of those things, you shouldn't just wring your hands and say, Oh, how terrible. You shouldn't just scratch your head and say that's too bad. You should pray about it. You should go to the Lord on their behalf. You can't go to them either. You can't go to another country every time someone dies, but you can go to the Lord in prayer. You can also pray for the person sitting next to you as well. This is the idea of praying for others. You can pray for the person sitting next to you in the tent. Because even though they're not going through all that, they're not sitting in jail and being martyred, they're going through something. They're going through some struggles. You can bring them before the Father.

But the idea here is that you need to be selfless in your prayers. You need to think about other people. Your prayers don't need to be about me, me, me all the time. They don't need to be about I, I want this, I want that. Like God is some kind of genie in a bottle, you just rub him the right way and you get your wishes. That's not the idea. It needs to be about other people. I've always been blessed when some of you in the church come up to me with a notebook and you show me all the people you've prayed for that week. That always blesses my heart. That's what this is talking about. Some of you send out texts when you do that. You'll pray for someone and text them and encourage them that way.

It's very fitting that Paul would end on this and close the book on this note, because after all he's said so far about our salvation, and after all he's said so far about our blessings, he ends by reminding us of this, we're not the only ones involved in this. We're not the only ones being blessed. God has blessed others too. And we need to pray for them. You know, in his commentary on the book of Ephesians, Martin Lloyd Jones tells a story of how the hospitals in Spain were filled up at the turn of the 20th century. They were overrun with cases of neurosis or anxiety and depression. Until war broke out in the country. Until the Spanish Civil War began. And then the problem stopped, the hospitals cleared out. Because people stopped thinking about themselves so much. They stopped being so selfish. And friends, there's a lesson in there for us. There's a principle in there. And that is that we need to do that too. If you want to stop being so anxious and depressed all the time, we need to start thinking about others, and pray for them and go to the Lord on their behalf. So will you do that today? Will you make that a priority? Let me close us in a word of prayer and pray that we would do that. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, this is a subject that is a difficult one to talk about because it's one that we are all lacking in today, at least I know that I am. We don't pray as much as we should, even though we have a God who is worth praying to. All these other religions that we mentioned, they chant and repeat and hum because they have a god that's just not worth talking to like this. And yet we have a God that we could talk to for hours, laying out everything that's on our heart. And we do it so seldom. Lord, would this be a reminder to us. It's been said that healthy churches are full of healthy praying, Christians. We want to be that way today, Lord, and as we come to the Lord's Supper, we remember that the fact that the reason we can pray to you and the reason we can call out to you is because of what Christ has done. And may that be a special thing for us to remember today. Even in the hot weather, Lord, we're here because we love you. And we want to remember all the wonderful things you have done for us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.