

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

May 24, 2026

Unpuzzled

“Praying in the Spirit”

Ephesians 6:18-20

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As we wrap up our sermon series of walking through highlights of the book of Ephesians, we turn to *chapter 6* where, among other things, Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus they are to be strong in the Lord’s mighty power. Paul says we are constantly fighting battles with unseen enemies, the leader of which is the devil. Paul uses the analogy of armor that we are to put on every day if we hope to win these countless battles. This is not just any armor, but armor given to us by God. The pieces of armor we are to put on are the Belt of truth, the Body armor of God’s righteousness, the Shoes of peace from the Good News of Jesus, the Shield of Faith, and finally, the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Then Paul wraps up this teaching on suiting up for battle with the devil and his evil forces by saying this in *Ephesians 6:18-20*:

EPHESIANS 6:18-20

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

19 And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God’s mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. 20 I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God’s ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.

PRAY IN THE SPIRIT

Paul is saying there is one overarching ingredient absolutely necessary to overcome the battles of life along with all this armor and that is for us to ***Pray in the Spirit***. Depending on which version of the Bible you are reading, Paul uses the word “prayer” four or five times in these three verses. Paul helps us understand this is not just praying in our own way however we want to pray, but He refers to “praying in the Spirit”. Praying in the Spirit is a level of praying that we should all make our goal to obtain in our prayer life. Praying in the Spirit is praying in a manner where our prayers are guided, empowered, and enabled by the Holy Spirit, rather than by human strength, selfish desires, or intellect alone. When we pray in the Spirit, we are relying on the Holy Spirit to align our prayers with God’s will and not our own. Along this same line of thought, the Bible says in *Romans 8:26-27*, “*And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don’t even*

know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will." The Holy Spirit knows God's perfect will and as we humble ourselves in prayer and invite the Holy Spirit to help us pray according to God's will, the Holy Spirit will line up our hearts and our prayers with God's will. Some of our best prayers happen when we say, "I don't know what to pray for, God. Holy Spirit guide me in how to pray. Holy Spirit pray for me according to God's will. I turn it all over to you!" Praying in the Spirit is praying through the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit for us to pray with hearts of submission and dependence upon God's will.

In *The Higher Happiness*, Ralph W. Sockman describes the true intention of prayer when he says, "We use prayer as a boatman uses a boat hook: to pull the boat to the shore and not to try to pull the shore to the boat." When we pray in the Spirit, we are not trying to pull God to us, to get God to see things our way, to do things our way, like a boat trying to pull the shore to it. Instead, praying in the Spirit pulls us into God's will, God's way of seeing things, of aligning our hearts, our intentions, our desires, our wills into God's. This is the most powerful way to pray, which is also the way Jesus always prayed. Jesus said this to His disciples in *John 15:7* about praying in this manner, "*But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!*" When we are guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit to align our prayers with God's will, we will always get what we pray for because we are praying for what God says is best.

PRAY IN THE SPIRIT AT ALL TIMES AND ALL OCCASIONS

How often are we to pray in this Spirit? Paul says that we are to ***Pray in the Spirit at all Times and all Occasions***. Praying in the Spirit is not limited to time and place. Every prayer Jesus offered to God was done in the Spirit. Jesus prayed alone, one-on-one with God in some out of the way, quiet location. Jesus also got away from the crowds to a quiet place to pray with His disciples. Jesus stopped and prayed in public when something came up that needed to be brought to God in prayer. Jesus also prayed with others during times of worship in the temple. Jesus prayed in moments of great distress, when He was sad, mad, angry, and when He was experiencing overwhelming joy. Jesus prayed at all times and on all occasions. Jesus did perfectly what *1 Thessalonians 5:17* says, in the New Living Translation of the Bible, "*Never stop praying.*" Or as the New International Version of the Bible says, "*pray continually*" or as the King James Version says that we are to "*pray without ceasing*".

How do we pray at all times and all occasions without ceasing? Henri Nouwen hit the nail on the head when he said, "As we are involved in unceasing thinking, so we are called to unceasing prayer." Our relationship with God should be something that is as natural as thinking or breathing. The atmosphere we Christians live in is one where we know, understand, and are constantly aware that God is with us at all times and on every occasion, and we treat Him as such. We may not speak to God every moment,

but we have a sense we are constantly in His presence and thus our very lives are an unceasing prayer to God. John McCarthur says that to pray continually is “To live in a continual God consciousness, where everything we see and experience becomes a kind of prayer, lived in deep awareness of and surrender to our heavenly Father.” Is that the kind of relationship that we have with God where we are continually aware of His presence with us at work, at play, at home, at church, on a date, in class, or in private where only God sees us? In his book, “Purpose in Prayer,” E. M. Bounds quotes these words from former college professor and Confederate soldier, General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson that illustrate praying without ceasing. He said, “I have so fixed the habit of prayer in my mind that I never raise a glass of water to my lips without asking God's blessing, never seal a letter without putting a word of prayer under the seal, never take a letter from the post without a brief sending of my thoughts heavenward, never change my classes in the lecture-room without a minute's petition for the cadets who go out and for those who come in.” Praying without ceasing is to do what *Philippians 4:6* says, “Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.”

BE ALERT IN PRAYER

Paul continues to say that in these spiritual battles we continually face we are to **Be Alert in Prayer**. When we are continually praying in the Spirit at all times and all occasions, the Holy Spirit makes us alert every step of our day to the countless snares and traps of the devil.

As many of you know, Missy and I were on vacation a few weeks ago and one of the places that we visited was Yosemite National Park. On our last day in Yosemite, we were driving high up on the side of a mountain on a two-lane road somewhere between 5,000 to 6,000 feet of elevation when all of a sudden, Hawkeye Missy says with great excitement that she just saw what looked like a momma bear and cubs. This is no surprise that Missy spotted them because she constantly looks for bears everywhere. She also has the uncanny ability of spotting the smallest, and most camouflaged wildlife. It wasn't easy, but I quickly found a place to turn around on this mountain road and sure enough roughly 100 yards or so above us in an open area on the side of the mountain, there they were, a momma bear and two large cubs. I couldn't hardly see them until I looked through our camera's 200mm zoom lens and I saw what only Missy could see, the momma bear and two cubs. This is how I want to see bears in the wild, at a distance from my car. I do not like the idea of coming upon a bear while hiking. When we hike in the wild in what is known as bear country, we are prepared. In most places, except for California, you can carry bear spray. I don't want to get that close to use it but if I have to, I will gladly do so. Some wear bells and talk loudly to alert and hopefully not walk up upon and surprise a bear. Those bears may be cute, but we do not want to get close enough to cuddle them. They are very dangerous!

Paul says praying in the Spirit is essential if we hope to be alert to all the dangerous snares and traps the devil sets for us. For me, that looks like spending time with God

first thing in the morning before I face what is to come that day and bathe that coming day in prayer by inviting Jesus to be in charge of every detail of the day. Praying in the Spirit in the morning is the best way to win the day by yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit to guide us in everything we do to follow God's will for that coming day. Then throughout the day continually praying in the Spirit for the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us to not be blindsided by all the dangers in life. That is being alert and will keep us from being blindsided in these spiritual battles and empower us to win these battles!

BE PERSISTENT IN PRAYER FOR ALL GOD'S PEOPLE

Paul says we are not only to be alert through praying in the Spirit, he also adds the last piece of the praying in the Spirit saying we are to ***Be Persistent in Prayer for All God's People***. Another nonnegotiable rule for hikers is to never hike alone because in doing so, we are far more vulnerable to the dangers of wildlife and unsafe terrain. So also, in order for us to win these spiritual battles in life we are not to face them alone. We absolutely need others to support us through praying for us. *Jude 1:20-21* says, ²⁰*But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, ²¹ and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love.* In order for us to be safe in God's love in this world we need others to be praying for us. What I love about this call to be persistent in prayer for fellow Christians is that Paul, this giant of a Christian leader, great man of God, humbly admits to the churches in Ephesus that he desperately needs them to help him through prayer. Paul is writing this letter to the Ephesian churches while he is somewhere in a Roman prison. What does Paul ask for... protection or to be set free from prison? No! Paul asks for prayer that God would continue to give him boldness and the right words, when as God's representative, he shares God's mysterious plan of the good news of Jesus Christ while he is in chains in prison. Paul knew he could not do this on his own. He asks them to not only pray for him and all the Christians but to not give up doing so. Keep on praying and don't give up until God clearly answers.

In one *Leadership* cartoon, a man at a church meeting says to himself, *Oh great! Here comes Bob. I told him I'd pray for him! "Dear God, help Bob. Amen."* He reaches out his hand to Bob and enthusiastically says, "Hey, Bob, been prayin' for you!" That is not the kind of persevering praying in the Spirit for other Christians Paul is talking about. When someone tells us they have something they are struggling with and we say that we are going to pray for them, we are then to add them to our prayer list and regularly lift them up to God in prayer. We are to continually bring to God in prayer a loved one who doesn't know Jesus, someone we know suffering health issues, those who are grieving the death of a loved one, people whose marriage is on the rocks, someone who is struggling emotionally, needing a job, or someone with whom we are in conflict, or just pray for each other that we will all be empowered to live faithfully in this world.

Lastly, I echo the words of Paul and invite you to pray for us pastors. Merrill C. Tenney wisely said, "If a church wants a better pastor, it can get one by praying for the one it has." We desperately need and sincerely covet your prayers.

As I close, I would like to lead us in a prayer that comes to us from one of our early church fathers from the 1st Century A.D., that of Clement of Rome. Please join me in prayer as I pray these words, "We ask you, Master, be our helper and defender. Rescue those of our number in distress; raise up the fallen; assist the needy; heal the sick; turn back those of your people who stray; feed the hungry; release our captives; revive the weak; encourage those who lose heart. Let all the nations realize that you are the only God, that Jesus Christ is your Child, and that we are your people and the sheep of your pasture." Amen!

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *The Holy Bible* (Several FREE copies are available in the DRC)
- *Unpuzzled*, J. D. Walt *
- *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer
- *The Gospel According to Jesus*, John MacArthur
- *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande
- *Respectable Sins*, Jerry Bridges
- *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Donald S. Whitney
- *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges
- *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*, Peter Scazzero
- *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer
- *Forgotten God*, Francis Chan
- *The Meaning of Marriage*, Timothy & Kathy Keller
- *Sacred Marriage*, Gary Thomas
- *Purpose in Prayer*, E. M. Bounds
- *A Praying Life*, Paul E. Miller

Icebreaker Questions

1. Have you ever had a moment when someone's prayers for you made a noticeable difference in your life? What happened?
2. What is one habit or routine that helps you stay spiritually alert throughout your day?

Sermon Discussion Questions

1. Paul calls believers to "pray in the Spirit." How is praying in the Spirit different from simply saying prayers or presenting requests to God?
2. The sermon describes prayer as aligning ourselves with God's will rather than trying to pull God toward ours. Why is that distinction important in the Christian life?
3. What practical steps can help us "pray continually" or maintain an ongoing awareness of God throughout daily life?
4. The Yosemite bear illustration emphasized spiritual alertness. What are some modern "snares and traps" Christians need to stay alert against today?
5. Paul specifically asks other believers to pray for his boldness and faithfulness. Why is persistent prayer for fellow Christians, pastors, and church leaders so essential?
6. What impacted you most from the sermon? How might you apply this week's sermon to your life?
7. How might this group pray for you this week?