



When a doctoral student at Princeton asked, “What is there left in the world for original dissertation research?”, Albert Einstein replied, “Find out about prayer. Somebody must find out about prayer.”¹ Every faith has some form of prayer. Remote tribes present offerings to idols and pray for things like health, food and rain. Five times a day modern Muslims stop whatever they’re doing—driving, drinking coffee, playing soccer—when the summons comes to pray. Even atheists pray. Have you ever been in a car with a self-proclaimed atheist during a near car crash? They don’t shout out, “Buddha!” or “Mohammed” do they? They “pray” and curse using Jesus’ name. There are a million reasons why we pray. We pray because we are thankful. We pray for forgiveness, for strength, for assurance that we are not alone. Millions in AA groups pray to a Higher Power, begging for help in controlling their addictions. We pray because we can’t help it. Prayer is universal because it speaks to some basic human need.

According to Gallup polls, more Americans will pray this week than will exercise, drive a car, go to school, or go to work. Nine in ten of us pray regularly and three out of four claim to pray every day. Yet, behind those impressive numbers lies a contradiction.

Most of us experience prayer more as a burden than as a pleasure. We regard it as important, maybe even most important, but we end up feeling guilty about our failure to pray, blaming ourselves and committing to just pray more and harder. Why is there a huge gap between prayer in theory and prayer in practice? Prayer can be confusing and frustrating. We can become skeptical of the importance and impact of prayer. What good will prayer do against terrorism, hurricanes and economic meltdowns? Wealth and success dilute prayer too. In my travels I’ve noticed that Christians in developing countries spend much less time talking about prayer and more time actually praying. Busyness, lack of margin, time and the social media world we are drowning in crowd out any chance of conversation with God.

I honestly believe Paul understood this struggle. Sure, he lived a long time ago, but he was a very busy man. Paul was an author, church planter, Apostle, world traveler, scholar, friend, pastor, and leader of a new movement of Jesus followers. He began his letter to the Ephesians with a prayer for them and now ends by teaching them how to have a battle-ready prayer life and the importance of developing battle-tested friends. Last Sunday, we learned that we are in a battle against the devil and his forces and we must put on the full armor of God to stand firm. With ¹ *Prayer, Does It Make Any Difference*, Philip Yancey, pg. 11

God’s armor on, we stand together with other Christians and fall to our knees. Let’s stand together, in honor of God’s Word and read Ephesians 6:18–24.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

Battle-Tested Prayer

Here in verses 18–20 Paul teaches us how to pray if we are going to defeat Satan. There are several ways to understand the connection between prayer and God’s armor. Prayer could be seen as the seventh piece of God’s armor. Prayer is also the way we put on the armor of God. Prayer above all things expresses our dependence on God. The idea here is that prayer should permeate all our spiritual warfare. Without prayer, God’s armor is useless. Paul says the fully equipped Christian soldier must link together with other Christians and fall to our knees. Paul goes on to highlight several ways to have a battle-tested prayer life.

We first *“pray in the Spirit.”* The Bible teaches us to pray to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. We need the Spirit’s help to if we are going to pray effectively. The Holy Spirit gives us the strength to pray and even brings to our minds what to pray for. Romans 8:26–27 tells us that only in the Spirit’s power can we pray in the will of God. Left alone, our prayers will often be selfish and out of the will of God.

Battle-tested prayer happens, Paul writes, *“on all occasions with all kinds of prayer and requests.”* Prayer should not be limited to our bed time or before a meal. Those are good times to pray, but effective prayer is much more than that. We pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers. We pray when we feel like it and when we don’t. Sometimes in my prayers, I jump right to my

list of what I want God to do. Prayer needs to be balanced with all kinds of prayers and requests. A really helpful acronym I use when I pray is called A.C.T.S.—adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. You've probably heard of it. We start by adoring God for who he is and what he has done. We talk to God about God. We pray amazed at his power, beauty, sovereignty, wisdom, righteousness and justice. In light of who God is, we are led to confess our weaknesses, failure, sin, and selfishness. That moves us to thanksgiving and we spend time thanking God for his many blessings, his favor, grace, and mercy. We thank God for our families, spouses, jobs, and how he has provided for us. Then, we finally come to supplication, asking God to supply all our needs. This is when we ask God to do his will in the many situations we lay before him.

Let me say a word to all the kids here this morning. Paul doesn't set an age limit on when you can pray! Five-year-olds and eighty-year-olds can pray. The Bible gives us guidelines to pray, but there is no right way to pray; there are many ways. You don't need to sound intelligent either. You don't need to use a special serious voice when you pray. There is no such thing as a dumb prayer either. Prayer is simply talking to God. It's telling him all that is on your heart and your mind. We pray not to just get stuff from God, but to get God himself. To move closer to him.

Paul tells us next that battle-tested prayer happens all the time, *"always keep on praying."* This doesn't mean that all we do is pray! Prayer should not be limited to certain times of the day. The sense here is that we *"pray without ceasing."* Prayer becomes a continuous part of our lives. The reason we are encouraged to "pray always" is because we are continuously subject to temptations and attacks of the Devil. He is relentless and so our prayers need to be constant. Because we have an enemy that uses many "schemes" against us, our prayers should also be specific.

We pray in the Spirit, we pray all kinds of prayers, we always pray, and most important we pray with our eyes wide open. Paul warns us to "be alert." We need to pay close attention and watch for oncoming assaults from the Enemy. Even Jesus himself said these words to the disciples. After spending some time in the middle of the night praying in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus returned to find the disciples sleeping. That had to be discouraging. Burdened and in the shadow of the cross, Jesus urged them, *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."* Paul wants us to heed those words as well—watch, pray, be alert! Do you have an important meeting this week? Is your spouse going in for test results? Does your child have a big test this week? Be alert. Be prayed up.

Paul challenges us next to pray for *"all the Lord's people."* The Lord's prayer begins with "Our Father," not "My Father." We are part of the family of God, the Body of Christ, the church. This

doesn't mean that we should pray for every single Christian in the world today. With over over 2 billion Christians, that would take some time! This is what we call intercessory prayer—prayer on behalf of others. There are believers all over the world who need our prayers. Are you praying for believers in Syria? In China? In our own community? We at least can create categories for other believers in the world—oppressed and poor, under regimes, Christians in Europe, etc. From mature Christians to baby Christians, we are all targets of Satan's fiery darts. Every one of us needs the prayers of other Christians. Even the Apostle Paul asked for prayer, *"Pray also for me,"* he asked.

When asking for prayer, Paul was specific. Twice he asked for prayer so that he would *"fearlessly make known the gospel."* What amazes me is that Paul didn't ask them to pray for his release from jail or for any earthly comfort. He prayed to be fearless. That's a great prayer to pray! He wanted courage and clarity when he preached the gospel. We usually assume that Paul was fearless, immune to discouragement, and a man who let nothing stop him. But, he got scared too. He was human but humble and honest enough to admit his need and ask for help. I can speak for all the staff and elders at CPC, we covet your prayers. Especially those who teach us the Word of God, please keep us in your prayers. We need clarity and courage just like Paul. Pray that we would be fearless. As you go to work on Monday, to school, or as you take your kids to the park, we need to pray for courage and clarity as we share the gospel with others. Let's all pray for one another to be fearless.

We pray in the Spirit, with all kinds of prayers, always praying, with our eyes wide open, praying for all God's people, and for those who teach and preach the Word of God. This is battle-tested prayer. Paul moves next to the necessity of godly Christian friends to fight this battle.

Battle-Tested Friends

In verses 21–22, Paul tells us about a man named Tychicus. He writes that Tychicus is a *"dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord."* Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus to deliver and read his epistle to the Christians in that city. Tychicus did the same with the epistle to the Colossians. Paul also sent him to encourage the church in Ephesus. It's so easy to pass over these verses when we read and study the Bible and not make much of it. Let's slow down and think about what Tychicus meant to Paul and how that relates to us.

Paul considered Tychicus a *"dear brother in the Lord."* Paul had many dear friends on whom he relied for both encouragement and help. Paul didn't just have young guys he was mentoring, he had all kinds of friends in ministry. Just take a look at the end of almost all his letters. Paul was not a one-man show, but

worked hard at making and maintaining close friends. There is no greater joy in life than serving God with people you love.

The mention of Tychicus and his ministry reminds me that we are not fighting this battle alone. There are other believers who stand with us in the fight. These Christians, like Tychicus, encourage us and speak God's truth into our lives. Tychicus was a huge encouragement to Paul. Through trials, blood, sweat and tears, Tychicus and Paul forged their friendship. Paul even trusted Tychicus enough to hand over his letter, what would become the Word of God, and have him read it to the church in Ephesus. This was a massive responsibility. Tychicus would also encourage the believers with news of how Paul was doing. Paul was not a closed book. He openly shared his life and his ministry with others. He wanted the people of God to know how he was doing and how they could pray for him.

The church is meant to be family, not a service we attend. We are to be praying for one another, encouraging each other, speaking truth to each other, growing in community together, and serving together. You **are** the church! Every one of you is important to the family of God, every one of you are needed in this fight. Don't fight this battle alone, you'll fail. The church is an army, and the soldiers need to stand together on our knees if we have any hope of surviving the battle.

Battle-Tested Blessing

Paul closes his letter with something of a prayer and a blessing, "*Peace, love with faith, and grace with an undying love.*" These words are what all Christians must take into battle and Paul has talked much about them throughout his letter. **Peace**—Christ himself is our peace (2:14–15) and we are to put on the Gospel of peace as boots. **Love with Faith**—the shield of faith must be surrounded with love. Paul has talked so much about love in Ephesians—Bear with one another in love, speak the truth in love, walk in love, love our spouses, and love Christ. Paul used the word "love" 15 times in 14 verses in this letter. The church is supposed to be the community that shows the world what it should be. We do that through love. And finally, **grace**. Paul urged us to remember God's grace. Grace is a primary theme of Ephesians. Paul wrote that grace is God's gift. Because of God's grace, we are forgiven, redeemed, given new life, salvation and our spiritual gifts. Peace, love with faith, and grace are all the "spiritual blessings" Jesus Christ has blessed us with. With prayer and faithful friends we are ready to stand firm.

How's your prayer life? If you are like most Christians, you are not satisfied with it. I want to share just a few things I've been doing that have really helped my own prayer life. First, I've been keeping a prayer journal. Trust me, I am not a big journaling guy

at all. But, I've been keeping several lists in my journal of people and things to pray for. I even write out long prayers to God. It has been very helpful. Second, I use my car time for prayer time. The challenge for me is to turn off the radio, especially KNBR! When I do, I am often rewarded with a good conversation with God. Third, I've been reading two really helpful books on prayer that have greatly encouraged me—*A Praying Life*, by Paul Miller, and *Praying Circles Around Your Children*, by Mark Batterson. My all-time favorite book on prayer is called *Prayer—Does It Make Any Difference*, by Philip Yancey, I highly recommend that too. One more thing. Be on guard against legalism and guilt in this area. The freedom Paul gives us is that prayer is a lifestyle of connecting with God, not something mechanical.

How's your friendships? The Peninsula can be a lonely place, especially if you don't have any relatives around. Next week most of our ministries kick off. Are you signed up? Are you planning to attend any of them? I hope so. Whether it's WBS, Men's Frat, 20's, Higher Power, or a community group, jump in and open up your life to others. God blesses that. God wants that for you. Do you have faithful friends you can turn to for encouragement and help? So often we are afraid of imposing on others or bothering them. I get upset when my friends don't call me or invite me somewhere because they think I'm too busy. Others of us are guarded, and we don't let people into our lives. Paul's life and ministry remind us to open our lives to friends in the Body of Christ and share what God is doing in and through us. Maybe you already have plenty of friends but you have not been intentional with them. Get them together. Share your life with them. Pray for each other and do ministry together.

If we are going to stand firm in the battle against the devil and his forces, we need to develop a greater dependence on God in prayer and a closer walk with faithful friends.

I want to end with a prayer from St. Patrick:

As I arise today,
may the strength of God pilot me,
the power of God uphold me,
the wisdom of God guide me.
May the eye of God look before me,
the ear of God hear me,
the word of God speak for me.
May the hand of God protect me,
the way of God lie before me,
the shield of God defend me,
the host of God save me.
May Christ shield me today.

Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit,
Christ when I stand,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
Amen.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail,
please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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