

Sermon Title: Praying Always
Scripture Text: Eph. 6:18-24 (Ephesians #48)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 8-21-22

Come with me now to Ephesians Chapter 6. Today is farewell to Ephesians for us—for *this* series. It is impossible to study this book without being enriched in your spiritual growth. I chose Ephesians to follow our study in the Sermon on the Mount because it is Jesus proclaiming the real meaning of the Law, and the whole meaning of the Law is to point us to our Savior (Gal. 3:24), and Ephesians explains as well as anything in the Bible what we have "in Christ" (1:1, 3; 2:6-7, 10, 13, etc.). Remember: That phrase "in Christ" is the theme of this book—it occurs there about 27 times. It is *such* an enriching book—three chapters of *fantastic* doctrine of salvation, three chapters of *fantastic application* of the doctrine of salvation. The final stroke of the Apostle Paul's brush as he finishes his picture of the Christian life paints prayer into the picture.

As we have entered this last section, we know that it is themed with warfare. Chapter 6, Verses 10 through 12 introduces the spiritual war into which you were thrust when you identified with Jesus Christ (cf. Rev. 12:17). And then Verses 13 through 17 in Chapter 6, that we saw last time, describes the "armor" that God gives to us for this battle. Verses 18 through 20 are grammatically connected to the passage concerning the armor, but there really is a different emphasis there.

If you are looking at the New American Standard Bible that we usually use (NASB-1995, unless otherwise noted), you will notice that they begin a new sentence at Verse 18, that you should "pray at all times"; but actually, it's a continuation of a sentence; there's a comma in the Greek, and it continues on with "praying always" (NKJV). The point is: We are to *wear* the "armor" while we are "praying." We are to "pray" while we wear the "armor." We are to wear the "armor" and "pray" as we live in the midst of a spiritual war that is living as a Christian in a "world" that "hates" Christians and Christ (Jn. 15:18-19).

So, Verses 13 through 17, concerning the "armor"—that is the Word of *God* directed to *man* concerning the battle and what He has given us for the battle. When we get to Verse 18, we begin discussing the word of *man* directed to *God* in the *midst* of the battle.

Any time that anybody writes or speaks on prayer, it *always* hits humble, prayerful people right between the eyes. Most things written or preached on prayer make people feel discouraged about not praying enough or somehow not doing it right—and *I hate that!*

I didn't come this morning to *discourage* you; I came to encourage you that, *however you pray*—praise God! Do it more if you want—that's good! Whatever your habits are—great! If God prompts you to do more, that's fine—but *God loves it when you pray* (Prov. 15:8b). *Enjoy* the privilege, be encouraged, and keep doing it!

Before we dive into our text, I mentioned this is grammatically connected to what we just read about the "armor of God"; it continues the same sentence. But I want you to understand: Prayer is *not* one of the pieces of armor. Paul is *not* saying that prayer is a weapon. He *does not* identify it as one of the pieces of armor; those were all "helmet," "sword," "shield," "belt," etc. No such thing with prayer. Now, it is mentioned in the *context* of spiritual war—it's in the *context* of the battle that is before us—but it is *not* part of the armor, and it is *not* a weapon.

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With the pieces of the armor, he said, "Put *this* on, and put *that* on, and add *this* to it." He doesn't say, "And put on prayer." You don't *aim* prayer at the enemy and pull some imaginary spiritual trigger to launch an attack; that is not what this is saying.

I point that out to combat a common misrepresentation. In some corners, it is very popular to say something like: "Prayer is the greatest weapon of our warfare." Now, what is the problem with saying that? Well, it isn't accurate, because it isn't what the text on the armor says; *and* it almost always goes hand-in-hand with bad doctrine.

People who say things like, "Prayer is your greatest weapon" are usually superstitious and mystical about prayer, rather than being biblical. They believe things like: "Well, if I haven't prayed enough today, maybe I'm putting myself at risk for a demonic attack." Well, that is a subtle form of trusting in your works: *I* didn't pray enough—therefore, I'm not strong enough.

Your spiritual safety and wellbeing is *not* dependent upon your prayers as the object. If you pray that way, then you have shifted your trust from God to your prayers. You are not saved by your prayers, you are "saved" by the "grace" of "God"—Ephesians 2:8-9. You are not *kept* by your prayers—you are "kept by the power of God" (1 Pet. 1:5).

Praying is very important (Matt. 26:41; Lk. 18:1); and you should be praying, as our text says: "always," everywhere, and in every circumstance (1 Thess. 5:17). But to say that prayer is your greatest weapon would be like putting a soldier through Boot Camp and then saying, "Now, here's your walkie-talkie—and this is your greatest weapon." Very important to be able to communicate with Headquarters, *but* no battle has ever been won by bonking the enemy over the head with a radio! Think about the analogy. It is *not* a weapon! It's a *tool*, but it's not one of the weapons.

You certainly don't *call* the enemy on your radio, and yet that is an anti-biblical and *terribly* foolish practice—I would call it a *dangerous* practice. Some writers and speakers tell Christians that in their prayers, they should *command* Satan to be bound, or they should command demons to go away. *Absolutely not!*

If you look over to the little Book of Jude, there's this interesting little reference in Verses 9 and 10—"But Michael the archangel"—he's sort of a Commander-in-Chief of the angelic forces of God (Dan. 10:13,, 21; 12:1; Rev. 12:7)—"when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses..."—do you know where that is described in the Old Testament? *It's not*. It is *only* described here. Here's a *detail* of an event from the Old Testament that was written 1,400 years later. The Bible is really cool about putting those things in. But we *don't know* what this argument, what this dispute, was about.

"He disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses," but Michael "did not dare pronounce against him"—who? The devil—"a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!' But these men"—that refers to some false teachers in the latter part of the First Century—"these men revile the things which they do not understand"—they were speaking to the devil, speaking to demons; and even *Michael* wouldn't do that, so who do we think we are?

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Now let's look at this wonderful passage. I've titled it very cleverly, straight from the text: "Praying Always." And here is how we're going to look at this: Verses 18-24—we're going to finish the rest of the book: The Four "Alls" Of Prayer, The Apostolic Example Of Prayer, and then Christian Greetings.

The Four "Alls" of Prayer. When you see a word repeated four times in one sentence, it's a theme, alright? "All" is the theme of this verse: Ephesians 6:18—"praying at *all* times with *all* prayer and petition in the Spirit, and to this end, being on the alert with *all* perseverance and petition for *all* the saints" (LSB).

Let's look at those four "alls." And I realized—not while I was putting this together, not while I was writing it, not when I printed it, not when I went over it, not when I edited it, not when I went over it again this morning; but *while I was preaching in the first service*, I thought, "You don't have the 'alls' in the order that they occur!" Alright, work with me here—we can do this!

"All" Number 1 is: The *Variety* of Prayer. It's the second occurrence of the word "all"—"all prayer and petition." Two words that very much overlap:

"Prayer" is the most general word for prayer. It describes any communication directed toward God; it can be a prayer for help, a prayer of confession, a prayer of profession of faith, a prayer of adoration of God, a prayer of thanksgiving, a prayer of intercession for somebody else. It's the most generic word for prayer.

The word "petition" is a *specific* prayer for a specific need or situation. It comes from a root word that means "to want" or "to beg" or "to need" or "request"—so it's not, "God bless the whole wide world." Now, I am *all for* God blessing the whole wide world; He *did*—He "so loved the" whole wide "world that He gave His only begotten Son" (Jn. 3:16). But God also delights to hear, *in detail*, the desires of your "heart," the concern of your "heart" (Ps. 62:8); He loves to hear you *articulate* your concern for the need of others.

So, "all" kinds of "prayer"—all *varieties* of prayer.

"All" Number 2—which is really "All Number 1"; I don't know *why* I did that; now it really bugs me—is: The When and Where of Prayer: "at all times in the Spirit."

"All times" is pretty easy to understand. It's the same word for "time" that we saw back in Chapter 5, Verse 16, where it's not talking about "time" as in the *chronology* of one second after another; it's talking about "time" in the sense of: It's the "time" for this to happen—an opportune time, a circumstance, a need, or an open door for some kind of ministry.

The concept of "praying at all times" is also reinforced by that word "praying." It's a present participle; that means it's a constant, ongoing action. As you wear the armor, as you're in the battle, you should always be praying—in every circumstance of this, and in light of every occasion.

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Prayer is *not* just for catastrophes, it's not just for when you are specifically under attack; it's not just for rejoicing; it isn't just for mealtimes; it's not just on special days; it's not just that prayer that you have written down and memorized. It's for *all* the time—whether you feel like it or not, it is *always* right to be praying.

And then there's an interesting "where" of prayer. It's not "where" in a Zip Code kind of place. The literal meaning is: "in the sphere of the Spirit"—"Praying at all times *in the Spirit*." True prayer is not just words passing over your lips; it needs to come from *you*—the *real* you: your spirit, your soul, your heart; the inner you, if you will—and it needs to be under the control of the Holy Spirit, whom you have in you, as we have learned in Ephesians Chapter 5; and you can "be *filled* with the Holy Spirit" (vs. 18). Your prayer needs to be empowered by the Holy Spirit as much as *any* part of the Christian life does (cf. Zech. 12:10).

Look at Romans Chapter 8, Verses 26 and 27. Do you want to talk about what "praying in the Spirit" means? Well, you are in the Spirit, the Spirit is in you, and you are praying. 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; 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."

Understand: The Spirit is with you—He is in you, He lives in you, He indwells you (Rom. 8:9; 1 Jn. 4:13). You can be full of the Spirit, under His control; that's how it should be as you pray.

If you look at Jude, Verse 20. And by the way: We are going to do a little series on Jude this fall, so buckle your seatbelts and you can read the book 20 times before we get there. I promise, you will still have questions. Great little book! In Jude, Verse 20, he says: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit..." That means that praying is *much more* than an act of the flesh.

And here again, we need to address some false teaching on what "praying in the Holy Spirit" means. There are some people who interpret this to mean that there are *two* kinds of prayer: that which you verbalize in your own language, and that which you pray in "unknown tongues"—or, as some have invented the word: your own "prayer language." That is a doctrine that has arisen from the spiritual experiences of some people, but it *does not* come from the Bible!

There is *nothing whatsoever* in the context of *any* of these passages—Ephesians 6, where we are; Romans 8, that we just quoted; or even Jude—*none* of those passages are dealing with spiritual gifts! And "speaking in tongues" is one of the spiritual gifts—it is one of the *miraculous* spiritual gifts, which are "the signs of a true apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. 1 Cor. 13:8). The idea of a "prayer language" unique to one person, and that person does not know what the language is—that is *completely foreign* to the text of the New Testament. You can go back and scrub through our teaching in First Corinthians; as you get to Chapters 12 and 14, you will see much more about that (compare 1 Cor. 14:4a with 1 Cor. 12:7 and 1 Pet. 4:10).

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But what this *does* mean is that prayer is a *spiritual* exercise. It is to come from the *real you* of the spirit. You'll notice in Romans 8, it mentions your "heart" and it mentions the Holy Spirit—there's such an intertwining there. The motivation, the prompting, the desire, and the energy of prayer are part of your life in the Spirit (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). It's part of the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit to you. And it goes without saying: *Your* spirit should be under the control of the *Holy* Spirit.

So, "praying in the Spirit" is a natural, expected evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. It's praying in harmony with the desires of the Spirit of God, as you ascertain them. And you ascertain them from what He has revealed to you in His Word. It's praying with the right motive: It's the desire to glorify God. It's the desire to allow His Spirit to work through you. It's the desire to see His Spirit work in the lives of others that you may pray for.

Look again:

The Number 1 "all" is The Variety of Prayer—"all prayer and petition": everything general, everything specific.

Number 2: The When and Where—"at all times in the Spirit."

Number 3: The Manner of Prayer is: "with all perseverance"—"being on the alert with all perseverance..." (LSB).

"Being on the alert" there means "to keep awake"—not be falling asleep—"be attentive, be vigilant"; it implies alertness as the opposite of laziness or lethargy or listlessness.

"All perseverance" is an interesting phrase; it is actually an intensified form of a word that means "strong." It means "having tenacity," hanging in there (Lk. 18:1). It implies "giving ongoing attention to something." And it is *antithetical* to our culture. We live in a world of "tweets" and "sound-bites"; and God says: "*Persist* in prayer." We tend to think, if we don't have something tangible in our hands to show for the time that we have spent—it's not worth our time. Well, it's pretty hard to show something tangible in your hands most of the time when you pray.

But *this* is what God expects of us. If you look at the first believers in Christ, anywhere in Jerusalem: In Acts Chapter 1, Verse 14, Jesus had *just* ascended, and they "with one mind were *continually devoting themselves to prayer*." Skip down to Chapter 2, Verse 42—the end of the second chapter of Acts, describing the life in the First Church of Anywhere, in Jerusalem: "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread *and to prayer*."

Prayer is a *great* gift from God, and He says: "I want to hear *all* of your prayers of *all kinds*! I want to hear them *all the time*! I want to hear them when it's you *groaning* in your spirit. I want to hear it when it's you *shouting* from the housetops in your exultation." He *always* hears! He *always* loves it. *And*—He *always* answers! The answer is either "Yes," "No," "Not now," or, "I have an even better idea, or a better time."

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We know the phrases that we typically call "The Lord's Prayer," and we usually say it and remember it in the version that is recorded in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Chapter 6; and it is there, and that's right, and that's good. But there is a *parallel* passage in Luke Chapter 11, where Jesus gives an almost identical sample prayer; and in the *following* verses—Luke 11:5-13—in talking about prayer, He tells the story of the fellow who *persists* in asking his friend over and over and over, until he gets what he needs. We are to *continue* in prayer, *persevere* in prayer (cf. Col. 4:2).

But now, keep your perspective balanced, where it needs to be. When you pray, you need to understand: It is *not* to be primarily seeking what *you want*. And you say, "Well, wait a minute! That's not so bad. I *want* my wife to be *well*! I *want* this persecution to stop! I *want* this war to end!" Okay—that's fine. But you need to be seeking what *God* wants; and prayer is part of the process of aligning *my* heart, *my* desires, with the will of God (1 Jn. 5:14).

Because you understand: When I pray, I *know* what I want in almost every situation—but I don't know *everything*; I don't *understand* everything; my knowledge is *woefully* limited; my insight is *definitely* not what God's is (Ps. 147:5; Is. 55:8-9); and so I want to pray persistently, and say, "Lord, if I'm not understanding this, teach me; show me. Help me understand Your Word, and move as You will."

I have a favorite book on prayer. I think that most books on prayer make a mistake. They are about prayer, first and foremost; and the slight mistake they make is: They need to be about *God*. Because just the process of praying—oh, we can say *tons* of things about that; and that's usually where the guilt manipulation comes in. But when it is prayer *to God*, He is the One who is going to do anything about it! So my favorite book on prayer is: "The God Who Hears." I have recommended it to many of you; you can still find it—it's in print.

Let me quote to you from it. It's from Dr. Bingham Hunter. He says: "Two things these days thwart persistent prayer. The first is our time orientation. Persisting in prayer is not popular anymore, because there isn't time to do it. Who can wait for God to get around to responding? If you want to trust God for more than instant answers, you may have to change the way you live! It's hard—*very hard*—for Christians who are used to instant pudding, instant credit, and instant replay, to wait for anything—even God.

"The second complicating factor is: misunderstanding. Persistence and importunity"—oh, *great* word; I wish we still used it—"Persistence and importunity are *not* the methods we adopt to convince a reluctant God that we are serious! We persist in prayer primarily as an expression of our *complete* dependency on God for *all* aspects of our existence. Persistence and importunity affirm our recognition of the reality that apart from God, we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). Persistence flows from the certainty of our creaturely helplessness, and the logical conviction that God alone can help."

I love that! I pray because of my "creaturely helplessness"! I have never informed God of anything (Rom. 11:34b). He "knows all" (Jn. 16:30; 21:17; 1 Jn. 3:20; cf. Ps. 147:5). He "knows before" I "ask" (Matt. 6:8).

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There's more, and Hunter is right. I want to read one more paragraph: "Persistence is an act of humility, as well as an expression of faith. This attitude is diametrically opposite the popular notion that if we are persistent over a long enough period, God will eventually see the strength of our desire and respond. That is manipulation. It says, 'Look at me. Look at *me!* Look at *me!* Look how persistent I am!'—while humility says, 'I'm looking to You. I'm looking to You! You!' "

So, back to Ephesians Chapter 6, Verse 18.

"All" Number 1: The Variety of Prayer—"all prayer and petition."

"All" Number 2: When and Where—"at all times in the Spirit."

"All" Number 3: The Manner—"with all perseverance."

"All" Number 4: The Indirect Objects—"for all the saints." Look at it again at the end of that verse: "all perseverance and petition for *all the saints*."

"Petition" is the same word that you've already seen earlier in the sentence: those specific requests for specific needs.

"All the saints" means that our priority in praying is to be for the Christians around us (e.g., Jas. 5:16; cf. Gal. 6:10). It isn't selective. Remember, Paul made a *big*, big deal in this book—a *huge* deal—in Chapter 2, about Jews and Gentiles in Christ; and, "There used to be this *giant* 'wall' between you (vs. 14), and now it has been knocked down! Now, 'Pray...for all the saints': Jews, pray for your Gentile brothers and sisters. Gentiles, pray for your Jewish brothers and sisters." Within the family of God, *every* person should call out to the Father on behalf of *any* other member of the family (Ps. 119:63; cf. Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4; Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 Jn. 3:14, 16).

Now, again: Please don't let this make you feel guilty if you have not specifically prayed for every Christian you know, every day this week. But it is *clearly* telling you that you *shouldn't* put boundaries on your prayers. Whenever you are reminded of another Christian, *pray* for him, *pray* for her (e.g., Phil. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:3). If you know a specific need, well, *bring it to God*—He *loves* to hear your petitions (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8). If you *don't* know a specific need, but you *think* of that person—well, *thank God* for that brother or sister, and pray for strength and maturity for them.

Now, some people are more zealous about this, more committed to this; I would even say there is evidence of kind of a giftedness—I might call it the "gift of faith" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:9), that they are better at exercising that faith on behalf of other people. But whatever it is, in over a half-century of ministry, I have seen people that I know of who specifically prayed *for me* nearly every day, as a matter of self-imposed discipline and habit. And I will *never* know the full value of that, but I'm humbled; I am so thankful for it.

If you have that kind of ministry, to *persistently* pray for things (cf. Lk. 2:37)—that's why we publish a weekly prayer guide, to help you be reminded. And you'll notice that some things come into that and they are there for a week and they're gone, and some things come into there and they've been there since we started it because there is still a need, there is still an issue to keep praying about.

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I am thrilled for those that spend many hours intimately with the Father; and if any of that is focused on me—oh, how humbling, how wonderful.

I heard a *great* suggestion this week. The context was, talking to someone who was thinking about leaving a church; and this suggestion was made: "Okay, before you leave, do this." Now, I do not suggest you leave. I hope you are not in the process of leaving. I'm glad you're here. But this suggestion could be applied universally. Here was the suggestion—and if even a few of our Heritage Bible Church family would actually do this, it would make us all the better; here was the plan: Take your church directory...And we have an app on the phone, you can have it on your phone; I happened to pick up the directory after I looked at this. I noticed, in the way that our directory is formatted, there are *three* households on each page. Well, that would make a nice cutoff—okay, how about three at a time. The suggestion is: Pray your way through the directory. Pray for those people there. In some cases, pray that next year, they will put their picture in—that could be a specific request. But pray for that *family*; pray for that man, that woman, that mom, that dad, those kids—just pray for them, lift them up before the Lord.

And it might take you to Page 2, and you'll look at it and you'll say, "Well, Lord, I don't know who that person is." *He* does. I have a good idea: *Pray for them!* And see if you can introduce yourself to them at church! How wonderful that some people say, "You know, I prayed for you this week." I go, "Oh, my goodness. Pray more! *I need it!*"

Pray your way through your church family—even if you don't do the "whole directory" thing, start making a list of people that you interact with, of needs that you've heard about. Take our prayer guide and just start praying through it systematically—*not only* on Wednesday nights, when it's published; *not only* when it comes out each week. Just pray—anytime, anywhere, for any person, in any situation, for any reason. Just pray. God *loves* that!

Those are the Four "Alls" of Prayer.

Now, much faster: We have an Apostolic Example Of Prayer here in Verses 19 and 20. Here's a "for instance" from Paul's life; he's telling you to pray, and then he lets us get this little glimpse into what he would like you to pray for. Verses 19 and 20—"as well as on my behalf"—so, right before that is "with all perseverance and petition for all the saints"; he says, "Well, would you toss me in there, too?"—"as well as on my behalf, that words 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—so that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (LSB).

"Keep praying for me, would you? I need this." He sensed the *incredible*, weighty responsibility of his ministry (cf. Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). Remember, he wrote to the Corinthians, and in Second Corinthians [Chapter 11] he talked about how, "Yeah, I've been beaten up, persecuted, left for dead, thrown in jail, all this stuff...But beyond all of that is the 'daily' care of the 'churches' (vs. 28)." I mean, he had a *big directory* to pray through: Ephesus, Colossae, Philippi, Thessalonica, all the whole region of Galatia—he had a lot.

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As a matter of fact: *He* understood—and we need to understand—that his life and his ministry was *all* the work of God (1 Cor. 3:5-6; 15:10). He is the guy who wrote Philippians 1:21—by the way, he wrote that from the same jail cell that he wrote Ephesians—he said: "For to me, *to live is Christ* and to die is gain" (cf. Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 5:8). "So, would you pray for me?"

And remember: As he wrote this, yes, he *was* in jail—*unjustly* in jail. It appeared that many of his plans were scuttled. He couldn't travel as he wanted to. He was alone a lot of the time. He *yearned* for contact with his friends; some could come and visit but, for the most part, it was very lonely. His future was uncertain. But look what he was concerned about: "Pray that I will have *words* when I open my mouth about the mystery of the Gospel, and that I will speak with boldness."

In Romans 15, he asked for prayer that his service to God would be acceptable, and that he could minister to the Romans in person. He got that one—by getting imprisoned there in Rome (cf. Acts 19:21; 23:11; 25:12; 28:13-14, 30-31). In Second Thessalonians 3, he asked for prayer for the Word of God to spread, and for deliverance from evil people. That's kind of like Ephesians Chapter 6: There's a spiritual warfare going on; let's spread the Gospel, and be spared evil. In Colossians 4, his request was for God to grant him opportunities to preach.

The point is that the prayers that Paul requested for himself were *always* incidental to the furthering of the spread of the Gospel. He did not ask them to pray about his welfare, his medical needs; he didn't ask his supporting churches to dig deeper. The point is: Effective prayer is prayer that is "in the Spirit"—it's what the Spirit wants, it is desiring for what the Spirit wants. And personal gain, personal comfort—those are not the primary motives.

Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't persevere in prayer for unresolved physical problems. "Well, Grandma, I *know* you have that cancer, but I prayed for you four days in a row; God hasn't answered, now just buck up." No, no, no, no. It doesn't mean you don't bring that petition before the Lord—"all prayer" and "all petition" of *all* kinds—but acknowledge that it is *God* who is in control (Jas. 4:15).

I have prayed earnestly, and I *do* pray earnestly for the healing of people; I've done it countless times. Some have been healed, contrary to what doctors said would happen. Some people I have prayed for fervently, and they are with the Lord. In either case, the legitimacy of the prayer is [determined by] whether the focus is on God or man. "Lord, in the midst of this battle, please, give me words to speak 'the mystery of the gospel'; give me 'boldness' to say it, to 'speak the truth in love' (Eph. 4:15)."

When you request prayer—*that's fine!* We love that. But let's think about always phrasing it, thinking about it, calling on the Lord in this way: "Lord, help us to spread the Word of God in the midst of this. Father, I know that Joe and Betty"—sorry if there's any "Joe" or any "Betty" here—"I know that there is a big rift in their relationship. Now, it's not just that we want Joe and Betty to get along—God, *what will glorify You?*" The practice of grace, the practice of forgiveness, the practice of reconciliation.

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We know that there's this situation, and this guy's *job* is at stake! Well, yeah, I would like him to still be employed and take care of his family; but most of all, let's pray that "God" is "glorified" (1 Pet. 4:11).

And notice Paul's perspective on his situation, which was actually pretty lousy. But you see his heart come through: "I am an ambassador in chains." That's kind of an ironic statement. Ambassador? Well, an "ambassador" is a person who is *free*, who represents his government to somebody else (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20). So what's an "ambassador" who is "in chains"? Well, that's irony, "Because I'm representing the Kingdom of God. They can throw *me* in jail, but they can't stop the message of the Kingdom, they can't stop the 'good news' of who Jesus Christ is" (cf. 2 Tim. 2:9). That's why he was so content: He knew that his position in the Lord was secure (2 Tim. 4:18), and so his place in the Lord was exactly where the Lord wanted him.

Now, quickly, as we finish: Standard Christian Greetings. This was very standard for First-Century churches. He is telling them now, this is not just "Love, Paul"; it takes him four verses to say it. Verses 21 through 24—"But that you also may know about all my affairs..." Notice, he said, "Pray for 'boldness,' pray for the 'words' to say. There's a lot of other stuff going on, and Tychicus can tell you when he gets there." "But that you also may know about all my affairs, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make everything known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know our circumstances, and that he may encourage your hearts." And then, a standard biblical greeting: "Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love" (LSB). Very much like the end of Second Corinthians, which we will recite at the end of our service today.

"Tychicus" gets his name dropped here. He was a beloved, valued friend of Paul. If you study carefully the Prison Epistles, the Book of Acts, and everything else that we can put together, we get the idea that Tychicus and Onesimus—who is mentioned in the Book of Philemon—were apparently the ones who carried the letters of Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon from Rome to their destinations.

You see, in that time—about 67 A.D.—FedEx was on strike in Rome, *and* he couldn't even put a stamp on it and send it. His friends carried this. Go ahead and get out your Book of Maps—you know, the 68th book of your Bible, just after Concordance. Look where Rome is, look where Ephesus is, look where Colossae is. *It was a big deal*—hand deliver the letter. They would take it there, they would read it, they would talk about it, they would bring the greetings; and then they would make a copy and leave it there, and take the letter on to the next place. And Ephesians was almost certainly meant to be a circular epistle (cf. Col. 4:16).

But please: Let God challenge you concerning your prayers. If you have declared Jesus is your Lord and Savior, you are at "war" (Rev. 12:17; cf. 1 Pet. 5:8). You didn't *start* it; it has been declared against you by "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4, LSB). God has given you "armor" (cf. 2 Cor. 6:7). You need to wear your armor as you pray; you need to pray as you wear your armor, "praying always."

Sermon Title: Praying Always
Scripture Text: Eph. 6:18-24 (Ephesians #48)

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Let God's Word challenge you about your praying. For example: Psalm 145, Verse 18— "Yahweh is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (LSB). Now, listen: God is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-10; Acts 17:28); it's not saying He gets more *physically* close to you. But what a great metaphor! He is "*near*" me (Phil. 4:5; Jas. 4:8; cf. Ps. 73:28), He is "*with*" me (Matt. 28:20), He *lives in* me (Jn. 14:23). Proverbs 15:8— "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is *His delight*." He *likes* to hear from you!

Now, when I first wrote this, I had 14 more passages to quote to encourage you about "praying always." I'll bet you can find them. I'll bet you can find 15.

The summary is that prayer is one of the means that God uses to give us what *He* wants (cf. Ezek. 36:37). It's not about *me* manipulating *Him* to get what *I* want; it's about *me* calling upon *Him* to humble myself before Him, and *want* what *He wants* (cf. Prov. 11:23).

And prayer is your *personal* communion with God (Heb. 4:16; cf. Is. 30:18). I can pray *for* you, but I can't pray *like* you. Only *you* can do that.

And once you bring something to Him, understand: He *delights* to hear it, and He is going to answer! Maybe "Yes," maybe "No," maybe "Not now," maybe "I have a better idea." And without second-guessing Him, you "trust" Him (Ps. 9:10; 28:7; 37:5; Prov. 3:5-6).

Listen again; I'll close with another paragraph from Bingham Hunter, because some people think about not getting what they want in prayer as some sort of proof that "prayer doesn't work." Not so! Listen to this: "If God is just, why do good people often experience great pain, while many evil persons seem to get away with murder? Consider this: If two people float downriver, and one person's craft is holed by a submerged rock, is the wet, bruised, and bedraggled soul who crawls ashore, having lost all the gear in the boat, better or worse off than the other person who is dashed to pulp on the rocks below the hidden waterfall downstream? If God stops you, through some traumatic discipline, from getting away with a course of action which may eventually destroy you or those you love, *thank Him* for being concerned enough to *stop you!*"

"No" and "I have a better idea" are some of the most *exciting* answers to prayer. Let's be "praying always," including right now:

Father God, please give us more love for one another. Teach us better to pray for one another. Please give us the "words" to speak—to "speak the truth in love," to preach the Gospel. Please give us "boldness" to seize those opportunities when they come. And thank You, Father, for sometimes stopping us, and sometimes for enabling us to do "exceeding abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think, according to Your power that works within us." And thank You, Father, that You actually like to hear from us. That is too marvelous to fully grasp, but we thank You for it, in Jesus' name. Amen.