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Sermon Notes

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## **Praying for All the Saints**

**Scripture: Ephesians 6:18**

**Speaker: Andrew M. Davis**

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**Topics: Prayer, Walk by Faith, Martyrdom, Abiding in Christ, Holy Spirit, Pride**

### **Introduction**

Before I begin my message, I just want to invite any of you that would like to join the elders tomorrow night in prayer for racial reconciliation and for wisdom in our community here in Durham and for the situation in Charlotte and across the nation to join us at 6:30. It's a regularly scheduled elder's meeting, but we would like to invite you to come and pray with us if you'd like to. If this is something that has been pressing on your heart, something that you don't know the answer to, we don't either. But we're going to look to God and say, "Lord, just give us wisdom and help us to minister here in this community ." So, that's 6:30 to 7:30. Then we're going to ask you to leave because we've got work to do. I'm just kidding, but maybe you could just join us. Maybe the Holy Spirit will be poured out on us in an awesome way and that would be incredible. We're going to meet in the Welcome Center where we usually meet and if a large number of you come, we'll transition in here for an hour of prayer. Be praying even if you can't come at 6:30, for us to have wisdom to know how to minister here in Durham, in light of recent events.

I would like to turn our attention now to Ephesian 6, specifically to verse 18. There, Paul urges us to pray in the Spirit as the capstone to his teaching on spiritual warfare. *"Pray in the Spirit in all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."* We're going to look at each of those phrases today. And really, it is remarkable how Paul brings this incredible letter to a close with a really intensive focus on prayer. We're going to look one week at it. Next week, and specifically praying for evangelism and missions as Paul asked for prayer for himself to boldly, clearly share the Gospel. We're going to talk more about that next week.

### *Prayer: An Indicator of Spiritual Strength and Maturity*

But it is amazing, the astonishingly deep theology of the Book of Ephesians, the reasoning, the teaching, the unfolding of deep, Christian doctrine. All of that means nothing if it doesn't result in a deep, consistent, full prayer life with Almighty God. Martin Lloyd Jones put it this way, "The ultimate test of the Christian life is the amount of time that we give to prayer." The amount of time that we give to prayer. The end to which all knowledge and teaching in scripture is meant to bring us, is to know God, to have fellowship with God, to realize our utter dependence on Him, and the power of His might. To realize it intensively, to feel it and to turn it back up to God in prayer, that's the measure of maturity in Christ. All Christians should have a full, deep, personal prayer life for themselves. Every day, begun with a rich time

of worship, of confession of sin and thanksgiving, scriptural meditation, watchful preparation, and the context here for spiritual warfare, mindful of the fact that you yourself are going to be assaulted by the world, the flesh and the devil, and you need to get ready for that. You need to put on the spiritual armor to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. You need to get yourself ready by putting on the full armor of God, each piece put on with prayer. "Then having done everything in preparation that you should stand firm in the day of testing."

But, what verse 18 does for me is, it gets me to branch and to look horizontally and to look at other brothers and sisters in Christ who are going to go through the exact same thing I am today. I should care about that. It shouldn't matter to me that my brothers and sisters throughout the world are going to go through the same kinds of assaults that I am, and I should be praying for them. We should be drawing our hearts together in intercessory prayer.

### *Elijah's Faithfulness in Prayer*

Some time ago, a number of weeks ago, I was meditating on Elijah. I was thinking about James 5:16, which talks about the prayer of elders for a sick person, saying the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up, therefore, pray for each other. Confess your sins to each other. Then it says, "*the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*" We should pray for each other because of powerful and effectual, the King James Version says, prayer, produces an effect. Now, later in this message, I am going to talk about how that has scrambled my brain, my entire Christian life and probably will never get unscrambled. I'm going to talk about how I've gotten past that to still pray and to pray fervently. But there is an amazing power in prayer taught throughout the scriptures. Then he gives us this example of Elijah. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain and it did not rain for 3 1/2 years. Again, he prayed, and the heavens produced the rain and the earth produced its crops. So, that's an example.

Now, in my mind, I was going to the story of Elijah. Now Elijah was an amazing individual. When you say that he was just like us, it's like, huh? But, what he was saying is that Elijah was human, he was just a human being, just a regular human being. You remember the story how he pops up in the account in 1 Kings 17, he pops and confronts wicked King Ahab with these words, "*As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel lives, there will be no rain or dew on the land except by my word* [going forward.]" Then he disappears. And the Lord commanded him to go to the brook, Caroth, where said, "*I have commanded the ravens to feed you.*" It's a fascinating account, and I remember meditating on that. And so in the morning, the ravens would bring him food. Then in the evening, the ravens would bring him food.

Then it hit me, this question came to me, "What did he do for the rest of the day?" There certainly wasn't any cell coverage out there at the brook, Hedron. I don't think he brought any books with him. He didn't have anyone to talk to. He did have that raven meal to look forward to, that was going to be good. My guess is that it probably wasn't sumptuous but just enough to keep him going. He had the brook to drink from. "Now what? I've eaten the raven breakfast, drunk a bit from the brook, I'm good there. What now?" I don't think that he wondered what to do at all. He spent his day in prayer with God. He walked with God, like Enoch, like Noah. He walked with God. He had such a deep, rich, full relationship with God that it was delightful to him to spend it in prayer. Now, what James tells us, what we didn't know, is that before he even showed up in the account, he has already fervently prayed that it wouldn't rain. That's

already happened. The account actually doesn't tell us that. James tells us that. We don't have any information about it. James told us that he prayed earnestly, fervently that it would not rain. It's an odd prayer if you think about it. But he did it because that was in the curses, the Mosaic curses, that if the land turns to idolatry which Israel definitely had, one of the covenant curses would be drought. He prayed fervently that it wouldn't rain.

### *God's Power Displayed in Prayer*

Then in the course of time, God commanded Elijah to show himself and to have a contest with the prophets of Baal. You remember how all of that turns out. One of the most dramatic moments of redemptive history, Elijah versus the hundreds of wicked prophets of Baal, and how they cried out to a god that didn't exist. "Oh, Baal, hear us." Remember how there was a contest and they had each set up an altar with sacrifice but they were not to light the fire. The fire would come down from heaven and the god who answers by fire, he is God. But Baal didn't hear, there was no answer, no one was there. The fervent of the prophets of Baal didn't affect anything. It was not powerful at all because there is no Baal. Then it was time for Elijah to show the power of God in answer to prayer. Remember how he has them soak the sacrifice with water, and again, then a third time. It was totally soaked with water down to the trench. The whole thing was drenched. Then he prays a simple prayer. Elijah was a man just like us and he prayed, "Oh, Lord, answer by fire so that, number one, all people may know that You are God, and number two that I have done all of these things at Your command." Now that's the mystery, God's sovereign initiative and Elijah's prayer. And God answered by fire. He sent fire from heaven and it consumed everything there, and the people fell down and said, "The Lord, He is God." But Elijah's praying wasn't done for that day. He got down and prayed that it would rain that day because the Lord had already revealed to him that today was the day that the rain was coming. Elijah was just responding at every moment to God's initiative and then the Lord heard and answered Elijah's prayer. Rained poured down from heaven. This powerful thing was prayer.

### *A Defense Against the Evil Forces*

No, I don't understand how it all works, but I know this, the people of God are under constant assault by the world, the flesh and the devil, including you. Prayer is a mighty, powerful, effective force in defending ourselves against satan's attacks. I also know this, we're called on to mission. We're called on to advance. The two infinite journeys, we're called on to advance internally in personal holiness. We're called on to advance with the Gospel to those who are presently lost or even more to those who have no possibility of hearing the Gospel today, frontier missions. We're called to move out and I say to you, both the internal journey and the external journey will be bitterly opposed every step of the way, by satanic forces. Only by prayer are we going to make even a single step of progress. We must pray.

We're coming to the topic of prayer and spiritual warfare. Look at the context again, you've heard it read, verse 10-13, *"Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power."* If I could just stop say that you do that by prayer. That's how you are strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Draw near to Him in prayer. "Oh, God, give me power and strength to fight the devil today." Verse 11, *"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes for our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. When the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground and after*

*you've done everything, to stand.*" So I've told you those three steps, be strong in the Lord and His mighty power, draw near to Him in prayer to do that. Put on the elements of the full armor of God, each one of them reminding you so some aspect of God's saving work in your soul. Each piece, put on with prayer, as the hymn writer put it. And then when the day of evil comes, at the time of testing, stand. Those are the three steps.

Now, what we're going to do is to reach out, horizontally, to seek to help brothers and sisters do the same thing. We're not alone, we're in an army, a family. We're in a family that is at war. So, verse 18, *"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 saints."* There is a sense of supersaturation in that language, "all, all, all, every." We're going to look at it phrase by phrase.

Samuel Chadwick said, "The one concern of the devil is to keep saints from prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom. But, he trembles when we pray!" In spiritual warfare, prayer works in concert with the previous commands. They work together, the ministry of the word in prayer. I think we should see a strong connection between verses 17 and 18. NIV starts like a new command in verse 18, but it really is just a continuation, "taking up the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God and praying in the Spirit." There's taking up the word, taking up prayer. They harmonize beautifully and powerfully.

## **Pray in the Spirit**

### *The Most Vital Aspect of Prayer*

Last week, we looked at that first step. The issue of praying in the Spirit. This is vital. This is the most vital aspect of our prayer lives. Cold, lifeless prayer is dead, it's worthless, but the Spirit, as we saw last week from Romans 8:26 and 27, is given to help us in our weakness, specifically in prayer. We don't know what to pray for, we don't know how to pray. The Spirit helps us in our weakness. He does that in a variety of ways. Most importantly, by the fact that He Himself is interceding for us as Jesus is at the right hand of God. The Spirit is interceding for you. So you are entering into the prayer ministry of Jesus and the Spirit as you pray in the Spirit. It's already going on. But, the Spirit also teaches us what to pray for.

### *What Is It to Pray "in the Spirit"?*

We said last week that praying in the Spirit is praying for the right things in the right manner. Then I brought you to the book of Revelation. Remember how we followed the phrase, *'in the Spirit'* four times. John was *'in the Spirit'* on Patmos and saw Jesus the mediator, the resurrected, glorified mediator by whom we intercede, through whom we have access into the throne room of God. Keep Jesus in mind as you intercede. 'Praying in the Spirit' means intensely mindful of Jesus' blood, shed for you. To open up access for you into the second vision, Revelation 4, John was in the Spirit and went through a doorway into heaven and saw a throne with someone seated on it, the throne of Almighty God. The God of the universe, the King over all kings, the Lord over all lords. That's Almighty God, He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth. All the people are like grasshoppers, like drops in a bucket, dust on the scales. This is the infinite God. Praying in the Spirit is mindful of the sovereign power of God and the wisdom of God.

Thirdly, in Revelation 17, remember, *'in the Spirit'* John traveled and moved. He saw this woman on a beast and it represented the satanic evil, wicked, world system. This woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, and intoxicated with the lusts of this age, and we can see through spiritual eyes, the danger of the world system that we're in. That's the opposition we're facing and so to pray *'in the Spirit'* is to be very mindful of Babylon, so to speak, and all of the attacks on our soul that are going to come. Finally in Revelation 21, we see the Bride of Christ, glorified, radiant and beautiful. We see how we're going to win in the end, we're going to be glorious. We're going to make it! We're going to make it and all of the elect are going to be saved. They're going to be glorified. They're going to be in Heaven. No one will be lost. It's going to be radiant and beautiful in Heaven. We see that, and we pray toward that end. That was last week.

## **Pray for All the Saints**

### *A Clear Vision for Prayer in the Church*

Now, we're going to extend out to pray for all the saints. We're going to think about intercessory prayer. The Spirit's going to lead us to pray for the saints. Now, again, the word 'saints' does not mean what the Roman Catholic Church meant on September 4th when it canonized Mother Theresa. In preparation for this sermon, I read the rules of canonization, of becoming a saint in the Roman Catholic Church. I got more confused, not less. It's an elaborate process. I don't really know what they mean by 'saint.' I know that in my town, there was St. Anselm's and St. Jeremiah's and all that. I was a Catholic and I went to St. Jeremiah's and then we went to St. Anselm's. So, the saints are especially special people who have done especially special things. They are voted on by the church. They are then seen to be saints, worthy of special veneration. I don't think any of this is true. I don't think that's what the Bible teaches. Saints are believers in Jesus, simply put. Ephesians 1:1, right in the beginning, *"Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus."* Faithful in Christ Jesus are the saints. We see the same thing in Philippians 1. He writes to the saints in Philippi. These are just the set apart ones under God, we're the holy ones, made holy by our faith in Christ. That's what saints are. So, we're to pray for other Christians.

Paul has already given us examples in this book, of prayer for the saints. He prays that. In Ephesians 1:18, he says, *"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints and His incomparably great power for those who believe."* For us who believe, so that's Ephesians 1. Then in Ephesians 3 he says, *"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. And to know that love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* So Paul is praying that all the saints will be *"filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* Paul gives us examples of that.

Paul has also given us, in the book of Ephesians, a vision for the church. A vision for the people of God, for the church. We are to see this, Ephesians 2, a holy temple, this spiritual structure, rising. I love that, that dynamo image, rising to become a temple in which God lives by His Spirit. It's in construction. As we brought in 1 Peter 3, the new, *"living stones"* that are quarried from Satan's dark kingdom. They're put into the walls. It's just rising in every conversion, every elect person who comes to faith in Christ. It just got a little bit bigger, a little more glorious. Awesome! That's what's going on now. That's what the

Gilowe's are going to do. We get to be a part of that too here in Durham and to the ends of the earth. We get to add new people through evangelism and missions to that Church. It's becoming more glorious, not just by evangelism, but also by discipleship, by sanctification. It's becoming more glorious by putting sin to death and growing in holiness. We're more radiant. We need to have a vision for that. Ephesians 4 has a vision more of a body, joined and held together by supporting ligaments. It's growing and building itself up in love. So we have two different images, but it's the same thing. It's the people of God, the Church, getting more and more glorious and more and more perfect in Christ. We need to pray about that. It's what we're getting at here in verse 18. We need to be involved in that in prayer, by prayer.

### *Spiritual Warfare Upon Us All*

So, you have to see first and foremost that our brothers and sisters are under attack. They're under attack. They're under spiritual attack. You know exactly what I'm talking about because it's happening to you too. The same things that are happening to you are happening to everyone else around the world. You should care about that. It should matter to you. It's a universal satanic attack. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, "*Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that you're brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of sufferings.*" The same kinds as you are. You should take the attacks that you're experiencing in your soul and then just normalize them horizontal and say, "Everybody is going through this." 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.*"

What Satan tries to do is that he likes to isolate us, to separate us, so that we're on our own. He can pick us off, one at a time. He likes to isolate us from the Body of Christ. Together, we're terrifyingly powerful to him but isolated, he can pick us off. So, if you are isolated as you face satanic assault you're going to think that you alone are going through these kinds of things. You're going to feel especially dirty, especially weird. Alone, very alone on this struggle. You feel there's no one you can talk to. There's no one who would understand what you're going through. Satan is a master at isolating us. This will tend to increase our guilt at our sin in a very bad way, make us feel that we are unique and really to some degree, unforgivable because there's such a special set of wickedness in our lives. Or, if we're going through afflicting circumstances or trials, it will have the effect of greatly increasing our complaining, our discontent. "No one knows the troubles I see. No one's going through what I'm going through. No one." If I could just share with you brother or sister, others are going through similar things. It might not be exactly like what you're going through, but actually, people are going through these kinds of afflictions.

Praying for others, then, lifts our eyes off of our immediate circumstances, up to Heaven, up to Almighty God. From Heaven, horizontally, pray for this brother, pray for this sister, things are going on. Then little by little, you're less discontent in your own circumstance. You're more powerfully able to fight sin in your life. Help starts coming from looking up and then looking around you to the Body of Christ. Intercessory pray also tends to humble you. It tends to make you realize that it's not just Jesus and me, just us two. You know that Jesus is doing a work that's going to blow your mind! Just think about the words, '*a multitude greater than anyone could count,*' looks like. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of people redeemed by Jesus. I just think that the more you meditate on that, the more humble you'll get. Just think about that. "I'm one of 500 million." There's a lot of people that God has loved. It just tends to humble us. We have to band together.

Therefore, if our brothers and sisters are persecuted, we should care, we should intercede for them. If they're going through natural disasters like hurricanes, floods, or earthquakes, or different things and they have lost their homes, we should care about them. We can care far more in prayer than we can by any other physical means of ministry. There's a limit to how much time, energy and money we have. We have to be wise about how we can help, but in prayer our hearts can become very expansive. We can be grieved about certain situations. We can weep about certain situations. We may never personally touch them, but we can care about them and we can pray. And, if individuals are struggling with sin, it should matter to us, especially in the local church that we are committed to. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:29, talking about all of his sufferings. "Five times I was beaten, 30 lashes minus 1, 3 times beaten with rods." On top of all that, the ship wrecks and all, you almost get the sense that this is the worst of all. "It's the constant pressure I feel of my concern for all the churches. I'm constantly worried about how they are doing spiritually." Then he says this, "Who is weak and I do not feel weak? Who was led into sin and I do not inwardly burn?" That's the horizontal connection, I care about the sins that my brothers and sisters are struggling with. It matters to me if there is sin in our church, horizontally. It should matter to me. So, we're praying in the Spirit for all the saints. We're going to reach out and pray.

### Prayer "Changes Things"

Now, here we come to the mystery of prayer. I touched on it in the beginning. I don't fully understand, it's a mystery. The psychology of prayer, the spirituality of prayer, what it does to me, makes perfect sense. For that reason alone, it's worth doing. It recalibrates my mind. It makes me more heavenly minded. It makes me more loving toward other people. It makes me, makes me, makes me do all of what's true and good and right. How about this slogan, "Prayer changes things." That's where my brain gets scrambled. "Changes from what?" They haven't happened yet. Now, that's my engineering mind. That's why I just think too much. "Pastor, you overthink things! Just pray!" Amen. I'm going to just pray! How does pray change things? Well, I think what that means is, before we prayed, there was this situation. Then we prayed and this situation got much better by biblical patterns. I think that's what it means and I think that's simply true. I have reasoned it out this way, that prayer works this way. It's part of God's sovereign plan. He knew that we were going to pray, He motivates us to pray ahead of time. But, He won't do the 'X' until we pray. He withholds certain blessings from a prayerless people. You won't get that thing. Then when you pray, then it happens.

### The Pilgrims' Prayers

I read the story about the Pilgrims. You know that they landed in Cape Cod. Then they had a really rough winter and then they survived, somehow. They planted some crops and then they had the first Thanksgiving celebration in 1621, that's true. In 1622, they did not plant enough crops to celebrate. They couldn't afford a feast so they didn't have it. In 1623, they planted far more crops but there was a drought for many, many, many weeks. As a matter of fact it was so great that the Native Americans said that they'd never seen anything like it. They had no memory of such drought. Their lives were hanging in the balance. So, the leadership of that community called the people together and said, "We need to fast and pray." They got together, they fasted, they prayed. They prayed all day. By the evening, storm clouds were gathering, literal clouds. The next morning, there came a gentle rain that continued on and off, intermittently, with some sunshine. Then there was more rain for 14 days. Praise God! Do you think

those people thought it was an answer to prayer? I'm thinking they did. Now, can I figure all this out? No, I can't figure it out.

Let me give you an illustration that's been helpful for me, geek that I am. On our refrigerator we have a bunch of things that we like looking at, artwork, prayer cards, photographs. They're held to the refrigerator by magnets. How many of you understand magnetism? One of you raised your hand. I'm going to talk to her afterwards, okay? I'm serious. You get a powerful magnet, you put it about 6 inches above a paperclip and what happens? The paperclip clicks to the magnet, just like that! Can you explain that? Neither can I, but it works. I don't need to figure out the physics of it. They don't know either. I can tell you right now, I've known some of the smartest physicists and they don't know either. They just have fancier names and more descriptions of the phenomenon. But, they don't know either, anymore than they know gravity. It's a mystery, but it works. All I know is I've got this thing and it goes, "Thunk" and there it is!

So, when we go to the Word of God, and we find out what God is doing in the world, then we get on our knees, we pray and keep praying. This blessing comes that wasn't there before, we can say, "prayer changes things," and "God answers prayer." That's the best way I can explain it. If you have another answer, that's fine. It doesn't matter to me, just pray! Pray in the Spirit and pray for the things that God has called you to pray for. It's very difficult to work out God's sovereignty and human responsibility. But, we know that God answers prayer, powerfully.

### **How to Intercede for All the Saints**

#### *Be in the Spirit*

Now, what I want to do for the rest of the time is just step through the phrases to learn something about intercessory prayer. I'm going to try to be as practical as I can in the remaining minutes that we have. We've already talked about being in the Spirit. Let me say again that the first thing you need to do, to intercede for all the saints, is to be sure that you're in the Spirit. What you do is you take a recent spiritual temperature check. "Have I been in the Spirit, leading up into this prayer time? Have I been characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control?" Ask those near you, "Would you say that's characterized me, this afternoon?" If you don't need to ask and you know it's not, then you need to begin by confessing your sins to God and asking for forgiveness. Ask Him to forgive you for the sins that He brings to you mind. Then pray to be filled with the Spirit. Begin by praying to be filled with the Spirit. Don't waste your time praying if you're not in the Spirit. It would be a waste of time, start there.

#### *Pray At All Times*

Secondly, it says, "Pray at all times," effectively. Pray in the Spirit on all occasions. So what this means is, all different opportunities, different times, different occasions in your life for prayer. What I think first and foremost is, just make time for prayer. I believe you need to have a concentrated prayer time doing nothing but praying, everyday. I believe it's best, first thing in the day, early in the morning, like Jesus did. It's not the same as praying while driving. I think that praying while driving is a very good thing as long as you keep your eyes open. That would be a bad form or distracted driving. Calvin is taking driver education. I don't know that they've covered prayer while driving. Thinking not, but you can pray, but



keep your eyes open. Now, I'm not talking about praying without ceasing, we'll get to that in a moment. I'm talking about a concentrated pray time in which you're doing nothing but praying. Like we said last week, remember Praying Hyde, how it took like 10 minutes for him to get his heart quiet and right before God and to know who he's talking to? We can't always do that, but there are really special, important times we should do every day. I'm talking about your quiet time. Then having had your quiet time, you can have other occasions like that through the day. Daniel did them three times a day, three times a day! You can extend those. It doesn't just have to be in the morning. You could do it morning, noon and night. Having had that quiet time, then you're going to want to secondly, "*pray without ceasing*," so on all occasions. So, we have a concentrated prayer time, then you're going to have "*praying without ceasing*" throughout the day. Then, we can have other times, like special prayer meetings. I just invited you to come and pray with the elders tomorrow at 6:30pm. That's a special prayer meeting. You have prayer times with your Home Fellowship. Pray in the Spirit on those times. You have all occasions for that, seize the time.

### *Pray With All Kinds of Prayer*

Next, pray with all kinds of prayer. There are different types of prayers that we pray, "*On all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*" he uses two words, prayers and requests. I'm not going to go into the details of different types of words for prayer, but there are many different types of words for prayer. The point is, there are different patterns for prayer. Use them all! There are quick prayers, there are longer prayers, there are pre-written prayers, planned prayers, impromptu prayers, corporate prayers, small group prayers, retreat prayers, Nehemiah-like prayers, you know where Nehemiah is there, the cupbearer and the king. He makes a 'big ask' of the king. Right before he does, he prays and then answers the king. Those are the quick, arrow-to-heaven type prayers. There are lots of things to pray for. Give time for praying for all the saints. I think you need to organize it, I need to organize it. I have prayed best in intercessory prayer by being organized. I would suggest that you organize your prayer life.

### *Get Organized*

John Piper talked about having no organization in your prayer life is like, "going off on a family vacation with no plan." I love that picture. The whole family gets into the car, they're all there dressed as they were that morning. 'Here we are. Where are we going? Family vacation. Oh, huh. Where are we going? Don't know, we're just driving.' Pulls out of the driveway. Does he go left, does he go right? We don't know. That's just ridiculous. We have to plan and think ahead of time, how it's going to be. The more organized that we are in our prayers, the better, to a point. I'm not saying we can't be immediately moved when we hear something, and pray. I'm not saying that. I'm saying that in general, for intercessory prayer be organized. I would suggest concentric circles. Pray much more frequently for the people much closer to you. If you're married, pray for your spouse everyday and even multiple times a day. Same thing for you kids or your parents. If you're single, there's going to be a tight circle of people you know best.

### *Pray in Concentric Circles*

That brings us to most people's circle. That is, pray for your church family. Pray for the brothers and sisters in Christ who you know best, who are around you, people in your Home Fellowship, people that you interact with, accountability partners, people that you meet together with, pray for them consistently and regularly. What should you pray? I think you can write down requests, you can keep a prayer notebook. If you can remember it, do it, but just pray concentric circles. Pray also for the leadership of the

church. Pray for the elders, the deacons. Pray for key leaders in the church, women ministry leaders, others that you know are playing a key role in the life of the church. Pray for them! Then just pray, concentric circles, for the whole church. Pray for them by name. Go through the church directory. Pray through it once a month. You're praying even for people that you don't know so well, once a month. Then further out in concentric circles, pray for our community, for the Raleigh-Durham area, for what's going in the city. Pray for what's going in this area and then further out to the state, Charlotte, NC and further on. Pray for brothers and sisters in Christ, for the saints in these locations. Pray for other churches here in the Raleigh-Durham area. Pray for folks that are ministering in Charlotte. Pray mindfully. Further out, pray for our nation, what's going on in the US. Again, pray for Christians in Washington, DC. Pray for Christians in Massachusetts. I mention Massachusetts because I found out that there's a new law that the churches in Massachusetts need to have gender neutral bathrooms and have to use gender appropriate pronouns as the individual is defined. This is going to be a terrible thing for freedom of religion if it takes root, not just in Massachusetts, but throughout the nation. Pray about that. Pray for the proper response to these kinds of things. Then to the world. Pray for the world. Next week we're going to talk more about how to pray for missionaries, how to pray for the spread of the Gospel. Pray for special categories. We'll talk more next week about missionaries reaching unreached people groups. Pray for the persecuted church. Pray for brothers and sisters that are being persecuted.

#### *Pray With A Purpose*

I went to Voice of the Martyrs website this morning just to look at it again. There was a brother there, an elder in the Philippines who was killed by Muslims, according to the story. I don't know that much about the story, but they have been trying to get the land that the church owns. The church has been resisting, and now this man was killed. I'm not 100% sure if it was persecution, but it sure looks that way. There are things like this all over the world. There are nations that are making laws that make it difficult to be Christians in that area. Pray for the persecuted church. Pray for Christians that are facing natural disasters. You may ask, "What should we pray for?" Pray with a purpose. What is God doing in the world? He's saving the elect, moving them from justification through sanctification, in to glorification. Pray for those things. Pray for Ephesians 1:15-18, Ephesians 3:14-21, pray as Paul teaches us how to pray. Pray for those things. Pray with a purpose. Look at what it says, "*With this in mind,*" or ESV has, "*To that end, pray.*" Think about what God is doing. "He is saving people that He chose from before the foundation of the world, making them holy and blameless, in Christ."

Walk through the things that you've learned, theologically, praying purposefully. Then pray alertly. It says, "*Pray in the Spirit, on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests, with this in mind, be alert.*" Here, there are two levels. One is just, being aware of what's actually going on for the brothers and sisters that you're praying for. What's happening in their lives? What's happening in the big picture, being aware of what Satan is doing, for we are not unaware of his schemes. You're asking people, "How can I pray for you? What's happening?" Be alert, be aware of how Satan is attacking. Or, imagine, what would a pastor, who regularly preaches, how would it benefit Satan to pull me down into sin. If it would be strategic, you could pray for me that, that would not happen. Not just for me but for the other elders. Godly elders are special focuses of Satanic attack. Pray for their protection, as many of you do. You tell me that you do. Keep praying for them. Be aware and then just, be alert while you're praying.

#### *Pray Alertly*

Have you ever had a really, really, really quiet, quiet time? The kind that's really quiet. It's unbelievable. It's like time just flew by, an hour goes by and you don't even know what happened. I'll tell you what happened. The same thing that James, Peter and John were doing when Jesus was praying. What were they doing? I've had some really sleepy prayer times and it's hard! For me, I get up early and I don't generally have trouble getting up but sometimes I have trouble getting up and being alert. Sometimes you have to get up and pace back and forth, stir yourself up. Awake my soul and well, don't sing because there might still be some sleeping, and it wouldn't be appreciated. You know how in Proverbs it says, "*Greet your neighbor with a loud greeting in the morning, it would be considered a curse.*" So don't do that. "But I'm praying for you!" But be alert. I'm amazed at how often I get sleepy in prayer, almost at any time of day. I actually think it's a satanic attack for me. I want to be alert while I'm praying. Be vigilant. Be aware of what's happening. Let's be alert of what's happening in each other's lives. The church covenant says, "We will watch over one another in brotherly love." The elders have to do that. We have to be alert. But, you be alert in each other's lives. "What's happening with you, I've not seen you recently. Are you doing OK? How can I pray for you?"

### *The Perseverance We Need*

Then, pray with perseverance. It says, "*With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*" It is so easy to want to just give up in prayer. Jesus told of the prayer of the persistent widow, that we should always pray and never give up, Luke 18:1. We tend to give up.

George Mueller is one of the greatest examples of persistent prayer that you'll ever find. Listen to what he says about persistence in prayer. "We must continually, continue to wait patiently on God until the blessing we seek is granted for we observe that nothing is said in the text, 'Ask and it will be given to you,' about the time and circumstances of when it will be given. There is a positive promise, 'Ask and it will be given to you,' but nothing as to time. Someone may ask, "Is it necessary that I should bring a matter before God, 2, 3, 5, or even 20 times? Isn't it enough for me to tell Him just once? We might as well say that there's no need to tell Him just once, for He already knew before you asked." Very sharp answer. There wasn't even a need to tell Him just once if there's no need for you to tell Him 20 times. Tell Him 20 times! As a matter of fact, keep on praying until you have the answer. That's what He is saying. He wants us to prove that we have confidence in Him, and that we take our place as creatures under the Creator. Sometimes He makes us wait just because He's the King, and it would be bad for our pride if He instantly granted everything we requested. We would become so arrogant. We have to wait because it humbles us. Mueller says this, "I am now, in 1864, waiting upon God for certain blessings for which I have daily besought Him for 19 years and 6 months, without 1 day's intermission. Nineteen years and six months, still the full answer is not given concerning the conversion of certain individuals. In the meantime, I have received many thousands of answers to prayer. I have also prayed daily without intermission for the conversion of other individuals, for about 10 years, for others about 6 or 7 years, for others 3 or 4, for others about 2 years, for others 18 months and the answers are still not granted. Yet, I am daily continuing in prayer and expecting the answer. Be encouraged, dear Christian, with fresh earnestness to give yourself to prayer, if you can only be sure that the things that you ask for are according to the will of God."

That's just advice from Ephesians 6:18 on intercessory prayer. Next week I'm going to talk more about praying for the spread of the Gospel. It's been my passionate desire to see this church, far more

evangelistically fruitful than we are and I think that prayer is the key. So, next week we're going to talk about that.

### **Gospel Call**

It would be wrong for me though to end without making a direct appeal to lost people to come to faith in Christ. Honestly, you cannot pray in Jesus' name as a non-Christian. The first and most important prayer that you should pray is the prayer of that broken-hearted tax collector who stood a distance and wouldn't lift up his eyes but just beat his breast and said, "*Be merciful to me, Oh, God, this sinner.*" So, if you are lost, you're on the outside and you're looking in, I urge you to call on the name of the Lord Jesus. I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon that it's because of His shed blood that sinners like us can come into the presence of God and pray. All you have to do is say, "Lord Jesus, save me," and your sins will be forgiven. You don't have to do any good works. Good works will follow, certainly. But just by simple faith in Christ, all your sins will be forgiven. Close with me in prayer.

### **Prayer**

Father, thank you for the time we've had to look at Ephesians and its instructions on prayer. Teach us to pray. Lord, we're not good at it and we need to grow. Help us to be a praying people. Lord, I pray specifically for tomorrow at 6:30. Would you call out some people from this church to join with the elders in praying about racial ministry in this city, racial reconciliation, and the joy of seeing the Gospel, victorious in this very sad and dark time. Lord, I pray that You call up prayer warriors to do that. Lord, I pray that you would make our church more fruitful and passionate in prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen.