

Part 2: Why We Pray?

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Last week we began a series titled "Some Assembly Required." The aim of this series to introduce us to a number of things. Primarily, it shows us many of the activities which make up the Christian life. It answers the question of, "If grace has so captured the heart of a person by faith in Jesus, how then should we live?"

But secondly, and of distinct importance to us this Lord's Day, is to show how the church, this weekly assembly of believers, is meant to be a place where we together are practice and encourage one another in this lifestyle so that we might be refreshed and so filled to pursue this kind of Christian life not only here at church, but throughout the rest of the week.

We find ourselves today in the conclusion of Paul's letter to the church, the assembly, in Ephesus a town in what is now modern day Turkey. The thrust so far in Paul's letter has been two fold. First, to those who understand their brokenness and their sin Paul tells that church that we have been won back to God by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

We see this affirmation of salvation to all who would respond to it in **Ephesians 2:4-10**.

We are saved apart from works by grace in Jesus Christ, so that by Jesus' grace we might do good works for Jesus Christ.

What are these good works? This is Paul's second goal, to show that people who are radically reconciled to God by the cross are also radically reconciled to each other through redemption. We see this in **Ephesians 2:17-22**.

In the radical nature of atonement, God is creating a community of the redeemed who are joined together as a temple, a dwelling place for God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Having so stressed the gospels effect to save souls and to create the church, Paul concludes his letter with one simple exhortation: **Ephesians 6:10**.

Be strong in the Lord. Though we have been reconciled to God through Jesus, though we have been one to each other by grace, we have need for strength. There will be trial, there will be seasons of weakness so Paul wants the church to be strong in the midst of it.

And he launches into the beautiful good news of what most of learned in Vacation Bible School, **Ephesians 10:11-17**.

Here is the armor of God. Here are wonderful truths of ways in which God has called us to not sit on the sidelines but to call us into battle. Battle against what? The forces of Satan himself. Now I want to preface this. If we are not careful we can become arrogantly optimistic in reading a text like this.

I remember a Tom Cruise movie that came out in the early 2000s. Tom Cruise played a samurai. But at the end of the film, a bad guy shows up with a Gatling gun and wrecks all the samurais. Why? Because he literally brought the biggest gun in the world to a knife fight.

We might think that because we have these wonderful gifts that God has given to us in our salvation that this battle is going to be a breeze—that following Jesus will always be easy battlefield victories, with no need for encouragement, endurance, or difficulty.

But what happens when it feels like you're the one with a sword and the Devil's got the gun? What happens when it feels like all the power you have in your weapons and armor is insufficient against the pain, the difficulty, the sorrow and the hardship you are in? What happens when you look around at a bloody battlefield and it seems that you're the only one standing?

Here Paul gives us what is of equal importance, but of enduring value in these moments as he concludes his call to stand firm. We pick this up in **Ephesians 6:18-20**.

How are we to endure? We are to be a people dedicated to prayer. I read this week one pastor who said that, "It is not the weapons which make the warrior but the heart." And what is it in this passage which shapes the heart of the one who holds the weapons of grace? Prayer.

Today we are going to answer the question "Why We Pray?" I would hope that you prayed at some point during the week. There are at least five distinct prayers we offer together on Sunday morning. But why? Why is it that the Christian people are to be people of prayer and the Christian church is to be a place of prayer?

We are going to look at this passage in detail today and we are going to note four reasons. First, we pray because **We have the Spirit at all times**, second we pray because **We have access to all kinds of prayer**, third, **We have need for all kinds of perseverance**, and lastly **We have relationships with all kinds of saints**.

We see our first reason for prayer today in the first part of **Ephesians 6:18**.

We pray because **We have the Spirit at all times**.

Now there is an assumption we can't simply assume in this text. What is that assumption? That all of us are part of the "we" who have the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells us who "we" are in **Ephesians 1:13-14**.

So who gets the promise of the Holy Spirit? Not those who hear the gospel, but those who as we saw last week, hear and believe the gospel are given the promise of the Holy Spirit as a seal and guarantee. Seal and guarantee of what? That one day we will be finally, fully, and unashamedly in the presence of God.

The Holy Spirit is God with us reminding us of the fullness of our redemption. While we are not yet in glory in the physical presence of the whole Triune God, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in the believer by faith. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit reminds us that

while we might not be with God as we live life in this world, that God is with us as we await the world yet to come.

What great hope there is for us who at times feel so wearily alone in life? Prayer reminds us that we are not alone. That though we are praying to God the Father who has always dwelt in heaven, and to Jesus the Son who has ascended to the right hand of God the Father, we do not merely pray to a God who is distant. But we pray because God is near to us, dwelling in us as the Holy Spirit at all times.

There is no time in which you might find yourself where the Holy Spirit does not avail itself to you to cry out to God. We can always find places where our cell phones don't work, we can find corners of our houses where no matter how hard we yell our kids can't hear our requests, we can find internet dead zones, but for the believer we can never find ourselves in a time or in a season where God is not with us in the Holy Spirit.

What does this constantly abiding Holy Spirit desire to stir us to do? Many things, but among them is prayer. Look at **Romans 8:26-27**.

Here's the beautiful thing about the Holy Spirit. It lives in you, and it is also God. So it knows the mind of the Godhead because it is a member of the Godhead, but it also knows your broken head better than you do. Which means that when Christians pray, we pray in the Spirit which helps us see our needs and to conform them to the purpose and pleasure of the Father.

When we pray, we pray to God, with the help of God, for the grace of God, reminded of the promise of God.

Just to clarify, Paul isn't saying that some intense holy sect of Christians pray in the Spirit, and some Christians just pray. He's not giving us a legalistic standard of zeal. It's not that if you pray hard enough, long enough, big enough then you've crossed the line and you're praying in the Spirit and now you have special power. To pray as a Christian is to pray immediately in the Spirit. That's the gift and the seal of God's promise to you. This privilege is the privilege of all who know Jesus through faith. Just as conversion stirred the disciples to gather last week, our conversion also stirs us to pray through the Holy Spirit.

If you are in here today and you are unsure of where you stand in relationship to Jesus, and yet you find yourself vocalizing and wrestling to and with God about the circumstances in your life, I want to tell you that the Holy Spirit might very well be working on you. He is awakening your heart and calling you to come further into full faith and submission to Jesus Christ.

Any Christian knows that there are some prayers which God in his wise, good plan doesn't answer. But one thing we know in scripture is that God loves to answer prayers for salvation, he will not turn a deaf ear to those who come to him in faith and say: "God I know I don't have what it takes but I hear Jesus does. I know the wounds I carry, the pride I walk in seems too heavy for me, but I've heard Jesus can bear the punishment of those in my place." If that's you keep leaning into that work, and while you're at it, talk to the person sitting next to you because we want to help you with that.

It is because any believer is filled with the Holy Spirit that we desire to use that gift to pray at all times, in all places to God because we know he hears us, he sees us and he knows us because he lives in us.

But secondly we pray because **We have access to all kinds of prayers.**

Paul says in **Ephesians 6:18**, "with all prayer and supplication."

There's a slight distinction between these two words and that is that the first word *prayer* is a Greek word that is understood as any expression towards God. It is a distinctly religious word. The second word is a word that can be used in a legal sense, like a request one might give to a judge or a plea given in court.

Paul is giving one example of what all prayer might look like. Prayer might at times look different than prayer at other times. Here we see that beauty of a varied prayer life.

When we pray honestly, our prayers multiply. Some of us wrestle to pray because we only pray one way, and that one way is typically riddled with some sort of vague spirituality. If you're like me, don't you sometimes wrestle to be honest with God? It's almost as if we think that if we let God know how it's going in our hearts he might worry that he saved the wrong person.

In Isaiah 7, God goes to Ahaz, King of Judah who is shaking in his boots, wrought with anxiety, and totally beside himself because the Assyrian Empire is bearing down against him. The Lord speaks to him and says, "Ask a sign of the Lord your God, Ahaz. Let it be as deep as the grave or as high as heaven." In other words God says, be honest with me Ahaz, tell me how scared and lonely and messed up your heart is and I'll show you I'm big enough for it.

But Ahaz puts on this religious hypocrisy which spoils many of our own prayer lives. He says, "I will not ask, and I will not put you to the test." This sounds good! It passes the theology test. But God knows what's going on in Ahaz' heart. He knows that Ahaz is so anxious and worried that he is already working out a backroom deal with the nation of Egypt so that they might help him. Our lack of prayerfulness generally doesn't stem from a lack of need, but a misplaced need. We often turn to the world before we turn to the Lord.

But God says, "Get out of here Ahaz, I know what's going on in your heart and I'm going to give you a sign so that you might know I'm God and I'm big enough for this. These big nations you fear, will be destroyed in a couple of years. Stand firm."

One thing the Holy Spirit does is it helps us be honest with God, it shows us our faults and our weaknesses, our burdens and our wounds and in that moment it does two things. One, it reaffirms the Lord's love for those who are saved by Jesus. But secondly, it presses you to take those raw and real thoughts and to bring them to God.

This is where all kinds of prayer begin to pour out of us.

We see all kinds of prayer in the New Testament. Go read through Paul's letters this week and notice what he prays for and how he prays. That's a guy who knew all kinds of prayer and supplication.

When we have the Spirit of God inside of us we can pray at all kinds of times: set aside times, busy times, car times, Sunday times. We can pray in all different ways: prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of gratitude, prayers of confession and repentance, prayers of requests and appeals, prayers of unknown frustrations and things we can't quite put our fingers on.

Now I want you to do some homework this week. I want you to take note of what you pray for, and think about what would happen if God was so moved to answer all of your prayers? When we realize the gift we have of “all-prayer,” we should heartily and honestly think about what we are praying for.

I’ve been most convicted of this in my prayers at dinner and bed time for my kids. Most often I’m only asking that God would do what salt and Benadryl could do on its own. Full and happy kids are great, any parent knows the blessing that would be, but doesn’t God desire us to want more for our kids and shouldn’t that shape our prayer life?

A life of “all-prayer” should cause our prayers to get at what God wants. Are we thinking about our prayers and praying not as if they are merely transitions, but that God might actually want to answer them.

What might this look like? How should we pray? It’s in the concluding part of our passage today that Paul begins to answer that question.

Namely, we should be praying because **We have all kinds of need for perseverance**. Look at **Ephesians 6:18b**.

We pray because God is sovereign and this world is sinful and we need endurance.

Prayer is first and foremost an admission of God's sovereignty, we are praying to God because we admit that he alone is the one who knows all things and is mighty in all power. In this way your prayer life reveals what you think about God.

We need to have our theology right because remember what Paul said in **Ephesians 6:12**.

Life is very hard. We wage war not only against stubbed toes and strained relationships. But the enemy the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. We don't wage war on the devil out of arrogance, we wage war on the devil in the power of God's grace because we are daily assaulted by him.

And there will be times in your life where God wants to so humble you, that you realize all you have left is prayer. In those moments what you need is perseverant prayer. There are times where prayer is joyful and easy, and there are times where prayer is pressed and painful but in those moments we see the goodness of God to meet our needs.

Following Jesus is very hard and without the help of prayer we have neglected ourselves one of the best means God has for our very own endurance. Stay alert, says Paul.

There's this beautiful scene in Revelation where Jesus is presented as the only person worthy of opening the scroll which will begin the final movement of God's redemptive program. And in that moment we read this: **Revelation 5:8**.

In heaven, stored up to be answered by the victorious Lion-Lamb Jesus Christ, are the prayers of the saints. All of our prayers for perseverance will one day be answered finally and fully in the coming

kingdom of Jesus Christ and this reality causes us to pray unceasingly and with much perseverance because we know our God desires to comfort us in our prayers.

What you will notice is that John didn't say the bowl held the words of the prayers. But simply the prayers. This is important because we ought not to think that God loves us and delivers us based of the bountiful words of our prayers, but instead God is concerned with and eagerly keeping the instances of your prayers. If someone were to at the end of the year present to you a bowl full of all of your individual of prayers, and dumped it out before you, would you be pleased in their amount? Or would you shamefully say: "That's it? That's all the times I realized I needed the Lord's help?"

We all need help in growing in our prayers. In fact it's Jesus' disciples who saw Jesus praying and said, "Hey Jesus, teach us how to pray like that." So for those in here who want help growing in perseverant prayer we have three hopes I want to touch on quickly.

First, ***The Lord Teaches Us How to Pray.***

God wants us to pray better. As we will see in Luke, Jesus teaches us how to pray, the Holy Spirit yearns in us to pray, and the Bible gives us lots of samples of what prayers can look like. Take heart that if you are a believer, God has given you the tools to grow your prayer life.

Secondly, ***The Church Reminds Us to Pray***

This is why we pray publicly and often on Sunday mornings, and for different reasons as well. We pray at the beginning to consecrate this time to the Lord, we pray at the end to commission us to service for the week, we pray before the sermon to have ears to hear, we pray after the sermon for a sober response and we have this big prayer in the middle called the pastoral prayer.

All these prayers together are meant to do two things. First to show you what prayer looks like, but secondly to actually call you to participate in those prayers as well. For this I want you to pay specific attention to the Pastoral Prayers. As we have elders and residents lead our service each week they are tasked with considering the needs of our church and spending intentional time seeking the Lord's favor in our need and praising the Lord in our bounty.

For many of us, that might be the longest time we spend in prayer all week, do not waste it. Pray with them. That's what the word "Amen" means, it means "let it be so." It's an utterance of agreement. No one will think it weird of you offer up a little amen to something so as to say, "Yes, Lord I see and need that too!"

Kids, as you sit during this prayer I know it's hard and there are many things that distract. But I want to encourage you try and be still before the Lord during it so that as you grow you are comfortable spending time in prayer with God.

But lastly to help us persevere in prayer ***The Church Requires us to Pray***

This is what leads us into our last point this morning which we will see in **Ephesians 6:18-20**.

Paul says that we should pray in all seasons. But don't we all know that it's easier for us to pray when things are difficult. It is often in our weaknesses that God does the most work for our prayer life and it's often in our ease that we wrestle to momentum to pray.

But here we see how God can stimulate us in our time of ease to prayer and that is by praying for others. This is our final point this morning we pray because **We have relationships with all kinds of saints.**

Paul desires his church not just to pray for themselves, but to pray for others. In fact it's almost as if the perseverant prayer Paul wants the church to practice is prayer for one another!

We have this thing we say in the church and it goes like this: "I'll pray for you." For many of us "I'll pray for you" is the church equivalent of the parenting phrase, "Maybe later." It's sometimes used as a cop-out for any further action.

But what if we did something profound and we actually started praying for each other?

Paul assumes that the church needs this mercy. It is in this mercy that God not only spurs the individual to prayer but also encourages the other who we are praying for with the fruits of prayer. The church should be a place where we encounter enough prayer requests to keep us busy with prayer the rest of the week.

By God's grace we are a church community that is growing in fellowship and hospitality, but may we be a church growing in prayerfulness for each other. This can be applied in this body in two simple ways.

First, ask people how you can pray for them. Start right here after church. This kind of prayerfulness should be expected inside of a community because we know God gives us to the ministry of prayer.

But secondly, when someone asks you that, answer honestly. It's ok to ask for prayer because your life is busy, but try to think about how that busyness is actually affecting your life. Is your Bible reading failing? Ask for that. Are you finding yourself impatient with your roommates, ask for prayer for your anger. Here is a wonderful resource of fellow believers using all-prayer as an appeal to the sovereign King who cares for you, use this tool and be comforted!

As we practice the power of "all-prayer" we find that something incredible inevitably happens—the gospel goes forward. Look at **Ephesians 6:18-20**.

As we commit ourselves to praying for each other, and in asking for prayer, the gospel will go forward.

In 2 Corinthians Paul thanks the church for praying for him in his affliction because as a result he was comforted and other people were able to hear the gospel. Look at what he says, and what we need to be reminded of this morning: **2 Corinthians 1:11**.

We pray because we want many to be blessed with the gospel. Knowing people in the church, gathering together as the church stirs us who are the church to pray for empowerment and to pray in gratitude for all the gospel is doing.

We pray together because we have all the Spirit, at all times, in all our prayers, with all perseverance for all the saints because we want the gospel to go out into all the world.