

Ephesians 6:18–20 | “Prayer & Spiritual Warfare”
Preached on January 11, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 6, verses 18–20 today. *[pause]*

We are almost done with the book of Ephesians, but before we finish, we need to see how Paul concludes his section on the armor of God. *[pauseeee]*

Paul has told us that we need to be strong in the Lord, for there is a spiritual battle raging.

He then told us to put on the armor of God, and explained each piece in our armory.

But at the end of talking about this battle, Paul adds something else that we need in order to fight well and stand: we need prayer. *[pauseeee]*

So we must get ready to fight and to battle with...prayer? *[pause]*

What a counter-intuitive thing, if you view it from an earthly viewpoint!

If you think about it from a mere human perspective, including prayer here is shocking. *[pause]*

Usually in a battle, you think, “I need action, action, action!” Yet Paul is calling us to pray? *[pauseeee]*

Usually a battle is filled with feats of strength, activity, and movement, but to pray, you need to slow down and stop.

You have to pause the hustle and bustle in order to reach out to the Lord. *[pause]*

This goes against our natural tendency to ‘go and do’ in order to accomplish a victory, yet God is calling us to the slow, focused discipline of prayer in spiritual battle. *[pauseeee]*

“Sir George Adam Smith tells how he and his guide were climbing [a mountain] in the Swiss Alps. *[pause]*

It was stormy and...when they reached the summit, they were filled with exhilaration. *[pause]*

Sir George forgot about the fierce winds, leaped up and was nearly blown over the edge to the glacier below! *[pause]*

The guide grabbed hold of him and exclaimed: ‘On your knees, sir. You are safe here only on your knees!’”¹ *[pauseeee]*

In our struggle in the spiritual battle, do we remember that we are safest on our knees? *[pauseeee]*

¹ Original source unknown. Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/prayer.htm>.

Consider this question: when you are faced with temptation, what are your most common thoughts? *[pause]*

Is it, “I just need to do this, and do that, and then this and that,” or is it ever, “I need to pause and pray”? *[pauseeee]*

When someone else is struggling in some great trial, how do you counsel them? *[pause]*

Do you immediately think of all of the action steps they need to take, or do you ever just stop and pray? *[pause]*

Our normal tendency in battle is to gear up and go, but through the battle, we should be pausing and praying more. *[pauseeee]*

I think that we do not see prayer as the answer because we are too self-reliant, and not nearly as God-reliant as we should be. *[pause]*

When we think of a battle, we think of the movies, where the person goes out and uses their skill and might to defeat a bunch of enemies.

So we carry that mentality over to *spiritual* warfare—we think that all I need is my own strength, better strategies, or more knowledge.

And so we approach spiritual battle with an “I got this” mentality. *[pauseeee]*

A teacher once asked a little boy, “Johnny, tell me frankly, do you say your prayers before you eat?” *[pause]*

Johnny replied, “I don’t have to, my mom is a good cook!”² *[pauseeee]*

While that’s a funny little illustration, how many of us are like that?

We don’t think we need to pray because “we got this.” *[pauseeee]*

In battle, people tend to be self-reliant, but prayer pushes you to be God-reliant. *[pause]*

Inherent to prayer is a person saying, “I need the Lord because I’m not enough in myself.” *[pause]*

So while our world’s weapons are human might, human strategies, and human techniques—one of our main weapons is prayer to our God. *[pauseeee]*

As E.M. Bounds put it, “What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer.”³ *[pauseeeee]*

² Original source unknown. Found at: <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustrations/prayer>.

³ E.M. Bounds, found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/prayer.htm>.

Paul is pushing us to see that, yes, you are in a battle, but remember to slow down and rely upon God amidst it because you will tend to revert back to self-sufficient action. *[pauseeee]*

Let's READ the passage to see what Paul says about prayer. *[READ 18–20]*

According to these verses, we see that we are to...

I. Pray in the Spirit at all times.

We all want to know how to do something and how often. *[pause]*

When you get new medicine, you look at the directions in order to see how to take the medicine and how frequently—it's important! *[pause]*

Well thankfully, we aren't in the dark when it comes to the manner and frequency of our prayers, for Paul tells us here what to do. *[pause]*

He first tells us what should be the *frequency* of our prayers, when he says, “praying at all times.” *[pauseeee]*

How often do you pray? *[pause]*

Sadly, I'm sure each of us could confess, “Not enough.”

It definitely doesn't fit the “at all times” standard. *[pauseeee]*

Now obviously, this doesn't mean literally every moment of every day, for you can't pray while asleep, but it does point to the fact that our lives should be characterized by continual prayer. *[pause]*

One commentator put it this way: “Nothing less is suggested than that the life and strife of the saints be one great prayer to God.”⁴ *[pauseeee]*

If you are praying ‘at all times’ then that means that not every prayer is going to look the same. *[pause]*

Sometimes it will look like the traditional time of prayer where you sit down, close your eyes, and pray for a period of time.

But other times, it will look like a quick prayer to God, “Lord, help me.” *[pause]*

Other times, it will be during a conversation with another person, where you say, “Let's pray for this right now.” *[pause]*

⁴ M. Barth quoted in: Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 182.

Sometimes you will pray with eyes wide open as you drive, with eyes closed as you drift off to sleep, or with eyes filled with tears as you cry. *[pauseeee]*

If we are to pray ‘at all times’ then don’t think that because you are not sitting down in a certain chair and setting aside time that you cannot pray. *[pause]*

There are times when I’m even preaching *and* praying because I feel my incapability, and need the Lord’s help. *[pauseeee]*

In every situation, in every opportunity, do not neglect the need for prayer. *[pauseeee]*

When you are on your way to work, do you ever pray, “Lord, help me to be a good, godly worker today.” *[pause]*

When your child is throwing a temper tantrum, do you ever pray, “God, give me wisdom and grace in how to respond to this.” *[pause]*

When you have to have a difficult conversation, do you ever pray, “Heavenly Father, I need words, please give them to me.” *[pauseeee]*

That’s what it looks like to pray ‘at all times’ for it shows someone who is always “on the line” with their Lord.

So we don’t only go to God when it’s easy or convenient, we go to Him *always*. *[pauseeee]*

There will be times when it’s not convenient or when it’s not easy.

You might be weary, you might feel discouraged, you might have some doubts, but that’s not the time to withdraw, it’s the time to draw near. *[pauseeee]*

This “all times” instruction also means that we are not to go to God *only* when we are in a “storm” in life. *[pause]*

Some people do this: they only go to God when it’s REALLY bad, but when everything is OK, then their prayer-life is basically nonexistent.

But we are to go to God all the time, whether life feels smooth or whether it feels like a storm. *[pauseeee]*

Something else that we see in this passage is that we are to pray *different kinds of prayers*. *[pause]*

Paul says to pray, “with all prayer and supplication.” *[pause]*

The word ‘prayer’ used here is a general term for prayer, and so it entails all kinds of prayers like: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and requests. *[pause]*

The term ‘supplications’ is a word often used for specific, urgent requests for a need. *[pause]*

So when you put those two things together, you see that Paul is calling us to pray different kinds of prayer. *[pause]*

It makes sense, too, if we are going to be praying ‘at all times’—those various times are going to call for various prayers. *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes we will need prayer to escape temptation, and sometimes we will need prayer to thank God for delivering us *from* that temptation. *[pause]*

Sometimes we will pray for strength, and sometimes we will praise God for *His* strength. *[pause]*

The various life circumstances, the various battles, the various flaming arrows, and the various people involved call for various kinds of prayer to God. *[pauseeee]*

Does your prayer-life involve different kinds of prayer? *[pause]*

How often do you confess sin? *[pause]*

How often do you thank or praise God? *[pauseeee]*

Something else that we see here is that we should pray, keeping alert with all perseverance. *[pause]*

To ‘keep alert’ is to be watchful and vigilant, like a guard on duty, so a certain ‘watchfulness’ should characterize our prayers. *[pause]*

The implication is that it’s easy to let your guard down, and when that happens, prayer goes by the wayside.

So in order to be a faithful pray-er, you need to be alert. *[pauseeee]*

To be alert is to be aware of the spiritual dangers around you, and so be ready to pray for them.

It’s to be awake to the needs of others, and so lift them up to the throne of grace. *[pause]*

To keep alert leads you to pray according to what’s going on, and according to what’s needed for the moment. *[pauseeeee]*

Imagine you are going through a great hardship, and someone sleeps through the whole thing. *[pause]*

Due to their sleep, they don’t know what you are going through or what you need, but if they are awake, they know what’s going on and can minister to you effectively. *[pause]*

That’s how we are to be spiritually—awake and alert to what’s going on. *[pauseeee]*

How many times have you prayed, but haven’t been alert? *[pause]*

You just kind of went through the motions, not fully engaged.

That's the opposite of what God calls us to do! *[pause]*

God doesn't want us to pray routine, heartless prayers, but to pray in watchfulness to what's around us. *[pauseeee]*

The devil will try to distract you or discourage you from prayer, but don't let him.

Keep alert to what God is doing, to what is going on in your life and in the lives of others, and how you can pray for each. *[pauseeeee]*

This keeping alert is to be done "with all perseverance." *[pauseeeee]*

"A cartoon pictured a little boy kneeling in prayer. *[pause]*

Obviously disgruntled with the results of his prayers, he was saying, 'Aunt Harriet hasn't gotten married, Uncle Hubert hasn't any work, and Daddy's hair is still falling out...

I'm getting tired of praying for this family without getting any results.'"⁵ *[pauseeeee]*

While that illustration makes us chuckle, do you ever feel disheartened about prayer? *[pause]*

You will be tempted to let your guard down.

Prayer will get hard, and you will be tempted to give up. *[pause]*

Life circumstances will feel like they are knocking you down, so you will be enticed to prayerless discouragement. *[pause]*

God will feel distant, so you won't feel like going to Him, but "keep alert with all perseverance"!

Persist in prayer, keep at it, don't give up, but see its vital importance. *[pauseeee]*

Our prayer lives should have a certain steadfastness to them, where even in our lowest points, we are still reaching up upon High. *[pauseeeeeee]*

I've waited until now to touch on something in this passage, and that is the fact that Paul says to pray in the Spirit...

Like what does that even mean? *[pause]*

Put succinctly, praying in the Spirit is prayer that is stirred on, reliant upon, empowered, and guided by the Spirit. *[pauseeee]*

To pray in the Spirit is to let the Spirit work in your heart from start to finish. *[pause]*

⁵ Original: *1000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, G. Curtis Jones. Found at: <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustrations/prayer>.

He prompts you to pray, helps you to know and feel that God is near, gives you the words to speak, the right attitude, and the faith to trust God's promises. *[pause]*

We need the Spirit in order to rightly pray, for we are approaching God, and in a *spiritual* battle. *[pauseeee]*

We are to pray at *all* times, with *all* kinds of prayer and supplication, with *all* perseverance, and we are to pray for *all* the saints. *[pause]*

God wants our lives to be full of prayer in every way. *[pause]*

Is your prayer life “full”? *[pauseeee]*

I know there are many in this room who are great prayer warriors.

Keep up the good work, knowing that you can only do this because of the Spirit within you. *[pause]*

And for those who feel like failures in this regard...

Do not let your failure in the past discourage you today, but persevere in prayer, even if you feel like you are fumbling through it. *[pause]*

God is gracious and merciful—He wants you to go to Him, and welcomes people like us, who feel like “prayer failures.” *[pauseeee]*

So Paul tells us to pray in the Spirit at all times, but also, he shows us something that we should be praying for...

II. Pray for others in the battle.

“In one cartoon, a man at a church meeting says to himself, ‘Oh great! Here comes Bob. I told him I’d pray for him! ‘Dear God, help Bob. Amen.’ *[pause]*

He [then] reaches out his hand to Bob and enthusiastically says, ‘Hey, Bob, been prayin’ for you!’”⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Sadly, we are a lot like that man when it comes to our prayers for others—we tend to focus on ourselves and our needs, while other people’s needs aren’t always a priority. *[pauseeee]*

It’s easy to approach Christianity in an individualistic way.

We only think about our own battles, our own temptations, and our own requests, but God wants to lift our eyes up to see that we are in this together. *[pause]*

⁶ Found at: https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2000/june/12495.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

This whole section is directed to the church as a whole, not just the individual, and Paul wants us to remember that we are in the battle *together*. [pause]

It's not merely "you" wrestling against these spiritual forces, but "we" are wrestling against them.

So no wonder Paul says here to make "supplication for all the saints." [pauseeee]

We should be continually praying for others, lifting up earnest requests for their needs. [pauseee]

When you pray for another person, you are showing that you care about them, so also, making supplication for the saints shows a deep love for each other. [pauseeee]

Think about how encouraging it would be to know that fellow believers are making supplication on your behalf before God. [pause]

They are praying for God to give you what you need to resist temptation, to stand firm in the faith, and to live for the Lord.

They are praying that the devil's flaming arrows wouldn't hit your heart, but that you would hold up the shield of faith, with chest protected by the righteousness of Christ. [pause]

They are praying that you would be wrapped with truth, always.

That you would walk in assurance of your salvation, knowing the peace of God, and armed with the sword of the Spirit. [pauseeee]

What a comfort to not be alone in this battle! [pause]

We are fellow soldiers, who don't fight alone, but support each other greatly with prayer. [pauseeee]

I can't walk in your shoes, face exactly what you are facing, but I *can* pray for you to have what you need to go through it.

And in that way, we can help each other in this battle, even though we are not together all day, every day. [pause]

You don't have the same marriage as me, the same job as me, the same life situation as me, the same exact temptations and trials, but you have the same God and are in the same battle. [pauseeee]

Do you pray for God to give other believers what they need spiritually, or is it all about physical healing alone? [pause]

Do you ever pray that they would grow through their physical trials, and not give into temptation to be discouraged or despair? [pauseeee]

We are to make supplication for *all* the saints, for we *all* need prayer. *[pauseeee]*

This life isn't easy, the battle rages, but what a powerful weapon that prayer is in the battle—use it! *[pauseeeee]*

After asking for the Ephesians to pray for all the saints, Paul asks for them to pray specifically for him. *[pause]*

Many consider Paul to be one of the godliest men, yet even he recognized his need for prayer—he wasn't too prideful to ask for it. *[pause]*

Do you ever ask specifically for prayer, or is your pride in the way? *[pauseeeee]*

Paul's prayer request is that he would be given words to speak the gospel boldly. *[pause]*

Are you ever nervous that you won't have the right words to speak when witnessing to someone else?

Even Paul needed prayer to speak the right words for the situation! *[pause]*

He didn't trust his knowledge alone, even though he was super smart, but he knew that God must "give" him the words to speak. *[pauseeee]*

The message of the gospel never changes, but every situation needs specific words that best fit the circumstance. *[pause]*

May God give us the words to speak, as we interact with others! *[pauseeeee]*

A big part of Paul's prayer request is *boldness* to speak the gospel clearly and without reserve.

He didn't want fear or pressure to hold him back from resolutely proclaiming the gospel, rather, he wanted to make sure he "opened his mouth" with boldness, even in chains. *[pause]*

He wanted the gospel to be made known because it's the glorious good news of what Christ has done and how salvation is available for all kinds of people, who become united as one in Christ. *[pauseeeee]*

Do you ask for prayer to speak the gospel *boldly*? *[pause]*

Often we don't even speak about it at all, yet we need to see its glory and power, as well as the fact that people need to hear it to be saved. *[pause]*

So let's be ambassadors of the gospel, boldly declaring the message that Jesus saves. *[pauseeeee]*

Other people need prayer, so let's pray for them! *[pause]*

Pray for other saints, who are in this battle with us that God would help them and sustain them.

The battle isn't always easy, but we have a great and powerful Lord, who answers prayer.
[pauseeee]

Let's also pray for others to be bold, faithful ambassadors of the gospel, for some of them are in great trials, like Paul, who was "in chains."

They need divine aid, but will we be used to intercede on their behalf? *[pauseeee]*

Looking at this passage, we see that...

As we go through spiritual warfare, we need prayer!

Paul shows us that we need prayer in spiritual warfare, so that we can stand firm in the faith with the armor of God.

So when faced with spiritual battle, instead of being self-reliant, instead of cowering in fear, instead of giving up—we pray. *[pause]*

But our hope isn't in the mere act of our praying, but in the One who we pray to.

Therefore, we keep praying: we pray for ourselves, and we pray for others. *[pauseeee]*

Know this—when we pray, God can do some amazing things against the enemy. *[pause]*

As Mary, Queen of Scotland said of the Scottish Reformer, John Knox: "I fear John Knox's prayers more than an army of ten thousand men."⁷ *[pause]*

And as Sidlow Baxter stated, "Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons—but they are helpless against our prayers."⁸ *[pauseeee]*

May we have such great confidence in prayer to God as we battle spiritually that we go to Him "at all times in the Spirit."

So let's be armed with prayer, relying upon the Lord's work in our lives, interceding for others, and praying for the Gospel to go forth with boldness. *[pauseeee]*

May we do this to the end of our lives with utmost trust in the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

"While very ill, John Knox, the founder of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland...began to pray, interceding earnestly for his fellowmen. *[pause]*

He prayed for the ungodly who had thus far rejected the gospel.

He pleaded on behalf of people who had been recently converted, and he requested protection for the Lord's servants, many of whom were facing persecution. *[pauseeee]*

⁷ Mary, Queen of Scotland, found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/prayer.htm>.

⁸ Sidlow Baxter, found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/prayer.htm>.

As Knox prayed, his spirit went Home to be with the Lord. *[pause]*

The man of whom Queen Mary had said, ‘I fear his prayers...’ ministered through prayer until the moment of his death.”⁹ *[pauseeee]*

A Christian soldier fights with a posture of dependence upon God to the end of their earthly life. *[pause]*

Let’s gear up for battle with prayer right now.

⁹ Original: *Our Daily Bread*, April 11. Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/prayer.htm>.