

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sermon Series: Connected: My Life in the Church
To be used with: Session Six: Connected Through Prayer
Sermon Title Possibilities:
 My People Pray for Me
 Prayer and Gospel Advancement
Scripture: Ephesians 6:18-22

Connection To Unit Theme: *Connected: My Life in the Church* is a six session study from the book of Ephesians, based on *I Am A Church Member* by Thom Rainer. These theme-based sermon outlines will cover the same topics and Scripture passages as are being studied in the small groups. This will allow you as the pastor to reinforce what small group leaders are talking about. Session 6 of *Connected* is called “Connected Through Prayer” and The Point is, “Support your church with prayer.”

If we want to have faithful churches then it must be comprised of faithful people that pray. It is vital that members pray for one another, pray for their leaders, and pray for gospel advancement. Though we don’t fully understand the mystery of prayer we know that God commands us to pray and that he works through our prayers.

Introduction:

Charles Spurgeon is known as one of the best preachers to have ever lived. His ministry was marked by faithfulness and much success. When folks would ask Spurgeon why he had so much success he would often say, “Because my people pray for me.” That’s wasn’t just sentiment. Spurgeon believed it, relied on it, and it was true. Consider this story:

Five young college students were spending a Sunday in London, so they went to hear the famed C.H. Spurgeon preach. While waiting for the doors to open, the students were greeted by a man who asked, "Gentlemen, let me show you around. Would you like to see the heating plant of this church?" They were not particularly interested, for it was a hot day in July. But they didn't want to offend the stranger, so they consented. The young men were taken down a stairway, a door was quietly opened, and their guide whispered, "This is our heating plant." Surprised, the students saw 700 people bowed in prayer, seeking a blessing on the service that was soon to begin in the auditorium above. Softly closing the door, the gentleman then introduced himself. It was none other than Charles Spurgeon¹.

E.M. Bounds is correct, “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, men mighty in prayer.” We need prayer for one another, pray for our leaders, and pray for gospel advancement. It’s not an accident that the greatest request that Paul had for these Ephesians is that they would go to the Lord in pray for him.

¹ *Our Daily Bread*, April 24.

I. Pray for one another

These verses on prayer are connected to the verses that go before them. Prayer is the means by which the armor of God is taken up. Prayer is our main spiritual weapon. Note the use of “all” in this passage. This shows how universal and second nature prayer should be to the life of the believer.

Prayer also has a way of changing the way that we interact with others. When we lovingly pray to the Lord for someone we are far less likely to slander them before men. When we pray for someone else we become invested in their well-being. The Spirit works and moves when we pray for one another.

Application: Who are you praying for? How does this shape your relationship with them? Do you take encouragement from knowing that others are praying for you?

II. Pray for leaders

I’ve heard that Satanists pray for the downfall of specific Christian leaders. I wouldn’t doubt that this is true. They know what the apostle Paul knew: if our leaders fall it causes great harm to the church. Not that the fall of any believer isn’t significant. But the fall of our leaders has a way of discouraging many saints. Paul was not shy in saying, “pray also for me”.

Are you ever discouraged by the state of the church? Even your own local church? Ever frustrated with leadership? Try praying for them. Consider these words from Gardiner Spring:

"O, it is at a fearful expense that ministers are ever allowed to enter the pulpit without being preceded, accompanied and followed by the earnest prayers of the church. It is no marvel that the pulpit is so powerless and ministers so often disheartened when there are so few to hold up their hands. The consequence of neglecting this duty is seen and felt in the spiritual declension of the churches and it will be seen and felt in the everlasting perdition of men while the consequence of regarding it would be the in-gathering of multitudes into the Kingdom of God and new glories to the Lamb that was slain²,"

Pray for your leaders. There is great consequence to our neglect of this duty and great glory followed by our obedience.

Application: Are you praying for your leaders? Have you asked them how you can pray for them?

III. Pray for gospel advancement

You can tell a person’s passion by what they ask you to pray for. For Paul you could tell that his passion was gospel advancement. Notice that even though he is “an ambassador in chains” his prayer isn’t for the removal of his chains. His prayer is that the gospel might advance and that he might be bold in the midst of his trying circumstances.

² Taken from here: <http://www.gty.org/resources/print/sermons/52-36>

Note also that Paul prays that boldness and faithfulness would be given to him. If you scan through the prayers of the New Testament you will notice that the prayers are largely for the messengers and less for those that will be receiving the message. That's not to say that we shouldn't pray for those that will be hearing the word, but it's a fitting reminder that the greater portion of our prayers ought to be for the faithfulness and the boldness of those proclaiming the gospel. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Pray that the workers would be emboldened and faithful.

Application: What do your prayers look like? Are they more shaped by gospel advancement or temporal needs? Challenge yourself to pray for gospel advancement.

Conclusion:

If we are being honest all of us could be “praying more”. The reason that we don't pray as we ought is that we become too self-dependent. Prayer in some regards is the posture of a little child completely dependent on his parents to provide for him. We forget this about ourselves. That's why I've always identified with this from Martin Luther:

‘When Luther's puppy happened to be at the table, looked for a morsel from his master, and watched with open mouth and motionless eyes, he [Martin Luther] said, “Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat! All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat. Otherwise he has no thought, wish, or hope³.”

We will not grasp the importance of Ephesians 6:18-22 unless we've rightly understood the rest of the book. We are hopeless and helpless sinners whose only hope is in a Redeeming God. He has done what is necessary—He has made a dead heart come alive. The more this reality becomes true in our lives the more we we'll be faithful in prayer.

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³ Luther's Works, Volume 54, Table Talk (Philadelphia: 1967), pp. 37, 38. May 18, 1532