



2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: May 16th - 22nd

Sermon: May 15th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus

May 16

Matthew 6:9; 7:11 & Romans & Galatians 4:6-7

The sermon yesterday was devoted to the main truth that prayer is the appropriate and necessary response of God's people to darkness. So often, we look at what opposes us and run to our man-made plans to overcome our issues, but this misses the larger truth that our real enemy is not physical (although darkness is represented by the physical) but spiritual.

Considering the subject matter, I felt that a week spent on the doctrine of prayer would be a marvelous thing. As we talk about the importance of prayer as it relates to living an obedient and faithful Christian life, it may be a welcome time to dive into the topic for a few days. So, this week we are going to talk about several biblical truths related to the overarching subject matter of prayer.

Today I want to begin by discussing the glorious blessing of prayer. There is a popular phrase in our culture at large as many people are prone to say, "we are all children of God". That sounds nice but it is patently unbiblical! While it is true that we are all God's creation, only those who are saved by grace through faith in Christ are the children of God. This means that the joy of communing with God, as an adopted son or daughter of His, is reserved for those who are saved. It may not be widely considered, but this adoption is a marvelous blessing, and it is the precursor to meaningful and intimate prayer. While it is true that the vast majority of people (lost and saved) pray to someone at some point in their lives, it is equally true that only real believers enjoy true communion with the One True God, and this should not be taken lightly!

Our texts for today set this up quite well. Galatians is a good jumping off point for us as it teaches that it is through the adoption of God into His family that we are given the Spirit which testifies of our sonship by crying "Abba, Father". This kind of language is incredibly important as the Bible makes clear that one of the great blessings and benefits of the Christian life is adoption into the family of God. Once we were enemies of God but now, we have been reconciled to God, through the atoning blood of Jesus, which paid our debt, bridged the divide that was created between God and man because of our sin and made possible the ultimate joy of salvation which is being brought into God's family through adoption. This adoption is cemented in our minds and hearts through the work of the Spirit who testifies with us that we are indeed children of God.

Now, this marvelous truth of our adoption forms one of the pillars of prayer in our lives. You will notice that Jesus began the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 with the phrase "our Father". This portion of Scripture is so familiar to us that we sometimes miss the gravity of what He is saying. Why do we pray? In part we pray because prayer is conversation with our Father! He is a Father who has gone to great lengths to usher us into His family, a Father who has proven His love for us by sending His Son to die in our place and, consequently, a Father who has proven His desire to commune with us. Who wouldn't want to speak to such a Father?

I wonder how many of us speak to God with this mentality. Do you see God as a Father who loves you, who desires for you to know Him and who relates to you as His child? Furthermore, do you see a God who wants to bless you? This was Jesus' point in Matthew 7. The God who adopts us and relates to us desires to bless us! He wants to give us good gifts, and He does give us good gifts, as we ask for them. Does this mean we get all we ask for? No! sometimes our requests would not work out for our good and God knows this! However, we come to God with our requests knowing and trusting that our Father desires to give us good things. One motivation of prayer, therefore, is found in our knowledge of God's character and relationship with us which springboards us into communion with Him.

May 17

Ephesians 6:18

If you had to summarize the circumstances of the setting in Acts 12 in a sentence or two you would do well to say that the disciples were locked in a battle, and they knew it! There was great, and violent, opposition and a foe that required supernatural power to overcome.

It is interesting that this battle was not limited to First Century Jerusalem. In fact, the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, telling them that a battle is to be expected! Over the years, Christians have found that the Kingdom of light is locked in an ongoing struggle with darkness, and this meant that instructions for war were needed.

Chapter 6 of Ephesians constitute Paul's wartime directives and, interestingly enough, we see a strong parallel in the disciple's response in Acts 12 and Paul's commands to all believers in verse 18. As we consider how to prepare for battle, both texts teach us that prayer is indispensable to our lifestyle. Over the next 6 days we will examine how we should pray, by taking apart this one verse in an effort to more fully comprehend the type of prayer that undergirds us in the struggle.

First, we see that prayer is to be "at all times". John MacArthur has pointed out that this broad phrase points to both frequency and duration. Frequency means that we are to be in a constant state of prayer. Prayer should be second nature to us as we make decisions, discern situations, and disciple others. If we consider every moment of our lives as lived in battle, the need for supernatural wisdom and power propels us to frequent prayer. Now, this does not mean that every moment of our lives is meant to be lived on our knees before the Lord (although a bit more of that would be wonderful)! Instead, it means that we should be in a constant state of communication with our Lord. we should be crying out for insight, praising God for His mercy, seeking God's blessing, begging God for the salvation of lost souls and praying for our brothers and sisters in battle with us.

Not only should we pray frequently "today", but we should also be praying for the duration of our lives. Folks, until you take your final breath on this planet, you are in the battle! This means that you have need to pray. To be sure, some instances feel more combative than others, but every moment of your earthly life takes place on contested soil. As we sense and understand the conditions and the gravity of each day, we will seek the Lord more and more frequently.

See also: 1 Thessalonians 5:17-19

May 18

Ephesians 6:18

It is one thing to note how often we are to pray, it is quite another to ensure that we pray in a faithful and appropriate manner. This is on Paul's mind as he adds to the admonition to pray at all times with the truth that we are to pray "in the Spirit".

What does this mean? Some people may take this to be some mystical experience that is impossible to define and therefore totally subjective. We've all known folks who "blame" the Spirit for their own intuitions and premonitions. In fact, the mere mentioning of the Spirit's name is often a trump card for any scheme or inclination that comes our way. Is this what Paul means? Is he encouraging us to some hyper-emotional, illogical discipline?

The answer to that question is a resounding "no"! Paul is not teaching us that prayer is meant to be an excuse to leave reason and truth behind! Instead, the Apostle is expressing a clear truth that we must understand if we are going to be faithful and fruitful prayer warriors.

The idea is simple, to pray in the Spirit is to pray in submission to the Spirit as we walk in accordance with the revealed will of God. In a nutshell, the Spirit of God has been given to us to lead us into all truth. He illuminates the revelation of God and teaches us how to apply the Word to our life's situations. This means that the Spirit is active in our souls in prayer as He leads and guides us into the correct choices or God-honoring desires such that our prayers will be answered by God as they align with His plan and our hearts will be in step with God as we seek to obey Him.

A man or woman of God who prays in the Spirit is one who is familiar with the Word of God and desirous to obey the Will of God. This is the person whose prayers are effective and often answered. The text reminds us that we should be asking whether our prayers are consistent with God's will or if they are simply a reflection of our own carnal, selfish, or foolish hearts. It may well be that our prayers go unanswered precisely because they do not align with God's character and desires as revealed in His revelation to us!

Now, you may be asking, how do I know if I'm praying in the Spirit? Here are a few diagnostic questions: if my prayers are answered, would God gain more glory? If my prayers were answered would others come to know God or be exceedingly blessed by Him? If my prayers were answered would the Kingdom spread? If my prayer were answered would my relationship with God be strengthened? If my prayers were answered, would anything in the Scripture be violated?

This is a helpful, important way to discern whether or not we are indeed praying in the Spirit as we fight the battle.

See also: James 4:3; 1 John 5:14

May 19

Ephesians 6:18

Today's portion of our verse of the week deals with the types of prayers we should offer as we live our lives in spiritual battle. In describing the tenor of our prayers, Paul states that we should pray in the Spirit "with all prayer and supplication". The term "prayer" is familiar. It denotes communication with God and is the subject matter of the entire verse.

Conversely, the phrase "supplication" is not nearly as common and, therefore, demands some attention from us today. To "supplicate" is to earnestly entreat someone for something. It brings with it the picture of pleading or passionately beseeching a party. Often it is associated with prayer that is offered while lying flat on the ground or on bended knee in a position of total submission and desperation.

Many commentators remark that the intent behind adding the term "supplication" to "prayer" is to encompass all kinds of communication with the Lord. If this is the case, then Paul is instructing us to pray in all circumstances and with varying emotions depending upon the subject matter. We are to offer prayers of thanksgiving and worship and prayers for insight, but we are also to offer prayers of supplication whereby we plead with God for something or someone.

In this manner, prayer is to reflect a deep, meaningful and all-encompassing relationship with our Father. Just like the tone of our conversations varies with those we know and love the most, so our prayers should vary based on our circumstance and need. We should commune with God when we are elated and we should converse with God when we are down-trodden.

The larger truth is that all of our lives should be lived in conversation with the Lord. There is nothing He cannot accomplish and no situation that does not warrant our interaction with Him. When we are thankful, we should pray. When we are hopeful, we should pray. When we need insight on a decision, we should pray. When we are faced with an obstacle or enemy attack, we should pray. When we are in a dark night of the soul and in desperate need of intervention from on High, we should pray. In all things, at all times there should be open communication between us and the Lord.

What are your prayers like by comparison? Are they typically homogenous? Are you guilty of not bringing your needs before the Lord? Perhaps the opposite is true and you only talk to the Lord in prayer when you do have a need! Whatever the case may be, the instruction is clear, our prayers should run the gamut of emotion and subject matter. In this way, we cultivate a deep, abiding relationship with the Lord and we prepare ourselves for battle in the process!

May 20

Ephesians 6:18

My kids taught me a lesson a few months ago. I had a challenging day which ended with my driving my three girls to an appointment. My children are talkers! They love to converse and they love to ask questions. To be clear, this is a marvelous thing, but on this day dear old dad had tuned out! I just couldn't stay in the moment; my mind was tired and I drifted off as we were riding down the road. Somewhere along the way, one of my girls (I'll reserve mentioning her name to protect the guilty!) caught on to the fact that I wasn't mentally sharp in the moment. Based on her observation, she began to ask me questions, realizing that I was just nodding my head in agreement and then she struck! Out of nowhere, she asked for ice cream and received an informal approval. A few minutes later, when we were getting out of the vehicle, she asked if we could stop at Dairy Queen, when I objected (because I was in my right mind again!), she protested and called her sisters as witnesses that I had unwittingly agreed. The point, when we are not alert, we are prone to mistakes!

This idea is almost certainly in mind in our verse for the week as Paul implores us to "be alert". The term means to be cognizant of our surroundings, always mentally focused on the situation and the possibilities that might occur. A good soldier must be alert! His enemy is constantly seeking his destruction.

John Piper has described the difference alertness makes by contrasting the difference of mentality between a person hiking in the woods against the mindset of a soldier, locked in battle, trudging through the forest. A hiker may well be relaxed, enjoying the sounds of nature and happy to explain away anything that is out of the ordinary. When they hear a sound in the distance, the assumption would be that it was rather benign in nature. The point is that many different oddities would need to occur before a hiker is convinced that anything dangerous occurs.

Conversely, a soldier in battle is alert to every occurrence. A twig snapping causes him to snap to attention. Every breeze and slightly unique noise creates reason for his alarm. There is no such thing as ease when you're in the battle.

Alertness is key to the believer because we are in a cosmic war. Alertness is also a primary means of informing our prayer life. When we are alert, we see our needs and the needs of our fellow brothers and sisters. When we are alert, we are more in tune with the advances of the enemy, allowing us to pray in an educated manner. When we are alert, we are far more prone to see the blessings of God and praise Him for His intervention and blessings. Conversely, when we are at ease, things slip past us. Our guard is down and our defenses are easily compromised.

How do we maintain alertness? First, we read the Word of God so that we are constantly reminded of spiritual truth and the ploys of the enemy. Second, we live our lives on mission! When we are engaged in the battle, it is easier to think and discern rightly. We should be looking for God's activity, asking how the Lord is moving and discerning the needs of others as we advance the Kingdom together.

May 21

Ephesians 6:18

If you're like me, the term "perseverance" immediately raises my eyebrows. The phrase implies resistance. I've never had somebody tell me to "persevere" through a good book or a television show that I was enjoying or a date with my lovely wife! The reason is that I enjoy those things already. I don't view completing a good book as "perseverance", I see it as a joyful journey.

The point is that Paul is implying something when he tells us we should persevere in prayer. I believe there are at least two ideas here. First, we should persevere in prayer because prayer can be challenging at times. In another text, the Apostle implores the Romans to "strive with me" in your prayers. Again, we see this idea that prayer is work! It requires energy and, at times, commitment to a discipline that we might not always choose. To be clear, I'm not saying that prayer should ALWAYS be difficult but there are times and seasons in which prayer can be a challenge.

Prayer can be difficult when our minds don't seem to want to focus. Prayer can be hard when we feel like we should be doing something else. Prayer can be hard when we need to discern what to pray for! In all these ways, praying requires perseverance. Our verse reminds us that it is worth the effort to pray.

Second, prayer requires perseverance because we don't always get our answers immediately. Sometimes God's plan includes our patience. There is a category of prayer that includes faith-filled delay. I would assume that most of us have had an experience where we prayed for something for years and years before it came to fruition. In those seasons, its easy to give up! We are tempted to move on to plan b or just lose heart and stop asking, but this would be a mistake.

God uses these seasons to deepen our faith and to humble us. We are reminded in moments of diligent, yet to be answered prayer, that God is God and we are not! We are brought back to the realization that we desperately need His power and that our greatest efforts are not enough!

Brother and sister, I implore you to persevere in your prayer. Your God is able, His plan is good and all-encompassing and He hears you. it may be that your answer hasn't come yet but this doesn't mean it won't. instead, keep pressing in, keep imploring God to move and keep believing that He hears you. As you do, you will find that God rewards your continued effort and that He will move in profoundly miraculous ways.

May 22

Ephesians 6:18

If you're like me, your prayers can take a somewhat selfish turn over time! I realize that I pray so often for my own needs and desires, often to the neglect of the well-being of my brothers and sisters in Christ. This doesn't mean that personal prayer and requests are wrong (the Bible commands us to make our requests known to God) but it does mean that prayer should be more than a simple laundry list of what we want or need.

The text for the week makes this clear in the final few words of verse 18. It is in the concluding phrase that we see the scope of our prayer should include "all the Lord's people". Paul is intent to remind us that our prayer must be communal and, dare I say, global in scale.

Notice first that our prayers should be others focused. This means that we need to be aware of the challenges that others face and cognizant of our responsibility to pray for them. When was the last time you thought about your brothers and sisters in need? I firmly believe that others focused prayer is a key to a selfless life. When we are concerned with other people and worry about their well-being, we find that our problems sometimes seem small and our minds are transfixed on our contemporaries instead of on our own issues!

Second, I do believe there is a global component to this instruction. Paul is writing here to local churches but he does not say their prayers should terminate on who is in the proverbial room. Instead, he desires that they lift up all believers. This is consistent with the thrust of the biblical teaching on the subject. For instance, in Acts 11, we read of Agabus predicting a severe famine which proved to be the catalyst for the church in Antioch to provide help "for brothers and sisters living in Judea." In other places, we read of Paul's instructions to assist sister churches with offerings, prayers and the like.

Over and over again, the Bible teaches and shows us the necessity of caring about our family members, in all localities. This means that when tragedy strikes in the Ukraine, the Middle East or anywhere else for that matter, the church should pray. It means that we cannot write off foreign affairs or struggles in inner cities as "their problem", instead we should be aware that in all of these places we have family who is working and living in difficult times.

This realization will lead us to a deeper prayer time AND it will cause us to be more missional. How? The answer is simple, those that we pray for, we develop a heart for and those we care about we serve. I firmly believe that one answer to our missional malaise is a more intentional prayer life. May we be a church that is concerned with "all" the brothers and sisters that populate this earth!