

Pillar #2 Unceasing Prayer – Eph 6:18

Eph 6; This is the second message in our **Pillars of the Church** series

The first, last week, was unapologetic preaching; Proclaiming the authority of God's

Word without apology; And not just inside these walls, but outside

And not just me, but all of us; Declaring the truth, popular or not; And sharing its message, with a sense of urgency

That's the first pillar upon which we build our entire ministry; And every church should

The 2nd is **Unceasing Prayer**

And the pillar passage is Eph 6, where Paul says, starting in v16 . . .

In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; [17] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, [18] praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints

- If you're like most, including myself, you fail to pray for 1 main reason – laziness
It's not that you don't believe in it, or that it does any good; It's that you're unwilling to put forth the effort
The solution to which is not more *information*, but more determination; More discipline

IOW you just gotta do it

Just do it

That's the key to an effective prayer life, and the point of this entire message; Just do it

I could stand up here until I'm blue in the face telling you about it . . .

And you could read book after book to be inspired by it . . .

But at the end of the day, it's a lot like exercise – it does you no good if you don't do it

So that's what we're going to do at the end of our time together – we're going to pray

In the meantime, I want to add some fuel to your fire; So consider first of all, that . . .

• **It's crucial** (Eph 6:11-18)

Just do it b/c it's crucial; Especially so in the spiritual battle that rages; The very *context* of Eph 6, where Paul implies that prayer is the power behind the fight

Look at v16 again; Paul says *take up the shield of faith . . . and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit – praying at all times in the Spirit*

The word *praying* is a participle – something you do *while* you do something else, or in *order* to do something else

Like in the Great Commission of Mt 28, where Jesus says – Go and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them and *teaching* them

Both participles, indicating the actions necessary to accomplish the goal – the goal of making disciples in that context

And the same is true here in Eph 6, where Paul says to *put on the whole armor of God* – while *praying*; Implying that prayer is the power behind the fight

The muscle within the armor; The means of wielding the weapons, and being strong in the Lord (11)

All of which makes it crucial – crucial for the battle that rages, crucial for your life, and crucial for those in need around you; Second . . .

• **It's powerful** (James 5:16)

Just do it b/c it's powerful; **James 5:16** – *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working*; James makes explicit what Paul implies

And the fact is, God can do more in 5 seconds of prayer, than you can do in a lifetime of work; It's that powerful; And he does that much*****

And if we really believed it, we'd be on our knees *far* more than we are

Do it b/c it's powerful; And 3rd, b/c . . .

• **It's commanded** (Col 4:2)

Prayer is mentioned 296 times in the Bible, including **Col 4:2**, which says – *Continue steadfastly in prayer*; It's a command – short, simple, and to the point

We're not told *how* it works, or why God set it up this way, or why he chooses to work this way – we're just told to do it, and trust him for the results; And so we do*****

And not just some of the time, but . . .

All the time (1 Thess 5:17)

Just do it, all the time

1 Thess 5:17 says – *Pray without ceasing*; And **Rom 12:12** – *Be constant in prayer*

Neither of which means always be on your knees with your eyes closed

Otherwise Jesus would have failed at it; And we wouldn't be able to fulfill the *other* commands of Scripture

So it must mean something like – make Jesus the constant companion of your thoughts

Have an ongoing conversation with him *in your heart*, every waking hour; No matter what else you're doing, or who else you're talking to*****

That's the first part of what it means to pray all the time – do it in your heart

Second, make sure your prayer life includes *dedicated* times of prayer – *on your own*

Pray all the time, on your own; Like Daniel did in **6:10** of his prophecy; It says . . .

When Daniel knew that the document [i.e. the law that banned prayer to anyone but the king] had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Daniel made time for prayer on a consistent basis – 3 times a day

Not just when trouble started, but *previously* as well; Not secretly, but openly

And so should we; Not necessarily *exactly* like him, or with that *frequency* – but on a regular basis; Dedicating time each day to talk and listen to God, *on your own******

In your heart and on your own; Those are the first two aspects of praying at all times

Third, is getting together *with others*; Pray in your heart, on your own, and with others
Like the Disciples did in Acts 1, shortly after Jesus ascended to heaven; They gathered in the upper room and *devoted* themselves to prayer; Together

As did the new believers in Acts 4, shortly after Peter and John were released

And the church in Antioch in Acts 13, before sending Barnabas and Paul off

Part of praying *all the time*, is getting together with *others* to do so

- But I'm pretty sure you know all that; Knowledge isn't the problem, is it?
Sticking with it, is; *That's* the problem; Persevering in prayer; *Keep alert with all perseverance* Paul says in v18

We start and stop our prayer life so much, it's not even funny
Each time with the best of intentions, sure – but it's often not long before we fizzle out
We start all strong, and gung-ho, and ready to go – but drop back or drop out
Like people do in their work week – bright-eyed and bushy-tailed on Mondays, they
barely make it on Friday
Or like some of you did with your *giving* at the beginning of the year; You started
strong, but stopped somewhere along the way; You were a flash in the pan

And the same thing happens with prayer; But it doesn't have to
Don't be a flash in the pan; Count the *cost* of praying – the cost time, energy, and
inconvenience; Make the commitment; Adjust your life; And persevere

If the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers over this present darkness are constantly at
their posts – stealing, killing, and destroying . . .
How much more should we be constantly at ours? Way more

Not to mention the fact that, that's where the fruit is; That's where the blessing lies
Praying at *all* times – in your heart, on your own, and with others

Third, pray . . .

In the Spirit (Eph 6:18)

Put on the whole armor of God Paul says – *praying at all times in the Spirit* (18)

Meaning under his influence, or with his help, or according to his will
That's what praying in the Spirit means – under his influence

It doesn't mean praying in tongues as some are want to say
In the Spirit is a phrase used 21x's in the NT, and only once is it used in the context of
tongues; But even then, it still means “under his influence”

The point being, that when it comes to prayer – make sure you do it *in the Spirit* as
opposed to in the flesh; Just like every other aspect of living life
Make sure you're Spirit-led and Spirit-enabled; Sensitive to his leading, and fueled by
his provision and his thoughts
Make sure that when you're on your knees – you're discerning *his* will and
appropriating *his* help; B/c anything else is prayer in the flesh

- And you know you're there, when you try to *preach* in your prayers
Or get a message across; Or try to impress someone; Or worry about what people think
That's not prayer in the *Spirit*, that's prayer in the flesh
Because when you pray in the Spirit, the *only* one you're concerned about, is God
The only one you're talking to is him; And the only thing you're *saying*, is what *he* lays
on your heart
And if he doesn't, if he doesn't lay anything on your heart to pray – don't speak
Better that your heart be without words, than your words without heart
Pray in the Spirit; Under *his* influence

And do so . . .

For all things (Various Scriptures)

Just do it, all the time, in the Spirit – for all things; Including saints, sinners, and situations

Like Paul says in v18b – *To that end* [meaning for the purpose of *praying at all times in the Spirit*], *keep alert with all perseverance* [there's the all the time thing again, and sticking with it], *making supplication for all the saints*.
All those who are in Christ; All those who are saved
Not just a select few who have done great things over the years, but *all* believers in
whom God has done a great thing

We're to make supplication for them – presenting their requests to God and praying for
their needs; Like Nehemiah did in the OT, on behalf of the people of Israel (Neh 1:6)
And Jesus did for *us* in Jn 17; And countless others have done throughout the centuries
Make supplication for the saints, the church

- But don't stop there – pray for *sinners* as well
Like Jesus told us to do in **Lk 6:28** – *Bless those who curse you, [and] pray for those who abuse you*. Sinners
Not to mention those who are *lost*, like the people of Nineveh for whom *Jonah* prayed
And the religious leaders and rock throwers for whom Stephen prayed at his stoning***

Pray for saints, pray for sinners, and pray for *situations*

Like asking the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers (Lk 10:2) – that's a situation
The point being – pray for everything, and don't stop

- Otherwise, you sin; Like James said in 4:17 – *Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin*.
And the prophet Samuel said (**1 Sam 12:23**), speaking to the people of Israel – *As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you*.
His failure to pray for those in his care would have been wrong
That's one of the reasons we pray so diligently for you as a staff on Tuesdays
And for one another in Small Groups, and Bible studies, and Student Ministries*****
B/c to do otherwise, would be sinful

Pray for everything; And pray . . .

With a pure heart (Ps 66:18)

All the time, in the Spirit, for all things – with a pure heart

The Psalmist said in **Ps 66:18** – *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened*. If he had harbored it, hung on to it, refused to confess and repent . . .
God wouldn't have heard his prayers

It's the very principle Peter applied to husbands in **1 Pet 3:7**

Saying – *Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered*.

And then more generally in 4:7 where he said – *Be self-controlled and sober-minded [aka pure of heart] for the sake of your prayers*.

Harbor sin in your heart, cherish it, hold on to it; Refuse to admit it, confess it, and turn
from it – and God won't listen to your prayers*****
Not for yourself, and not for others; Pray with a pure heart

And then last, with . . .

And a firm belief (Mk 11:24)

Just do it, all the time, in the Spirit, for all things, with a pure heart – and a firm belief

Jesus said in **Mk 11:24** – *Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

A firm belief that God will grant your request is prerequisite to receiving it

As is the request being according to his will, 1 Jn 5:14

If we ask anything according to his will he hears us. Don't leave that out

Otherwise you'll wonder if you're in sin when you're not; Or don't have enough faith, when you do

To the best of your ability, pray according to God's will, and do so with a firm belief that you'll receive what you ask for*****

The combination of which is why I think some people's prayers are granted more than others; They're not only sensitive to the will of God . . .

And therefore only praying accordingly – but they firmly believe he'll respond

And when he doesn't, they persist; Just like Jesus wants us to

Lk 18:1 says – *He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*

Now we're back to persevering (**Summary**)

So whether it's asking for wisdom, provision, power, or blessing; Or praying for saints, sinners, and situations – Just do it

Pray all the time, in the Spirit, for all things – with a pure heart, and a firm belief

That's unceasing prayer; And I want to take a few minutes to do so right now; I want to pray together as a church

- I don't want to just talk about it, I want to do it; And I want *you* to do it – in groups of 2, or 3, or on your own, or even up front on your knees (Seth; Instrumental)
Whatever the case, I want to spend a few minutes thanking him for his goodness and exalting his greatness together
And confessing our sin to him, committing to turn from it
And lifting up some petitions for yourself, and our church, and the world

So *get together with someone* next to you, or settle in by yourself . . .

Or, if you'd like, come forward and join me on your knees

And one last thing – I want you to *pray out loud*; Even if you're by yourself

As I prompt you with some categories and requests – I want you to lift up your voice, much like we do in worship, and call out to the Lord; Let's do that now

- **Confession** – for the things you've done, and things you haven't
Committing to turn from your sin in repentance

Adoration – exalting and thanking God for his goodness and greatness

For all he's done, all he's doing, and all he's promised

Requests – for yourself, your family, our church, our nation, the world

Yourself – passion for souls; desire to grow

Your family – love would reign; Christ honored

Our church – staff; resources; build-out; expansion of ministry

Our nation – guide our leaders; watch over the elections

The world – gospel would spread to more and more people; God worshipped

Prayer (no music)– *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy; to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.* (Jude 24-25) (What A Friend We Have In Jesus)

- As we take the offering, let me encourage you to continue in a mindset of prayer – reflecting on the message
That's why we started do this at the end of the service – so you could think on what was just said, and let it soak in
And when the time comes, we'll stand and worship together

Close – Visitor bags; Introduce yourself; Next week's pillar is Unashamed Worship, and we're going to mix up the service a bit, so be sure to come on time