

Combat Prayer, Part 2

Ephesians 6:18-20

Thankfully, God is unlike us. He doesn't get hurt feelings; He doesn't end the friendship. He doesn't say, you know what, this friendship seems a little bit one-way? But just be mindful of that, that you come to God in both good times and bad, in foul weather and fair weather, too. Honor him as God for the good things. Give him thanks. Demonstrate how much he means to you by talking to him throughout everything in your life, whether good or bad. Pray to him in favorable seasons and unfavorable seasons. Pray to him in hardship and in ease. Pray to him in comfort and discomfort. Pray to him when you feel healthy as much as when you feel sick. Pray according to the fruit of the Spirit. Pray in all the virtues that are to clothe the Christian soldier for battle as Paul has unfolded here.

I'm going to give you just a few examples of this, and let's kind of wake you up a little bit by having you turn some pages, okay? Let's, we'll, we'll stay close. I won't have you

turn too many pages. We'll just go back a few pages in Ephesians, and I just want you to, I just want us to survey together some of Paul's prayer reports in his epistles, starting with Ephesians 1:15. Ephesians 1:15. And I just want you to see that Paul himself is not only ready for prayer with a working radio, but he's always praying, and he likes to talk about how he's always praying. Why? Because he wants to show how spiritual he is as an Apostle for Jesus Christ? No, it's just a flow of his life. Out of that flow of his life, what's natural for him to talk about, it's instructive to us, isn't it? We learn a lot by reading Paul's prayer reports in his epistles.

Look at this one in Ephesians 1:15 to the first half of verse 19. He says, "For this reason, I, too, having heard," of the faith in the lo, "of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints," what's that? Evidence, evidence of conversion. "Having heard of these things," your faith, your love, "I do not cease giving thanks for you while making mention of you in my prayers." Like, My thankfulness, that's just part of my larger prayer life for you Ephesians. And here's what I'm praying, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the

spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the full knowledge of him, so that you, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened.”

Again, I know you're Christians. I know that you've been regenerated. I know you have eyes to see, ears to hear. “I want you to know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches,” of his, “of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of the might of his strength.”

Like a general in Christ's army, Paul is praying for his fellow soldiers, and he goes to the commander-in-chief, and he thanks God for the troops. And then he makes requests of the commander. He makes requests from headquarters that these troops have spiritual wisdom, that their hearts are enlightened, that their, their, hope comes from a place of deep conviction, that they have assurance in God's riches, which is in infinite supply, and they have confidence in the surpassing greatness of God's power that is available to every soldier on the field. Can you see in the context of spiritual warfare why that would be so encouraging, that somebody, a leader, is praying for you like that?

Turn a page or two to the right. Look at Ephesians 3:14, same kind of, same kind of prayer report, here. Ephesians 3:14-19, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, and he would give you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you, being firmly rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and the length, and the height and the depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God, strengthened in divine power, rooted and grounded," full assurance of the love of our Commander-in-Chief. It doesn't do me much good to think my President loves me. But to know my God, who is omniscient, who sees everything, who is in every place because he is omnipresent, because he is the eternal, infinite God, to know that that commander-in-chief loves me personally? You can't knock me down. I'm untouchable. I'm invincible in my commander's army.

Paul prays, verse 14, "For this reason." What reason is that? So that we don't lose heart, whether these Ephesians

losing heart at Paul's afflictions or for any other reason. So we don't lose heart when, when, someone, in our, among our number stumbles and falls. So we don't lose heart when, when, when there's, when there's dissension in the ranks. So we don't lose heart when we're attacked by the world. So we don't lose heart. His prayers are so that we don't lose heart. They're to equip us in our battles in this spiritual warfare. They're for our doctrinal understanding. They're for our theological stability, because armed with the truth of Scripture and the doctrines of Scripture and the theology that runs from cover-to-cover of Scripture, when we're armed with those things, we are steadfast, firm, immovable, untouchable.

Turn to the next letter, the letter to the Ephesians, or the Philippians, Letter to the Philippians, and look at Philippians just right there in the beginning, Philippians 1:3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all because of your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now." Paul gives thanks in joy for the fellowship of the troops. Anybody who's served in the military, those who had good experiences in the military, but anybody who's had a, served in the military

among some kind of a unit where you really got to know those guys and really got to serve and work hard with somebody and suffer with somebody, you know that there's a depth and a bond, there, that is irreplaceable. You, you can't find it really anywhere else in life. There's just something special about being in the ranks of others, others who are soldiers, others, others who are fighting a fight.

So he gives thanks in joy for the fellowship of the troops. That's how he's thinking about these Philippians. They fill his heart with joy. They're joined together with him in common cause. They're partnering together in the common mission of the Gospel itself. Is there any greater cause to fight for? Is there any greater work to invest in? Is there any greater endeavor in life? There is not. And this informs his prayer life in verse 9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more, in full knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent in order to be sincere, without fault, until the day of Christ, having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

The driving energy of every Christian soldier is love, and the more we have love for one another, like a soldier loving his fellow soldier to his right or to his left, he'll die for that guy to his right or to his left. Will he die for the principles of the war? Will he die for the principles of democracy? Is he, is his head filled with the Constitutional documents as he marches to face an enemy in Afghanistan? No, it is not. What is his mind filled with? This guy to my right, and this guy to my left that I've suffered with, that I love, that I care for. I'll die for that guy.

Driving energy of every Christian soldier is love: love for our commander, love for the army that we're in, love for the church that we belong to, love for our brothers and sisters. And it's not a love that is feeling-oriented only. There are feelings there, but it's a love that's not ignorant, but informed. It's a love that's not gullible, but as Paul says there, discerning. It's a thoughtful love. It's a love that's driven by the mind, from which flow all the affections of the heart, and the will that drives all action and all communication.

Next letter, turn over to the letter to the Colossians. Colossians, chapter 1. Again, Paul's prayer report, Colossians 1:3-8, gratitude for the troops; verses 9-12, prayer for the troops. Look at the gratitude. "We give thanks to God," chapter 1, Colossians, verse 3, "We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints." This is really cool because Paul to date had not been to Colossae. He really had heard of this. He's got second-hand knowledge about the Colossian church and how they're doing. He's heard about it from Epaphras.

But he prays like he's met them, like he knows them, because he knows what caliber of people they are because God has made them that way. They're the same, they share the same traits in common with every other soldier that's enlisted into Christ's army because it's the same Spirit that, bry, binds us all together. It's the same Lord Jesus Christ who is our commander-in-chief. He's the head of the church. So he feels like he knows them, and really he does. "So ever since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, the love which you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you



previously heard in the Word of truth, the Gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and multiplying, just as it has been doing in you since the day you heard and, "unner, "understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, who also informed us of your love in the Spirit."

Paul can identify these Colossians, again whom he had not met yet, as soldiers in the same army. He sees the evidence of regeneration, of salvation in them, evidence of virtues of faith, love, and hope. He sees the abundant fruitfulness coming out of their lives and out of their church that's affected the region with the Gospel witness. And so, verse 12, for this, or shu, I should say verse 9, "For this reason also," as a comrade-in-arms, "for this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and multiplying in the full knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious

might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who's qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

Again, the prayer of this Apostle, this general in the army. He's a foundation stone in the church of Jesus Christ, and as such, he's a model for all spiritual leadership in the church, not only for pastors and elders, but all Christians as well, as they pray for one another. He prays for knowledge, prays for wisdom in the application of knowledge. He prays, he prays for understanding because soldiers in this army are to be thoughtful soldiers, not only acquiring knowledge, but also by using knowledge skillfully, wisely, for the obedience of the commander-in-chief. That means your expectations about coming to church is that you're coming here for training.

I like to call that section, Ephesians 4:1-16, the church, the local church, it's the training center for the Christian life. That's what we come here for, is to be trained, not to be entertained. I hope you're entertained a little, but not much. I want your mind to be informed. I want you to be trained in godliness. The goal in gaining and using knowledge is to please

our commander-in-chief, to be a useful soldier in his army, to be strong, steadfast, patient.

Some soldiers I've met before, some people I've served with, they're like petulant little children. They're complaining about everything: complaining about the food, complaining about the orders, complaining about waiting. And believe me, in the military you do a lot of waiting. It's called hurry up and wait. Hurry up and get there so we can wait more and then wait for hours. Usually in the blazing sun is how they usually like to have you wait on the tarmac, sun beating down on you while you're fully equipped in hundreds of pounds of gear, and you melt and bake; sit there waiting for a plane to show up or something like that. And then you get on the plane, and it's more waiting. You sit there and cook inside of a tube for a while. So believe me, if you're one of those soldiers that jump out of an airplane, you're very motivated by the time you open the door to get out of that plane.

See, there's a, there's a method in the madness. They're training you to have the right attitude. But so many people, so many soldiers, so many sailors, I was in the Navy, so I know

sailors, complaining all the time, whining, groaning, moaning. You think, I mean, if, if the enemy hears this stuff, he's, it's, it's just going to encourage him. Stop it! Joyful soldiers, that's what we're to be. Not reluctant to mix it up at all. No! We're ready to get into this fight. We're ready to go get some. Now, we could keep going through the epistles. That's enough for now. Just, I'll leave you to make more discoveries on your own. We need to keep moving. But you should do that. Go through Paul's prayer reports and you're going to see this constant prayer. Combat prayer is constant, and that's what prepares us for the next point: to be instant in prayer.

Second point, combat prayer is instant. Combat prayer is instant, and you can go back to Ephesians chapter 6. We pick this up in verse 18, where Paul uses that second participle, being on the alert, or in other translations it's, staying alert or keeping alert or being watchful. Again, just to remind you, the main command in verse 17 is, take. Take, followed by the two participles, praying and being alert, in verse 18. So, "take the helmet of salvation," "take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," but then do that by "praying and being alert,"

verse 18. That's how we head to the battlefield. That's how we engage the enemy.

If we're in constant prayer, praying at all times in the Spirit, we are prepared to be instant in prayer as well. You say, What's, instant, mean? Well, I'm using the word, instant, as an adjective, here. According to an older usage, instant means to be immediate, to be present, to be at hand, because to be effective in battle when the attack comes, you must respond immediately with the call for help. It doesn't do any good for the attack to come, to see that there's an overwhelming number of enemy troops coming at you, and to be fumbling around. Where's that radio? Where's that handset? What? No, you need to have it at hand. You need to be ready. You need to be dialed in. You need to be in comm, in, in, comms at all times so that you can be instant when the need arises.

Same thing in prayer. When the attack comes, a prayer must be immediately at hand, an ever-present resource as we turn to. It's not one of those prayers that when trouble comes, you say, Okay, I've heard this before. God, I know it's been a long time since we talked. I know it was the last time I got into trouble

that we talked, so kind of overlook that, but I really need your help now. Christians are those who are on familiar terms with the one who's at the other end of the line. Praying at all times, we're instant in prayer. Prayer, then, is immediately available at a moment's notice. We turn to it readily, instantly, because we know the true effect of bringing that resource into the battlefield.

So we're to be "praying at all times with all prayer and petition in the Spirit." And to this end, that is the context of spiritual warfare, enemy assaults, sneak attacks to get us to fall into temptation, fall into sin, the goal for us is to resist in the evil day and to stand firm. So "to this end, being on the alert," Paul says, "to this end, with all perseverance and petition," not just for yourself, "for all the saints." The word for, being on the alert, literally, it means to stay awake, it means to be awake, stay awake, be alert while you're awake. Stay on the lookout. It's kind of like a guard standing duty at his guard post. He's to stay awake, but not just stay awake daydreaming. He's to stay awake being alert, with his eyes peeled for enemy activity. He's watchful.

This is the mentality that Jesus refers his Apostles to in Matthew 26 verse 41. If you'd like to turn over to Matthew 26, we'll be right back in Ephesians 6, but, so hold a place there and then go to Matthew 26, and we'll start at verse 38. But in Matthew 26:41, there's a word that's used for, watchful. It's a different word, same concept, different word. But in Matthew 26, we'll start in verse 38. Jesus is just hours away from being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Here in the Garden of Gethsemane, he separates from most of the disciples except for his closest men, that inner circle of Peter, James, and John. He pulls them away for the purpose of fighting in prayer with him. They're in an exclusive company, aren't they? They're marked out for special privilege. They're a four-man unit to go and make comms with headquarters for the purpose of a spiritual battle.

And when Jesus gets to the spot for prayer, he tells his close friends what's on his mind, verse 38, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death." Guys, this is grave, this is serious. Remain here. Keep watch with me. In other words, Be watchful, men; the enemy is at hand. He's upon us. Stand guard with me. Jesus is fully awake. He's completely aware. He's alert. He's instant in prayer. All of his senses are pinging and

he starts pleading for the Father's help to go fight the battle that he was about to enter. He's our example, isn't he? That's how we're instant in prayer, praying as he did, whether it's in the wilderness resisting the temptations of the devil, or he's in the garden facing untold depths of anxiety.

What about the disciples? What are they doing while he goes over there and prays? Sleeping. Sleeping. They didn't get it, did they? They had no idea of the battle that was about to break forth in the spiritual realms. No idea. Do we blame them? Would we do better? Let's just say it that way. No, we would not do better. They walked for three years with Jesus. They didn't do better. We wouldn't do better. But do we blame them? Well, we have to. Why? Because he commanded them, stay awake, keep watch, pray with me. Did they disobey a direct order from their commander-in-chief? They did. They had no idea what was going on around them.

Verse 40, Jesus rebukes them. He comes to the disciples, finds them sleeping, says to Peter, "So you men could not keep watch with me for one hour?" Then he says, leaves that indiscretion, that failure behind, and he says to them, "Keep



watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing." I mean, I know you all, all you guys are warriors. All you guys have lion hearts. All you guys are in this with me. I know, I know the Spirit is willing, but as you've just demonstrated, the flesh is pretty weak, isn't it?

The flesh will be your undoing. The flesh is going to compromise you every time. Pay attention to that Puritan pastor-theologian John Owen. He wrote an entire treatise on that one verse, Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." Many have been helped by his treatise called *On the Mortification of Sin in the Believer's Life*. I'll attempt to just summarize the principles, here, and illustrate what it means to be instant in prayer through this discipline of watchfulness in prayer.