

Prayer and the Well-Armed Believer

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[0 : 00] Let me have you turn in your Bibles this evening or this morning to Ephesians chapter 6, verse 18.

! Praying always, praying at all times in the Spirit. Let's do just that.

Heavenly Father, as we come this morning to take your Word in hand, we are thankful that we who know the Lord Jesus Christ may ask you to work in us through your Holy Spirit, who you have given to us, that as the psalmist prayed, that your Word would be opened that we might see wonderful truths in it.

And we ask this because of Jesus. I'll tell you at the beginning that I am not going to cover the whole verse.

I am going to leave the remainder for your studies personally. I think we have spent a fair amount of time in Ephesians chapter 6 beginning in verse 10 and carrying down here to 18.

[1 : 34] And I trust you are not overly labored by the fact that I'm going to leave the second half of the verse because as we study the first half you will find it to be supremely important.

And I trust its value plays out in your life as a result. Let me say ahead of time that I have a goal or objective that I think fits the Scriptures and it is this.

That as the result of the teaching and preaching of the Word of God with the enabling of the Spirit that your prayer life... I mean there should be an outcome to preaching.

Would you agree with that? That your prayer life is improved. When I say that our prayer life is improved I suppose everybody is sitting here well okay that's alright.

Let me say that if I were to begin this sermon on the subject of prayer and start out by confessing that prayer is one of those areas in my life that I'm still working at you'd probably not be all that bothered.

[2 : 47] Would you agree with me? Last week as I was sitting with my father in the nursing home out of the clear blue he said to me, Tim, what's your greatest challenge?

Well I have to confess that I have a fair share of them. Being me is really hard. And I remember after I thought for a moment I said, Dad my prayer life is my greatest challenge.

And I know my dad prays for me. Even though he has Alzheimer's and has moments where probably his lucidity is not as sharp and acute as it should be.

Nevertheless, I know he prays for me because when I would come in following that he would talk to me about his prayers for me. And I tell you that when I stand up here to preach on the matter of prayer and I say to you, that's an area that I have some challenge and difficulty in.

It probably doesn't faze you but to help you understand and make a comparison. Listen, were I to come this morning to this pulpit and say, I am going to preach this morning about drunkenness and I would say, and I'm having a real problem with it.

[4 : 04] You'd probably say, well who are you to talk to me about that? Right? Or if I were to come up here this morning and say, I am here to preach this morning about moral purity and I'm just not on top of that one.

That would be very unsettling to you, wouldn't it? Agreed? Yes. When I come to you this morning and say, listen, prayer is the area in my life that I continue to work at and I need his help.

The fact of the matter is, is that you identify so closely with me because your lives are struggling with the same thing. And I want us this morning to understand just how important it is that our prayer life is governed and controlled and enabled by the Spirit of God.

Ephesians chapter 6 beginning in verse 10 and carrying on down to verse 18 is really about spiritual warfare.

And we can get all caught up in the armor. But I want you to understand that this morning what we really are here to focus on is this matter of the priority of prayer.

[5 : 25] It is supremely important in the believer's life. When I was a young boy, you know, most of you know that I grew up as a missionary's child in India.

And this was in the days, I remember when we went from New York to Bombay by ship. And on our first return from the field, it was a many weeks journey.

We came by steamer and my parents were bound and determined to find the cheapest way to travel. And it was by some tramp steamer that made its way across the Indian Ocean and down. Actually went around the Cape of Good Hope. Can you imagine what that was like? And then came up. And eventually we landed somewhere in England. And then we journeyed and visited different missionaries in that area.

And one of the things that my parents were bound and determined is that I should grow up with a little bit of enculturation. And so they took me to every conceivable place that had historic significance.

[6 : 35] One museum after another. I was intrigued by one particular thing in museums. I was always intrigued by the military parts of those museums, you know.

I'd want to go out and put my hands on the cannons and look at these great big balls that they shot out of those cannons. And you'd walk through the museum and you would see these suits of armor. I was just enthralled by suits of armor. I thought, man, when I grow up I want to wear one of those things. In fact, I'll remember my parents actually gave me a little bit of pocket money.

And I spent all of my pocket money on a piece of aluminum, briefly, very flimsy. It was a breastplate. It looked like armor.

You know, it's shiny. And my brother and I played with those things until I, being much older than him at that point and larger than him, I could take significant advantage of him.

[7 : 38] So we stopped doing those things. You know, sword fighting is pretty dangerous when you're big and, you know. But I just loved the idea of armor. And, you know, you'd walk through these museums and you'd see these great big suits of armor.

And I have to tell you, I thought, these are pretty neat. This is nifty. This is nice. You know, they didn't frighten me at all. They didn't bother me.

But I want you to imagine that if in the ancient world some great big hulking knight had put on that suit of armor, armor, and torn out after a set of serfs in a village, it would have been pretty terrifying, wouldn't it?

You see, it's not the armor itself that makes all the difference in the world. It is the person who's inside it and the one who gives the armor its energy that makes the difference.

And so this morning as we think about the subject of the believer being well-armed against the enemy, I want you to understand at the very outset that the Holy Spirit wants us to get a grip on the fact that our battle is not our own and that we must have his help.

[8 : 47] That's what we're looking at this morning when at the conclusion of this lengthy passage on the subject of spiritual warfare, the Spirit of God says there in verse 18, praying at all times in the Spirit.

I want you to go back just for a moment, if you will, back to verse 10. And pick up, if you will, there the argument that Paul begins. He says, Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. As Paul brings this wonderful book to a conclusion, he wants us to understand that we are going to face adversity and difficulty and we have an adversary that is very interested in our harm and our destruction and if we are going to endure and we're going to survive his attacks, we can't do it on our own.

And so verse 10 is the beginning of the argument and verse 18 is the conclusion. There is a sense in which you have bookends in which at the beginning and the end of Paul's argument, he helps us understand that this battle is not our own.

I trust that as we've worked our way through Ephesians chapter 6 and dealt with this matter of spiritual warfare, that you've not been all caught up in the armor and the details and forget that spiritual armor without the spirit is worthless.

[10 : 22] You can actually have a head full of Bible verses. You can have a firm grip on some of the theological truths that are foundational to us. You can know every point about the nature of

God.

You could be ready to pass a theology exam and the truth of the matter is, is you could still be readily overcome by the enemy because in the face of all the information that you've gathered, you really don't have a dependence upon the spirit and the enemy loves when you're in that condition. And so Paul begins to tell us here at the beginning in verse 10 that our strength must be in the Lord and here at the end, he highlights the fact that our spiritual strength is inseparable from our prayer life.

Our spiritual strength is inseparable from our prayer life. And so he makes this statement, he says, praying at all times in the spirit.

And his emphasis here is on the centrality of prayer in spiritual living and he wants us to recognize that this is a foundational matter for every one of you as believers.

[11:33] Prayer is really at the center of spiritual living and success and apart from prayer, we are just an accident looking for a place to happen. Can I say that again slowly so you understand it?

Apart from prayer, we are just an accident looking for a place to happen. So how important is prayer in the Bible? Just touch on a few illustrations.

I could spend the remainder of our time going through one after another, but let's pick up on several that make it clear that prayer for the believer is absolutely essential.

Turn in your Bible back to Exodus chapter 17. Exodus chapter 17. This is early in the Exodus when God took the nation of Israel out of Egypt and he was taking them on their journey to the promised land where they were going to be involved in conflict.

Earlier, actually, in Exodus, we are told that God did not take them the short route because they had not been toughened up and they had to endure some hardship and difficulty in battle so that when they came into the land of promise, which they were going to have to capture with their sword, they were ready for the conflict.

[12:50] Here in Exodus chapter 17, we find one of their early battles. And if you pick up there in verse 9, we read that, So Moses said to Joshua, Choose for us men and go out and fight with Amalek.

Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand. Now, sometimes those who are generals are distantly removed from the battle and do you know why they're distantly removed?

They don't want to risk being caught and killed. That was not the reason that Moses did what he did. And as we read through the passage, we discovered that what happened is that while Moses had his hands lifted up, what was going on with the battle down there on the plain with the people of Amalek?

The nation of Israel was enduring. They were succeeding. They were being victorious. And Moses eventually got tired and he put his hands down.

And as soon as he put his hands down, what happened with the conflict? The nation of Israel began to suffer. And Moses, seeing this, he learned that there was something going on that was directly connected with his time of prayer and his hands being lifted up for the people that were down there in the conflict.

[14:08] And as a result of that, what we have is that Aaron and Hur grabbed a stone, had Moses sit down on the stone, and then they stood on either side and had Moses' arms up in the air.

And as a result, the people of Israel succeeded in the battle. Why? Because of prayer. I'm reminded also of what we read over in 1 Kings 17-18.

You don't need to turn to that passage. But if you would remember, in 1 Kings 17-18, we're given a little picture of the power of prayer because it tells us that Elijah prayed, and it tells us in the book of James that for three years it...

Does anybody know what happened? It didn't rain. It didn't rain. And God uses that to bring Ahab and all the nation together, and they end up on top of this mountain, and here is Elijah and the prophets of Baal, and they're having this little contest, and Elijah prays down fire from heaven, and then he prays rain into the nation.

And it tells us over in that passage in James that it was because of his prayer that these things took place. I'm reminded also of what Jesus taught his disciples on the matter of prayer and our dependence upon him.

[15 : 32] And over in John chapter 15, verse 5, there's a passage that I trust is just woven into your life. Without me, you can do what? You can do nothing. So I want you to think just for a moment this morning of just how important, how significant the matter of prayer is in your life as a believer, and recognize that here you are, you are faced with the reality that you have a spiritual enemy that is desperately determined to destroy you.

And it's not the armor in itself that is by itself that essential. Apart from prayer, it's just a suit. And there are some of you here this morning that as I, as your shepherd, as your pastor, think about your life, I am aware of some of the heartache and the difficulties, and as I look at what's going on in your life, one of the things that I would plead with you is that your prayer life would change so that you're not harmed as you have been.

I want you to understand that your enemy is after you. And I want you to understand that prayer must be your heart's great defense. Well, let's stop and think about the passage because it says they're praying.

Praying. I don't need to break down the issue of prayer for you because you understand what it means. It is coming to the Lord with a dependence upon Him. It is coming with a recognition of the promises that He's made.

It is coming believing that He is, as it says in Hebrews chapter 11, He is and He is the one who is the rewarder of those that do diligently seek Him. You understand what prayer is.

[17 : 11] So let's think a little bit about what it says there. It says that at all times, we're to pray at all times. That little word always, or at all times, as we have it in the ESV, is a word that is talking not so much about the length of time.

There are two different ways that time is used in the Greek here. One is talking about the length of time. Like, I prayed for 39 minutes.

That's not what's being said. It is talking about praying at all kinds of circumstances, all kinds of settings, all kinds of moments.

And it's recognizing that praying 10 minutes or reciting the Lord's Prayer for 20 times or whatever is, is not what is in view here.

It is talking about the fact that every setting and every circumstance, every issue in your life is worthy of prayer.

[18 : 19] prayer. So when should we pray? For one, we should pray when we are being tempted. I want you to remember what Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew chapter 26, verse 41.

He, knowing what was coming, went off to pray. And He made statement to them. He said, listen, pray that you enter not into temptation.

And so let me ask you the question, how often are you challenged and tempted by the enemy? Is it something that only happens very rarely and occasionally, or is it something that is incessant?

I know that it's incessant because it happens to me. It happens to you. My temptation may not be the same as your temptation, and some of the things that you are battling with may be completely different from the things I am enduring.

But here's the truth of the matter. All of us are tempted incessantly by the enemy who is interested in our demise and our harm. And so what we should do is be people that are praying all the time.

[19 : 25] All the time. We should pray before we open our mouth. We should pray before we open our mouth. I want you to turn back in your Bible just for a second to Nehemiah chapter 2.

Look at verse 4. Nehemiah chapter 2 verse 4. By the way, if you've been tracking, we're teaching, we're studying the book of Nehemiah in Wednesday evening, but at the outset of the book, it starts out by Nehemiah discovering the condition of the nation of Israel, in particular, the city of Jerusalem, and we know that he had spent a long time in prayer for the condition of the city and what had happened to the people of God.

I believe as a result of his incessant prayer that God opened the door and gave him an opportunity to present his concern to the king. He'd prayed for a long time.

He'd been fasting. Weeks had passed. It had been front and center on his life, but the moment that the king asked him, what is it that you would like, do you know what he did first?

He took a second and he prayed one of those bullet prayers. How many of you prayed a bullet prayer? A year and a, well, not last winter, the winter before last, I was driving in the city and I had come to a left-hand turn and there I was waiting.

[20 : 55] It had been snowing pretty bad and I am waiting at the stoplight for the opportunity to go. And there was a guy that came skating around making a, how was it, a left, a right-hand turn and as I'm watching him, it became quite evident that his tires were not going in the direction that he was cranking the wheel.

I was actually at the stoplight talking to my wife saying, honey, I'll be home in a, I'm going to have a wreck. Do you follow that?

And I remember in that same frame saying, oh Lord. That's a short prayer. Do you understand that? Could anybody add a couple other words along with that? Oh Lord, help me to whatever.

You know, it's like, those are known as bullet prayers. It's like, help me. So when should you pray? How many of you would admit that you would be well served if you never opened your mouth without praying first?

James tells us that the tongue is the toughest thing to handle. Am I right? And so, I would encourage you, when should you pray? Well, pray when you are tempted. Pray when you are tempted to open your mouth.

[22 : 05] Pray instead of fretting. I want you to look in your passage, in your Bible, to Philippians chapter 4, verse 4 through 7. When should I pray? I should pray when I am tempted to fret.

And some of us are better fretters than others. We have more practice. But listen to what it says there in Philippians chapter 4, verse 4. He says this, he says, rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.

How many of you really enjoy being around grumpy Christians? You know what a grumpy Christian is like? It's one of those persons who, you know, everything is just not going well and they're kind of frowny and unhappy and, you know, they've missed the truth, the sweet blessing of their relationship.

Well, we're reminded here in Philippians, it says, hey, rejoice in the Lord. Verse 5, it says, let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. And then verse 6, do not be anxious about anything.

But in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. So, when should we pray?

[23 : 19] That's the question that the Bible verse brings to our attention when it says, pray at all times. When should we pray? We should pray when we are tempted to fret, to be anxious.

When else should we pray? We should pray at the start of our day. Isn't that right? The start of your day as you are waking up and you are beginning to ponder the things that lie in front of you and you're thinking through the responsibilities that you have and some of the challenges that you're facing, that's the time to come to the Lord in prayer and say, listen, I want you to be the one that I look to and I trust and I depend upon this morning rather than get caught up in my own thing. I'm reminded of what it says over in Luke chapter 18, verse 1. Men ought always to pray and not faint. So, why don't you do this before you turn on the TV?

Why don't you pray? Before you decide you're going to check Facebook, why don't you pray? Before you decide that you want to make some scuzzy little comment about somebody else's statement on Facebook, how many of you know what I'm talking about?

I have deleted more of the brilliance that I have produced from this little pea brain that I've decided after the second read is like, that is not going to be good to say.

[24 : 46] How many of you there? Okay? It would probably be a little prophylactic or preventive just to pray before you even open Facebook, right? Go ahead and pray before you decide you're going to surf the internet.

Go ahead and pray before you're going to indulge in that thinking, that bitterness or that irritation or you begin to fret about the way things are devolving in your life. Why don't you decide before you entertain that that you're going to pray?

Why don't you pray before you decide that you'll refresh your memory with some of the hurts that you've endured from other people in the fellowship? So as we look at this part in the beginning, I want you to recognize that what the apostle is saying is that the prayer life of the believer is to be something that is robust and profound and covers the broad range of everything going on in our life. Praying always, all the time. But now let's come to the most important piece. Praying in the spirit is what Paul is very interested that we care for here.

And so as we are addressing the issue of spiritual warfare, I want you to understand that as we come to this piece, we're talking about the very most important part in the equation, we are to pray in the spirit.

[26 : 15] We're instructed to pray through the enabling of the spirit of God and I cannot overstate the importance of doing so in the power of the spirit of God.

Let me help you understand just how important it is that we live in the spirit, walk in the spirit, and rely upon the spirit for our daily spiritual life. You're in the book of Ephesians.

Turn back just a little bit to Galatians chapter 5. In Galatians chapter 5, it says this, it says, I say, walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Now, is the issue of gratifying the desires of the flesh a gender-specific problem?

How many of you understood what I just said? Not at all. Men, women, boys, girls, all of us have issues where we are tempted by the enemy and we look to gratify the desires of the flesh.

[27 : 26] And what Paul says is that we are to walk by the spirit and we won't do that. So I want you to understand this morning that it makes sense that our prayer life should be utterly dependent upon the spirit of God.

And I want you to ask yourself the question, is that what characterizes your prayer life? Let's stop and think carefully. Is spirit dependence the thing that characterizes your prayer life?

Some of us are fairly good with prayer lists. How many of you understand that prayer lists are helpful? If we don't have prayer lists, guess what we're going to pray for generally? A little bit like this.

Dear Jesus, help mommy and daddy. Help all the missionaries in the world. Help me to have a good day. Amen. Our prayers, if we don't have a list that's a little more robust and a little far thinking, a little further thinking, we tend to be pretty self-focused in our prayer life.

Would you agree with that? Prayer lists help us to get a broader picture, but here's the danger of a prayer list. You can crank through your prayer list and never think one bit about how all of it makes sense.

[28 : 42] Have you ever done that? Have you ever prayed through your prayer list and when the end of the day, you just checked it off, but there was nothing really resonating? So what does praying in the spirit mean?

Let me talk first of all about what it does not mean. Praying in the spirit does not mean mouthing an unintelligible collection of vowels and consonants.

I have dear friends that are quite caught up in the supposed exercise of speaking in tongues. And I want to tell you with gentleness and clarity that the New Testament gift of tongues undeniably in the scriptures was the ability to communicate in other dialects.

Interestingly enough, when the charismatic movement came back into popularity in the early 20th century, that was like 1916 or something like that, at Azusa Street Mission, those who began teaching the issue of the charismatic gift of tongues made the supposition that the gift was actually the ability to speak dialects or foreign languages.

And as a result, this is history, this is fact, they sent out a wave of missionaries without any language training. Now, it makes sense, do you follow me?

[30 : 15] It makes sense if what they thought they had was actually the New Testament ability to speak foreign languages. Guess what happened when they got to India and China and Burma and Malaysia and wherever else they went?

Guess what happened? All the nationals in all those countries had no idea what they were doing when they were going blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, whatever. And they came back and rethought their theology and it became a matter of, well, this is spiritual praying and nobody understands it.

I want you to understand that praying in the Spirit is not a collection of unintelligible vowels and consonants, nor is it being exceptionally moved by emotion.

Now, sometimes we think that just because we have been moved by emotion that that necessarily is the work of the Spirit. How many of you understand that emotions are pretty fickle things?

Huh? I, once again, bear with me on Facebook, but I have people that will every now and then post these little cute things about cats and dogs and tell me that if I just watch this clip, it will break me down into emotions.

[31 : 39] You follow that? Nah. I mean, I can get carried away with emotions and I think you know that, but cats and dogs don't do it.

And we ought to be careful that we don't assume that just because we have a little emotional surge that it's the Spirit of God. You can work up emotions.

And that's not necessarily the work of the Spirit of God. Just as an example, when was the last time you thought about people going to hell and you broke down in tears?

That's the Spirit. So, let's talk about what it is to pray in the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit is praying with, number one, a sense of blessing in our relationship with Him.

I think about the passage in Romans chapter 8, verse 15. I want you to look at that passage. One of the sweet... Romans chapter 8 has a lot to say about the love of Christ and the Spirit of God who is at work in the believer.

[32 : 47] If you were to ask me what are some of the most significant things that the Lord has done in my life in the last 10 years spiritually, I would tell you that it has been His working in helping me slowly grow in appreciating the love of Christ and appreciating the work of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer.

And here in Romans chapter 8, verse 15, it says this, you have received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

When was the last time that in your prayer life you just had this abiding sense that the God in heaven is your Father and He cares about you in a way that is beyond your comprehension and you rest in the goodness of that relationship.

To pray in the Spirit is to pray with a sense of blessing in our relationship both with the Spirit of God and with the Father. To pray in the Spirit is also to pray with a thankfulness for His indwelling.

I think about the passage over in John chapter 15 or 16 where Jesus said this, it is to your advantage that I leave. That had to be a mind blower for the disciples.

[34 : 16] Do you follow that? They had no idea that things were going to end up the way they did. And we know that because even after the Last Supper as Jesus went through breaking the elements and said, this is my body which is for you and this cup is the cup of the New Testament in my blood and He explained the fact that He was going to die for them.

As they left that time they were bickering with who was going to be number one in the kingdom. They didn't get it. Jesus says, I'm leaving.

But it's a good thing I'm leaving because when I leave you're going to get the Spirit. And so to pray in the Spirit means to pray with a thankfulness that He indwells me that I have the blessing of the Spirit of God abiding in me.

When was the last time that you found yourself tempted and as you were struggling with that temptation you thought to yourself, listen, if I do this sin I am going to grieve the Holy Spirit who abides in me.

Do you follow that? Think with me. Your eyes are going where they shouldn't go and you think to yourself, the Spirit is looking and seeing and grieved by that.

[35 : 33] To pray in the Spirit is to pray with a conscious dependence on His person and His work. When was the last time that you let Him know how glad you are that He is there to help you?

Do you follow that? I am so glad that I have the Holy Spirit abiding in me. I can tell you that earlier in ministry I found that I spent a great deal of time, in fact, more time in study than in prayer over a passage.

I wanted to understand the Greek, I wanted to understand the structure, I wanted to understand the flow of the sentence and context and all of those things are supremely important but as I have grown older in the Lord I have found that praying in the Spirit is as valuable if not more valuable in comprehending the Scriptures.

So praying in the Spirit is to be dependent upon His work. I want to tell you another thing that to pray in the Spirit means to pray with a deference to His Word.

What do I mean by a deference? To pray in the Spirit means to pray with the enabling of the Spirit of God doing something in my thinking.

[36 : 56] Do you follow that? And if we follow the passage in John chapter 16 we understand that the work of the Spirit of God is to bring the Scriptures to mind.

And if I am praying in the Spirit my prayer life will be enriched and characterized by the Scriptures.

To pray in the Spirit is to pray with an amplified focus on Christ. Turn in your Bible turn in your Bible and I close with this to John chapter 16 verse 14.

I have made repeated references this morning to the book of John in particular to chapter 16 because in John chapter 15 16 you find John giving us perhaps the most complete study of the doctrine of the Spirit's ministry in our lives as Jesus explains to the disciples the benefit they're going to have after He leaves.

But look at John chapter 16 verse 14 as Jesus is explaining to His disciples what the Spirit of God will do when He comes. He will glorify me.

[38 : 22] How do I know that I'm praying in the Spirit? How do I know that I'm walking in the Spirit? How do I know that I'm rejoicing in the Spirit?

How do I know that the Spirit of God is at work in Tim Kenoyer's life? I know it when Jesus Christ is the one that is exalted and lifted up.

Why? Because that's His work. He will glorify me.

He I want you to think with me for a moment. Paul is greatly concerned for believers in Ephesus whose lives were threatened by an enemy that wanted to trash them.

Do you follow that? And as that passage was being read I have no doubt that as perhaps Timothy don't know for sure but as whoever was reading that passage of Scripture was reading it with the enabling of the Spirit of God I have no doubt that he could look out on the congregation and see the faces of people that he loved as a shepherd and he saw them there harmed and wounded.

[39 : 55] And his heart was with them as he prayed oh I hope they get it and they pray always in the Spirit.

Do we have an enemy? Yeah. Yeah. Has he wounded you before? Yes. Am I more fearful of him today than I used to be?

Yes. Am I more conscious of the Spirit's enabling and sufficiency and power and blessing? Yes.

And where are you in that? Let's close in prayer. Holy Spirit work in the lives of people that know the Lord Jesus Christ are blessed with salvation and desperately need victory over an enemy that hates their soul.

And let the thing that characterizes the outcome of the preaching of the word of God today be this God that we be a people who pray at all times in the Spirit.

[41 : 59] Amen. Let's stand together as we close and as we are singing our closing song God I want to encourage you if you are here this morning and there's a matter that you need to settle and