

The Praying Soldier

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn now to Ephesians chapter 6, and looking tonight at verse 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.

We've seen the six parts of the armour that have been described in the previous verses. Two sets of three kinds of parts of the armour.

The second lot of three were the ones that are in fact used by way of wielding them, such as the sword and the shield, and also putting on the helmet.

And we've seen what he refers these to mean, or to signify, in terms of our salvation. And now the apostle comes to round off this passage by referring to prayer.

And while it's true that some would take it as another part of the armour, this reference to prayer, it is, I think, better looking at it as not a part of the armour as such, but the means by which we are enabled to use all the parts of the armour effectively.

[1 : 24] Because there's nothing here about prayer being something spiritual. It is itself something spiritual, of course, not like the helmet, which is the helmet of salvation.

Prayer is something that really covers the whole aspect of the armour, and the defence and the attack part of the armour, including the sword. And the fact that that complete set of armoury is to be used effectively, now requires us to see how it is to be done by prayer.

If you think of a Roman soldier, which you've seen was the apostle's picture here as he describes this armour on the basis of what a soldier in Roman times would have looked at, literally, Roman soldier needed, in order to wield the armour properly, he needed to wear the armour properly.

He needed to be fit, and he needed to be strong. But not only did he need to be fit and to be strong to begin with, he needed to keep exercised, he needed to actually maintain this fitness, to maintain the energy required, the stamina required, the physical strength, the mental agility to use that armour effectively.

And indeed, to go through periods of substantial training, even from the moment you became a soldier, you still had to regularly train so that you kept up your effectiveness in the use of the armour.

[2 : 53] Well, if you spiritualise that in the way that the apostle is doing here, it really is pretty much saying to us, that is how it is for the Christian as well. You have the parts of the armour provided by God.

And in order to be able to use that armour effectively against the wiles of the devil, to stand, to be strong in the Lord, in the strength of his might, so that we may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil, we need to use the armour by way of prayer.

It is by praying that we maintain and get further strength to use the armour effectively. In other words, a person who may say they have this armour and may indeed have this armour, may indeed genuinely be Christians and be the Lord's.

But still, if prayer comes to a low ebb, if prayer is just at a minimum in any Christian's life, the effectiveness of using the armour is very much dissipated as well.

That's something that decreases as our prayer habits or our prayer exercise decreases. And that is why the prayer and the mention of praying and the way that he mentions it is so significant in relation to the armour and how we use it.

[4 : 19] Now there are four things mentioned about it just very briefly. We can cover these four things tonight. First of all, he's saying praying always, or at all times, as it's translated there, praying always.

Then it's praying with all prayer and supplication. So he mentions these two specifics of prayer. Not just praying always, but prayer and supplication.

All prayer and supplication. Thirdly, he mentions praying at all times in the spirit. And then fourthly, it's praying watchfully, or being watchful, so as to continue to persevere in prayer.

Keep alert with all perseverance making supplication. In other words, prayer as we go on in praying is something that you've got to watch against declining in.

And be watchful against the enemy even as you go on praying. These four things. Firstly, praying always. Now here's a very powerful reminder to us, that if we are going to use this armor and wear this armor effectively, it cannot be done out with communion with God.

[5 : 32] It cannot be done out with a living relationship with God in Christ. It cannot be done without our souls, without our persons, really having this daily living communion with Christ, this daily ongoing life of prayer, this fellowship with God, which is really where prayer fits into a believer's life.

We are absolutely here confronted with the need for communion with God on a regular basis, not just the existence of that communion with God, but the engagement in it actively and continuously, and even increasingly, in order for this armor to be used effectively.

And you know, that's one of the great tests for us, isn't it? We speak about, the Bible speaks about the importance of growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How do I know I'm doing that? Well, it's one of the great indicators that the knowledge that I have of God is a knowledge that's really working in my life in a way that's effective, in a way that's preparing me for serving God in this world, in a way that is indeed a genuine, forward-looking hope towards heaven.

Well, it's in this matter, isn't it, one of the great tests of our knowledge and of our growth in knowledge and in grace is how much do we devote to prayer?

[7 : 05] How regular are we in prayer? How much is prayer an emphasis and a priority in our lives? What the apostle is really saying is if we minimize that part of our lives, then we really are losing our claim to be serving Christ and effective Christians, and effectively to be looking forward to the best of times with Christ to come.

The ultimate test of my knowledge of God, and of my claim to know God, is in my praying. If I know God, then I will be speaking to God.

I will be bringing my concerns to God. I will be describing my circumstances to God. I will be, as this passage goes on to say, as we'll see in a minute, I'll be entreating God.

I'll be supplicating God. I'll be thanking God. I'll be increasing in that if I want to increase my knowledge of God. The only way to do it is in this living fellowship with God.

That's the difference between nominal Christianity and an actual proper living Christianity. A nominal Christian isn't bothered about prayer.

[8 : 18] If there is prayer, it's much more of a formal, stereotypical thing, something which is read from a book or whatever, and maybe it's not there at all. But for a living soul, a soul that has come to know the Lord, a soul that knows the benefit of forgiveness, a soul that loves Christ, that soul is going to be in communion with that, with that Savior.

That soul is not going to want any day in their life to go past without as much as possible having this communion with Christ, drawing strength from Christ, seeking Christ's help to use this armor, depending on the Spirit of God to lead us through each day.

So he's saying praying always. He's really gone through all these parts of the armor, and then he lets that just flow into this emphasis, praying always.

And when he says here at all times, it really means, at all times, by that he means, in all kinds of circumstances.

It's really, in a sense, the literal translation will be in all seasons. And everybody has seasons of experience. Seasons when it's like winter for you spiritually.

[9 : 35] Seasons when it's like summertime. Seasons when it's like spring, when there's new growth. Seasons when it's like autumn, when things are dying, and there's decay entered into your experience.

All of these experiences, plus the providences of life, the things that God brings about in his plan for us, every single day we live, things that we expected, things that we didn't expect, things that are difficult and trying, and things that fill us with gladness and with joy.

In all seasons. To use the armor, because you see, all of these seasons are opportunities for our enemy. And we've seen something of that going through the parts of the armor.

Satan will take advantage of the seasons. He'll take advantage when it's autumn in your soul. He'll bring things to you then that he won't bring to you in the height of summer or in spring.

And whatever seasons are actually currently in our souls, we have to bring that to God in prayer. And pray in all seasons.

[10 : 39] Pray at all times. What a great privilege we have, as the hymn writer put it. What a privilege we have to bring everything to God in prayer.

Everything. Every single thing that's on our heart at all times. It's our privilege, as children of God, to bring them to God in prayer.

Praying always. Praying, secondly, with all prayer and supplication. What does he mean by all prayer? Well, all prayer really includes such things as all types of prayer or circumstances of prayer.

Jesus said to the disciples that when they were going to pray, they would close their closet door. In other words, the prayer that we have individually with God, our private praying, our praying in secret, as it's often called.

When we go before God, wherever it is and whenever it is, and we make space in our lives for that, whether it's beginning or end of day or both or whatever, it is that particular time and type of prayer it's included in this.

[11 : 56] But it also includes, like tonight, prayer meetings where the church of God comes together to pray and to pray in different types of prayer meetings. Some all prayer, some prayer and Bible study like we have this evening.

but in all prayer, with all prayer, with all types of prayer, private, public, prayer meetings, family. Also, when you have sudden prayer required, emergency type prayers, we were given great advice by the late Principal Grimm in college preparing us for the ministry.

And I look back with great thankfulness to the practical wisdom that he distilled to us in terms of what we would meet with in the ministry of the Gospel.

And one of the things he said was always cultivate for yourselves the mind that actually thinks about what he called ejaculatory prayer, which really means prayer in a set of circumstances that you didn't anticipate and you can just immediately pray to God, even if it's just the word help.

What do I do? Help me Lord, take me through this. Strengthen me for this. Give me words to speak to this person. Whatever it is, whatever the circumstances, every single Christian will have them from time to time where there is an immediate kind of crisis or emergency or situation where you feel you just can't cope yourself and you need help.

[13 : 28] What do you do? You pray, you cry out to God. He's there for you. He's there at all times. He's the ultimate 24-7 really, isn't he?

With his listening ear to his children coming to him in prayer. But there's also the other planned prayers, the habits of prayer that we have, the times that we generally set apart for prayer.

Very often, Christians will have that and you'll have it yourselves, no doubt, that there are certain times and parts of the day that you know you're going to have more time usually for prayer than other times.

Maybe it's early morning, maybe it's late before you go to bed, whatever it is, the planned prayers, the set times for prayer. They're included in this as well. It's really simply saying all prayer, all kinds and types of prayer.

And then, supplication. With all prayer and supplication. Now the apostle uses this word elsewhere. Sometimes, like the word prayer, it's a more general meaning of prayer, but then you'll find words like this, supplication, which is much more detailed and more specific.

[14 : 45] Sometimes he'll use the word request, like in the fourth chapter of Philippians, with prayer and supplication make you requests known to God. Now supplication really is a specific request or entreaty.

You actually plead with God. To supplicate is to entreat, to bring something to God in which you are really entreating him or pleading with him.

You're supplicating in the sense that you're bringing things to him for which you're earnestly pleading for his help. And that fits in so beautifully with the wearing of this armor because we don't just put on this armor and then march out nonchalantly to fight with the enemy.

We put on this armor and we plead with God to help us to wear it properly, to help us to wield the sword and the shield as we must as we go out to battle each day.

We entreat the Lord, we appeal to him to help us. Every day you think about your justification by faith. He's given you that.

[15 : 53] You don't take that off like you sometimes lay down the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. You don't take off your breastplate of righteousness, your justification by faith.

But you still need to plead with God as to how to use it aright, how to think about it properly, what it really means in practical terms, how it relates to your ongoing life as a Christian, how it gives you confidence against the enemy, how the way in which the enemy attacks you is repelled by the fact of your forgiveness and its completeness.

But we need daily to ask God to help us. Lord, help me to use this armor. Teach me how to use it properly. Show me how to use it against all the different assaults that my enemy will bring against me.

So there's praying always and there's praying with all prayer and supplication. And then he comes to praying at all times in the spirit. Praying in the spirit.

And this is a phrase which can very easily be misunderstood and actually be misapplied because it is not primarily to do with how emotional or fervent anyone is in prayer.

[17 : 16] prayer. It's quite possible to be intensely emotional in prayer and not be praying in the spirit and in fact not being a prayer at all.

This reference to praying in the spirit includes at least the following three things. First of all dependency.

when we pray we need to pray in the spirit in the sense of being and knowing ourselves to be utterly dependent on God for prayer.

for our prayer to be as it should be. After all think of Romans 8 verses 26 to 27. You remember the passage yourselves very well.

Where in Romans 8 there in verse 26 the apostle is saying likewise the spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for us we ought but the spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words which can't be uttered.

[18 : 24] And he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the spirit because the spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Now he is not you notice there saying that we do not know how to pray. Sometimes we find it quoted like that as if that's what the verse says.

The verse is saying we do not know what we should pray. for as we ought. He's dealing with a context of pursuing holiness. A context of being led by the spirit.

A context of sanctification and overcoming sin. A context of preparing for the world to come and of bearing with sufferings towards the glory that awaits the people of God.

We do not know in relation to these great things we don't know what to pray for as we ought. And isn't it true of so many of our circumstances when God brings about circumstances that are very trying and difficult for us we have to hold up our hands to God and say Lord I don't know what to pray.

[19 : 30] What do I pray for? How do I know the way ahead? Well he's saying you pray in the spirit. The spirit helps you and the verse in Romans 8 there that says the spirit himself makes intercession for us and it's saying the spirit also helps with our infirmities.

It's a word in Greek which literally means coming actually upon someone in need and then being able to help them.

So what the spirit is it's a picture really of the spirit coming upon us in our need as if he was just traveling by or of course he inhabits every believer.

It's as if he was traveling by and sees this person in need and stops to help. That's the idea of the spirit of God helping with our weakness helping us with the weakness that we have.

Our many forms of weakness and he makes intercession for us with groanings which can't be uttered. I know these words are difficult to interpret and to understand different ways of looking at them but the point is that we pray in the spirit when we are dependent on the spirit.

[20 : 49] It's not about the fervency of words, it's not about how long we pray or how short our prayers are. It's that we are conscious when we come before God in prayer, Lord I don't know what to pray for.

And even if we don't have these words in an actual confession, it's still there in our minds as we come to pray about something, that we need the spirit's help, that we need the spirit of God to lead us, to lead our thoughts, to give us insight, to give us calmness of mind, to help us to reflect, to enable us really to pray.

And then Romans there said, as we ought, which means literally, which literally means as is necessary. Really that goes back to the circumstances, the situations in which we are, we don't know what to pray for, as is necessary in these circumstances.

But the spirit himself comes to help us. So we pray in the spirit when we pray with a sense of dependency on the spirit.

Secondly, we pray in the spirit when we pray with simplicity. Again, that could be misunderstood. We pray with simplicity does not mean that we have no depth or no depth of thought to our prayer.

[22 : 17] It doesn't mean that somebody who's able in prayer to go into depth of thought as they're dealing with God in prayer, that that's not really praying in the spirit. We're not saying that.

Simplicity in the sense in which we're using it here really means that praying in the spirit is not about following a ritualistic form of prayer. You can have that not just in terms of a written prayer which we don't generally ourselves follow, but you can still have it even if we don't follow a written set liturgical type of prayer.

We can still have, especially as time goes on, we can have a kind of set format to prayer that we just depend on. We come to depend on the form that we're used to rather than on the spirit.

And we don't pray so that we can comply with the thoughts of those who are with us as we pray, if we're praying in public. It's not about pleasing human beings.

It's not to fit the mold that people think we should fit into. And I've said phrases that are necessary in prayer, otherwise it will be thought of us being pretty weak and being pretty shallow.

[23 : 38] Prayer, let's always remember what prayer essentially is. Prayer is a child telling their father something about their need, something about what they envisage their need to be, or even expressing the fact that they can't even understand that properly.

But it's in the simplicity of a child asking father for help, coming to father to say, father, here I am, I really don't know the way forward, I'm depending on you to help me.

That is simplistic prayer, simple prayer. Prayer which is, although it's in simplicity, it is basically profound. Over the years come to the conclusion, more and more, that while it's always difficult, of course and not right in many ways to assess praying except your own prayer, to hear somebody praying as if God is there as their father and they're just speaking directly to him as a child simply to a father, that is really the prayer that's of faith and praying in the spirit.

Praying with a sense of dependency, praying with simplicity, not trying to impress people, not being concerned, do I match up to the kind of prayer I know somebody else to pray, not saying, well, I know some people who will pray for half an hour so I've got to make at least 20 minutes of it.

No, it's simply a child saying to their father, Lord, I want to speak to you, I want to tell you about this, I want to confess this to you.

[25 : 22] And then if you run out of words, well, that's it. That doesn't mean you haven't prayed or prayed in the spirit. Thirdly, praying in the spirit is not just a matter of dependency and a matter of simplicity, it's also a matter of liberty, another word which is sometimes used and I've used it myself and yet can be used in the wrong way.

Praying in the spirit is praying with liberty. But that's not exactly the same as long prayers or using a lot of words. Jesus said that the Pharisees thought that they would be heard for their much speaking.

They stood on the corners of the streets and in the synagogues and they thought that they would be heard by God for their much speaking because they just went on and on and on.

And they weren't praying. Like the Pharisee we saw in Luke 18 who went to the temple with the tax collector and he prayed with himself.

He didn't pray at all. He didn't pray to God. He didn't pray with liberty. He didn't pray in the spirit. He was taken up with thankfulness that he was not like other people, not realizing that God was despising him, that God had him in contempt.

[26 : 46] it's not about how long we pray for, it's not about using lots of word, it's rather the sense of knowing God to be there.

And when you know that God is there and when you know that there is what really is difficult to define if you haven't experienced it, and I'm sure all of you have experienced it, but it's one of the advantages of being asked to pray in public.

I know it's difficult for some people to think of praying in public, it might even put some people off coming to profess their faith, but there are so, so many advantages and privileges to being asked to pray in public, and in fact, this is certainly one of them, that you come to know those occasions where you know God is there, where you find what you can call a spirit of prayer.

You know, we're asked to pray in certain places or in certain circumstances, and those of you who are used to this will follow what I'm saying. There isn't a spirit of prayer there, you're stuck for words, it just doesn't flow, it's not just that the words don't flow, your mind seems to be stuck, and you're struggling through with a prayer, but you're really saying, well there was no spirit of prayer there, I really found that tough, I really found that difficult.

Liberty, liberty is a mark of God's presence, liberty not necessarily, as we said, in a long flow of words, but in a freedom of thought, and in a sense in your soul that prayer is being drawn out of you, that the spirit is indeed leading you in prayer.

[28 : 35] And of course, it's just as much the case in private. There are times when you go on your knees or you're standing, or however you pray, and the words don't come and the thoughts don't flow.

And times when you really have to confess to God, Lord it's so difficult for me today to pray, forgive me, help me with it, but I just can't. Other times, as soon as you've begun and your thoughts are taken up, maybe with the scripture you've read or something, and off it goes, and your thoughts develop, and your prayer develops, and your sense of God's presence becomes more acute, and it goes on, and you're led from one thing to another in your prayer, and you get up from your knees, and you realize there was liberty there.

The presence of the Lord was that the Spirit of God led me in prayer. But there's one qualification to that, and it's this one.

If we're struggling at any time with prayer, prayer, that does not mean we're not praying in the Spirit. There may be times when you and I are praying in the Spirit more than ever before, and you're really struggling to get to grips with God.

You cannot understand what He has done, why He has done it, why you're feeling like this, why you come to the Bible and it's so cold to you compared to the usual, why you don't have the appetite you used to have, why there's this sense of gloom and decay in your soul, and you struggle through prayer, and you express this to God, and you just can't find the words, and there isn't a liberty there.

[30 : 21] Does that mean you're not praying in the Spirit? Not at all. Maybe then you're praying in the Spirit more than you've ever prayed in the Spirit before. If we are genuinely wrestling with God, then we are praying in the Spirit.

So he's reminding us it's a sense of dependency on God, that praying is praying in the Spirit in the sense of being dependent utterly on God, praying in the Spirit with simplicity, with the voice and the attitude of a child to a father, and praying with liberty, seeking that the Spirit will lead us and bring us onwards and that the sense of the presence of God will make it an occasion where prayer flows.

So he's praying always, praying with all prayer and supplication, praying in the Spirit, and then praying with watchfulness and perseveringly.

Where he's saying there, to that end, because of this, keep alert with all perseverance. Well, again, go back to the picture in your mind of the soldier.

There he is all kitted out, he's had a good night's sleep, all of a sudden he's called to go out the next day, as he's in the barracks, the Roman soldier is there, his shield is beside him, his sword's beside him, the helmet's there, up comes the call to go out, there's an enemy approaching, or you've got to march somewhere, put on your gear, puts the helmet on, has the sword in his hand, takes his shield, out he goes, along with his companions.

[31 : 57] But if he hasn't kept fit, he's very soon going to be struggling. If he hasn't been watchful enough and careful enough to keep himself in good shape, if he's just been rolling around the barracks for months and then doing as little as possible, well, he's not going to be as fit as he should be.

That's the same for the Christian as well. We have to keep up our watchfulness. We have to keep up our level of spiritual fitness. While we do that through prayer, we also do it through the word and through using the word of God in order to store and feed and feed and inform our minds so that we keep up that level of spiritual fitness.

And as we wear the arm and as we go out against the enemy, we can have all the fitness, we can have all of that behind us and be in really good shape. But then if you just relax and switch off and aren't watchful, you know who you're facing, you know what kind of enemy this is, the wiles of the devil.

We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

they're looking for the least opportunity when you're going to switch off. Well, yes, you've got your armor, you're wearing your armor, but you're daydreaming. You're not really thinking about what the Christian life requires.

[33 : 34] Before you know it, the enemy's in. And you've suddenly got to waken up and realize what's happening. with all watchfulness, with all perseverance, keeping on in this activity, never ceasing in this activity, never letting a day go by when you say, I don't need prayer today, or I don't need as much prayer today.

I'm always reminded of what Luther said when the workload that came upon him increased so much. when the break with Rome or around that time, and then, of course, the demands upon this one man became so immense, and he had to do all this writing, and meet all these people, and confront all of these Roman Catholic theologians who were actually accusing him of so much damage to the church.

All of these things to this one man, and he's just heavily laden with all this massive amount of work. What did he say? Well, he said, the more work is laid upon me, the more hours I must pray.

I must add to my hours of prayer, the more the Lord adds work to my life. Jesus is the ultimate example of all of this for us.

And when he came to that great moment in his own experience, in the garden of Gethsemane, he found the disciples asleep. While he was in an agony of prayer, he came back the first time and found them sleeping.

[35 : 20] Indeed, he found them sleeping all the time. But you remember what he said to them. Could you not watch with me for one hour?

Now, he didn't mean that they weren't meant to be praying. But they were meant to be praying and watching. Watchful against the enemy. Watchful in his support. That's why he then said, Watch and pray that you don't enter into, so that you do not enter into temptation.

For the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And you have to be watchful against the weakness of the flesh, even when you know the spirit, your own spirit, is willing.

That's why he's saying, With all watchfulness and perseverance, pray always, with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, with all watchfulness and perseverance.

May the Lord help us to pray. Let's pray. Lord, we do pray that you would teach us to pray as your disciples came to ask this request.

[36 : 43] Christ. We do pray also that when we know prayer being so important in the experience and in the life and in the conditioning of your people, Lord, we pray that you would make us conscious each day of our need to maintain that prayerfulness.

And we pray for your spirit to help us even in that. And we pray, Lord, as we come to pray to you, that our great concern will be to pray in the spirit.

to pray in a way that we know is right. And whatever we are thought of for it by others, grant that our concern may be to close in with God and to come in communion of soul with you, to express our requests and our concerns and our thanksgivings in your presence.

Hear our prayers, Lord, we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.