

Ephesians 6:21-24 - Daily and Eternal Reinforcements

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen is right. Thank you, guys. You're going to get a turn to sing it later. Hang in there. It's so good to have a God like that, isn't it?

To have someone whose faithfulness you can trust. All the time. We're in Ephesians 6 this morning. In fact, we're in the last four verses of Ephesians 6, the last chapter of Ephesians.

Don't say amen yet. This is not the last sermon in this series on Ephesians. We're almost there. But there's a couple more. Did you know there's another letter in the Bible to the church in Ephesus? It's a shorter one. We're going to look at that very briefly. But we're almost at the end. We're close. And you can be excited then and make me feel bad. But the last time we were in Ephesians, we wrestled with the reality that we are at war.

[1 : 09] That there's spiritual warfare going on day by day in our lives. That demands of us that we stand firm in Christ. That we be taking up the armor of God, actively abiding in Christ in order to battle against the forces of evil that rage against us.

We talked about the importance of standing firm in Christ. And knowing that wartime demands different priorities from peacetime. Demands sacrifices.

Demands looking at things differently because of where we are. And this morning, Paul picking up on that is going to give his parting words to the church in Ephesus.

Words that are full of significance and meaning for us. What would Paul like to leave us with at the end of this letter? Let's give our attention again to God's holy word.

Ephesians 6 at verse 21. So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything.

[2 : 14] I have sent him to you for this very purpose. That you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts. Peace be to the brothers and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but these words of our God will stand forever.

Let's ask for his help as we look at them together. Pray with me. Father, we come to you because these are your words. Because we believe you spoke them not only to the church in Ephesus, but to the church in Huntsville today.

And that we need them. And that we need you to speak, Father. We hear from men and we know of men's good ideas and advice. We need to hear from you.

Would you speak clearly by your spirit? Would you speak to our hearts? And would you change us? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Apparently, it never really happened this way.

[3 : 26] But there's a great scene anyway in the movie Braveheart where William Wallace and his ragtag bunch of Scottish soldiers, if you can call them that, are fighting against the more numerous, more highly trained, more confident English army.

And there's a scene where they're so, they've been discouraged. They've been frustrated. Things haven't often gone their way. And they're just outnumbered by the English army.

So much to the point that as they get ready for this one battle, the leader of the English army says, we can beat them with just our Irishmen. We're just going to send the Irish out against them.

They can handle them. And so he sends the Irish out front and they run towards the Scots and they're charging towards each other and then they stop. And they get there and they slow down and

they shake hands and they hug and the Irish switch sides.

And they come over and it's reinforcements for the Scottish army. A jolt of energy. A burst of excitement. They have more than they thought. These guys will stand with us too.

[4 : 34] There are many great battle scenes and movies where reinforcements come just in the nick of time. I'm sure you have your favorite. I'm going to mention just one more.

These are two examples of just movies I've seen so that you know that I do watch things other than Disney princess movies. So I figure Braveheart and Lord of the Rings, maybe I can get my man card back at the end.

And so Lord of the Rings in the two towers, there's an epic battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, the Battle of Helm's Deep. And if you've seen the movie and if you haven't, you can probably imagine a little of what it looks like.

You've got Aragorn and Gimli and Legolas and the rest of the good guys fighting hard to defend a fortress. But they're battling against these unearthly creatures of Saruman.

And he sent them against them and they've come in the battle. They're just overwhelming them. The fortress is collapsing. They're flooding in. One black creature after another flooding in and overwhelming the guys which of course are painted in shining clothes.

[5 : 46] And Legolas' hair is brighter than anything else on the screen. And here they're just being overrun. And the leaders are backing up and saying, we've got to get out. We've got to give in.

This is over. We've been defeated. We couldn't hold out long enough. And then what happens? Gandalf, of course. Gandalf shows up on the hill, the wizard riding a horse.

And the battle stops. And everyone turns and looks at Gandalf. And just a few seconds later, hosts of men on a horseback come rushing over the hill, right? Reinforcements that Gandalf has recruited and brought in.

And all of a sudden, the good guys are back on top. And they chase the Uruk-hai away from the fortress and into the forest for them to get destroyed. It's a great, great victory. They showed up just at the right moment.

Now, in both of those examples, things turn out well. It ends well for the good guys. But can you relate to how those discouraged soldiers would have felt before the reinforcement showed up?

[6 : 54] To feel overwhelmed, to feel at the end of everything you have and you've done everything and you're going to get defeated. This is the end of it.

In the fight for the kingdom of God, in the battle that we wage against the forces of darkness, it's easy to get discouraged, isn't it? Have you ever felt that way before?

Do you feel that way this morning? It's easy to think we aren't strong enough, that we should just give in, give up. Perhaps you feel outnumbered, overmatched, lonely even in your labor for God.

Maybe you can relate to how I've felt wrestling against personal sin in my own heart and life. Like it just keeps coming up. Even in the middle of a worship service.

There's my sin. I thought I had that idol under control that I'd really managed it and then it comes back up again. Like I'm never going to just be done with it.

[7 : 54] There it is, rearing its ugly head again. Maybe you've been seeking to live sacrificially. To seek first God's kingdom and His priorities.

To live with kingdom priorities in a world that tells you to seek first yourself. To get your own pleasure and fulfillment taken care of. And you feel alone.

No one else is trying to live this way. I'm discouraged. It's discouraging to be alone. Maybe you've been seeking to honor God in a difficult relationship.

You feel you're the only one who cares. Nothing seems to get better. You're alone in the fight and now you're, to be honest, ready to quit too. Why bother if he or she's not going to be a part of it?

Maybe you've been laboring to see God's kingdom come here in Huntsville and He's given you a passion for a part of this city or an aspect of your life where you want to see God's kingdom come and you want to see things change but you feel like you're fighting fire with a water bottle.

[9 : 01] That you're just spitting on the fire. You're seeking to bring light into darkness to push back the effects of the fall in your community and you think you're doing what God wants you to do but it seems like there's no progress.

So you're overwhelmed. Discouraged. And Paul understands the Ephesians could easily feel that way. Called into spiritual warfare against the forces of evil and indwelling sin.

Surrounded by a culture of idolatry and self-serving hedonism. Struggling with difficult relationships even within the church. They can't find someone who's easy to get along with. As he closes this letter, here's Paul's heart. Here's what he wants to do. He wants to offer some encouragement to discouraged believers. That's what he has for us this morning. Not only is there the armor of God for us as we fight these battles but also there are reinforcements. We won't be left alone. We need not ultimately be discouraged. [10:02] There are reinforcements both for today, for daily strength and support and for eternity, for eternal security and blessing.

Let's look at the great hope and encouragement offered to us in this passage. Paul begins by speaking of the daily reinforcements that we have here and now. What I'll call gospel partnership. You could just say people. Starts with P too so that works. You can just people. All of the words today start with P. Look at how clear Paul is. That the Christian life is not one lived on our own. In isolation from others. At first he mentions our mutual need for prayer in the verses leading up to our passage. Look at verse 18. He's just told them about the armor of God and what's needed in this battle. Praying at all times in the spirit. With all prayer and supplication. [11:00] To that end keep alert with all perseverance. Making supplication for all the saints. And for me. That words would be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. For which I'm an ambassador in chains.

That I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. Pray for me. As we put on the armor of God for the battle we fight each day. Paul says praying all the time. For all the saints. Paul shared several times in Ephesians how he's praying for them, hasn't he? He writes his prayers out for them right there in the letter. Now he's doing what? He's asking them to pray for him. Here's what you can pray for me. They're together in partnership for the sake of the gospel. So they share in that together. Even when he's been sent out from them. They share in it together by praying for each other. Bible commentator Matthew Henry once wrote, The greatest remembrance of our friends is to remember them before the throne of grace. [12:02] It shouldn't be just a spiritual platitude when someone says, Pray for me. And we think, Oh sure, I'll pray for you. And don't. Prayer is the work of the kingdom.

And it's the way we can partner with someone because God works through our prayers. He's active there. He works in places we can't. In times we can't. For the gospel to advance. So prayer. And then secondly, the written word of God. We're about to be told that Paul is sending Tychicus to Ephesus to encourage them. But first, before we see what he's going to do, notice that Tychicus almost certainly was carrying the very letter we've been studying for the last few months with him. Paul sends Tychicus with God's word for the Ephesian church.

Paul doesn't merely pray for the people he's in partnership with. He tells them what he prays for them. And he encourages them with God's word. Do you share God's word with your brothers and sisters?

[13:11] Do you tell them how you're praying for them and how they can pray for you? Isn't it a great encouragement to get a note, a text, an email? Whatever it is, something that shares God's word with you, that encourages your heart in the loneliness and busyness of the battle, that says, I'm in it with you.

You're not in it alone. And both of those things are encouraging reinforcements in the battle that God uses in our lives. But there's one more, and I want you to think about it this way. Suppose you have some longtime friends from way back. They knew you when, and you haven't lived in the same town with them for a while, and you love them, and you pray for them, and you care about them, but you don't get to talk much anymore. You keep in touch through Christmas cards. You got anybody like that? You hear from them once a year, and you know what's going on because you see that they've gotten one year older than the last time you got to talk with them. And it's great. You love them. You can pray for them. You can be excited to see their family grow. But imagine that this year, instead of a Christmas card, they came through Huntsville over the holidays. Imagine you got to spend a whole evening with them, sharing stories, catching each other up, telling them what

was going on in your life, laughing together, crying together, after not seeing them for years and years.

[14:31] Someone who knows you and your story. That's a different kind of encouragement, isn't it? To be with them, to have them in your presence. Wasn't it different last week to have one of our missionary partners here with us?

Someone who'd grown up here and gone out, and then Justin Houston is here. You can shake his hand. You can hear his stories. Have him open God's Word and encourage us to be able to put my arm around him and pray for him.

It feels different from praying for him from thousands of miles away. God often sends reinforcements, spiritual aid and encouragement for the weary among us, often through the presence of other Christians.

Look at verses 21 and 22. Paul says, Paul says this, I'm going to live the reality that I've been teaching you about through this whole letter.

I'm going to start living it in front of you. The reality that in Christ, God has connected us to each other. That y'all aren't just numbers to me. Your names, even terrible names like Tychicus, that you have to say over and over.

[16:02] It's unnecessarily difficult. But your names and your faces, you actually mean something to me. I remember y'all, I was with you. You're partners for the gospel.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we're connected to each other because of him. And so God is building us together. What has Paul been teaching us? He's making a family out of us that we would be built up into a temple where he can dwell by his Spirit.

Paul says, that's the reality that I'm going to live in front of you. Enough that I would send Tychicus to you. Notice he sent him there to tell you how we are.

That may not strike you as strange, but Paul, you've just written us a letter. It's a long letter. Just tell us how you are. Why does he have to travel thousands of miles over sea to tell us how you are?

Because it is different in person. Because we care about and love each other, because there's an encouragement there. It's not just writing it down. Time and time again in Paul's letters, messengers like Tychicus go and they give information from Paul and bring reports back to Paul.

[17:14] They need to know about him. And he needs to know about them. People are valuable to Paul. They're valuable to us here at Southwood too.

They must be if we understand the kind of community the gospel creates. It doesn't create nameless faces that sit in a sanctuary with you every Sunday. It doesn't.

It creates a community of people where you know who they are and you're able to lock arms. Vital relationships, partnerships together for the sake of the gospel. These aren't just random people Paul goes to church with or used to go to church with.

They're partners with whom he must lock arms for the sake of the gospel. Because it's hard to fight alone. And it's hard to sacrifice alone. Amen? It's hard.

The discouragement of the struggle can be overwhelming. The sense of isolation can be devastating. And so Paul needs them and their prayers. Paul needs them and their prayers.

[18:19] They need him and his. Two brief points of application here about gospel partnership. The first is we need it.

You need it. I need it. Don't fight alone. Paul didn't try it and he doesn't recommend it.

And you say, oh, but I don't have time to connect with them. To be part of a community like that. To lock arms over there.

It's just, it takes too much. I don't have margin. I know that feeling. But I've learned actually you don't have time not to. We don't have enough time on this earth to neglect partnership.

We need each other. You need gospel partnership in your life. Not just formal church membership. A functional church family.

[19:19] A small group, so to speak. Partnership across miles and miles that you can share and labor alongside. I'm convinced some of the most vital members of our church rarely come through these doors anymore.

Some of our elderly shut-in members pray for this church and for the advance of the kingdom here so faithfully. people you may not have even met.

Every time I get to see Delilah Harris, some of you know Delilah. Every time I see her she tells me how she's been praying for me and for this church. The last time I was with her you know what she

said?

She said, well I need to remind you I need that list. You know what list she wanted? The entire membership list of Southwood. You only gave me part last time.

I pray for each one of them by name. Most of you don't know Delilah but she prays for you by name. And you need that.

[20 : 23] I need that. I need to know that she's praying for me and I need her prayers. What a great encouragement that is. Even if you don't know her we need prayer.

We need people who point us to God's word. We need people who show up in our lives to encourage us for the sake of the gospel. We're not okay on our own. We're not just strong enough to power through.

We need gospel partnership. And so do others. Your spouse needs it.

Your kids need it. Your friends need it. Your pastor needs it. Your search committee needs it. Were you listening to Tripp? Thank you for your honesty. Y'all led us in that through this season.

Grace Crawford wrote in the issue of branches that will be in your mailbox this weekend or this week. She's another search committee member. She says, why am I grateful to you all?

[21 : 22] Because you've provided much needed support with your prayers, emails, recommendations and words of encouragement. The weight that we feel is heavy and yet you continue to remind us this is God's sovereign will not ours.

He knows Southwood and loves her dearly. This is his church and we remain confident that he will continue to bless us, keep us and forever make his face shine upon us. Thank you for reaching out to us as your words and prayers have been tremendous in feeding our spirits and she finishes this way, please continue.

While progress continues to be made, the heaviness is real and Satan has attacked in various ways attempting to distract and deter from God's will. As we move forward in these final stages, your prayers, support and encouragement are needed more than ever.

To say again what Tripp just told you in the announcement. Pray for them, partner with them, you get to be a part of it. And it's not just the search committee. Who needs your gospel partnership this week?

Who needs you to pray for them and also needs to know that you're praying for them? Who needs you to talk football or kids with them and also show them God's word?

[22 : 35] Encourage them from his word. Who needs you to show up? Just to show up. How many times in your life has the most encouraging and helpful person in a difficult situation been the one who didn't say a single word?

Has that happened in your life? The most helpful person of all the people who wanted to engage with you, the one who just came and hugged you, held you, cried with you?

How many times is that how God brought encouragement into your life? What a great encouragement that is. Who needs it from you? Is there a loved one hurting and grieving?

Is there a friend battling through the pain and loneliness of divorce? Is there a mission partner here or around the globe feeling overwhelmed? The gospel partnership, people locking arms and working together for the sake of the kingdom is so much what God has called the church to.

It's so much who we are that we want to make it easy for you. It's so important to us as a church. You don't have to go 30 steps outside the doors of this room to find out what's going on and how you can pray for every single one of our local and global mission partners.

[23 : 53] Did you know that? Every one of them. There's a wall right out there. It says express grace over it. It's our mission partner wall. You can go there and it's really served up for you.

You can watch a video about them. There's postcards and you can write them a note. Send it around the world and you don't have to leave this building. 30 steps, I counted. You can go over there.

We'll take care of the stamp. There's pens. There's notes. And you can send it to them and encourage them and have partnership with them in what they're doing. Where would God send you to be a Tychicus?

To carry His word of encouragement to someone who needs it. What a great gift that God has called us not into isolation, not as individual people who are now on our own to figure things out, but into community with others serving Him.

Daily reinforcements in the battle. But that's not all that this passage references. There are daily reinforcements in gospel partnership. There are eternal reinforcements in gospel promises.

[24 : 58] Look at verse 23. Peace be to the brothers and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Paul concludes with a benediction, a good word of blessing for God's people. And the whole point of a benediction is that these gifts and promises are lasting, that they're eternal resources of encouragement and hope for God's people.

They're gifts and blessings now in many ways, but especially they're eternal promises. Maybe if you're writing a hymn, you'd say strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow would be good words to use.

Notice the last word in this verse, incorruptible. It's a really significant word, but it's a little hard to know where it fits in this verse. It means something that lasts, something that's immortal, something that never decays.

Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 15 to talk about our resurrection bodies. They'll be glorious and that will last and not break down like these bodies. Something that won't decay, that'll never end.

[26 : 13] And it fits in this verse equally well with grace and with love. And translators and commentators disagree on where to put it and how to understand it. Let me tell you, the net of that is actually the same thing.

Because Paul is not saying, when we talk about love incorruptible, Paul is not saying this. Grace will be and will come to all those whose love is strong enough that it never fails, that you never let Jesus down, that your love never wanes, that it's strong to the end.

Anybody who does that, those people will get grace. Grace, that's not what Paul is saying. That can't be the meaning. Why? First of all, because that's not what grace means.

Grace is not something I have to perform well enough to earn. Grace is an unmerited gift. Secondly, that can't be the right way to understand it because the whole book of Ephesians has been telling us it's God's love that is so beyond measure, so without end, is so perfect.

It's His love, not ours that's described that way. This is not about the quality of our love, but about the permanence of God's blessing. And so the reason the word incorruptible still works right here with love, the reason it can be love that doesn't decay, is that it works with both of them.

[27 : 41] It's eternal grace and love. God's eternal, never-ending grace rescues us and gives us a love for our Savior that will indeed last through eternity, won't it?

Because of what He's done for us, we will indeed love Him forever. It will not fade away. Not because we never fail, but because He never fails.

Because the resources of His grace never run out. Because the reinforcements for us are eternal. That's His promise. So in addition to love, Paul offers the blessing of God in his two favorite words for this throughout his letters.

He started this letter with these two things. Grace and peace. When they're from God, they're more than mere well wishes. Just a nice thing at the end of the letter.

You know, be happy. Have a good day. They're promises of His blessing because they're coming from God. Peace from the only one who can truly offer it.

[28 : 44] Peace already with Him because of Jesus, we've learned. And ultimately, one day, peace altogether because of Jesus. We spoke of the encouragement of a long-time friend coming back and spending an evening with them.

What's better than those videos of a soldier coming back home to his family? Is anything more encouraging and tear-inducing than seeing them surprise their family members?

Bring tears and shouts of joy? All of those videos are special. Imagine if instead of just that, instead of just I'm home, the soldier after saying, I'm home, whispers in his loved one's ear, for good.

The war is over. How much more exciting is that? How much more encouragement and rejoicing happens there? And that's exactly what God says. Peace to you for good.

The war will be over and we'll be at peace. What a great word of blessing to the one who's struggling and tiring in a battle against sin.

[29 : 54] Grace be with you. Jesus has conquered even your sin. Your God is at peace with you and one day you'll battle sin no more. To the one who's feeling alone in the battle against evil, peace be to you.

Jesus has conquered. Don't forget what's true. You battle a defeated foe and God's still at work so the broken things will be fixed. Justice will come. All will be made right because God is working alongside you.

He stands with you. You're not alone. Eternal reinforcements in the gospel promises of God's benediction. I hope that's what you hear every Sunday at the end of our service.

I love the benediction. It's not a mere ritual or formality that we say we gotta end somehow so we do this little thing at the end. It's spiritual resources for God's people.

And it's always about grace and peace. All the way back when God told His people to receive a benediction back in number 6, God told Moses that when Aaron the priest was going to speak blessing to his people he would say this, say to them, the Lord bless you and keep you.

[31 : 12] The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you what? Peace. The Lord be gracious to you and give you peace.

That's the word that He speaks to His people. God didn't say tell Aaron to do it because something has just happened and they need this message. God said this is how He should always bless my people.

Grace and peace. Those are present and eternal realities. Whatever words of God we use in the benediction, the call is not for us to go do something.

It's for us to sincerely receive God's blessing. It's why I'll say lift up your heads and receive the Lord's benediction. Look up and revel in that the love of God is exactly what we sang about it being today.

That the grace of God in Jesus is as amazing as we talk about. That you're actually at peace with God. That that's real and true with the creator of the universe who's your Father.

[32 : 15] That's what's being spoken to you. A word from your heavenly Father. A gospel promise to encourage you in your difficulty. To empower you in your weakness.

To lift your eyes as it were to an eternal reality in the midst of a darkness that you don't feel like you can see beyond. There's a guy in the Bible I really relate to.

His name is Gehazi. We're rolling on good names today. First Tychicus, now Gehazi. Gehazi was Elisha's servant, the prophet Elisha. And what happens in their story is that the king of Syria gets tired of Elisha messing up his battle plans by telling the army of Israel where he's going.

And so he decides to send his army to get that prophet. And so as they come to the city therein, one morning Gehazi walks out to get the paper, so to speak.

And he looks up and this is what he sees. 2 Kings 6 at verse 15. When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city.

[33 : 24] And the servant said, Alas, my master, what shall we do? He comes back in, wakes Elisha up and says, it's over.

Let's give up. Let's turn in. There's nothing else for us to do. It's only going to get worse from here. It's just the two of us against all of them.

That's all I see. I know that feeling. Do you know that feeling? Here's what happens to Gehazi and Elisha. Elisha said to him, do not be afraid for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

Gehazi's like, come outside. You haven't seen yet. And so Elisha prays and says, O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.

So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. What happens?

[34 : 28] Elisha knows Gehazi doesn't see the reality of the reinforcements that they have. The army of God there with them. So he prays God would allow him to see what is true.

And he does. And God delivers them. That's what happens in gospel partnership when through others God sends reinforcements to encourage us that he's with us, that it is true.

It's especially what happens in gospel promises when through God's blessing of grace and peace to his people, he opens our eyes to the reinforcements with us now and always.

He opens our eyes to and presses into our hearts what's really true. Lest we give up. Lest we despair in our discouragement.

We're not alone. This is true. There's grace to you. There's peace in the midst of what you're going through. I'm in control and I'm with you.

[35 : 29] God has reinforcements for the battle and the victory is his. Amen? Let's pray. Oh God, open our eyes that we would see like Gehazi.

We so struggle with feeling alone, with feeling discouraged, with feeling outnumbered and overwhelmed and we often don't see the point.

Why keep struggling? It's exhausting. Would you open our eyes that we would see you for who you are as the glorious king over all, as the one who is caring for us and even, Father, holding us in the palm of your hand.

Give us that vision of you that we would know that you're caring for us moment by moment in this life and that you have everything taken care of for the life to come.

Give us great hope and encouragement because of that. May we trust you more today. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.