

DEVOTION TO PRAYER

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[0 : 00] It doesn't rate in my top 10 of all-time favourite movies. That's because I've actually never watched it. That's because I saw the shorts and decided not to watch it.

But it did, however, win a 1989 Academy Award for Best Picture. It's called Driving Miss Daisy. It doesn't rate up there amongst my all-time favourites. There's no guns from what I understood in the shorts, and Clint Eastwood doesn't star in it, so it doesn't rate for me.

But it is apparently a good movie, from what I understand. I've read all about it and so on and so forth. There is, throughout the movie, an undercurrent of racial tensions in the movie.

But the main plot is the developing relationship between the two main characters. The two main characters are Miss Daisy, a stubborn 72-year-old widow, and her African-American driver, Hoke. Miss Daisy has an accident because she puts her foot on the accelerator instead of the brake. I mean, that's the sort of thing that can happen at any time. You see it occasionally, they pop up in the newspaper.

[1 : 11] And no insurance company will touch her. And so she has to get a driver in order to drive her around. And she hates the thought of losing her independence.

She wants nothing to do with Hoke. In fact, on one occasion, she angrily blurts out to him, I don't need you, I don't want you, I don't like you. However, over the years, their relationship develops. And the film ends, the movie ends on Thanksgiving Day in a retirement village where Miss Daisy now lives. It's sort of 25 years since they first met.

Miss Daisy is 97, Hoke is 81. And Hoke is visiting Miss Daisy. And he notices that she has not eaten her pumpkin pie, which is tradition on Thanksgiving Day.

And she tries to pick it up with her fork, but he gently takes the plate from her and her fork from her. And he says, let me help you with it. And he cuts a small piece of the pie off and he gently feeds her.

[2 : 17] And she's delighted, it tastes great. And then he gets another piece and feeds her and then another piece and feeds her. And the film ends with a car apparently fading in the background, sort of making all the connections come together.

What the film does, it documents the wonderful transformation of their relationship from a refusal to be dependent on Hoke, the driver, to a delightful dependence upon him for even a piece of pie. And the movie portrays beautifully, I think, the journey of the Christian life. It is a journey from self-reliance and independence to God-reliance and dependence.

It's a journey from self-confidence and strength to God-confidence and a humbling and acknowledgement of our utter total weakness in everything.

And so we have this core value as a church called devotion to prayer. And this core value makes a statement as a church, it's a statement to God, to the world, even to our own consciences, that we exist to do things that we cannot do without the supernatural grace of God.

[3 : 41] It's a statement, devotion to prayer is a statement that says we are weak and our confidence is in the supreme majesty of God and his goodness.

We are totally dependent upon God for everything, no matter how big or small. St. Paul's as a church exists mainly to do the humanly impossible.

Everything good, everything worthwhile, everything eternal and God-glorifying that we want to do as a church, we cannot do without the supernatural grace of God.

And it is pride and it is arrogance where we think we can build the church, we can see ministry flourish, we can see people come to Christ just by putting in the right strategies, saying the right words, having the right programs in place, even the right people leading the programs in place.

Our culture is a culture of independence. And when we let that culture permeate the church, you have pride and arrogance.

[4 : 51] And Ephesians 6, this is why we're reading this passage for us tonight, Ephesians 6 verse 12 puts all of our ministry visions and plans and activities in their rightful context.

It says, and you should have Bibles open at this point, Ephesians 6 verse 12, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual force of evil in the heavenly realms.

The context in which we're gathering right here, right now at 6.42 on a Sunday afternoon, and the context in which we seek as a church to labour, to know, to treasure and to represent Jesus is a battlefield.

We're in the middle of a long and protracted wall. And I suspect that most of us, when we came to church tonight, never even had that on our radar. You know, we didn't jump into a sort of Humvee with a big gun on the back of it, fighting our way to church.

It's difficult for us to understand as we sit here in church, in this building in Chatswood, in the most affluent city of the luckiest country during the longest period of peace that we've known.

[6 : 12] It doesn't seem like a battlefield, but what did I say last week? What I said last week is that what the Bible does for it, what God, who is ultimate reality, helps us to see things the way they actually are.

And that's what the Bible does. And so here, Paul helps us to see reality. He helps us to see things the way they are. So verse 10 of Ephesians 6 opens with the word finally.

Now it's not Paul signalling that he's getting to his final point of his letter. You know, finally, this is my last point. Everyone goes, breathe a sigh of relief. It's nearly supper time. The word is better translated for the remaining time.

Paul is making a statement in his final verses that the whole of the remaining time before Christ returns will be characterized by conflict, tension and hardship for the Christian and for the church.

And frankly, this should not be a surprise for us. We've just finished going through the book of Revelation. Revelation deals, a whole chunk of Revelation in the middle there, deals with this cosmic war that rages until Christ comes and finishes it all.

[7 : 24] And so our expectation of the Christian life and Christian ministry is that it will not be easy. It will be hard work. Verse 12 says that the war that we're engaged in is not against flesh and blood.

It is a supernatural war. It is therefore futile if we fight this war by and in our own strength.

We're involved in a battle with a formidable enemy. And Paul is quite specific about our enemy. He says our struggle is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

And so if we attempt in any sense to try and spread the influence of the kingdom of God, that is to see people in Chatswood to know, treasure, and represent Jesus, we try and spread that influence by using conventional human tactics and wisdom, that is we trade strength with strength and sarcasm with sarcasm and cunning with cunning and manipulation with manipulation and power with power, we will lose.

Our opponents are too great. You see, the devil and his angels are a great demonic enemy with a defined and disciplined chain of command.

[8 : 45] And even though he doesn't possess anything like the power of God himself, Satan is still terribly powerful. He can only be at one place at one time, but with his army of evil spirits, he imitates God's presence everywhere and he imitates God's power over all things.

And he imitates God because he desires to be God more than anything else. And it's that desire to be God, which is at the center of his terrible total spiritual evil.

Verse 12 alludes to this by describing the enemy as the power of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil. So there are plenty of people in history who have gone pretty low in terms of perpetrating evil.

You can think of a few, you know, Stalin and Hitler and a bunch of others like that. But they're not even coming close to Satan's evil. You see, Satan has no conscience.

He has no compassion. He has no remorse. He has no morals. He feeds on pain and anguish and filth. He is supremely cunning.

[9 : 54] Verse 11 speaks of the devil's schemes or the devil's methods, if you like. And he's been honing his schemes and his methods for millennia. He is an accomplished philosopher and

theologian and psychologist.

He has studied for thousands of years enough time to be astonishingly brilliant at every discipline. He is the ultimate manipulator and subverter and actor.

And 2 Corinthians 11 says that one of his deadly methods is he masquerades as an agent of God. He sets himself up. He presents himself as one on God's side.

Whatever his tactic, he seldom attacks openly. His strategies, which are administered by his devils and nearly always unseen, shrewd and perfectly tailored for the victim.

He operates best when he can convince people and even God's people that he doesn't exist or that he's not powerful. And can persuade us that life, in fact, is not a battle.

[10:56] He is evil beyond our comprehension and without conscience or principle. He is diabolically cunning and he is against us.

He hates Christ. He hates God's children. He hates the church. He hates the mission of St. Paul's Chatswood to see Jesus known, treasured and represented in such a way that more and more people are rescued from his evil clutches.

He hates the plans that we have to go deeper together in fellowship with Christ, to serve each other in love and to connect better in our community for the glory of God. He hates what we're doing with our building project right now.

He hates the establishment of ICS. He will do whatever he can to destroy the work of the gospel in your life. That is Paul's cosmic perspective.

With all its chilling implications. See the value of prayer so far? And frankly, all would be despair except that it's only part of Paul's cosmic perspective.

[12:08] You see, on earth, amongst mortals, Satan has no equal. You don't match him in power. Not even close. But in the heavenly realms, on the other hand, he is far exceeded by the triune God.

Colossians 1 and 2 says that the entire spiritual realm owes its existence to Christ. Thrones, powers, rulers, authorities, invisible and visible in heaven and on earth.

And so Christ is not only more powerful by virtue of the fact that he created Satan, but because he also defeated Satan at the cross. He has sealed Satan's doom.

Although in this present age, he still exercises control over those who have not found freedom in Christ. And for those of us, and this is a warning, for those of us who neglect Christ's resources and rely upon our own strength and human wisdom, we place ourselves in harm's way.

When we decide to take matters into our own hands, rather than patiently relying upon God, we take matters into our own hands, we place ourselves in harm's way.

[13:29] And so what are we to do? That's what the rest of this section is about here. In Ephesians 6. Paul leaves us with two commands that dominate his advice in this last letter, verse of the letter. The first is in verse 10.

It says, finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. That is, for the remaining time, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

And this command is in fact a passive command. That is, it says, be made strong in the Lord. In other words, don't find your strength in yourself. Be made strong in the Lord. Find your strength in Christ.

We are totally dependent upon Christ. The power is his. The victory is his. And without his strength and his victory, we will falter and we will fall. And yet, we still need to pursue being made strong in him.

And so what Paul does here is he sort of expresses here a proper combination of divine enabling and human cooperation. And he does it again in verse 11, where he says, put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

[14:35] So if your aim is to persevere in the Christian life and not be defeated by the cunning schemes of the devil, then you must put on the armor, take up the weapons as described here in these verses.

The armor is meant to protect us from the attack of the evil one. And it's really simple. Truth, verse 14. Righteousness, verse 14. The gospel of peace, verse 15.

Faith in 16. Salvation in 17. And the weapon is the word of God in verse 17. All things referred to earlier in Ephesians as gifts coming to us from Jesus himself.

Now, when you look at Ephesians 6 and you see this bigger picture of the Christian soldier in the armor of God, they look pretty formidable.

It's like you've got the whole armor on, the helmet, the breastplates, and all of a sudden, your big sword, and you feel like you're 10 foot tall. Sort of like I do when you give me a big gun. I feel like a whole bigger man than what I actually am without a gun.

[15 : 36] That's what happens in movies as well, I think. It kind of feels a bit like that. And that's kind of what this soldier can feel like. Because they've dressed up, formidable image, and there's a call to action.

And so the soldier gets ready for action. They've got their sword, they've got all their armor, and then they do something incredibly amazing here. They fall to their knees and they pray.

Now, that doesn't mean that there's no action. It means that every action of this soldier, dressed out, ready for this formidable battle, is that every aspect of it is bathed in prayer.

You see, prayer isn't just another one of the bits of the armor. It's just not another sort of weapon you've got. It's meant to pervade everything, all aspects of the cosmic wall that the disciple of the Lord Jesus is engaged in.

But there is a temptation here, I think. You know, you've got truth, you've got salvation.

[16 : 39] You know, I'm a Christian. I've got my theology worked out. Come into a good church. And you start to think, I can fight this battle.

In the same way, I feel like I'm pretty much indestructible when you've got a 308 strapped over your shoulder. I feel like I'm pretty indestructible here. And yet, in verse 19, we see that's not Paul's temptation.

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me, so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains.

Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should. Now, let's be frank here. If ever there was a fearless and competent soldier in the cosmic battle, it would have to be Paul.

You see, he's the Chuck Norris of the early apostles. That's his picture, or the Clint Eastwood, or the John Wayne, depending how old you are. This is Paul.

[17 : 45] He's an awesome figure as an apostle of the Lord Jesus. Wrote one third of the New Testament, planted churches all over the Middle East, spread the gospel as far as you can imagine.

He stood before people like Felix and Agrippa, officials of Rome, soldiers and commanders. And he fearlessly spoke the gospel.

And he says here, I can't do that without your prayers. He says, I am fearful that I would lose courage and I would fail in the pressure of this battle.

And so he asked them to pray for him. I need your prayers that I would be fearless in this battle.

And that's why he instructs them in verse 18. To pray in the Spirit at all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests.

With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints, including me, the Apostle Paul. Now, the prayer he's calling for here is comprehensive.

[18 : 48] We're to pray on all occasions. That means it's both regular and it's constant. And what he's calling us to do here as Christians who have been adorned with the armor, he's calling us to consistently be praying.

Adopt an attitude of prayerful dependence on God for everything in their life. That's why he says pray with all kinds of prayers and requests.

Being alert and always keep on praying because you don't want to give up. You don't want to fall asleep. Prayer is essential. And if prayer is so essential for Paul in this cosmic battle, I seriously have to ask the reason.

Is the reason why we're losing ground, particularly in the Western church, has it got anything to do with the lack of genuine prayer and commitment to prayer? Have we got comfortable?

It's my conviction that we are weak because we do not pray as we ought. As American theologian Joel Beeky says, the greatest prayer problem with the church is prayerless praying.

[20 : 05] And prayerless praying is where we don't really see our need and our dependence upon God, but we just mouth it anyway. It's where we can articulate real and right knowledge and needs, but actually don't give ourselves up to God, pour our hearts out to God, as if we actually needed God to act in order for there to be a victory.

Prayerless praying is mouthing words without a heart or an attitude of prayerfulness. It's praying, Lord, give me today my daily bread.

But having a fridge full of food, not really needing to pour my heart out to God, because I know there's some in the freezer.

I pray the prayer, but do I really, truly believe that God provides for my needs every single day and without his provision, it doesn't exist.

It doesn't happen. That's prayerless praying. Mouthing the right words, but with a heart that says, I'm not really dependent.

[21 : 36] The other problem with prayer is a lack of prayer altogether. Because a non-existent prayer life means that I'm self-righteous because I don't confess my sins to God. It means I'm ungrateful because I do not give thanks to God.

It means I'm presumptuous because I just assume he's going to provide my daily bread for me. I don't ask God for my daily needs. I'm self-centered because I don't ask God to bless other people. I'm irreverent because I do not praise God or seek his kingdom to come.

I'm unfriendly to God because I don't enjoy relating to him. And let me tell you, I've been a Christian for just over 20 years. And nothing makes me feel more like a faithless hypocrite than prayerlessness.

This is the one Christian discipline that I have struggled with for 20 years. And for the last few years, I've worked out why.

Because I like to be in control. And I suspect I'm meant to feel like a faithless hypocrite because of my prayerlessness.

[22 : 45] Jesus ends his parable on the persistent widow in Luke 18 with a really important question. You see, the beginning of the parable in verse 1, Jesus tells the reason why he's sharing this parable.

It's to show them, that is to show his disciples, that they should always pray and not give up. The very thing that Paul has encouraged the Ephesians to do in chapter 6, to keep on praying.

That's the point of the parable. And so his question at the end of the parable has some real force to it. It's there in verse 8. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

See what Jesus does there? He connects prayer, that's the point of the parable, with the question of, will there be faith when I come?

He connects prayer and faith, trust, dependency on him, together. Together. Jesus is saying in Luke 18, that continual prayer until he comes is not only the evidence that we are people of faith, but also the means of building faith and dependence on him until he returns.

[24 : 09] prayerless praying or non-existent prayer life reveals an independent, self-confident, faithless heart.

Can you see the conflict between that and the person who declares themselves to be someone who trusts in the Lord Jesus? You see, we can say all that we like, all we like that we believe in the sovereignty of God and that God ordains everything and that he elects stuff and he purposes all things to be, he's in control of all stuff, and we can marvel people with our knowledge and of these doctrines of grace and, but the place where we demonstrate that those things that we say that we value, we actually value in our hearts, is metaphorically on our knees in prayer.

Prayer is where our theology of the sovereignty and the goodness of God translates into actual action, which is what core values do.

My friends, the context in which we as a church exist to know Jesus and treasure Jesus and represent Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people is a cosmic war. That's the context in which we gather here right now and in which we seek to do all the ministry that we're doing and it doesn't look like it on the surface.

It doesn't look like we're involved in cosmic war. The people driving past there at Fuller's Road right now are not thinking, ooh, battlefield going on there. That's not what they're thinking and let me tell you, when they drive past here and if they do, you know, if they're not watching where they're going, they have a glance over here and they see a sign on the front of the building that says time to build and they notice that we've got some building program going on here and if they drive a bit further just before they turn left or go straight ahead, they'll notice there's another one right next door.

[26 : 02] Alto are doing a building project too and on the surface, both of them look the same kind of thing except Alto's bigger than ours. It's the same kind of stuff. Alto's got a building project and Paul's Chatswood's got a building project.

It all looks the same but our one draws the attention of Satan in a way that Alto's one doesn't. Satan is against us in the way that he's not against them. Alto will sell and service cars, Holden cars, mind you, on their site and ours is a battlefield headquarters for the souls of lost people in Chatswood.

Two very different things. We are locked in battle every day for everything we do and let me tell you, right now, your leadership, God, and I can only thank God for this, your leadership in your church right now is more acutely aware of it than I've noticed in the last number of years.

More acutely aware of the battle that rages every day and it's causing us to pray. We've been walking in some very hard days for months now and we are being driven to prayer and God is revealing that he is in control on a whole number of things.

[27 : 21] But bit by bit, God has been humbling us. We have become less confident in ourselves and more confident in God. Everything we want to see happen here as a church will happen will not happen without the supernatural grace of God.

Are you aware of it? Are you aware that he's in control of everything in life? You see, we don't exist to preach.

We exist as a church to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit so that people are supernaturally awakened from unbelief and changed beyond what any human being can cause in their life.

We don't exist to teach kids' church. That's going on over there right now somewhere. We don't exist to teach kids' church but to teach kids' church in the power of the Holy Spirit so that young people are supernaturally converted, built up in the faith and loved beyond what any of the kids' church teachers can do for them.

We don't exist to sing but to sing in the power of the Spirit because the affections of our hearts have been supernaturally awakened and the glory of Christ is treasured beyond what any music can produce for us.

[28 : 47] We don't exist to do evangelism and missions but to do evangelism and missions in the power of the Holy Spirit so that hard unbelieving hearts will be supernaturally changed to soft Jesus receptive believing hearts.

Friends, I want to see people come to Christ, treasure Jesus, I want to see people living lives for his glory, I want to see people healed from scars, from grudges, grudge bearers turning into forgivers and haters to lovers and grumblers and whingers turned into joyless rejoicers, I want to see joyless people into hopeful people that judgmental turned into people who are merciful.

I want to see all that happening in people's lives and I can't do it. It is a supernatural work of God. Everything we aim to accomplish as a church is impossible without God's supernatural action and frankly that is so liberating but it's also so incredibly humbling because it means that I am weak and I guess weakness and humiliation which always comes before humility is one of the first things needed for a vigorous prayer life.

Recognizing that you have no power in this world but God does and so friends I want to call for you to pray right now for our building project for it to be finished on time and in budget.

There is right now and I can't believe I'm saying this with a smile on my face. Right now there is \$50,000 to \$60,000 that could go against us and the immediate response is take control of that.

[30 : 44] Don't spend the money. No, no, no, no. It's stuff that's already committed and it could go against us. You know if you stick an excavator out there in the car park and all of a sudden they start digging stuff and they find dirty dirt in there I know that's a weird statement they find dirty fill in there all of a sudden the bills go through the roof.

Find a couple of sheets of asbestos in the car park boom through the roof and expenses and we can't cover that and so there's about 50 to 60 in this project that could go against us we've got no control over it whatsoever and if it goes against it it's going to hurt us a lot.

So pray that it will go in our favour. Pray that God would act. Pray that George Altamonte the chairman of the Altai group over there who's been generous to us already will be even more generous towards us just because we're his neighbours.

If God can get Pharaoh to move Pharaoh's heart to say to the Israelites yeah go and take all the wealth of Egypt with you he can move the head of the Altai group to give us a few more dollars. Seriously pray that God would move. God has promised to do for us things that we cannot do for ourselves when we pray.

[32 : 05] God has designed and ordained and planned and promised that he will act when we pray. God has promised to act when we get on our faces before him and we confess our sins and

give thanks for his grace and plead for him to pour out his supernatural blessings on our lives and our families and our church and our city.

when we pray we are declaring that the supernatural action of God is essential in the life of St. Paul's Chatswood.

So is it not breathtaking to hear Jesus say ask and it will be given to you? Is it not breathtaking to hear Jesus' brother James say you want something but you don't get it because you do not ask God or to put it out positively if you'd asked me I would have given it to you.

It's astonishing that God acts in response to prayer. It's astonishing because the all-knowing all-seeing all-planning all-powerful God wills for our Christ-exalting prayers to be the occasion of his action.

that's mind-blowing in my mind. And so devotion to prayer is a core value of this church. My desire for us at St.

[33 : 34] Paul's is to be more like the 97-year-old Miss Daisy than the 72-year-old Miss Daisy. Joyfully dependent on our gracious God's provision daily provision in such a way that when we pray give us today our daily bread we actually mean it.

We actually mean that we are dependent upon him for everything. And so may this core value not just be written on the paperwork and on the walls and posters and stuff around the place but written in our hearts in such a way that it shapes the attitude and activity of our lives.

Let me tell you what it does for the full time staff here at St. Paul's this is how we shape it. Likewise with Christ in a Bible situation. I give full time staff here one day a month committed to just prayer for this church and for the ministry of this church.

One day a month and I think it's the most valuable thing not that they do other things which are valuable but it's the most valuable thing. I'm always encouraged when I look at my diary and know that staff member is committed today in prayer.

They're praying today. And they also report to me on their private devotional lives. They're actually being saturated in the scriptures and actually have a life of prayerfulness.

[35 : 00] And so St. Paul's as a church we're committed to constantly bringing all things to God in prayer, intentionally building prayer into the centre of our life together and developing a culture where natural and unstructured prayerfulness just comes out in our interactions with one another.

Not just it's time for prayer meeting. Not just that. I pulled the face kind of stuff. But not just the prayer meeting time but natural interactions with one another where we converse about stuff and we share things with one other.

We just pray for your brother. I just want to pray for your sister. Natural prayer flowing out. We're as a church committed to encouraging and equipping for prayer on a personal family level and incorporating prayer into every church activity.

And so let me just take Jesus' question and make it a little bit more pertinent for us at St. Paul's. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith at St.

Paul's? I want to ask you, are you more like the 72 year old Miss Daisy clinging to independence or the joyfully dependent 97 year old Miss Daisy?

[36 : 23] I believe Christ will find faith at St. Paul's if we learn to live a life of prayerful dependence until he comes in every day across all the church and all the activities of this church.

And my hope and my prayer is that we become more like 97 year old Miss Daisy. And this core value of devotion to prayer is written in our hearts.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, you are sovereign over all that is and we are so dependent upon you and yet Lord, in our sinfulness and our sinful pride, we cling to our independence.

Oh, Father, there is so much more power and freedom just by surrendering to you the God who is not just a God who is sovereign but a God who is merciful and good and just.

Father, we pray that we would be delightfully and joyfully dependent upon you in all things. Lord, as I've asked our church across all the services today to pray for our building project, I pray that this 50, 60 grand, whatever it is that could go against us, that it will go for us.

[37 : 48] I pray, Father, that you would intervene and act in amongst the lives of all these people that we have no control over, builders and Alto Group and everything else.

Willoughby Council, everyone, so that it will go in our favour. And when it does, that it would cause us to rejoice, deeply rejoice and give thanks to you.

may we be reminded constantly, Father, that you're in control, you have all the power in the world where we virtually have none. May that be a comfort and a joy for us, in Jesus' name.
Amen.