

All-Prayer

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help, if we could turn to Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 6. Ephesians chapter 6.

Ephesians chapter 6, and we'll read from verse 10, where Paul writes, Finally be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might.

Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

[1 : 41] And then verse 18. Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. All prayer.

I think I mentioned to you before that whenever I come to this passage in the Bible, I'm immediately reminded of John Bunyan's famous book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Because, as you know, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it gives to us an allegory of the Christian life. And John Bunyan, he had such a great grasp and knowledge of Scripture, that Spurgeon described Bunyan as a living Bible.

Prick Bunyan anywhere on his body, said Spurgeon, and his blood will flow bibline. Because the very essence of the Bible, he said, flows from his veins. And you see that in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan was saturated in Scripture. And the book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is saturated in Scripture. But you remember when you read through *Pilgrim's Progress*, you'll see that after Christian fled the city of destruction and was delivered through the slough of Despond, and he passed through the wicked gate, and then he explored the interpreter's house, and he stood at the cross, and the burden rolled up his back, and then he perseveres up this hill called Difficulty.

[3 : 21] And then he lodges for a time at a place called Palace Beautiful. And at Palace Beautiful, it was this mountaintop experience for Christian. It was, when you actually count it in the book, it was five days of fellowship, where Christian found rest and relief and refreshment in his pilgrimage.

But on the fifth and final day of his fellowship, just before leaving Palace Beautiful, Christian, or Bunyan writes about Christian, he says, Christian was taken into the armory, where he was shown all manner of weapons, which the Lord has provided for his pilgrims.

So Christian was taken into the armory, shown all manner of weapons, which the Lord provided for pilgrims. And what's remarkable is that there was enough armour in the armory to provide armour for all the servants of the Lord.

And you remember that as Christian was given the whole armour of God at Palace Beautiful, he was given this armour before he would descend into the Valley of Humiliation to face Apollyon.

And as you know, it's all based upon what we're reading here in Ephesians chapter 6, where Paul is encouraging us and exhorting us to pick up and put on the whole armour of God.

[4 : 39] But you know, there's one weapon, when you read it in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, there's one weapon in God's armoury that I'd never really noticed before. I always knew it was a weapon against the attacks and the advances of the devil.

But I'd never noticed it until Bunyan actually points it out in the Pilgrim's Progress. Because when Christian went into the armory at Palace Beautiful, Bunyan writes that he saw all manner of weapons which the Lord provided for his pilgrims.

He says there were swords and shields and helmets and breastplates and shoes. But there was also a weapon called all-prayer. The weapon was called all-prayer.

And that's what he's picking up on from verse 18. And this is the second last weapon Paul encourages us and exhorts us as Christian soldiers to pick up.

The weapon all-prayer. And of course, if we were to look at Roddy the Roman tonight, I didn't put him on the screen because, well, this weapon is invisible. It's an invisible weapon.

[5 : 49] But all-prayer, as you know, is an important weapon. All-prayer is an invisible weapon. But all-prayer is an important weapon. And I want us to consider this invisible but important weapon under three headings.

The power of prayer, the purpose of prayer, and ultimately the priority of prayer. So the power, purpose, and priority of prayer. First of all, the power.

The power of prayer. Now look at verse 18. Paul writes about the whole armour of God. This is what he says near the end. Second last item. Praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

All prayer. As you know, by now, we've been looking at this for, I don't know how long now. But we can see that Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it's full of encouragements, and it's full of exhortations to us as Christians.

And as Paul comes to the conclusion of this letter, he gives one final exhortation. Right there in verse 10. Be strong in the Lord. Be strong in who you are in Christ, and be strong in what you have in Christ.

[7 : 02] Finally, my brothers and sisters, he says, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes or the wiles of the devil.

So Paul says to us, as he has said to us many times before, Christian soldier, have you put your armour on today? Because the Christian life, it's not a playground.

We're not in a playground. We are in a battleground. It's not a physical warfare, it's a spiritual warfare. Because we have an enemy, a great enemy, and he's the enemy of our soul.

He's our adversary, the devil. Verse 12. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, Paul exhorts us. Therefore, Paul's therefore are so important. Take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

[8 : 05] We must stand firm. But we can only stand firm if we have begun our day by going into God's armoury and prayerfully picking up and putting on the whole armour.

All eight pieces of the armour. The first piece of the armour, we've seen it before, it was the belt of truth. We're to prayerfully pick up and put on the belt of truth. It's to be worn at all times, whether we're on or off duty, because as Christians, we're to have integrity, honesty and reliability.

We're to rejoice in the truth, love the truth and speak the truth. The second piece of armoury speaks about is the breastplate of righteousness. Through Calvary's great transaction, we have received that breastplate of righteousness.

And it's there to protect our heart from the wickedness of sin and the wiles of the devil. The third piece of armour was the gospel shoes, these shalom shoes, because as Christian soldiers, we're all ambassadors.

We are all ambassadors for Christ and we're always to be ready to give an answer for the reason, for the hope that is within us. The fourth piece of armour, the shield of faith.

[9 : 16] That's a great piece of armour because as Christian soldiers, we're people of faith. We are to link our shields so that we keep formation, we keep focused, we keep moving forward and we keep fighting the good fight of faith, always looking, not to man, but to the author and the finisher of our faith.

The fifth piece of armour that we prayerfully picked up and we've put on is the helmet of salvation. We need to protect our mind. Our mind is precious. We need to protect our mind from the ambushes and the attacks and the assaults of Satan.

We need to guard our mental, emotional and spiritual well-being from the devil because he will make us doubt. He will make us disengage from worship. He will make us despair about our salvation.

Then last time, a number of weeks ago now, probably three weeks ago, we looked at the sixth piece of armour. Paul exhorted us to pick up this short, sharp, double-edged sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

because as a sword, it provides direction. It also provides discernment. It protects us against the errors of the enemy.

[10:28] The sword even pierces the enemy. It pierces the enemy when he attacks us and he assaults us in our times of temptation. Now, at this point, most commentators conclude their study on the whole armour of God.

They stop there at six pieces. They stop with a sixth piece of armour, the sword of the Spirit. But as I mentioned before, I believe that there are eight pieces. Eight pieces of armour in the whole armour.

The first piece of armour or the first pieces of armour, the first six, they're all visible. We could see them on Roddy the Roman. He's kitted out with his belt of truth, his breastplate of righteousness, his shalom shoes, his shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and his gladius, his sword of the Spirit. But the last two weapons are important weapons, but they're invisible weapons. The last two weapons, Paul exhorts every Christian soldier to pick up.

And they're both found in verse 18. All prayer and all perseverance. All prayer and all perseverance.

[11:40] We're considering all prayer this week and God willing we'll think about all perseverance next week. As we said, all prayer, it's an invisible weapon but it's an important weapon because prayer is powerful.

Prayer is powerful. And of course, we're all familiar with the slogan of the Slavic Gospel Association. They always come round every May and they always remind us about their slogan, Much Prayer, Much Power.

Little Prayer, Little Power. No Prayer, No Power. So the slogan, as you know, was first penned by the founder of the Slavic Gospel Association, Peter Dynica, who was nicknamed Peter Dynamite. And he was nicknamed Peter Dynamite because he was a powerful preacher and a prayer warrior. A prayer warrior. Don't you find it remarkable that that's how we often describe someone who frequently wields this invisible yet important weapon of prayer.

We say that that person is a prayer warrior. That's a Christian soldier who wields the weapon of all prayer. They're a prayer warrior.

[12:50] We describe them as prayer warriors. And there are many prayer warriors mentioned throughout the Bible. These people, men and women, who powerfully prayed to God.

It was Abraham, the friend of God, the man of faith. Moses, he was the man of God who pleaded on behalf of the people. There was Manoah who dedicated Samson to the Lord.

There was Hannah. She prayed for a son. Samuel, who was that son? There was Jonah who prayed in the belly of the fish when he disobeyed the Lord's call upon his life.

Jeremiah, he lamented before the Lord. Daniel prayed three times a day even in the lion's den. Habakkuk prayed for revival. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up.

Paul prayed when he was converted. Stephen prayed as he was stoned to death. And while the Apostle John was praying on the Lord's day, he was graciously given that glorious revelation of heaven.

[13:55] So there are many prayer warriors in the Bible who powerfully prayed to God. And there are many prayer warriors that we've heard throughout history. But you know, it's always Elijah's earnest and effective prayer life that the Apostle James used as an example.

Or the author of James who used it as an example. He reminds us in his New Testament letter that he writes, The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. But the thing about prayer is that the power of prayer isn't about the extent of prayer. It's not even about the eloquence of our prayer.

Nor is it about the emotion of our prayer. So the power of prayer is not about the extent, not about the length. It's not about the eloquence or the emotion of our prayer.

No, the power of prayer is all about our earnestness of heart. The power of prayer is all about our earnestness of heart. Because the power of prayer isn't about our head. It's always about our heart, which is why we are always to pray wholeheartedly. Now, often when we're in our morning or evening devotions, we will confess, well, my mind might have been there, but my heart wasn't. But we are called to pray wholeheartedly.

[15 : 26] So all prayer is to be wholehearted prayer, because the power of prayer isn't based upon the extent, the eloquence, or the emotion about prayer, but the earnestness, the earnestness of our prayer. But here's the question. What if God doesn't answer our earnest and effective prayers the way that we expect? Does that mean our prayers are not earnest enough? No. Because when it comes to the weapon of all prayer, we not only need to remember the power of prayer, we also need to remember the purpose of prayer, which is what we see secondly. So the power of prayer, and then the purpose of prayer. Paul says, with this weapon, we are to be praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. So the power of prayer, and then secondly, the purpose of prayer, the purpose of prayer. Now, as you know, I've said to you many times before that

I love the Shorter Catechism. I used to hate it as a child, and I'm sure you all did too. You dreaded having to recite it and memorize it for Sunday school. But looking at it now as a Christian, you realize how brilliant and how beautiful it is as a document to read it and recite it, and even try and remember it more and more. In fact, when it comes to this topic, the topic of prayer, the Catechism asks the question, what is prayer? Great question. What is prayer? The answer that's given, prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will. In the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies. What a summary statement of what prayer is. It's brilliant. Then the following question in the Catechism, after what is prayer? The Catechism asks, what rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?

What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer? And the Catechism teaches us that the whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer. But the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples commonly called the Lord's Prayer. But what I love about that answer is, it says, first of all, the whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer. The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer, which means that this invisible yet important weapon of all prayer, it can be made more powerful when it's accompanied with a short, sharp, double-edged sword of Scripture.

In other words, what Paul, even what our Catechism is teaching us, is that we should pray God's Word. We should pray God's Word. So our prayers should be full of God's Word. Our prayers, in many ways, should be saturated in Scripture, where we pray God's Word back to the God who gave it to us.

That's what we're to do in prayer. We're to pray God's Word back to the God who gave it to us. We are to plead and pray the promises of God. We're to hold God to account. Lord, you've said this, so be faithful to your promise. You've said this. You've said this. Be faithful to your promise. And you know, that's what David was doing in Psalm 27. Psalm 27, David's confessing, as you know, and as we read, the Lord is my light. The Lord is my salvation. He is the one who's there. Why should I be afraid?

[19 : 24] Even though the armies are against me, why should I fear? And then he keeps praying, and this is what he says to the Lord. We were singing it as well. Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. Be gracious to me and answer me.

You have said, so he's pleading the Word of God. You have said, so my heart says to you, your face. You have said, seek my face. My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek. So you've promised. You've told me to seek your face, so I'm going to seek your face. So David is praying God's word because he knew that this invisible yet important weapon of all prayer, it's made more powerful when it's accompanied with a short, sharp, double-edged sword of Scripture.

It's an amazing, amazing privilege to pray. And you know, you may be familiar with the name E.M. Bounds. Edward, I think he was McKendry Bounds, he was called. He was a 19th century preacher, but he was also known as a man of prayer, a prayer warrior. And he wrote many books about prayer. Lots of books about prayer. There was one called Power Through Prayer, Prayer and Praying Men, Prayer and Preachers, The Necessity of Prayer, The Essentials of Prayer, The Power of Prayer, and The Weapon of Prayer. E.M. Bounds wrote so many books about prayer because he knew, he knew that this invisible weapon of all prayer is very, very important. And he was convinced.

He was convinced that we are absolutely nothing without prayer. We're nothing without prayer. And it's so true. Spurgeon said the same. The whole engine grinds to a halt if the prayer meeting is not the priority. And the question that's often asked is, well, when it comes to the subject of prayer, well, if God knows everything, then why pray? Why are we to keep pleading? Why are we to keep praying?

Why are we to persevere in prayer? What's the point of prayer? What's the purpose of prayer? Because if the Lord knows what we're going to ask for before we ask it, and if the Lord knows what's going to happen before it happens, and if the Lord has already decided and determined the outcome of everything, regardless of what we pray about, then why are we going to pray at all? Why pray?

[21 : 56] Of course, well, the Bible calls us, the Lord calls us, commands us to pray. So we're to do it. We're to be obedient because this is what we're called to do. But the truth is, as much as we might want it to be, we are not in control of our own lives, which is why we can't live independent and we can't be isolated from the Lord. We need to depend upon the Lord and receive direction from the Lord.

And as you know, we depend and we receive direction from the Lord when we pray. In fact, Jesus not only teaches us the Lord's Prayer, he also teaches us that we need to pray like little children. We are to pray coming to our Heavenly Father. And when he talks about children praying, we're not, of course, we're not to be naive or gullible or innocent or immature. We're to pray depending upon the Lord. The quality Jesus readily found in children that he recommends to us as adults is dependency. The Lord teaches us dependency. Therefore, the purpose of prayer is not for the Lord's benefit.

The purpose of prayer is actually for our benefit. The purpose of prayer is not for the Lord's benefit. The purpose of prayer is actually for our benefit because prayer teaches us to depend not on ourselves, not in other people, but upon the Lord.

Prayer teaches us dependence upon the Lord. And this is especially true when seeking direction and discernment of God's will. Because if we're honest, and I'll be honest with you, I often pray, well, we often say, thy will be done in our head. But not, but we're actually praying my will be done in our heart. We are saying thy will be done in our head, but we're really praying my will be done in our heart. And if I can speak personally for a moment, that's what it has been like seeking discernment and direction for God's will regarding this call. I didn't want to talk about it with anyone. I didn't speak to anybody about it. Just Alison. Nobody in my family spoke to me about it.

[24 : 23] I didn't want to talk about it. Because my flesh said stay. My head said stay. My will said stay.

Why move? But when I honestly and wholeheartedly came before the Lord, I couldn't pray my will be done. Who can? Who dares to? Because that's not what we've been taught. And that's not what Jesus has taught us.

And I would be a hypocrite if I did that. We are to pray as Jesus taught us. And as we pray with our children every week, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. But what if the Lord doesn't answer our earnest and effective prayers the way we expect? Does that mean our prayers are not earnest enough or fervent enough or even faithful enough? No. So he said it's to teach us dependence upon the Lord.

And that is the hardest thing to learn. To let go of self and to depend upon the Lord. Because however heartbreaking and however hard it is, the purpose of prayer is to teach us to submit and surrender our will to the Lord's will.

And that's why I asked you to pray about this call. I asked you to pray about it when it all became public. Not because, well, I wanted everybody to know about it.

[26 : 02] But I wanted you to earnestly pray about it. Because however heartbreaking and however hard it is, the purpose of prayer is ultimately to teach us us to submit and surrender our will to the Lord's will.

And that's a hard thing to do. But that's the same in any situation in life. Whether it's with sin or sickness or suffering or sorrow or separation. All these things, however heartbreaking, however hard it is, the purpose of prayer is ultimately in the Lord's sovereign purpose.

His purpose is to teach us to submit and to surrender our will to the Lord's will. It's to teach us to submit and surrender and ultimately say, well, Lord, not my will be done, but thy will be done.

Because at the end of the day, as soldiers in the Lord's army, and this is the whole thing about prayer, as soldiers in the Lord's army, the priority of our commander-in-chief is not our happiness, but our holiness.

That is the priority of our commander-in-chief. It's not without happiness no one shall see the Lord. It's without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

[27 : 21] So our priority, the priority of our commander-in-chief is not our happiness, but our holiness. Which is why prayer should be our priority. And this is what I want us to think about lastly and very, very briefly.

The priority of prayer. So the power of prayer, the purpose of prayer, and lastly the priority of prayer. The priority of prayer. Paul says or exhorts us, praying we are to pick up this weapon, praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

With all prayer and supplication. Now as you know for many people, prayer is often a last resort. They've tried everything else, prayer is the last resort.

Or when something's going wrong, they pray emergency prayers to God in the hope that he will get them out of this difficult or dangerous situation. But you know, as a child of God, as a soldier in the Lord's army, prayer should be not the last thing we do.

It should always be the first thing we do. It should be the priority. Prayer should be first and foremost in our life. People have often described prayer as the breath of the Christian.

[28 : 34] And sometimes I look at myself, I'm thinking, well, Murda, you're holding your breath an awful lot. Because you're not breathing enough. The prayer should be the breath of the Christian.

Because as we said throughout, all prayer is an invisible weapon, but it's an important weapon. It's an important weapon, which is why prayer should be the priority of every Christian soldier, whether it's private prayer or even public prayer.

And as you know, Jesus emphasizes the priority of private prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. And you know, I always shudder when I read these verses. Because I think, that's not me enough.

He says, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, when you pray. So Matthew 6, Jesus says, When you pray, not if you pray, but when you pray. So you're meant to do it.

You're called to do it. You're commanded to do it. When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others and heard by everyone.

[29 : 36] Truly I say to you, they have received the reward. They want the praise of men. They've got the praise of men. That's the reward. But when you pray, says Jesus, go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret.

And your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Therefore we should see prayer as a gift, not a grudge.

We should see prayer as a blessing, not a bind. We should see prayer as a privilege, not a problem. It shouldn't be a problem to pray.

We should consider it a privilege to pray, whether in private or, gents, even in public. Now every man who's called on to pray struggles with the fact that they have to pray.

But we should see it as a privilege to lead the Lord's people in prayer. Because when we pray, we have an audience with the God of heaven and earth.

[30 : 41] And as E. M. Bounds once said, the goal of prayer is the ear of God. The goal of prayer is the ear of God. And the privilege of prayer is that we can call upon the King of Kings and know that the Lord of Lords is listening.

He's attentive to our voice. He's hearing our heartfelt cries. And that's what we're going to sing about in a moment in Psalm 130. That the Lord hears us, even when we're in the depths.

And so whether in private or in public, we should see this weapon, all prayer. We should see it as a privilege. We should see all prayer as a privilege.

Now time has gone, so I'll conclude with this. Peter Geoffrey, he was a Welsh pastor for over 50 years. He wrote a great little book about the armour of God.

It's a book that Effie gave me a number of weeks ago. And the little book is called Stand Firm. Stand, just as what Paul is telling us here. Stand Firm.

[31 : 42] And when Peter Geoffrey, when he described the privilege of wielding the weapon of all prayer, this is what he wrote. God provides the armour for us.

But we must put it on. This involves discipline. It involves effort. We are not merely to admire it. We are not simply to get out the brasso every now and again and polish it up.

We are to put it on. Therefore the armour of God, he writes, is not ornamental. It is essential. The armour of God is not ornamental.

It is essential. And that's what Paul is reminding us as Christian soldiers. That the power, the purpose and the priority of prayer in our lives is essential.

It's essential. It's essential because wielding this invisible weapon of all prayer is important in our Christian warfare. As we continue to fight the good fight of faith.

[32 : 47] So as Paul says, we are to pick up the weapon. Praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks to thee for the privilege of prayer.

And to know that every time we open our mouths. That the God of heaven not only knows what we're going to say before we say it. And he knows what we're going to ask before we ask it.

But the wonder is that he has worked out his plan and purpose. And worked our prayers into that.

And help us then, we pray, to see and to understand. That thou art the God who is sovereign.

Who is supreme and who is superior. And help us then to pray, not my will be done. But thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. We confess, O Lord, how often we want our own way.

[33 : 46] And we want to do our own thing. But help us, we plead. To submit to the Lord. To surrender to his will. And to confess that he does all things well. That he is on his throne.

That heaven is thy throne. And the earth is thy footstool. And Lord, give to us then, we pray, a renewed vision. Of who the Lord is and what the Lord is doing. And that we might confess that he is good.

And that his steadfast love endures forever. Lord, do us good then, we pray. Go before us, we ask. For we ask it in Jesus' name. And for his sake. Amen. Now we're going to bring our service to a conclusion.

This evening we're going to sing in Psalm 130. Psalm 130, page 421 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 130. Psalm 130.

We're going to sing the whole Psalm. So you know it's a song of ascent. It begins in the depths. Ends in the heights. It's also a prayer. Where the psalmist prays, Lord, from the depths to thee I cried.

[35 : 05] My voice, Lord, do thou hear. Unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear. Lord, who shall stand? If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity.

But yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayest be. So we'll sing the whole Psalm to God's praise. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried.

My voice, Lord, do thou hear. Lord, who shall stand? Lord, who shall stand?

In love, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquity. Lord, who shall stand? Lord, who shall stand?

In love, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquity.

[36 : 21] But yet with Thee forgiveness is the fear Thou mayest be.

I wait for God, my soul doth wait My hope is in His word More than they've had, for morning was My soul waits for the Lord I say for Thou may not to watch The morning light to see Let Israel open the Lord For with Him mercies be

Atlantia's redemption Is ever found with Him And from all His iniquities He Israel shall redeem The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.

Amen. Amen.