

God's People Part 2: How We Act
FIGHT Right – Part 3
The Right Tactic—Prayer
Ephesians 6:18-20

Introduction: In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul uses the framework of the three levels of warfare to equip us to win the war Satan and his demons are waging against those of us who follow Jesus.

The first level is the **strategic** level, where we learned the essential strategic truths that must be understood to win. Paul writes,

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (Ephesians 6:10-13)

As I did last week, I want to make sure you don't miss what Paul taught us about the strategic level of this battle, because it is massively essential to winning. Paul made it clear that,

- (1) The STRENGTH we need belongs to the LORD. (6:10)**
- (2) The GEAR we need to win is HIS. (6:11)**
- (3) The battle we must win is an EVER-PRESENT battle with Satan and his demons. (6:11b-12)**
- (4) Winning is refusing to QUIT living in glad submission to Christ. (6:13)**

The next part of the passage is what we looked at last week. It addresses the **operational** level of the war, which tells us how to win. Specifically, Paul walked us through the six components of the gear he told us, at the strategic level, must be worn.

14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, (Ephesians 6:14-17)

Now today we arrive at the third level: the **tactical** level. Tactics are everything. You can have the best gear in the world, but if you don't use winning tactics, you will lose!

George Washington learned this very lesson decades before the Revolutionary War at Fort Necessity. He didn't have the best gear nor even the most soldiers, but his defeat had nothing to do with any of that. In short, knowing the French and their Indian allies would attack him, Washington built a small fort in the middle of a low-lying field surrounded by trees that were within musket range of his position. When the enemy approached, they took up positions in the trees which were on higher ground surrounding the fort and simply fired down into Washington's position.

To make matters worse, the trenches Washington had his men construct outside the small walled fort to fight from were too shallow and incorrectly constructed, and as such, when a torrential rainstorm ensued, it flooded the trenches, soaked the gunpowder, and left Washington and his men with only one option—surrender (AKA Quit!).

To our benefit, Washington learned many valuable lessons from both the losing battle at Fort Necessity and the mistakes he made that led up to it. Because he was willing to learn from his defeat, two decades later, he was better equipped to lead a tactically sound campaign that secured victory for a massively outnumbered, ill-equipped, under-resourced, and far less trained and experienced army than the British military he had to defend the United States against in the Revolutionary War.

Now, remember, winning the war we are in is defined by not quitting on Jesus; that is, if we refuse to stop trusting Him with our life, if we don't quit loving being loved by Him more than anything and as such we don't quit living in relationship with Him (knowing Him!), if we refuse to stop obeying Him and therefore refuse to stop doing what He told us to do and not doing what He told us not to do, then we win! However, to do that, we not only have to put on the gear that equips us for the battle Satan and His demons will never stop waging against us, but we also need to properly implement the battlefield tactic that wins—PRAYER! Paul writes,

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, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Proposition: Ephesians 6:18-20 gives us three instructions for properly implementing the tactic of prayer.

The first instruction is to,

- (1) Let the Word of God (the Sword of the Spirit) be the constant CONTEXT of your prayers. (6:18a)**
 - A. 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. (6:18a)**

- B. The words translated as “**praying**” and “**prayer**” simply mean conversation with God. The word translated as “**supplication**” refers to prayers that ask God to do something or provide something.

Note: “**prayer**—a sacred term for *prayer* in general. **supplication**—a common term for a special kind of prayer [Harless], *an imploring request*. “Prayer” for obtaining blessings, “supplication” for averting evils which we fear [Grotius].”¹

- C. But what does Paul mean by “**praying ... in the Spirit**”? Well, Paul has already told us that the Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, the Bible (Ephesians 6:17). Therefore, to pray in the Spirit means to pray from the context of what the Holy Spirit of God is doing in your heart and mind as you read, study, and meditate on God’s Word (The Bible!).
- D. It’s considering what God has said in His Word as you reflect on the condition of your heart and mind in the context of your circumstances. It’s letting the two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12) do its work in you to equip you, motivate you, bring clarity to you, guide you, and align you with what’s actually taking place in your circumstances. It’s interacting with God’s Word in your heart as you talk to Him (prayer), so that the context of your conversation with God is the spiritual opportunity in the circumstances you’re in, which is the ULTIMATE circumstance in everything!
- E. As you reflect on what’s going on in your life and world in the context of what God has said in His Word, you will find yourself talking way less about your circumstances, and way more about what God’s Word says concerning the opportunity in your circumstances to grow in your trust and obedience to Him.

Note: “Moreover, it is prayer *in the Spirit*, prompted and guided by him, just as God’s word is ‘the sword of the Spirit’ which he himself employs. Thus Scripture and prayer belong together as the two chief weapons which the Spirit puts into our hands.”²

- F. Ironically, the Bible itself is filled with examples of people doing this very thing, perhaps most prominently in the Book of Psalms! I find it very interesting that the book that most inspires and fuels my prayers is filled with prayers and proclamations of praise that function as prayers, that were inspired and fueled by Scriptures written before the Psalms. For instance,

1. In Psalm 68:1, David is wrestling with the fact that Israel is surrounded by those who are seeking to, at minimum, take advantage of his position as King

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 358). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

² Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God’s new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (p. 283). InterVarsity Press.

and the nation's success, but most likely long to destroy it and seize all its resources. David is even aware that there are people within his own government who wanted to do that very thing! But as he deals with that very real reality, the words of the Torah, written by Moses, begin to come to mind, and they inspire and guide his prayer to trust the Lord!. He literally quotes Numbers 10:35 in the first verse of Psalm 68:1!

Note: “1 God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him!” (Psalm 68:1, Numbers 10:35)

2. In Psalm 86, David is wrestling with the fact that he has been betrayed! As he talks to God about all this (prayer!) in Psalm 86, he quotes Exodus 34:6.

Note: “But you, O Lord, are ‘a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.’” (Psalm 86:15, Exodus 34:6)

3. Finally, another example of David reflecting on God’s Word as he wrestled with his past, present, and future as well as Israel’s is in Psalm 118. Specifically, as David prays, he is reminded of what Moses proclaimed about God in the book of Exodus and quotes it verbatim.

Note: “14 The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.” (Psalm 118:14, Exodus 15:2)

- G. Therefore, don’t let false teachers or denominational fads confuse you. Praying in the Spirit is not some sort of ecstatic gibberish that you have no more idea or understanding of what you’re saying than anybody else who may be listening would have! As a matter of fact, praying in the Spirit may indeed be a very emotional experience at times, but by definition it’s not an emotional experience. Praying **IN** the Spirit is to pray within the sphere of or context of being led and influenced by the Spirit, and that influence is necessarily and unequivocally linked to God’s WORD! It’s why Jesus said,

Note: 25 “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:25)

- H. Every time David begins to reflect on his circumstances, he goes to what God has said, and in that meditation and conversation, he grows in his trust, relationship obedience to the Lord!
- I. Therefore, as we live in an abiding relationship with Christ, that is as we live trusting, knowing, and obeying Him, the Holy Spirit will certainly guide our hearts and minds in matters the Scriptures don’t speak to (i.e., what college to

pick, say yes or no to a job opportunity, etc.), but the Holy Spirit will NEVER lead us in a way that is contrary to the Bible (i.e. tell you it's "ok" to have sex outside of marriage, live selfishly, not forgive somebody that wronged you, teach a doctrine that's not aligned with the fundamental teachings of the Gospel like having to perform a religious practice to be saved).

The second instruction for properly implementing the tactic of prayer is to,

(2) Pray with a constant awareness and focus on the SPIRITUAL needs and condition of your brothers and sisters in Christ. (6:18b)

- A. 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,**
- B. “‘Watching’ is *agrupneō* (ἀγρυπνεω), ‘to be sleepless, keep awake.’ It means ‘to be attentive, vigilant.’ It is the opposite of listlessness, expressing alertness. ‘Perseverance’ is *proskartereō* (προσκαρτερεω), ‘to give constant attention to a thing, to give unremitting care to a thing.’³**
- C. When he writes, “to that end,” it links us back to the previous statement of praying at all times in the Spirit and thus in the context of what the Holy Spirit of God is doing in our life. So, what exactly is the Holy Spirit doing in our life? Jesus said,**

Note: 7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:7-11)

- D. Elsewhere we read,**

Note: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

- E. I’ve been hinting around at this already, but here is where I really need to be clear. God’s life is ONLY experienced in an abiding relationship with Jesus, and an abiding relationship with Jesus is one where we **trust** Him, **know** Him/live in an active relationship with Him/commune with Him, and **obey** Him! Therefore,**

³ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 4, p. 145). Eerdmans.

Paul tells the believers in Ephesus not to get distracted from being constantly aware of what's going on in the fight we are all in with Satan and the demons, that is, their schemes to get us to quit trusting, knowing, and obeying Jesus! In short, pray for one another in the context of what the Holy Spirit is doing in the life of every believer and thus in the context of what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives to give us victory in the spiritual war Satan and his demons are waging on every believer!

- F. This doesn't mean not praying for God to meet tangible, felt needs in others' lives. It means, in praying for God to meet physical needs, to be VERY aware that the battle is not about getting your bills paid, getting healthy/healed, or seizing opportunities for success in this world, etc., but rather it's about staying joyfully trusting, knowing, and obeying Jesus in every situation no matter what happens!
- G. For instance, if I pray for a person to be healed, and God does that very thing, but along the way they stop trusting, knowing, and obeying Jesus, then the physical healing they received is worthless. Their physical life improved, but they lost the fight to live in God's life! They are now a spiritual zombie—physically alive and spiritually dead! So, it's not that we shouldn't pray for physical healing; it's that we should be ALERT to the fact that the battle they are fighting is not to stop trusting, knowing, and obeying Jesus, as they surrender their desire for healing to the Lord (trust!).
- H. As I pray for people's physical needs, I need to be keenly aware that what the Holy Spirit is trying to do in everything is to teach us to trust, know, and obey Him so that we can experience the **"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control"** that only comes when we are abiding in Him! Those are the things Satan is trying to keep us from experiencing! His schemes to lead us to quit trusting, knowing, and obeying Jesus are intended to keep us from experiencing the life we have in every circumstance when we don't quit!
- I. As you pray for your kids, your family, people in the church, and whoever else you're praying for, the thing we need most is an abiding relationship with JESUS, and thus one where we are trusting, knowing, and obeying HIM! As we pray, we fight the enemy's actual attacks! That's what he's trying to destroy in us and all who know Christ!

The third instruction for properly implementing the tactic of prayer is to,

- (3) **Pray specifically for yourself and others to CONFIDENTLY engage those far from God with the Gospel of Jesus Christ! (6:19-20)**
 - A. **19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an**

**ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.
(6:19-20)**

- B.** Now, the immediate context of the passage is obviously what Paul specifically asked the believers in Ephesus to pray for him. But the fact of the matter is that every believer has been commissioned to engage those far from God with the Gospel of Jesus Christ so they can know and follow Him; therefore, it is totally in line for us to know we should be praying this way for ourselves and everybody else we know that loves and follows Jesus! We are all in the fight, and for each and every one of us, winning includes not cowering away in the moment of opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus with others.
- C.** This doesn't mean being willing to go into the break room at work, interrupt everybody's lunch, and preach a sermon to them! What this means is that when God opens the door for you to share the Gospel with somebody, you confidently walk through the door and do it! And listen, if you are a believer, YOU KNOW when that door is open! The Holy Spirit starts leaping in you that the opportunity is now, and when we fail to listen; when we cower away from it, we know it!
- D.** Now, if you never sense the prompting of the Holy Spirit to share the Gospel with others, you either aren't a follower of Jesus or you've said no so many times that you've become deaf to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and therefore what you need to do is repent! If you're not a follower of Christ, you can become one right now by surrendering your life to Him!
- E.** But, if you are a follower of Christ whose heart has grown cold or numb towards the mission of Christ, then you need to be honest about it with God and own up to the fact that you are proclaiming to follow Jesus but in actuality you're not! Jesus said if you follow Him, He will make you become a fisher of men (Mark 1:17). You need to fall before the Lord and cry out to Him to soften your heart to care about what He cares about, to restore the joy of your salvation that bubbles up so big within you that you can't help but share it no matter what you perceive the consequences to be!
- F.** Early in the book of Acts, on a day when Peter and John were on their way into the temple to preach the Gospel, they noticed a man, unable to walk or even stand, lying beside the gate, asking for money. Here's what happened,
- G.** **4 And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 And leaping up, he**

stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. (Acts 3:4-8)

- H. Peter and John then went in and began proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and calling the people to repent. However, when the religious leaders witnessed what was taking place, they arrested Peter, John, and the poor guy who got healed and brought them all before them to question what happened and try to convince them to stop proclaiming that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is the eternal Son of God and promised Messiah. But Peter and John were having none of it! They made it very clear that there was no way in the world they were going to stop sharing this amazing news, the greatest news that could ever be told! Seeing no way at that time to force them to stop, the religious leaders begrudgingly set them free after they made it very clear that if they didn't stop proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ they would eventually be punished.
- I. Peter and John then met up with their friends, and they all prayed together. Notice that at the center of their prayer is God's WORD. They begin by praying Psalm 146:6, then Psalm 2:1-2. Acts records,
- J. **23 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed"—27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:23-31)**
- K. Peter, John, and their friends prayed for themselves what Paul asked to be prayed over him! In other words, if you're a follower of Jesus and you want to win the war then you need to know Satan and His demons are going to do everything possible to convince you to stop sharing the Gospel of Jesus with others, whether its by convincing you that you don't know enough to have a conversation with somebody, or that you aren't holy enough or good enough to have the right to have a conversation with somebody, or that you aren't a good enough communicator, or that the cost of sharing the Gospel with somebody will

be too much relationally, emotionally, financially or physically and therefore you should keep quiet and thus QUIT obeying Jesus.

- L. This then needs to be a central part of the warfare tactic known as prayer. We not only need to pray for God to open the doors for us to share the gospel with those in our life, but we also need to pray for the courage to walk through the door when he opens it! We need to know that if Paul and the other Apostles needed prayer for boldness then we need prayer for boldness! We need to pray that we will not give into the schemes of the devil that attempt to silence the proclamation of the greatest news ever announced in the entire universe!

Challenge:

(1) How often do you spend TIME in conversation with God?

For far too many Christians it's hardly ever. If that's you, don't think you're going to go from basically nothing to multiple hours a day tomorrow. Start by blocking a couple minutes a day in the morning, even if it's during your bathroom break at work! Progress to finding a day during the week that you and your family can circle as a sabbath and as such give each other permission to commit part of that day to be in isolation from each other (even if it's still in your house). Put the phone down so that you can mentally detach from your family, friends, work and everything else that competes for your mental and emotional attention and just spend time in God's Word and in conversation with Him about your life, your family, friends, people at work, neighbors, and church. You will see an hour or more go by faster than you ever imagined! That leads to the second challenge.

(2) How much time in your conversations with God is centered in thoughts inspired and guided by His WORD?

Imagine if, at family dinner time, everybody sat around the table on their phones and never actually had a conversation with each other. You could check the box that you had a meal together, but you couldn't say it did anything to help grow your relationship with the people in your family!

Imagine if every staff meeting you had at work was about everything other than what you do at work and how to do it better as a staff!

The tactic Paul is teaching us to use in this battle (prayer) is the way our relationship with God actually grows and prospers, and when that relationship is healthy, the schemes of the devil don't stand a chance! But far too many Christians never even get started with the tactic that wins, and instead opt for losing tactics, to the point that many spend time in prayer, but it's never prayer in the Spirit, that is, prayer driven by their interaction with God's Word. Their prayer life is more like a kid visiting Santa Claus at Christmas. They spend their time telling God all the things they want and all the things other people want, and then slide down the slide (A Christmas Story) to go about living life with the anticipation they will get everything they want in a box under the Christmas tree!

Instead of taking time to read and meditate on God's Word, they instead read and meditate on whatever it is they heard on cable news or Instagram.

Instead of spending time alone with God's voice from His Word, they fill every moment with every voice but God.

Instead of spending time with God talking to Him about what's really going on in their life and interacting with Him about what HE SAYS about it, they speak to anybody, but GOD, about that stuff and only try to use God as their genie in a bottle!

Like George Washington at Fort Necessity, they have a tactic for spiritual warfare, but it's a losing one! They build the spiritual equivalent of a fort in the middle of a low spot in a field surrounded by trees, and then put some ill-advised, poorly constructed trenches around it to defend themselves. It's a losing tactic from the start that actually leads a person further and further away from an abiding relationship with Jesus, rather than further into one!

So, here's an idea! Take your Bible, my manuscript, and the discussion guide Jason Rhodenhizer makes for every passage of the Bible I preach on. Read the passage yourself and think about what it is you read, then read my manuscript and look up all the different Bible references I mentioned and take time to think on each of those. Talk to God about what the Holy Spirit puts on your heart for yourself and others as you study and think on God's Word. When you're done, go through the discussion guide and ponder how to answer the questions it asks. There's enough content in all of that that, that you could spread it out with the course of a week.

BONUS—if you're in a Life Group, do this last step with each other, THEN spend time talking to God (prayer!) with each other in the context of the things you just learned or got challenged by! If you're not in a life group, get in one or start one with your family, neighbors, friends at work, people you bump into in worship each week, or serve with in ministry here at Venture. Either way get in one or start one!

Note: One of the best books I've EVER read on Biblical prayer is [A Praying Life](#), by Paul E. Miller. I HIGHLY recommend it!