

SI: Paul says there is a context to the Christian life. You’re in a combat zone. You’ve got enemies who are trying to make you crash and burn in every one of these areas and relationships where you are trying to live as a Christian. The Devil can’t steal your crown. He can’t rob you of your salvation.

But he’ll do all he can to rob you of your joy.

He wants to make you ineffective and unproductive as a follower of Christ.

He wants to fill you life with sighing and complaining and fear.

The Lord has not left us defenseless.

He has given us spiritual armor to protect our heads and our hearts from the flaming arrows of the Devil. But after the armor there’s one more thing.

INTRO: My homiletics professor in seminary told us not to say in a sermon: “Finally,” or “In conclusion.”

Because if you do people expect you to wind down very quickly,

and they start disconnecting from you and getting ready for the next thing.

And even worse, if you say “Finally” but then introduce something additional—that creates anxiety and agitation.

Well Paul obviously didn’t get that memo, because after he says Finally, and presents his instruction on spiritual warfare and the armor of God, and after he gets to the last weapon—the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God which would be a great place to end . . .

He says, one more thing—and pray—and with this he finally does end.

There’s an old hymn, *Stand Up, Stand Up, For Jesus*. Has a line that goes:

Put on the Gospel armor, Each piece put on with prayer.

What is the armor of God? It’s all the benefits of Christ.

The pieces of armor are different facets of the Gospel.

If you are a believer then you have the Gospel armor.

You have all these benefits. You are at peace with God. You are saved.

You have to claim those things, believe them, work them out.

And you have to do that in constant contact with the living God.

Prayer brings you into contact with the living God.

You can’t win spiritual victories without prayer.

You may be going to heaven, but are you loving your spouse?

You may know Jesus as your Savior and know he is your righteousness,

but are you kind to your children and do you treat your co-workers well?
You may be a true believer and be at peace with God through Christ,
but do you sow peace and live in gentleness among your fellow church members,
even the ones who have at times hurt you or offended you?
Because when you spend any length of time with fellow sinners, that happens.

You may know the Bible well and be able to pull out the perfect Bible verse,
you may understand Christian doctrine, but are you living a sexually pure life,
are you a good steward, generous and cheerful in your giving?

This is why we need prayer.

As Christians we have all the Gospel armor, we have all the benefits of Christ—
but for them to be actually useful, they have to be put on with prayer.

Because the Christian life is not a formulaic, it's not mechanistic—
it's personal communion with God.

Walking with him, living in his presence through a prayerful relationship essential.

Let's look at Paul's final, final instruction about prayer,

and we'll use verse 18 as an outline for the sermon. Four points, the four alls.

1. Praying at all times
2. With all prayer and supplication
3. With all perseverance
4. For all the saints

MP#1 Praying at all times

This is a frequent command in Scripture.

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful and thankful.” Colossians 4

Pray without ceasing. 1Thessalonians 5

These are commands. So praying at all times is a duty and obligation.

But it's much more than that.

Jesus taught us to pray: Our Father.

We have a Father in heaven who has adopted us.

We're God's sons and daughters, we're heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ.

Yes, praying is a duty and obligation.

But because of who God is and who we are in Christ, prayer is much more than a duty and obligation. It's an expectation of love.

Do you remember life before cell phones?

Do you remember how infrequently you expected people to call?

Back then if let's say a family member was driving to Atlanta you would say—
call me tonight when you get to your hotel.

But now with cell phones we expect multiple calls on a trip like that.

How was the traffic in Birmingham? Did you stop at McDonalds in Anniston?

We want to hear from the person, we want to know he's ok.

We want her tell us exactly where she is and how the car is running.

Whenever Allison is driving somewhere alone I call her a jillion times and ask:

How's the car running. She always says the same thing: Like a top!

I'm not saying whether that is good or bad—but the motive is love.

Those expectations for frequent contact come out of love and concern.

We expect them to call because we want to hear from them.

Our Father in heaven always knows exactly where we are and what we need,
even before we ask. Jesus tells us that. He's not looking for information.

But he loves you more than you can imagine and he wants to hear from you.

He wants you to pray.

He wants to bless you through prayer.

He wants to encourage you in spiritual warfare.

Everything can be an opportunity for prayer,

not in a legalistic way, but as a way of communion.

You make numerous decisions every day, do you pray about those decisions?

Do you pray when walking through store? God, give me wisdom.

If did that, shopping trip might be different.
Do you pray when the phone rings and you look down and see a name?
Lord, help me be a good listener.
Do you pray before you respond to the email or the Facebook post or curt word?
It's hard, isn't it, not to just dash something off.
What if you prayed: Lord, Let words of my mouth and meditation of my heart . . .

Do you pray in the midst of your daily work responsibilities?
Lord, as I'm making a living, help me make a life worth living.
Whether I eat or drink or whatever I do, help me do it to your glory.
As you go on the internet or click on your phone do you pray?
Lord, keep my heart and mind holy.
Flaming darts coming at you all the time.
When hear something upsetting about political leaders, state of country or world,
do you wring your hands in despair or rage with anger?
Or do you pray: Lord, give leaders wisdom and grace of repentance, let them lead
our nation, let them lead our county, let them lead our schools for the good—
only the Holy Spirit can accomplish that.
Every frustration with leaders is a cue to prayer.

What might happen if you had continual conversation with God?
What blessings might rain down?
What spiritual powers might you realize?
Don't let your emotions keep you from praying.
Pray those negative emotions.
Tell God you're depressed or angry or bored.
Don't let feelings of shame for a sin you've committed keep you from prayer.
Ask the Lord to forgive you. Ask him to cover your shame.
Praying at all times . . .

MP#2 With all prayer and supplication

I think by this Paul means all kinds of prayers.

Supplication just one kind of prayer—it's asking for things.

But there are other prayers.

Have you ever heard the acrostic ACTS.

Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication

That's a helpful way of thinking about all kinds of prayer.

Adoration. You should adore God in prayer. Praise him, worship him in prayer.

Why are prayers of adoration important?

Because the Devil wants you to have a cold heart.

Adoration and praise warms your heart.

You understand this even in ordinary life.

Any time you verbally praise someone or something, your affections stirred.

Adrienne and Eliot just got a puppy.

I'm not a dog person, especially when they are inside. That's gross.

I haven't seen this creature in person, but Eliza has and she has gone on and on about what a cute, dear little thing it is.

Her adoration and praise has softened my hard heart a bit.

I'm kind of looking forward to seeing this new addition.

When you praise God, sometimes you experience a joyful forgetfulness of self.

You're raised above earthly things and see the Lord in his beauty.

Take time to adore God. Praise him in your prayers.

There are also prayers of confession

Devil wants you to remain ashamed of your sins and overwhelmed by them.

He wants you to feel distant from God and unable to come to God.

Or he wants you to feel calloused about your sins, with your conscience seared and your feelings of guilt deadened so you're unwilling to come to God.

You need to confess your sins.

God, keep me sensitive to your holiness.

Have mercy on me according to your steadfast love.

Not because I deserve it. But your faithful love that won't let go

According to mercy, blot out my transgressions.

Not because of my hard trying. Not because I'm punishing myself and trying to be my own priest, but because Jesus is my high priest.

Cleanse me and I will be clean, wash me and I will be whiter than snow.

David prayed that because he felt filthy, but God forgave him and restored the joy of his salvation. He'll do the same for you.

Thanksgiving. You need to pray prayers of thanksgiving

One of the Devil's schemes is to manipulate you into feeling self-pity.

He wants you to have a pity party. The one kind of party you can have all alone. I deserve better. If things were fair, I wouldn't have to put up with this.

But that's not true. If things were fair you would die and go to hell.

Thank God he's given you life and heaven through Jesus' death.

Thank him for all your blessings spiritual and material.

Thank him for your work, your church, your country, your freedom, your home.

Thank him for a good cup of coffee.

Thank him for giving you a good mind, that you can understand these things.

Read a thanksgiving Psalm and pray through it.

Psalm 105, 106, 107, 136—those are all good ones.

The last kind of prayer is supplication.

The Lord wants you to ask him for what you need.

He wants you to ask him for the things that are on your heart.

The best way to make sure you are asking him for the right things, for things agreeable to his will, is to make sure you spend some time first in

adoration, confession, and thanksgiving. When you do that. Gives perspective.

Pray at all times, with all kinds of prayers, and third, pray with . . .

MP#3 With all perseverance “Always keep on praying”

It’s hard to pray. It’s even harder to keep on praying until you get God’s answer.

There are many reasons you start to pray for something and then quit.

Sometimes you stop praying because you lose heart.

God doesn’t answer the way you think he should or when he should.

Jesus knew this would be a challenge for his followers.

You may recall he told a parable in Luke 18. Luke says:

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them they should always pray and not give up.

In that parable a widow was being oppressed.

So she goes to a judge to try to get justice.

But he’s a bad judge. He doesn’t care about justice. He doesn’t care about her.

He refused to hear her case.

But she kept coming back and finally she wore him out.

So just to get rid of her he ruled in her favor.

Jesus then contrasts God with the unjust judge.

God will bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry to him day and night.

One of the frustrations of life in a fallen world is that justice is not always done.

We see it in the persecution of church by hostile governments,
the corruption of the legal system, societal structures that hold some people down.

We see in messy situations where hard to know what happened, who’s responsible.

And when we are treated wrongly and there is no recourse we feel it.

There’s a temptation in this grow weary or pessimistic and to quit praying.

But believers always have a final court of appeal and Jesus assures us that there will
be an accounting, so keep praying. God is just.

God is also loving. The widow in the parable was anonymous.

To the judge, she was a nobody.

But when Jesus speaks about God’s justice in this parable he says God will take
care of his chosen ones, his elect. That’s you. If you are trusting Jesus.

In other words, when you pray, you are praying to a God who knows who you are
and has chosen you in Christ before the foundation of the world.

God foreknew you, and he chose you.

His election also means he has a plan for you. As the song says:

From life’s first cry to final breath/Jesus commands my destiny.

Your destiny under Christ’s command. He controls everything, so keep praying.

God’s just, he’s loving, and he’s wise.

He's wise especially in regard to his timing.

God's often criticized for his timing. Believers talk about this frequently.

It's hard to come to terms with.

In the men's Friday morning prayer meeting someone said this past week that God is 90 days behind our prayer requests.

Someone else spoke up and said, 90 days? For me it's more like a year!

But Jesus says God's justice will come quickly. Not immediately, but quickly.

What's the difference? It means that God is not delaying unnecessarily.

He's moving things forward expeditiously.

God's justice may seem a long time coming, but it will come swiftly when it comes.

Like a thief in the night. In the twinkling of an eye.

So Jesus says: Keep praying and don't give up.

Interesting he ends this parable with a question:

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

Will he still find you praying? Prayer is the tangible expression of your faith.

You can say you believe, quote all the right doctrines, but is God real to you?

Pray at all times, with all kinds of prayers, with all perseverance and . . .

MP#4 For all the saints

In 1 Samuel 12, Samuel himself says to the Israelites:

Far be it from me that I sin against Lord by ceasing to pray for you

It's a sin not to pray for each other.

You're not the only soldier in God's army.

The Christian life not just a private walk with Jesus, a march with fellow soldiers.

What happens to one of us happens to all of us.

Paul says: Pray for all the saints. Pray for all believers.

Pray for one another in Christ Covenant.

Pray for the babies and children in our church family, that they will grow up singing: Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Pray for the youth group and for our college students, that as they move into life they will follow God's calling.

Pray for marriages in our church, that husbands and wives will be filled with love and sympathy for one another. Pray for those who are sick and suffering.

Pray for the members of our church who work in business world,
and who are trying to honor Christ in the way they do business.

Pray for those who are school teachers, showing children wonder of God's world.

Pray for those members of this body with whom you have a problem,
and for those with whom you are in good humor.

Pray for other churches in Cullman and other believers you know in Cullman.

Pray for Christians in other parts of our country, pray for church planters.

Pray for Christians in other parts of the world—in Greece, in Azerbaijan.

Pray for missionaries in those foreign countries.

Pray for Christians who live in dark places, those who daily face poverty
and persecution. Pray for those who are in prison for their faith.

Satan's greatest scheme is to get us to focus on ourselves all the time.

Nobody's had troubles like I have. That's not true.

When you pray for all the saints, you get your eyes off yourself
and that is always good for you.

I experienced this recently in such an in-your-face way, I had to laugh at myself.

I was mulling over some small negative event in our church, in Christ Covenant.

Something that bothered me. Something I didn't want to deal with.

As these thoughts were going through my mind I walked into my bedroom

and glanced at my bedside table where I saw a prayer guide I've been using for Andrew Brunson, the Presbyterian missionary imprisoned in Turkey. His home church in North Carolina published this prayer guide, and on the front is a recent photo of him. He's lost 50 pounds.

When I saw that prayer guide, I thought—Andrew Brunson would love to be dealing with minor church problems. He would be weeping with joy to be in a major church crisis as long as he had his freedom and could go home to wife. When you pray for all saints, you get your eyes off yourself and the Devil has a very hard time getting a foothold.

But notice how Paul ends. This great man is not too proud. He asks them: Pray also for me. Don't be too proud or too private to say to one another: Pray for me.

So I'm going to ask you now. Pray for me. Please pray for me. Pray for Andrew. I need your prayers. Pray that I'll grow in grace and live a life of holiness. Pray that I'll be content. Pray that I'll love people more than comfort. I'm not in prison like Paul was when he wrote this letter, I'm enjoying a life of amazing comfort and security, but my heart's not grateful as it should be, and not focused on God's kingdom.

Paul asks them to pray that he would have words. Pray that for me too. Preachers are in the word business. Ask Holy Spirit to give me words of grace and encouragement, words that are both plainly spoken and creative and interesting at the same time. And Paul asks that they pray he speaks boldly as he should. Pray that for me too. Fear of man plagues Christian life and plagues ministry. I need prayers. Only reason I'm still here, prayers of people.

We're commanded to pray—at all times, with all sorts of prayers, always persevering, and for all the saints. Holy Spirit, help us. Lord, help us. And if we do, what might the Lord do in our lives?

What great victories might we experience in the warfare of the Christian life.