

Air Support

Spiritual Warfare

Ephesians 6:18-24

Take your bibles and open to Ephesians chapter 6. We will conclude our sermon series on the book of Ephesians this morning and our mini-series on spiritual warfare. If some of you are as old as me, you remember being raised as a kid in this area and you only had three channel choices, 3, 6, and 12. If you really wanted real clarity, if you went from channel 6 to channel 12, you had to go outside and twist the pole. If you could get your wife to hang on to the pole during storms, it was even better reception. 😊 Do you remember those days? Being raised on 3, 6, and 12, when I wanted to see an action movie or show, it was either a western show or a military show. In the westerns, you could always tell who the good guys were because they wore the white cowboy hats and the bad guys always wore the black cowboy hats. In the military movies, there would be a fierce fight, our allied forces would be in the trenches, a soldier with a radio would call in their position, and all of a sudden, the battle would change because the airplanes would begin to drop the bombs on the enemy and the allies won every time. Wow.

Communication and being able to call in your position is still important in today's military. Did you know our military now uses a single command ground and airborne radio system? Between the transmitter and receiver, it can actually change channels one hundred and eleven times per second. See, the enemy of the allies has come to understand that to keep our air support out of the battle, if they can jam the signal on the battlefield and keep that signal from going to the command center then they have a greater chance. But when our air power is called in, we are unmatched. On this Memorial Day weekend, as we pause to honor those men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in battle so that you and I can enjoy the

freedoms we have today, one of those the freedom to worship in this great country, please know I don't think it is coincidental we are finishing the book of Ephesians and our study of spiritual warfare.

I want to share with you in this last message how vitally important communication is, and how important it is for you to let God know how it looks from your perspective in how the battle is going. He wants to know your position so He's given us this beautiful thing called prayer. If you would let me liken this to a military, prayer is kind of like calling the air support. The Bible tells us that our battle is being waged in the heavenly places, and when we read about our adversary, about the spiritual forces that we are up against, you might think we're outmanned, but we're not out-God'd. So God has given us a way to communicate with Him during the battle. Let's finish out the book of Ephesians by standing in honor of God's Word. A special welcome to all of the guests that are with us this morning, we always love it when you're visiting family or the lakes area, and you join us at Hardin and you take the seats of some of our people who are gone this morning. Thank you so much for being here. We are reading Ephesians 6:18-24 in closing out the book of Ephesians. To get the context if you have missed the previous two sermons, please go on to our Hardin website and listen to those, but I want to back up to verse 14 and read the first two words and then we will skip to verse 18 because we talked about that last week, but it is for context.

Scripture

(v. 14) "Stand therefore..."

"...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, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know

how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”

(Prayer)

Father, we ask You to add Your blessings to the reading of this Your Word. Father, as we ask You every week, anoint us to hear, process, and when we walk out of here, know how to apply to our lives what we heard. We don't just want to be an attendant; we want to be a participant this morning. Don't let us be a hearer only, Father; please do not let me be a speaker only. Anoint me to speak, but also a doer of Your Word. Thank you Father for opening our eyes to the truth of this spiritual battle that we are engaging in. Please help us realize that we do not live in peacetime, but in wartime. It is not a jungle out there; it is a war out there. Help many of us to open our eyes to see that we are in a trench, and if we are not in a trench, we need to get in a trench and engage in the spiritual battle. Souls and lives are literally at stake. Anoint us now Father, we ask in Your precious Son's name, amen.

A couple of weeks ago, we looked at Ephesians 6:10-13 and talked about our adversary. Then last week, we looked at verses 14-17 and looked at our armor. If you will allow me to use a modern metaphor this morning, as we examine verses 18-24, we will not only see our adversary and our armor, we are actually going to see our air support. Here is the picture. As Christians, you and I have enlisted in God's army the moment we turned from a life of sin and put our faith in Jesus Christ, we put on the uniform of Christ through believer's baptism as we witnessed Will do a few moments ago, and you became part of a platoon, a local bodied church. We are engaged in spiritual warfare. We do not wrestle against other denominations; we wrestle against principalities and powers of spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. As soldiers, Paul wants us to be strong. He wants us to put on the whole armor of God. The picture is at the end of every day, of every battle we face, we may get a bruise, we may get battered, we may get worn out, we may get tired, we may get frustrated, but at the end of the battle, at the end of the day, at the end of our life,

we will be standing on our feet because we are going to do everything possible to stand. He tells us that to stand, we have put on our belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, sandals of readiness, and before you head to the trench, take up your shield, your helmet, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit.

Some Bible commentaries want to believe that prayer is the seventh piece of armor. But there really wasn't a part of Roman armor that would match prayer, so Paul doesn't compare it to armor, but it is actually the seventh piece of armor, coming to that perfect number; therefore, us being perfect and complete in our armor. I don't like to disagree with the commentaries, but that is not the picture I see. I see our armor being complete with those six pieces. So here I am spiritually, here I am physically, I am standing in the middle of the battle because I have on the armor of God and I stand confidently, but while I'm standing confidently, inwardly, I am not standing; I'm kneeling in the presence of God through prayer. I'm not just relying on the armor, fleshly, but I'm relying on my God to supply me the victory. While this battle is raging in the heavenlies and that is where our adversary is, that is where our enemies are, God wants you and I to know that our air support is far greater than that enemy we stand against. So what does Paul do to describe us standing? He uses a participle, and you know how I love participles because they are verbal adjectives and they describe actions and verbs. Paul switches from participles to verbs when he tells us to take up our shield, our helmet, and sword. So as we rush out into battle, he wants to make sure you understand how you rush out and what attitude you have when you rush out to the battlefield; you rush out praying at all times in the Spirit.

Do you ever forget to pray? Do you know what is really happening when we forget to pray? We are failing to recognize the presence of God. Kory took his first class at Southeastern Seminary this week as he is enrolled in the doctorate program for pastoral ministry. We encouraged Katie to go with him since it was his first class. We get to keep the grandkids whenever they are gone, so we had an ulterior motive for wanting her to go. So Kory and Katie go to North Carolina, but she can only stay through Wednesday. So she catches a plane from Raleigh, North Carolina, to come

back to Nashville to come back home when I get a picture from her Wednesday. I was a little perturbed, to be honest. It was a selfie, my daughter married to my son, her, and another man in the picture, and the man wasn't Kory. It wasn't an old daddy figure like me; it was a young man with a cap on. Sometimes it takes me a second to realize this wasn't just a text to me, but it was what is called a group text. At my age, I have learned not to answer group texts. There are just some things you want to say to the person that nobody else needs to witness you saying it. Things can get taken out of context. So once I saw it was a group text and not just to me, I held being perturbed in and didn't say a word until all of a sudden, the other people in the group text began to comment, "Wow!" "That is awesome!" "Are you kidding?" "Is he nice?" "What is he like?" Finally, I break my text silence and text these words, "Can I ask who the guy is in the picture?" I get this answer back, "Scotty McCreery." (Something like that) Supposedly, he was on TV, got really far in American Idol, maybe. Come to find out, Katie has actually been to some of his concerts as a singer, and she is the president of his local fan club. 😊 Papaw still didn't like it. Within a couple of hours, I get a text from Kory with him doing a selfie! So I just text back, "Is that your professor?" He said, "Dad, it is JD Greer!" Now, I know of JD Greer, but have not personally seen JD Greer. He is a pastor in Raleigh, North Carolina, for a church of over ten thousand people, a church that last year alone sent out one hundred and twenty five people doing missions, and has a goal in starting one thousand churches. All of a sudden, it dawned on me that if I had been in that airport in Raleigh, North Carolina, if I had been on that campus at Southeastern, I could have been in the presence of Scotty or JD, and I wouldn't even have known it. It was like the Spirit of God convicted me.

That's what happens in spiritual warfare. How many times on the battlefield do we not recognize we are in the presence of God, and we think we are all alone? Poor, pitiful me. What I've come to believe is prayer helps me recognize the presence of God, and who He is: GOD. Do I need to say more? I do. He is my Father. Is He your Father? Is there any father who would let his son go into battle and not give that son all the firepower and protection he can give his son? How dare we believe we are

inadequate on the battlefield engaging in spiritual warfare! Prayer helps me recognize who God is, and it helps me recognize where He is. He is with me. He is with me in the battle. Where I am, my God is with me, and it helps me recognize that in this moment, possibly, what He is doing or is going to do. How dare we just pray in the morning, how dare we just pray over our meals, and how dare we just pray before we go to bed when Paul tells us, on the battlefield, we need to pray at all times. Why? Because I think prayer not only helps you recognize who God is, I think prayer reminds you of who you are. You are a child of His. I wonder how much time lapses on the battlefield when you and I are totally oblivious to who we are as a child of God, as a saint of God, engaged in spiritual battle.

It also lets me know where I am. Do you know where I am on the battlefield? I am where God is. Because I'm where God is, that's why there is a spiritual battle taking place where I am. The reason I am in the spiritual battle is because God is with me, and God is with you, and our God has an enemy. He tried to take Jesus out and couldn't. He can't take God out, so he goes for God's army. Do you know what happens when I don't pray? I don't recognize what I should be doing, and I don't recognize what I can be doing. What I can be doing is what He is doing and that is trying to make His Son known so that, ultimately, the whole world can know who He is. Don't just make this a piece of armor. Don't believe that you just pray when you put on your belt, your breastplate, your shoes, your shield, your helmet, and your sword; we pray without ceasing. We pray in an attitude and live in an attitude where our life is surrendered to the presence of God on a daily basis. He clarifies it; he says pray in the Spirit. The preposition, 'in,' introduces a prepositional clause to denote location, sphere. Just as the Bible says I'm to walk in the Spirit, the Bible says I'm to pray in the Spirit. You know what it means to walk in the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit is to live my life, the steps that I take, I take them under the leadership, I take them under the influence, I take them under the control of the Holy Spirit of God who lives inside me. That is contrasted to walking in the flesh. You know your flesh. You know what you would do if it was left up to you. But we don't walk in the flesh; we walk under the control of the Spirit. Now, what does it mean to pray in the Spirit? The same thing. It means to pray under the influence of the Spirit, to pray

under the control of the Spirit, and to pray under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit. Many of you realize this weekend that Solo came out and our family is Star Wars fans. Kory always takes the boys to see Star Wars first, but he was coming home from Southeastern and wasn't getting home in time to see the premiere, so we had Crider call Kory when he landed at Nashville to tell him how great the movie was and how we enjoyed it, but we weren't going to tell him about it because we didn't want to spoil it for him. Kory was trying to be nice, he knew we were all listening, and then Crider hung up. We called him back to say, "Just kidding!" Then we all went last night. Crider did what he did because he was under the influence of Papaw. Crider did what he did because he was under the influence of Memish and Kiki. But man, if you would have heard him, you would have thought every word was his! He took the leadership we gave him and personalized it in talking to his dad, and that is what happens in prayer. When you pray under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God leads you, guides you, prompts you to pray, but you personalize it and make it yours. You go before your God, your Father, totally conscience, totally aware you are in His presence.

On Wednesday night, we like to say prayer is us declaring our dependence on God. That is what we do on the battlefield. We declare our dependency on God. John Wesley said prayer is striking the winning blow, and ministry is gathering the results. You and I pray under the leadership of the third person of the triune Godhead. Jesus talked about having to go away, but it would actually be to the disciple's advantage if He went away because the Holy Spirit that would come would be just like Him, except He wouldn't *be with* them, He would *live in* them. The world could never take Him from them because the world doesn't know Him and can't see Him. He talked about how the Holy Spirit would be our helper, our teacher, our witness, our convicter, and our guide. Jesus actually talked about how the Holy Spirit would only reveal to us what He has heard; meaning the Holy Spirit of God hears God, the Father, and God, the Son, talk in their counsel. He can't wait to come and let you and me in on what God is going to do, so that we won't miss out! Jesus said it is to our advantage because if Jesus was still here, He would be here physically, which means if He was here physically at the 9:15 service, He wouldn't be at First Baptist Murray. It

would be sad for those people at Murray, wouldn't it? Can you imagine getting out of church and hearing that Jesus was at Hardin, and you went to another church? Next Sunday, everyone would be at Hardin! Then Jesus would go to First Baptist Murray and we would miss Him again. No, the Holy Spirit is not limited to a human body. He is with us at all times. He lives within each one of us, so the Bible says pray at all times on the battlefield. Don't just pray in the morning, or at night, over your meals, or during an emergency. Pray with all prayer and supplication, Paul says.

I don't know about you, but my home church taught me to take prayers and all the different type of prayers in the Bible and put them under a formula I could remember called, ACTS.

A-adoration

C-confession

T-thanksgiving

S-supplication

Did you learn that when you were smaller too? I'm just telling you that when you're in the battle and recognize the presence of God, there will be times when you will just want to talk to your Father, and you will just want to adore Him! You just want to brag on Him and tell Him how awesome He is, tell Him how thankful you are! Then there will be other times on the battlefield where you will feel inadequate and you will just want to confess because there will be something causes you to doubt, something driving you to that feeling. You will want to take it to God to confession. Then there are times that you just see the things going on around you, you see those victories, you sense Him in your life, and you just want to break out in praise, in thanksgiving, and you just want to thank Him for who He is and what He is doing, and where He is in your life. There are times where under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God, you just feel compelled to make a request. That's ok, but there will be a balance in your life among these four primary types of praying.

He says, to that end when it comes to praying; keep alert with all perseverance. Four times Paul will say "all, all, all, all." Keep alert with 'all'

perseverance. Don't get distracted from praying. When you and I get distracted from praying, we're not practicing the presence of God in our life. We are not aware of who He is, where He is, and what He is doing for us and in us and through us. So Paul says persevere in praying, because praying keeps you alert. That is why Jesus said ask, seek, and knock. If you ask, it will be given. If you seek, you will find. If you knock, it will be opened. Then He tells this story about this friend who has a friend appear at midnight needing bread. But the friend he has come to doesn't have any bread, so he goes to his friend who he knows has bread, and he beats on the door. But because it is midnight, the friend won't come to the door. You got that, right. If someone comes to your house needing something but you don't have it and know your neighbor does, you go to your neighbor to meet your friend's need, because there is no Wal-Mart, no Kroger. You don't knock and leave; you knock and knock and knock, because you know he is in the bed. You know he is not going to get up and give it to you just because he is your friend, but if you don't let him go back to sleep and keep beating on that door, you know that, eventually, he will get out of that bed and come and give you what you need and you can go meet the need of your friend. That is how we are supposed to pray! Keep on praying. This is why some of you have had prayers answered that you have actually prayed for twenty, thirty, even forty years. Amen! You kept asking, kept seeking, and you kept knocking! What that does is it keeps us alert to what's going on in the battle around us. There is no telling how many times we took advantage of opportunities, big and small, that God gave us because we were praying and specifically asking God to meet this need that we have.

Then Paul says to pray for 'all' the saints. We pray for saints in general and for saints specifically. I can't tell you how many times it encourages me as a Christian to sense the Holy Spirit leading me to pray for somebody or something, I do, then later I find out that the very moment I was praying, someone was in a crisis and God actually used my prayer to help someone! Tell me you have had that happen. Maybe one time would be a coincidence, but no, not time after time after time. I will never forget being in spiritual warfare with a person who was losing their family, and one day, sitting in my office, (before the cellphone age) the Spirit of the Lord just

prompted me to pick up the phone and call this person and encourage them. This person had actually left another church to come to this church because they didn't feel like they could go back to the church where this was taking place. I just picked up the phone and called, feeling like the Spirit of the Lord had led me. It rang and rang and rang, and they didn't answer but went to the answering machine. In my flesh, I said the Spirit must not have been leading and I started to hang up, but I thought just in case the Spirit was leading and I said, "I just wanted you to know I'm praying for you and felt like God wanted me to let you know He loves you and this is going to work out," and I hung up. I have never heard from that person again in my life. A year later, a person was in my office and asked if I remembered so and so. I said, "Yes, I prayed for her one day." She said, "You did, didn't you." She said, "Do you remember making a phone call?" I said, "Yes, it was really strange because I felt the Lord leading me to call, and she wasn't home and didn't answer, so I didn't think I was following the Lord but I left a message anyway." She said, "I'm so glad you left that message. You have no idea, it got so bad in her life that she went to the gun safe and took out her husband's pistol and had it to her head and was getting ready to pull the trigger when her last words were, 'God, if there is hope for me, please let me know.'" She said the phone started ringing and she said she didn't answer it, but she heard your voice telling her that God loves her and there was hope, and she didn't take her life." I fell on the floor of my office. I have missed opportunities when I've sensed the Spirit of God lead me and I did nothing, and you have too, but never again.

Some of us don't practice the presence of the Lord enough that we don't know what is from the Spirit of the Lord and what is from our own thoughts and voices. This is why Paul tells us to pray at all times. Pray with all prayers. Pray with all perseverance. Pray for all saints. Then Paul says to pray for me, and tells us specifically what to pray for him about. He closes this by telling us about Brother T. He says by the way, I'm going to send Brother T to you, and he will tell you how I'm doing and what I need. It will be an encouragement to me and an encouragement to you. I put this together; Paul is closing this letter with military strategy. On the battlefield, you need good Intel, amen. Do you know why many of us don't pray? It is because we don't know what to pray for. We don't know how to pray.

Many of us rob other people of a blessing out of praying for us because we are so private with what is going on in our life that we won't dare share with anyone what is going on. What you and I do by doing that is cut ourselves off from our platoon and try to wage spiritual warfare alone. So many of us don't have good Intel, we don't know how to pray for each other. We just pray a general prayer of God be with so and so, rather than getting down in the trenches and saying God, open so and so's eyes to this, this, or that. God, we need a miracle from You, right now! We can't wait; the doctors have said this! Why do we do that medically, but we won't do it spiritually? Please fellow Christians, please fellow soldiers, let's not just wear the armor; let's be committed to letting God know our position and call in our air support and rely upon Him for the victory that only He can give.

It is Memorial Day weekend. We are free in this country because of men and women who gave their life. I pray while you enjoy your picnic or day off, or whatever you do, that you remember how important our military has been to us as a country and for those people who did not run from the battle, but they ultimately gave the greatest sacrifice they could give, and that was their life. But also remember right now the sacrifice of Christ, because that is why I am free spiritually. He went to a battlefield, He went to a cross and on that cross, and He gave His life. We want to remember Him this morning on Memorial Day weekend.