

INTRODUCTION

This is the last message in the series from Ephesians and the last message in the series on spiritual warfare. We’ve talked about “Battle Stations! Know Your Enemy.” Our adversary, the devil, is real and he is out to get out and defeat you. We’ve talked about “Battle Stations! Know Your Armor.” We’ve talked about “Battle Stations! Know Your Weapons,” and today we’re going to talk about, “Battle Stations! Know Your Assignment” because there is nothing truly more pathetic than a fully dressed, fully armed soldier wandering around saying, “Where’s the battle? What do I do now?”

When we go into battle every day of our life, we need to make sure our belt of truth is the thing that holds everything in our life together, the written word of God. We need to make sure the righteousness of Jesus is covering our hearts—not our righteousness—but his righteousness and we need to make sure that as we walk in this sinful, dirty world with the shifting sands of moral uncertainty we are standing fast and standing firm with those boots of peace the peace that passes all understanding. We need to make sure our minds are always covered by the helmet of salvation and everything we see and everything we hear is filtered through the lordship of Jesus. Then, we can hold up the shield of faith that is large enough and strong enough that when Satan shoots those fiery darts at us, we’ll be able to extinguish them. We will not doubt; we will not fear; we will have faith within our offensive weapon the word of God the sword of the Spirit.

This is not the *logos*, the written word, the potential word; it is the *rhema*, the word that becomes real to you. It’s like when you go into your bathroom with dirty hands. The soap sitting on your sink is the *logos* but when you take it and you rub your hands in that lather; it becomes the *rhema* to you. Just the word printed on the pages of your Bible that’s not powerful it’s only when you take it and apply it to your life that it becomes a powerful offensive weapon.

Now that you’re dressed for battle and you are equipped, what is it that every soldier of Jesus Christ does? Once you are dressed for battle, your assignment is to pray.

Ephesians 6:17-20. “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.”

Once soldier of Jesus dresses up and gets ready, the battle is fought in prayer.

(1) The battle is fought in prayer

I want to make a couple of introductory statements as we talk about our assignment. First, the battle is fought in prayer. Once we get up off our knees, we go out and what we are doing is basically picking up the spoils of the battle, but you must understand you will achieve victory on your knees on your face before the Lord in prayer, so many of you are not doing that every day. You’re going out into the world and you are getting knocked down. You are being defeated. You

are giving in to temptation and all kinds of attitudes displeasing to God. The reason, generally, is because you have not won the victory on your knees in prayer.

In Exodus 17, when Joshua was down in the valley of Rephidim fighting against the Amalekites, Moses was up on the mountain top with the rod of God in his hand. The rod of God represents the power of God released in the life of a believer through prayer. It was a picture of him praying. As long as Moses held up the rod of God on the mountaintop Joshua and the army of Israel was victorious, but whenever he lowered the rod, which represents prayerlessness, then Amalek and his armies would be victorious. Lift it up: Joshua. Lower it: Amalek. That’s a great picture of when you pray you win the victory. Finally, they just let old Moses sit on a rock and Aaron stood on one hand and lifted up his arm on this side and Hur stood on the other side (Hur was a “him”) and raised his other arm and together they held Moses’ hands up, which represents “all prevailing, powerful prayer” and when they held up the rod of God, the King James Version says, “Joshua discomfited Amalek in the valley of Rephidim.” In good old East Texas slang that means Joshua beat the stuffing out of Amalek in the valley of Rephidim. If you want to be victorious, you must constantly lift up your heart and your soul in prayer to the Lord. The battle is fought in prayer. Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint down on his knees.

(2) Not all prayer is effective

The second introductory statement is: Not all prayer is effective. I venture to guess most of you listen to me pray. Every now and then you pray before you eat; you may pray before you take an exam at school; you may pray when you go to bed something like “Lord, I lay me down to sleep.” And you wonder why you don’t really have victory. Merely mouthing words of prayers is not powerful in and of itself. You have to know how to pray. God says, “When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood,” (Isaiah 1:15) meaning wickedness. Have you ever had the impression that when you are praying, your prayers are not going past the light bulbs. May you have tried to pray, but you get right in the middle of the prayer and you say “Forget it, this is just not working!” Many of you are not actively participating in aggressive, powerful, warfare praying. You think prayer doesn’t work. It’s not God’s fault and it’s not the fault of prayer. When you walk into your bedroom at home and you flip that light switch if the light doesn’t come on, you don’t curse Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Edison and say, “I’m never going to use electricity again.” No, you know something’s wrong.” The light bulb is out, the breaker has tripped or maybe the power is off. When there is not powerful, effective, aggressive answer to prayer in your life, don’t stop praying. There’s something wrong and the fault is not with God. It could be you are not praying correctly. That’s why the disciples said to Jesus. “Lord, teach us to pray.” If you are like me, you have the desire to become more effective in your praying. I’ve been praying for a long time, but I still feel like I can improve my prayer life greatly. Today I want to share some principles with you from Ephesians 6:18 on how you can pray effectively and aggressively in the Spirit.

1. PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT IS PRAYER THAT LISTENS

Number one. Praying in the Spirit is prayer that listens. That may be one of your problems. It could be you are not effective in your prayers because you are doing more talking than you are

listening. Prayer was never designed to be a monologue where you say, "God, I have something I want you to know." or "God, there's something that I need." and you just talk, talk, talk to God. You need to be listening to what God is saying to you. The more you study it, the more effective you are in your praying, the more you will listen. In other words you'll be listening in your prayers more than you will be speaking. You can pray in the spirit according to Romans 8:26-27, by doing this. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Have you ever gone to the Lord and tried to pray but said, "I don't know what to pray for," so you just don't pray? You get up and go on your merry way. Some time try getting on your knees before the Lord and clear your mind and say, "Holy Spirit, speak to my heart. Tell me what I ought to be praying for." If you will listen to the voice of the Spirit, he will speak to you so you need to listen. I even suggest you may need to take a pencil and a piece of paper get on your knees before the Lord and say, "Holy Spirit tell me what to pray for and who to pray for." I promise you he will give you impressions. He'll give you people. He'll give you circumstances and situations you need to pray for and then you just pray for them right then.

Sometimes people come to me wanting to know how to become a Christian. I explain to them the plan of salvation and then come to the point where I say to them, "Now all you have to do is pray and invite Jesus to come into your heart." Then I always say, "Would you like to pray that prayer yourself or would you like for me to lead you in a prayer?" Most of the time they say, "Would you lead me?" So we do something like this. I say, "Just repeat this prayer after me. Dear God, I admit I am a sinner. I want to become a Christian. I turn from my sins and I put my faith in Jesus." Who's praying? Am I praying or is that person praying? We both are, and that person is just repeating what I am saying, but they are meaning that prayer themselves. That's what praying in the Spirit is. The Holy Spirit literally gives you the words to say and you pray those words after he gives them to you.

Paul says sometimes you are so burdened you don't even pray words. You just groan in your Spirit. It feels like you say, "Ohhhhh, Lord nooooo," and you just groan and it's not even a word, but that's the Holy Spirit leading you to pray. We ought to be doing more listening, than talking in our prayers because of who we are in relation to God. He's the father; we're the child. Shouldn't parents talk more and shouldn't children listen more? That's who we are with the Lord. Another relationship is that he's the master; we're the slave. Shouldn't the master speak more and the servant listen more? In the Old Testament little Samuel heard the voice of the Lord and Eli said, "Whenever you hear God speak, say these words. 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" That's great advice. Get on your knees and say, "Lord, speak to me. Your servant is listening." The problem with us is we get on our knees and we say, "Listen up, God. I have something I want to tell you." Let him speak to you. He's the father; we're the child. He's the master; we're the slave. Another beautiful relationship is Jesus is the bridegroom and we, the church, are the bride. Listen to what the husband has to say and do a lot of listening. I know ladies get a bad rap about talking more than their husbands do. That's like the guy I heard about whose father died, and somebody said, "Did your father have any last words?" He said, "No. Mother was with him until the end." But if you want to have a good marriage relationship, it is based upon communication: Talking and listening. Are you listening a lot in your prayers or do

you just find yourself blabbing off some monologue to God?

2. PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT IS PRAYER THAT LOOKS

Number two. Aggressive, warfare praying is prayer that looks. It is prayer that is vigilant. The last part of verse 18 says, "With this in mind, be alert." Where did we get the idea of closing our eyes to pray? In the Bible there are different postures for prayer. One may be prostrate before the Lord. A common one is on your knees with hands lifted before the Lord. Other times the Bible talks about people who lifted their eyes to the Lord, but nowhere in the Bible does it talk about closing your eyes to pray. Why do we do that? I don't know why we do a lot of things, but I suppose we do it because we want to block out anything that would distract us, but there is nothing holy or religious about closing our eyes to pray. The truth of the matter is spiritually speaking; you had better make sure you don't close your eyes when you pray, because that's when the enemy will sneak up on you. Pray alertly and be vigilant. Look around to see what God is doing. If I have learned anything in "Experiencing God," it is that the role of a Christian is to just look around this world, find out what God is doing and get in on it! You have to do that with your eyes wide open.

When God wanted to pare down Gideon's army of 32,000, they all went down to the water hole to drink. Some of the men got down on all fours like a dog and lapped up the water. God said, "Those warriors are unacceptable. Remember the ones who got on one knee and were looking around alert vigilant and drank water out of their hand? Those are the warriors I want." Spiritually speaking, in warfare you pray with your eyes open and know what's going on. The night before he was crucified, Jesus said to his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (Mark 14:38) That's why some of us fall into temptation. We're not looking around when we pray. The devil will do everything he can to keep you from praying. I think he'll try to push you in two directions to keep you from having a centered, powerful, effective prayer life. One direction in which he will push us is that he'll try to make us lazy and we'll think about how tired we are. Jesus said, "The flesh is weak, the Spirit is willing." Why don't you get up 30 minutes earlier in the morning and spend 30 minutes in prayer? If you were honest, you would probably say, "I need my sleep. I'm just too tired in the morning." That's the flesh. How about praying at night? You say, "Well, I'm just too tired I go to bed." I think the devil tries to make us lazy. I think the other danger is I the devil pushes some religious people into so much other religious activity that it seems like they don't have time to pray. They sing in the choir, they take up the offering, they teach Sunday School and they keep the kids in the nursery. They are so busy doing religious things that they don't pray. The battle is fought in prayer!

For 25 years of my life I have made a conscious commitment to try to spend time with the Lord every day in prayer. I want to testify to you that it never gets any easier. In fact, it's as hard for me to do today (perhaps even harder) than it was 25 years ago when I was a high school student and I made that commitment. The devil looks at David Dykes at Green Acres Baptist Church and says, "How can I make that pastor ineffective? I know! I'll keep him so busy doing other things that he won't pray." It's easier for me to prepare and give six sermons than it is for me to spend thirty minutes of uninterrupted time in prayer. The devil will push us toward so much activity that we won't pray. He'll push us toward laziness until we won't pray. We need to break through

that and look around and be vigilant and know that prayer is where the victory is won. It is prayer that looks around.

3. PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT IS PRAYER THAT LINGERS

Number three. It is prayer that lingers. Spend a lot of time in the presence of the Lord. Look at what Paul said again in verse 18. He said, "Keep on praying." Don't stop. The problem with so many of us is we treat prayer like a fast food drive through. We pull up, roll down our spiritual window and say, "I'll take the Full Meal Deal, number one, and supersize it, dear Lord if you would." We pull up to the window and expect to pay our money, get our stuff and go on our way and that's the way we treat prayer. "Lord, give it to me quick." "I want it right now." Let's just keep on going. That's not the kind of prayer the Bible talks about. The Bible talks about spending much time in prayer persistence in prayer praying over and over and over. One reason some of our prayers are not being answered is we just stop too soon.

A lady in our church told me a delightful story of a little girl named Sara who told her Daddy she wanted a brother or a sister and was going to start praying for one. She didn't know her mother was already three months pregnant. They didn't tell her. Her Daddy said, "Okay honey, I'll tell you what you do. You pray for God to give you a brother or a sister and in about six months I think he will answer that prayer." So she started praying. She prayed for two or three days. She told one of her kindergarten friends, "I am praying that God will give me a brother or a sister and in six months I'm going to have one." Her friend said, "Nuh uh! My mother had a baby and it takes more than a year." Sara said, "I don't want to pray for over a year," So she quit praying. Sure enough a few months later, her Daddy took her to the hospital room and said, "Honey, there is something I want you to see and there was her Mom and her Dad pulled back the blanket and there was a little baby brother and then he pulled back the other side of the blanket and there was a little baby sister: Twins! He said, "Aren't you glad you prayed for a little brother or sister?" She said, "I sure am, Dad, but aren't you all glad I stopped when I did?"

There may be times when it is good to stop praying, but usually that's our problem. We don't pray long enough. We have to spend extended periods of time with the Lord. We rush into the presence of the Lord and then rush out of the presence of the Lord and we don't tarry. Jesus promised in John 15:7 that it takes abiding remaining continuing to have our prayers answered. He said, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you."

4. PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT IS PRAYER THAT LOVES

Number four. It is prayer that loves. Effective, aggressive, warfare praying is always unselfish prayer that prays for other people. This past week as I was preparing for this message, I read every prayer in the New Testament that Paul ever prayed and never once does he pray for himself. He is always praying for other people. In verse 19 he says, "Pray for me." Have you ever noticed Paul never says, "God bless me and my wife, Dora, us two no mora." He's not selfish and self-centered and self-focused in his prayers. He is always praying for other people. I'm trying to point out some weaknesses in your prayer life. Could it be that you are doing more talking than listening? Could it be that you are praying with your spiritual eyes closed? Could it

be that you are not spending enough time with the Lord? Could this be the problem that you are only primarily praying for yourself? You have your little list and it's, “God, gimme, gimme!” True warfare praying is always prayer that's unselfish. Sometimes we make our selfish prayers sound unselfish. It's like the single girl I heard about who really wanted a husband, but she wouldn't dare pray that selfish prayer. Instead, she just prayed God would give her mother a handsome son-in-law. So we need to make sure our prayers are truly unselfish.

Most of you are familiar with the story of Job and at one time or another. You may think you have gone through or are going through what Job went through, but I daresay few of us have ever—or *will* ever—go through what Job went through. In one day he lost all of his assets: His crops, his livestock, and in one fell swoop all ten of his children died. Then, to make matters worse, his body broke out in sores and boils. He was in constant physical pain. To make matters worse, his wife turned against him. She said, “Your breath stinks, Job. Why don't you just curse God and die!” She got angry at him. Then these three “friends,” (the kind where with friends like that, you don't need enemies) Zophar, Eliphaz and Bildad come to torment Job. By the way, Bildad, the Shuhite, was the shortest man in the Bible. It's not “Knee-hi-miah” it's Bildad. These guys said, “Job, come on come out of the closet 'fess up. There is some terrible wickedness in your life that has caused you to deserve all of this. Come on and tell us what it is. You have to be some sort of character for all of these bad things to be happening to you.” Job kept saying, “I am innocent. I am innocent. I am innocent.” “Aw, come on, Job, you can't be innocent,” and they tormented him. Most of you know Job passed the test. God blessed him twice as much as he was ever blessed before. The turning point in the story was Job's unselfish praise. The turning point in the whole book is in Job 42:10. “After Job prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.”

Here you are and you are hurting. You have some relational problems. You have some pain or adversity in your life and you are just focusing on yourself. “Oh God. It's so awful! I'm hurting. Do something, God. Help me, God.” Do like Job and turn to those others around you. They may be friends or they may be pseudo-enemies like Job's friends and you need to pray for them. When you take your focus off your own problems and your own pain and you put it on others' problems and others' pain, you would be amazed at the blessing of God in your life. It's praying for others. You don't know. Sometimes you hear a message and you say, “I need to change. I need to do something.” but, by the time you get to your car, you've already forgotten about it.

5. PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT IS PRAYER THAT LABORS

The fifth characteristic of powerful praying in the Spirit is prayer that labors. It is work. When you really pray, you will work up a sweat. When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the Bible says he was under such agony and prayed with such intensity, that sweat drops of blood appeared on his forehead. That's the kind of praying the Bible talks about. James 5:16 says, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” Have you ever prayed fervently? Our problem is we pray mediocre, milquetoast, weak-kneed, nice, polite prayers to the Lord and there's no burden no agony. Paul said, “I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.” (Romans 15:30) The words “struggle by praying” is the Greek word, *agon*, we get our word, “agony” or “agonize” from it. Paul says, “When you know what praying is, you will agonize on your knees before

God." Prayer is true, aggressive, warfare praying. It is hard work. You wrestle with God.

In Genesis 32, Jacob, whose name means "grabber, usurper, selfish" was born holding on to the heel of his twin brother and that was the description of his life. "What can I get for myself?" One night before Jacob was to face his angry brother, he wrestled with God and the Bible says, "He wrestled with God and prevailed all night long." He grabbed hold of God and in this might conflict of wrestling with God, Jacob said, "I'm not going to let go until there is a blessing." This representative of God, who was obviously an angel, touched him on the hip and the Bible says from that moment for the rest of his life, Jacob walked with a limp. When you wrestle with God in prayer, your walk is changed forever. Your lifestyle is different. You never walk the same again. Then the angel said to Jacob, "Your name is Jacob which means *grabber* but from this day forward your name is changed. You are different because your wrestled with God in prayer. From this day forward, your name shall be called Israel, Prince of God. The reason there is a nation of Israel instead of a nation of Jacob is because God said, "Because you wrestled in prayer, I am going to make you a different person.

Have you ever wrestled with the Lord all night? Have you ever prayed all night? Have you ever prayed an hour? Jesus said to his disciples, "Can you not watch and pray one hour?" It is prayer that labors.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this series, I said my Dad was in the Navy on a ship and the cry came over the loudspeakers, "Battle Stations! Battle Stations!" Every sailor knew where to go and they knew what to do. Soldier of Jesus Christ, when you hear "Battle Stations! Battle Stations!" Do you know where to go? Do you know what to do? You go to your knees and you pray in the Spirit. If you will do that, there will be victory in your life.

OUTLINE

- (1) The battle is fought in prayer
- (2) Not all prayer is effective

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"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." *Mark 14:38*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes