

Does It Really Matter If I Pray?

When I say the word “prayer” what image comes to mind? Is it someone on their knees? Is it someone surrounded by candles? Maybe it’s men on prayer rugs bowing toward Mecca or Buddhists spinning prayer wheels.

People’s concepts of prayer are amazingly diverse. If you Google the words “pray” and “prayer” you get 92,700,000 hits!

A famous statistical experiment to determine whether or not prayer had a physical effect on the external environment was conducted by Sir Francis Galton in 1872. Galton, who really was poking fun at the idea of prayer, hypothesized that if prayer was effective, members of the British Royal family ought to live longer, because thousands prayed for their wellbeing every Sunday in English churches. So he compared longevity in the British Royal family with that of the general population, and showed there was no difference therefore in his mind proving that prayer didn’t work!

Well, the Bible presents prayer as a compelling, indispensable, high-priority part of life.

This is our final week in a study of the New Testament book of Ephesians.

This has been a challenging couple of months as we’ve tackled topics like the eternal plan of God, relationship issues, forgiveness, marriage and family, and how to deal with the Devil.

The book of Ephesians is about what God has done for us and how we’re to live in light of what God has done for us.

There are three major references to prayer in Ephesians. The first two are specific prayers that the author of Ephesians, who is an apostle named Paul, prayed for the congregation in Ephesus.

But there is a third reference to prayer in Ephesians. This one comes immediately after the description of the defenses which God has provided for us as we deal with this one the Bible calls Satan.

I. Prayer Is The Energy That Enables Us To Effectively Use What God Has Provided.

It's absolutely imperative that we know our resources. That's what the book of Ephesians has been all about about, our divine resources. It's absolutely imperative that we understand the protection that God has made available to us, and so we have spent the last several weeks studying God's provision.

But now when all is said and done, and we've got all the facts in our brains and all the knowledge in our minds, Paul brings us back to our trust in God. He closes out this beautiful book on the Christian's resources by reminding us what it is that energizes and empowers these resources.

It's as if he doesn't want to close without one more time bring us back to an acknowledgement of our source of strength in this world.

Francis Galton and the British royal family notwithstanding, God is alive and real and He's ordained prayer as a way to tap into His strength for living.

Prayer is the victory but what is prayer? Do we we really need to pray? How do we know how to pray?

Turn with me to **Ephesians 6, pg. 1041**

Read vs 13-18

According to the Bible there's a very real being called Satan who has you and me in his sights. His agenda is to disrupt, confuse, and destroy all the God has created.

Since we're created in God's image that puts us at ground zero as far as Satan is concerned.

In verse 18 we're given characteristics of prayer that's really effective.

Does it really matter if I pray? The Bible says it matters a whole lot. In fact eternal outcomes are depending on our prayers.

So let's take these and look at them one by one.

The first one comes from the words "praying always." Prayer that matters is consistent prayer.

Satan's agenda of confusion and destruction never stops. That's why we have to be consistent prayers.

Now this phrase "praying always" doesn't mean praying one long continual prayer that never ends. It doesn't just mean a "God consciousness" or a prayerful attitude.

The word translated "always" is the word *kairos*. *Kairos* is one of three nouns translated by the English word "time" in our Bibles and it means moments of time as opposed to just "time" in general.

It's used in Galatians 6:10 where it's translated "opportunity."

What the Bible's is really saying here is pray at every opportunity.

Prayer and sharing our faith are probably the two things that Christians read, talk and sing about the most and yet do the least.

And sometimes it's the people in the churches that are the strongest on teaching and doctrine that are the quickest to neglect prayer.

Knowledge by itself builds spiritual pride. And we can become so confident in our understanding of the Bible and even the various pieces of the Christian's armor that we fail to realize our true source of strength.

We ought to be in constant communication with God.

A thousand circumstances and situations that come into our lives every day ought to remind us to pray.

Now certainly we ought to have specific times for prayer. In Psalm 55:17 David said "evening, and morning, and noon, will I pray. In Daniel 6 it says the prophet Daniel prayed 3 times a day. We ought to have times which we have specifically set aside to pray.

But here the Bible is taking us beyond the concept of certain times to say that prayer should be a way of life.

Think about why it is that we don't pray more.

One reason is because we often feel like the things of our life are too insignificant to

pray about. They're too mundane, they're too inconsequential.

You know how most of the Christians who fall into sin and out of touch with God get that way? It isn't that they're walking in a long intimate contact with God and one day some big temptation hits them and bam! Down they go.

It's all those little areas that they thought didn't count. All those small things, those routine things that they assumed they could handle on their own and weren't really that important.

And Satan just led them along gradually into more and more confidence in themselves and one day something big came along and before they knew it down they went.

Effective prayer is consistent prayer.

But then the Bible doesn't just leave it at that. God knows our ignorance. He knows we need to be taught in a detailed manner and so He goes on to add a second characteristic. Effective prayer also takes on all forms.

So it's *praying always with all prayer and supplication*. There are 4 words in the Greek New Testament translated as "prayer." This one is a general, all encompassing term. We are to consistently pray with every variety of prayer.

So what is prayer? If it so important just what is it?

I have a book at home that says that prayer is only asking; anything else supposedly isn't true prayer. But when you read the Bible you find that prayer can involve any or all of a number of different elements.

Asking is a part of prayer. God wants us to ask for Him to work in our life. It shows we recognize how much we need Him.

Confession is part of prayer; acknowledging our sins to God. So is adoration, worship, thanksgiving, intercession. The person who only prays to ask for things is missing out on a tremendous source of blessing.

Some of the most precious times in prayer are when we're praising God and thanking Him for His goodness. When we're truly worshipping God in prayer it keeps us intently aware of His majesty and His greatness.

It's often said that prayer changes things. That's true. James 5:16 says, *The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much*. But it is also true that praise changes

things. And one most important thing that praise changes is our own attitude toward our situation.

Satan has an awesome arsenal. But his most disruptive weapon is labeled “discouragement.”

More people have fallen to discouragement than we could even imagine. But praise has a powerful effect on discouragement. Praising God for His goodness and His mercies, that the Bible says are renewed day by day, puts a wall of protection around us that satanic discouragement has a lot of trouble penetrating.

Praising God that He would sacrifice His Son on a cross so that we could be forgiven strengthens us against discouragement.

We need to be praying with all types of prayer. With all the debate that's gone on over public prayers it seems like I've seen and heard more editorials that quote Jesus when he said.

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.
Matthew 6:5-6

Time and time again that verse is used to say that Jesus taught against public prayer.

Well, I believe that when the Bible says, “praying with all prayer” it means not only all kinds of prayer but all forms of prayer too.

When Jesus Christ gave that command in Matthew 6 his point was don't do anything, including prayer, for the purpose of making yourself look good in front of other people.

Jesus prayed publicly at His baptism, He prayed in public at Lazarus' grave and He prayed with his disciples. The early church prayed together regularly. There are all different forms of prayer and we need to recognize the variety and not limit ourselves.

There's verbal prayer, silent prayer, public prayer, private prayer. There is planned orderly prayer. There is spontaneous prayer. Sometimes prayer is just a crying out from the heart.

Prayer ought to be so much a part of our lives that it takes on all forms and modes. You can pray on your knees, you can pray driving your car, you can pray walking down the street. God made us to have a relationship with Him and prayer is the way we communicate with God.

And so prayer is an endless variety of ways and forms but, praying is to be specific when it comes to requests.

So Ephesians 6:18 says, “all prayer and supplication.” The word supplication means “specific, special requests, dealing with specific, special needs.”

As we're involved in all types of prayer we need to remember to pray specifically.

Parents, how do you pray for your children? “Lord watch over my kids today.” Every child has specific needs. You ought to pray specifically for each one. Praying for their faith in Christ, praying for them at school. Praying for their daily commitment.

How about when you pray for missionaries? What do you say? “God bless all the missionaries, amen.”? Read the prayer letters that come in keep up with our missionaries realizing that they're people like you and me with individual needs. They need boldness, they need encouragement, they need finances. We need to pray for them specifically.

And then there's one another. We pray for each other. As we run the race and fight the battle we need to pray specifically for one another.

Here's where something like the church directory (or picture directory) come in handy. Take a directory and pray for one family each day. If it's a single pray for them to have wisdom as a single in today's culture. If it's a couple pray for their marriage. If they have children pray that they'd be wise parents and that the children would make wise decisions.

Could you imagine what would happen in this congregation if we all started praying like that? We'd be amazed at the things we'd see God do through this church.

He's doing great things, but we'd be blown away by the even greater things.

But now notice something else in this verse. It's, “all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”

Praying in the Spirit is not some mystical type of thing, it's simply this. It's praying in tune with the Holy Spirit. God's not interested in rhetoric, He's not interested in eloquence, He's interested in sincerity.

Praying isn't about saying all the right words, it's about talking to God with authenticity.

From the divine side to pray in the Spirit means that the, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, orders our mind, directs our prayers and empowers them.

From the human side to pray in the Spirit means lining up our prayers with the mind and will of the Holy Spirit and of course we find the Holy Spirit's will revealed in his revelation, the Bible.

People often ask, "Why should I bother praying about things? If God's got a will and a determinant purpose why should I pray? It's going to come to pass anyway."

You ever have that question? Probably we all have at some time. I think that there's an answer to that. And the answer is that God has ordained prayer as the means by which His purposes are accomplished in the world.

Over and over again we find men and women in the Bible praying according to what God has already revealed.

While Daniel was a captive in Babylon he read Jeremiah's prophecy that the captivity would only last 70 years. He counted them up and lo and behold the 70 years were almost up. So what does Daniel do? Pack his bags and buy a train ticket to Jerusalem?

He falls on his face and confesses the sin of his people and prays, *Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.* Daniel 9:17

God says the captivity will only last 70 years, Daniel realizes that 70 years are almost up, and so he prays that God would keep his promise.

Isn't that interesting?

The Apostle Paul was told by God in a vision "Paul your going to be taken to Rome, and just as you have testified of men in Jerusalem, so you will speak for me in Rome."

What does he do shortly after this vision? We're going to read it in a couple of minutes.

He asks the Ephesians to pray that he would open his mouth boldly in Rome.

God says You're going to do it. Paul asks prayer that he'd do it.

In the last chapter of the Bible Jesus says "I'm coming quickly" and John prays, "Even so come quickly."

Praying in the Spirit is prayer by the power of the Holy Spirit and prayer in harmony with the Spirit's revelation which is in the Bible which He inspired.

I've heard people say you don't need to pray for things God has already promised. He's promised to be with us so we don't need to pray, "Lord be with me." People in the Bible did it all the time.

The 4th aspect of effective prayer is that it is to be watchful prayer. Verse 18 again says, "being watchful to this end." What does that mean?

Watching means "keeping on the alert." The phrase "watch and pray" occurs often in the Bible. When Nehemiah was repairing the walls of Jerusalem and the enemy was trying to stop the work, Nehemiah defeated the enemy by watching and praying. He said, "*Nevertheless we made our prayer unto God, and set a watch.*" We asked God to protect us and then we kept an eye out for what was going on.

Before Jesus was arrested He went to the garden to pray. He told His disciples to watch and pray.

He had just spent the evening talking about His body and blood at the Passover meal. He said, 'I'm going away' He said, "A little while and the world will see me no more." He said, "I leave the world and go to the Father."

Couple that with the times before that when He told them straight out He'd be crucified. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out this is it.

Jesus goes off to pray and His disciples fall asleep. Peter, James and John had the opportunity to pray that the Son of God would be strengthened to go to the cross and they completely and totally blow it. Satan was laughing up his sleeve at these guys.

God expects us to use our God given senses, led by the Spirit, so that we detect Satan when he is beginning to work. If you don't know what's going on around you in your family, in the church, in your nation, your going to have a very restricted prayer life. We need to be alert to Satan's movement and tactics.

Then there are two more components of effective prayer in verse 18. The 5th one is persistent prayer.

The word "perseverance" means we are not to give up or become discouraged in prayer. This isn't because we're somehow trying to twist God's arm and make Him do what we want Him to do, but because we're deeply concerned and burdened and can't rest until we get God's answer. Our persistence in prayer is our acknowledgement that without God we can't really do anything.

And then finally prayer is to be unselfish prayer. Warren Wiersbe points out "The Lord's prayer begins with 'Our Father,' not 'My Father.'" We pray as part of a family that is talking to God and we ought to pray for other members of the family."

This is one army standing against one other army. All of the believers stand as a unit. No one stands alone.

Sometimes you hear people say, "I don't talk about my faith because it's a personal thing." Well, that's a half-truth. True salvation is a personal relationship with Christ but it's also, as Jude calls it, a common salvation. It's something we share in common with other people who have put their faith in Christ. We all face a common enemy and we are all subject to the same temptations.

Satan wants nothing more than for us to think that we're alone in our situation; that only we experience the trials and the temptations and the heartaches of life. I Corinthians 10:13 says, *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man.*

Our problem is that we tend to view our problems in a personal, subjective way. If all I think about is MY problems, MY difficulties, MY fears, MY failures, which is very easy to do, the result is that I become entirely self-centered and introspective and end up defeated.

God wants us to never forget that we enjoy the same salvation and fight the same enemy. It's not just poor little old me sitting by myself in a corner. All other believers are in this fight too

This is the God's battle, we're in God's army and that keeps our eyes off of ourselves and keeps the total picture in view.

You know the man Job went thru an extremely tough time. He cursed the day he was

born. He suffered tremendously. He had a wife that was a big encouragement through all his problems (she told him why don't you curse God and die!).

He had some friends who sat with him and said "Job there must be some secret sin your harboring or all of this calamity wouldn't have come your way."

But in the last chapter of the book after all was said and done we read this.

And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Job 42:10

Job's whole complaint through the book was "God is against me." He suffered. But when he stopped arguing with God and with others and began to pray for his friends God turned his life around. The fact that he was praying for others was a sign of his spiritual maturity.

When we realize that we're all one body in Christ, and that the way we pray for self is to pray for others we've reached a significant stage in our spiritual development.

So now we get an illustration of how to pray for another believer.

I. Prayer Is The Energy That Enables Us To Effectively Use What God Has Provided.

II. The Church Is A Community And The Members Need To Stand Together And Support One Another

And so Paul writes in verse **19 - 20 (read)**

This is powerful. Here's a guy who turned the world upside down with his preaching, wrote 13 of the books in our New Testament, got direct revelation from God writing to a group of Christians and saying, "Pray for me!"

That's what made Paul great. There was no self-confidence in this guy. There was no delusion that he was a one-man show, out there carrying the ball by himself.

It was the prayers of God's people that energized Paul for victory and he knew it.

Look at his request because it's unique in several ways.

He says, "Pray for me that I may be bold and speak as I ought to speak."

That's a unique request first of all because of Paul's location at this time. He's in prison in Rome but he doesn't ask them to pray that he'd be released.

It's unique because of his physical situation. Apparently, he was ill and yet he doesn't ask for prayer for healing.

This request is unique because of Paul's past experiences. I mean if anybody was bold and freely spoke out for Christ it was Paul and yet he's asking for boldness.

And then finally this request is unique because it only applies to Paul and no one else.

Some of the commentaries think that Paul was just asking prayer for himself in his every day preaching.

But at this point Paul's mind was going beyond that every day aspect.

Paul was a prisoner now in Rome. He had appealed to Nero after his arrest in Jerusalem and now he was anxiously awaiting the day when he would stand before the imperial court and the emperor of the most powerful nation on earth.

Paul sees himself as a prisoner before a judge, and yet this role fades out into an ambassador sent by Christ, the king of Kings, standing in the throne room by Nero, delivering the message of the King to the pagan imperial court.

When Paul asks the Ephesians to pray that utterance may be given to him, I don't think that he's asking for the right words to use in this situation. He knew what he was going to say. He was going to say that salvation only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

He was saying, "Pray that I get the opportunity."

Now catch the mentality of this man. This ought to be the drive of everyone of us. This ought to be our passion.

Eventually Paul lost his life for his faith. Nero had him beheaded hoping to get rid of him once and for all. But at this point Paul wasn't praying "God get me out of this mess, I've been falsely accused, my rights have been violated."

He's praying, "Oh God, give me the chance to speak as your representative. Let them ask me to give an account of my teaching and preaching."

He didn't want to get up there like some intimidated prisoner. He wanted boldness as he spoke for His Savior.

He wanted to be unhindered as he spoke for message of the gospel before the most

powerful man in the world.

And so he said, "Pray for me. Pray that I have opportunity. Pray for me that I'd speak boldly and clearly."

What is your prayer life like today? Is it consistent, varied, spirit empowered, watchful, persistent and unselfish? If it is then Satan won't get the upper hand in your life, but you'll stand firm against him.