

The Secret Weapon – *Ephesians 6:18*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Well, today we're going to tackle what I believe is the 7th and final piece of the full armor of God and represents what we might call "the secret weapon" that undergirds and supports and makes effective all the other pieces of armor. It's the secret weapon that operates with the very power of God...a weapon against which no enemy can stand.

As we prepare our minds to understand the significance of this secret weapon, I want to share with you some secret weapon history I came across, written by a man named Jeff Strite. It involves taking yourself back a few years, but not nearly as far as the 600 years I asked you to go back last week! This time we're only going back to the late 1700's:

1776. That was the year the Declaration of Independence was signed. But did signing that declaration actually make America a free and independent nation? No. There was still a long, and costly conflict that needed to be fought with THE superpower of the day.

America only had [a] rag tag army [that] was poorly paid (if they were paid at all). They had few - if any – uniforms. Their weapons were often what they brought from home. If any cannons, they were those taken from the British. And the soldiers often had to survive without adequate food and shelter.

By contrast they faced one of the most feared armies in the world. British troops were the best trained and equipped of any army of the day. Other nations looked on to this conflict and doubted these colonial soldiers could ever succeed. Few [expected] these "Freedom fighters" would prevail... But they did! And one of the reasons they prevailed was that they had a secret weapon. A secret weapon so powerful that even King George feared it. That secret weapon was a powerful brigade of soldiers that Britain referred

to as the "Black Regiment." They were such a powerful force for the cause of freedom that, before the Revolution started, the British governor of Massachusetts made the statement that if this Black Regiment ever came out in force to support the Revolution England would lose.

So, what was this "Black Regiment"? And what was it about them that made Britain fear it?...[Well,] The Black Regiment were the preachers throughout the Colonies. Their weapon was the Bible. And their battlefield was the pulpit. They were called the "Black" regiment because they wore black robes when they preached. (Some sources refer to them as the "Black Robed Regiment").

It was their moral leadership and influence that enabled America to become a free and independent nation. These preachers preached what they preached, because they believed that the very essence of [Christianity] was the idea that liberty is a sacred gift from God and that the united Colonies of America had been chosen by God to guard the sacred lamp of liberty.

Thus, on the first anniversary of the Battle of Lexington, a preacher named Jonas Clark declared: "From this day will be dated the liberty of the world." Resistance to England became a sacred duty - to a people who were on the whole, highly a religious people. And they were led – in their resistance to the tyranny of England – by their preachers.

Interesting, isn't it? But whatever your convictions are on the involvement of preachers in wars and conflicts between nations, these preachers definitely represented a powerful secret weapon that proved to be a game changer in the battle against the British. We should never underestimate the power of a secret weapon.

When I was in high school, I attended a small Christian school with about 40 kids in grades 9th through 12th. But even though we were small, we were sometimes a force to be reckoned with in sports. And there was no recruiting of talent going on, which I understand happens from time to time in Christian schools here in Oregon. Instead, we did well because we had some powerful secret weapons: the godly values being instilled in us, the strong work ethic we were being taught,

and the comradery and teamwork and underdog mentality that pervaded the school.

My sister's basketball team was a good example. They had 5 girls who had some talent, were close friends and had grown up playing basketball together. They knew each other's strengths and weaknesses, they played as a team, and could practically read each other minds as they moved up and down the court. When they were invited to tournaments with larger schools they were often paired up with the hosting team in the first game, since Cook Inlet Academy was a tiny Christian school they were sure they could easily defeat. But they were often in for a surprise when our girls would run away with the game. I've never had so much fun watching basketball as they surprised team after team and were almost never defeated, even against our local public high school with 900 kids. They had some secret weapons and they used them well.

But conversely if their secret weapons weren't used...for example, if relationships soured or one of the girls didn't make it to a game, or somebody fouled out, things fell apart in a hurry with no depth on the team to compensate. In my sister's senior year as they headed to state, one of the girls decided to go on vacation with her family instead of play in the state tournament, and without her they just weren't able to defeat their toughest competition and ended up 3rd in state. Their secret weapon was taken out of commission and without it they just couldn't pull off the victory.

Well, as we seek to be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might in our battle against the spiritual forces of wickedness, we desperately need the secret weapon God has given us, even more than colonial America and my sister's basketball team needed theirs. And as you may have already figured out from Ephesians, the secret weapon God has given us is prayer. Prayer is the secret weapon of unbelievable power that undergirds and supports the rest of the armor of God.

Let's begin our study today by doing a final reading of verses 10 through 18 of Ephesians chapter 6, Paul's closing words about how we can be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Beginning in verse 10 of Ephesians chapter 6, this is what Paul tells us:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word.

II. THE SECRET WEAPON: PRAY AT ALL TIMES IN THE SPIRIT

So I hope you noticed the clear revealing of our secret weapon in the first half of verse 18: *Pray at all times in the Spirit*. After outlining the first 6 pieces of the full armor of God: calling us to gird our loins with truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness and the boots of peace, and take the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit...Paul exhorts us to do all of this with constant and continuous prayer.

Now I want you to resist our common perception of prayer as something for our spiritual to-do list. It's so easy for us to think of prayer as a Christian discipline we should try to make time for...or as something we can only do appropriately if we stop everything and get on our knees or sit quietly somewhere without distractions...or as something that needs to follow a specific pattern laid out for us in the Bible...or something we can only do well if we learn the right words and appropriate Christian lingo. We may view prayer as boring...a waste of time when we could be getting things done...or maybe about as engaging as watching paint dry.

In his foreword to the book, “A Praying Life” by Paul E. Miller, David Powlison shares this common perspective on prayer:

IT’S HARD TO PRAY. It’s hard enough for many of us to make an honest request to a friend we trust for something we truly need. But when the request gets labeled, “praying” and the friend is termed “God,” things often get very tangled up. You’ve heard the contorted syntax, formulaic phrases, meaningless repetition, vague nonrequests, pious tones of voice, and air of confusion. If you talked to your friends and family that way, they’d think you’d lost your mind! But you’ve probably talked that way to God. You’ve known people who treat prayer like a rabbit’s foot for warding off bad luck and bringing goodies. You’ve known people who feel guilty because their quantity of prayer fails to meet some presumed standard. Maybe you are one of those people.

Prayer – it tends to become a production and a problem. Life – it’s always a production and a problem. You cycle through your to-do list, your anxieties, distractions, pressures, pleasures, and irritants. God – he’s there, somewhere, sometimes. Somehow those two problematic productions and the Lord of heaven and earth don’t all get on the same page very often.

But prayer isn’t meant to be a production or a problem. And God is here, now. Prayer is meant to be the conversation where your life and your God meet.

I thought that was a pretty descriptive analysis of some of the challenges we face when it comes to thinking about prayer. We can make it so complicated and so buried in religious and spiritual mumbo jumbo that we forget that prayer is, simply, talking and listening to our God. It’s a conversation with our Father, our Savior, our Guide and it’s as much about listening as it about us talking.

Wayne Grudem defines prayer as “the totality of our communication with God.” This encompasses our talking to him, his speaking to us, and our listening to what he says. Prayer IS relationship and as we pray we’re expressing our trust and dependence on God and our desire for deeper fellowship with him. We’re showing that we believe he’s alive and well and active in our lives.

Interestingly, Paul obliterates our erroneous idea of prayer as a religious activity for our to-do list...something we only do at specific times or in specific places. Take a look at verse 18 of Ephesians chapter 6 and count how many times the word, “all,” occurs. I count 4 times. ***With all prayer and petition pray at all times,*** and do it with all perseverance for all the saints. It’s sounding pretty intense and continuous, isn’t it? Other passages speak of praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22). Jesus himself told a parable to teach people they ought to pray at all times (Luke 18:1-8). King David speaks of blessing and praising the Lord continually and at all times (Psalm 34:1-2).

This is not to say that there aren’t times when it’s appropriate to set aside specific times to focus just on talking and listening to God. Jesus did this all the time, even when he was incredibly busy and in constant demand. He repeatedly slipped off by himself and found a quiet place to just talk and listen to his Father. But the challenge for us is to broaden our perspective on prayer and realize that the majority of it occurs as we go about our day-to-day business. If the praying Paul is talking about here can only take place when we lock ourselves in a room or disappear into the mountains, we’re all going to be unemployed soon, because Paul tells us to pray continuously and at all times.

Paul also tells us to pray in the Spirit. This phrase, “in the Spirit,” has a corresponding phrase that’s presented in Scripture as being the complete opposite of being “in the Spirit,” and it should help us understand what it means to be in the Spirit as we pray. The opposite of being in the Spirit, according to Scripture, is to be “in the flesh.”

There are two passages that line this out clearly for us. The first is in Romans 8, verse 9, and it says this:

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

The second is in Philippians 3, verses 2 to 4, where Paul tells us:

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of

God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh.

In these passages we see the stark contrast between being in the Spirit and being in the flesh. First of all, it's not possible to be in the Spirit if you're not a true believer in Christ who's received the Spirit dwelling within you. If that hasn't happened, you're automatically still in the flesh and will remain there until you come to true faith in Christ. It's an impossibility for you to pray in the Spirit. Secondly, though, and what we see in the Philippians passage, is that being in the Spirit is associated with putting no confidence in the flesh. When we're in the Spirit, we're relying on the Spirit's power and direction within us, operating in humility and dependence, rather than trusting in our own goodness and wisdom and human abilities.

Do you ever approach God in prayer with the attitude that you know exactly how he should fix a problem? You've thought about it and figured out the solution and now you just need to get God on board and get enough people praying so he'll finally do what you know needs to be done. I'd dare say that a large portion of our communication with God takes place with this attitude. And the scary thing is that our view is so limited and what we want and think should be done is so heavily based on the comfort and ease of ourselves and others, that God is actually very gracious in often not giving us what we ask for.

To me this is what praying in the flesh looks like. We come to God with our limited perspective and selfish desires and wants and try to tell him what needs to be done...and then we get mad when he doesn't answer our requests or do what we thought he should do. We may even conclude that prayer just doesn't work. On the contrary, praying in the Spirit is talking and listening to God with humility and recognition that we don't know what's best, but what we most of all want is for his will to be done and for his perfect solution and healing to come, even it means we or others have to go through some hard times to get there. Praying in the Spirit takes place when we come to God with the recognition that we don't know how to pray, but are relying on the Spirit to convert our feeble requests into requests for what God himself knows we need and is best for us.

Praying in the Spirit puts no confidence in the flesh, but comes honestly and humbly into the presence of God for fellowship, forgiveness, healing according to God's will, deeper relationship and strength to face the otherwise overwhelming challenges of each day. Praying in the Spirit sets aside my will and longs for God's perfect will, which is so much better than what any of us could ever come up with.

But please don't take this to mean that we can only ask God for what might be considered "spiritual" requests or that we can't share our true selves with him. The truth is that God desires us to be real and invites to come humbly as we are. We are each privileged to be able to pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and petition. That phrase, "With all prayer and petition," reminds us that we can bring anything to God. All prayer and all petition...anything we think of can be shared with God in honesty at any time night or day. We don't have to clean ourselves up and put on our religious face and use the perfect words and only ask for spiritual things. Everything's on the table and God delights in giving good gifts to his children. In fact, he's the best gift-giver in existence. Nobody can outdo him. And there's nothing too difficult for him...nothing!!! But as we come to him, God asks us to come in humility, learning to desire his perfect will above whatever we may think we need from our limited perspective.

Come as you are. Talk to him. Listen to him. Share every part of your life with him. Ask him for healing for yourself and others. Ask him for blessings for yourself and others. Ask him to change you and others. Ask him to give you a deeper desire for him and his Word. Just remember in all these things to ask in humility and recognize that God's in control of what he does and doesn't give you and he always knows what's good for you and what's not. Don't allow yourself to get angry if you don't get what you think you need or want. Realize that God often graciously says, "No," and he does it for our good. Pray in the Spirit with humility and an attitude of thankfulness, trusting that the Giver of good gifts always knows what's best for you and others.

And if you want to see some amazing answers to prayer, spend some time praying for things you know are according to God's will...like a deeper understanding of God's Word...like a boldness in sharing the truth of God's Word with others...like unity in the body of Christ...like an understanding of what it truly means to walk by the Spirit...like an opening of the eyes of your heart so that you'll know the

hope of his calling, the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe.

III. AS YOU PRAY: BE ALERT WITH PERSEVERANCE AND PETITION FOR ALL THE SAINTS

Continuing on in the second half of Ephesians 6, verse 18, Paul tells us that with this continuous prayer in the Spirit in view, we should watch out for our brothers and sisters in Christ and pray for their needs and their growth in the Lord. All of our praying shouldn't just be self-focused. As we're told in Philippians 2:4, "***Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others.***" Our praying should go beyond just our own needs and wants and should undergird and support other people in the spiritual battle they're facing. Paul says here in Ephesians: "***...and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.***"

Jesus, Paul and other writers in Scripture give us many examples of how to pray for others and some of the things to pray for. This need to pray for others recognizes that we are in a spiritual battle that can only be won when God steps in and breaks down strongholds, grants his wisdom, and brings the true freedom only he can bring. We can so easily fall into thinking we can fix our problems or the problems of other people by our wisdom and intellect or sheer willpower, or by following some 3-step process developed by a secular psychologist. But that's not what Scripture teaches us.

Instead we find that true victory and freedom and permanent conquering of problems and issues in our lives comes only by the power of God working through his Word and the prayers of his saints. If we don't really believe this is true, then we won't see our need to pray and it will seem like a non-productive activity. But think about it: If Jesus himself recognized his need to pray constantly, then I can guarantee you and I need it infinitely more.

Did you know that Jesus prayed for you before he went to the cross? In his final intimate moments with his disciples before the cross, recorded for us in John, chapter 17, we're told that Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and prayed to his Father for his disciples and for all those who would believe through their word...that would be you and me!

What are some of the things he prayed for? He prayed that the Father would keep the disciples in his name. He prayed for complete unity, that they would be one, just as the Triune God is one, and would be perfected in unity, thereby showing the world that Jesus was sent from the Father, and that the Father loves them like he loves his own Son. Jesus prayed that the Father would keep the disciples from the evil one. He prayed that the Father would sanctify them, make them more like himself, through the truth of his Word. Jesus prayed that you and I would be unified, walking in step with God and each other...and he indicated that this is how the world come to believe that Jesus was sent from the Father. Unity with God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ was something Jesus prayed for fervently and knew would have a profound effect on the world.

I'd like to challenge you this week or in the near future to spend some time looking at what the writers of Scripture prayed for on behalf of other people. What you'll find is that they were each convinced that it was only through prayer that God's kingdom would grow and be established...only through prayer would a door would open for God's Word to be shared.

We have two great examples just in Ephesians of the kinds of things Paul prayed for on behalf of other believers. The first is in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 15 through 19, the very place I began our journey into Ephesians. Listen to what Paul prays for there:

15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

First, Paul spent a lot of time thanking and praising God, didn't he? He says he does not cease giving thanks for the Ephesian believers as he prays for them. He's overjoyed at the faith and love God is creating within them and recognizes that it's only God who can bring such transformation within people. Secondly he prays

that the Father would give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. What a great thing for us to pray for each other, and a prayer that we know is in accordance with God's will.

And thirdly, he prays for an opening of the eyes of their hearts to fully know the eternal hope that God's calling brings, how much God values them as his children, and how great is the power available to those who trust in him. Do you want to know some great things you can pray for other people and be confident that you're praying according to God's will? Well, here's a treasure trove of requests God loves to answer.

The second example in Ephesians of the kinds of things Paul prayed for on behalf of other believers is found in chapter 3, verse 14. This is what Paul prays there:

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Paul is lining out for us ever so clearly what he prays for other believers. He prays that they would be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit dwelling inside them. He prays that they would be rooted and grounded in Christ's personal love for them, and that they would truly understand how vast and expansive and perfect that love is. And he prays that in comprehending this love, they would be filled up to all the fullness of God. Sounds like a great place to be, doesn't it?

This passage in Ephesians 3 is another treasure trove of "God's-will" items we can pray for ourselves and our fellow believers. And notice the confidence Paul has in

the power of God to answer these requests: ***Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us...***

IV. CONCLUSION

My friends, we too often underestimate the power of God that works through the prayers of his saints, don't we? Prayer is the secret weapon God has given us that changes everything and makes all things possible. Prayer is the way God has chosen to accomplish his will and work in the lives of his saints. It's a great mystery as to how he does it, but Scripture is very clear that this is the way he works.

When we pray, we acknowledge our need for God and express that we're relying on his power and wisdom rather than our own. We walk by the Spirit when we learn to pray continually with perseverance, sharing our lives and concerns and challenges, listening carefully for God's guidance, seeking God's strength instead of our own, and calling on his power to build his kingdom and defeat darkness and bondage in our lives and the lives of others. May God teach us to pray and give us each the firm conviction that it truly is our secret weapon that makes all things possible and against which the darkest forces of evil don't stand a chance!