

A Call to Prayer Ephesians 6:18-20

Introduction

“I’m going to love you and pray for you whether you like it or not.” Those were the words spoken by Pastor Wade Watts – to Johnnie Lee Clary – Grand Dragon of the OK Ku Klux Klan. It was 1979 and a radio station had invited the two men to participate in a debate.

Watts – a black pastor – put out his hand towards Clary when he met him - - - but Clary [just 20 years old] refused to shake it. The on-air debate ended with Watts quoting some Scripture - and then asking Clary about his own beliefs. Clary said he was not listening anymore – and stormed off the set.

Watts met him again before leaving the building and showed him his little daughter Tia. “This is my daughter Tia” Watts said. “You say that you hate all black people – tell me how you can hate this little baby.’

Clary took one look and brushed by. As he was leaving Watts hollered out: ‘I’m going to love you and pray for you Mr. Clary – whether you like it or not.’

Over the next ten years – Clary did his best to make Watts hate him. Klansmen harassed the minister with phone calls, broken windows, burned effigies on his lawn. They even burned down his church and threatened his children. Finally – the highway patrol had to escort the Watts children to school. But Reverend Watts kept praying

Clary was moving up the ranks of the Klan – but his private life began to crumble. His wife divorced him - - - and took full custody of his baby girl. Then – as he was trying to unite all the hate groups – the neo-nazis / the KKK, skinheads – he became overwhelmed and sickened by it all one night – went home to his apartment and put a loaded gun to his head – he would just end it all.

But – on his bookshelf – he noticed an old bible – which reminded him of the one he saw Pastor Watts carry years before. He opened it up to the story of the Prodigal Son and read it through 3X – before falling to his knees and asking God to forgive him.

Without telling anyone who he was – Clary joined a multi-racial church – and later phoned Pastor Watts. He told him how 2 years ago he had surrendered his life to Jesus. Watts responded with: ‘Praise the Lord – I never stopped praying for you!’

We come to this final section on the armor of God this morning. Paul closes this up with an encouragement to be people of prayer

Prayer is a mighty weapon in the spiritual battle

Prayer is one of the great gifts God gives to His children – a direct line to heaven

Chip Ingram: 'Intercessory prayer is our most powerful and strategic corporate weapon in spiritual warfare.'

MLJ: 'Let us never forget that in the Christian life prayer is essential. The place given to prayer in the NT is remarkable. See it in the life of our Lord Himself.'

In the NT – we are called to pray without ceasing

We are called to 'be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints [Eph. 6:18]

A Christian is greatly impoverished if he does not learn to make use of this great resource of prayer

I. Be on the Alert - vv. 18-20

Paul calls the Christian soldier to be on the alert – in prayer

We are not fully armed and ready without heeding this instruction

Alertness calls us to a kind of vigilance / readiness for battle

I Peter 5:8 - 'Be of sober spirit, be on the alert . . .'

Two of the most devastating attacks on American soil by a foreign enemy took place largely due to the surprise nature of those attacks

9/11 and Pearl harbor

We were caught by surprise

There is a scene with the disciples - - - where Jesus gave them instructions that could have helped them if they had followed them – [Watch and pray]

***** Mark 14:32-42**

Mark 14:38 - 'Watch ye and pray lest ye enter into temptation.' [KJV]

Alertness and prayer were the weapons needed in the spiritual battle about to take place

We have the same instruction today – 'Be alert and pray'

One of the ways we show alertness - - - is by praying!

We make prayer a priority in our lives

There are really a multitude of reasons to pray in the Scriptures

We pray for one another

We pray for an individual's salvation
We pray for the progress of the gospel
We pray to be fortified against temptation
We pray that God would be glorified in our lives
We pray to confess sin
We pray to draw near to God in fellowship

MacArthur: 'The ultimate purpose of our salvation is to glorify God and to bring us into intimate, rich fellowship with Him . . . Our fellowship with God is not meant to wait until we are in heaven. God's greatest desire, and our greatest need, is to be in constant fellowship with Him now, and there is no greater expression or experience of fellowship than prayer.'

Spend time in communion with God – being alert in prayer

Some people think – prayer is for other people who are good at it - - but not so much for me

That is an unchristian way to think! / that is the voice of the devil!
Satan does not want you to pray

He does not want you to call upon the name of the Lord – and to be delivered
He doesn't want you to be exercising your faith in this battle
He doesn't want you to be strong in the Lord

He wants to deal with you as an individual – apart from Christ

He knows he is no match for Jesus

Anonymous: "Satan trembles when he sees God's weakest saint on his knees.'

Prayer is for you!

- You should be praying for family members

Remember William Booth – once was asked to do the funeral for a man who had been put on death row for his crimes

He grabbed everyone's attention by saying: 'Johnny so and so never had a praying mother'

Mothers – pray for your children - - - and grandchildren!

- You should be praying for other church members
- Pray for unbelievers you know – for their hearts to be open to the gospel
- You should be praying for missionaries – and pastors – faithfulness in their ministries
- Pray for God to raise up missionaries / pastors that will faithfully proclaim His Word

- You should be praying for your own spiritual life / victory over sin
- Jesus also said to pray for your enemies

Matt. 5:44

As you and I live in the friction of this sinful world - - - we are tempted to complain about people and their sinful actions

What would happen if – instead of complaining and grumbling about another person - - we prayed for them?

Next time – you hear yourself complain about another person - - it doesn't matter who it is - - - make a covenant with God – to pray more than you complain

Prayer changes things - - - it changes you

When a Christian husband or wife comes to their pastor and says they have given up on their marriage - - - my question for them is: 'How much time did you spend praying for your spouse?'

Oh – I prayed – well – I did that one time . . .

Be on the alert

Lehman Strauss: 'the enemy watches for prayerlessness in our lives and then takes advantage of us. We must be constantly in prayer because we face a constant danger.'

J.H. Jowett: 'It is in the field of prayer that life's critical battles are lost or won.'

If you neglect prayer – or treat it as optional instead of essential - - - you are vulnerable spiritually - - - and you will reap fruit from that

Because prayer is so important it is not surprising – that Satan tries to keep us from praying - - - or seeks to sow doubt as to prayer's usefulness - - - or to corrupt the practice altogether with unbiblical ideas

We may fail to pray because of pride – we think we have a better way of handling things / or we don't think we need God's help in life

*** Pride and biblical prayer cannot co-exist together

If you choose to keep your pride - - - you will neglect prayer

We may fail to pray because we are so busy with other things

We may fail to pray because our hearts are cold - - we have neglected the Word / Christian fellowship / Christian service

There are no 'good' reasons to neglect prayer

Prayer can become corrupted and derailed thru false doctrine / teaching

Some people turn prayer into simply a means of getting from God material blessings we want

Phillip Yancey reminds us of a great truth

Philip Yancey: 'I need God more than anything I might get from God.'

In the Health and wealth gospel - prayer is simply the way in which we claim material riches or abundance from God's hand

Costi Hinn – whose uncle is Benny Hinn - - - began to see the huge errors of the prosperity gospel

He writes: **'I viewed Jesus Christ as our magic genie - rub Him right - and He'll give you whatever your heart desires.'**

That is a great distortion of prayer - - - and leads us away from true biblical prayer – and the proper attitude to have before God

The Bible does not discourage prayer for material needs –

Jesus taught us to pray: 'Give us this day our daily bread'
But – he never told us to pray for the riches of the world – in fact – warns against desiring them

The Bible does not discourage prayer for health – but [in the larger context of Scripture] we recognize that God may have other purposes for us – and does have higher goals for us

He doesn't want us to live forever in these bodies - - He wants to give us eternal life / and a resurrection body

The Corona virus has certainly affected all of our lives as of late

We have seen the cancellation of major sporting events, travel bans from Europe, self-imposed quarantines, national emergency declarations, and dire warnings from different health officials. We are told that the virus will have a 1-2% mortality rate for those infected. The flu, by way of comparison has a .01% mortality. The most at risk are the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions. Some have estimated that 1 million Americans

could die from this. All of the numbers thrown at us and the non-stop media coverage can be a bit daunting and perhaps capable of sparking grocery runs and other panic-driven behavior. Apparently some people are worried about running out of toilet paper as Walmart is having a hard time keeping it on the shelf!

The Heidelberg Catechism was written back in the day when plagues still regularly afflicted Europe and its message is just as appropriate today as it was then. 16th century Christians knew what it was like to live in a world where infectious diseases travel about. The catechism asks the question: 'What is thy only comfort in life and death?'

The Heidelberg Catechism - Q. 1

"What is thy only comfort in life and death?"

Ans.: 'That I with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil.'

The author of the Catechism understood both the brevity and fragility of life. He knew the Scriptures teach that under the best of circumstances we still are 'just a vapor that appears for a little while and then is gone.' [James 4:14]

Our great comfort in this world is not in being able to somehow navigate thru life avoiding all the many statistical causes of death. That is a fool's errand as the mortality rate for human life is still 100%. The far greater hope is found in knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and knowing that whether we live or die we belong to Him and will spend eternity with God in heaven.

When we pray -- we should pray from that foundation

II. The Prayer Closet - Matt. 6:5-6

Jesus brings up this idea of secret prayer / the prayer closet

Secret prayer is when we pray by ourselves before God

The idea is that - - - the best barometer of your prayer life - - - is shown when you are alone with God

Why would that be the case?

Thomas Brooks: 'the ordinary exercising of yourselves in secret prayer, is that which will distinguish you from hypocrites, who do all they do to be seen of men.'

When you pray solo – there is nobody there to see how spiritual you are - - - just you and God

Thomas Brooks: 'Where do you read in all the Scripture, that pharaoh, or Saul, or Judas, or Demas, or Simon Magus, or the scribes and Pharisees, did ever use to pour out their souls before the Lord in secret? Secret prayer is not the hypocrite's ordinary walk, his ordinary work or trade.'

There is certainly a place for public prayer / prayer meetings - - - we find such in the Bible

But - - - the core of your prayer life - - - is what takes place between you and God alone

One of the healthiest things spiritually speaking - you can do is to pray for others in your own personal prayer time

Jesus did - - - He prayed that we be kept from the evil one – **John 17:15**

On the cross – Jesus prayed for those who nailed Him there - 'Father – forgive them . . .'

A Christian who never prays for others / who never seeks God's favor on others is a very misshapen Christian.

The body of Christ is interconnected

'Lord – pour out your grace on so and so - - - protect them from the evil one / help them to grow in holiness / give them victory over sin / etc.'

I wonder if in heaven - - - we will find out whose prayers were instrumental in blessing our lives

How much of what you have from the Lord - - - is due to the prayers of others? [of parents / grandparents / ss teachers / fellow church members]

If we find that we only pray for ourselves - - we need to change that

Also – healthy prayer – will elevate the spiritual over the material

It's ok to pray for a job / for health / for our needs - - - but let's make sure we also pray for holiness, godliness, and righteousness – and for the salvation of the lost

Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter - - - he doesn't even ask them to pray for his release

He told them to pray for the gospel - - for boldness / clarity

Conclusion

“memorize this verse – you never know when you might need it” - - - those were the words of a Bible College Dean of women.

The verse:

Psalm 34:7 - 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.'

The school was Pacific Union College – located in Angwin, CA

One of the young coeds who memorized that verse was a 19 year old girl named Charlotte. She worked off campus part-time as a housekeeper to help pay her expenses. She traveled back and forth from school to her job by bus. Her life was pretty hectic – going to class, working long hours, taking a bus back to campus at the end of the day.

Sometimes she boarded the bus without thinking – at least – that’s what happened one night. When Charlotte finally looked out the window and didn’t recognize her surroundings – it was too late to do anything about it. When the bus pulled into the terminal in San Francisco she knew she was in trouble. San Francisco was 75 miles away from Angwin. As she got off the bus onto the platform – Sailors looked her over very thoroughly – a drunk tried to strike up a conversation with her. Charlotte looked around for a policeman – none in sight.

The information booth had a sign out: ‘closed for the night’

This was an appropriate time for the verse in the Psalms to come to her mind. The dean had said – you never know when you might need it. She knew she needed it now.

Charlotte scurried into the ladies room and dropped to her knees and prayed: ‘I’m lost Lord, and I’m afraid. Please help me find my way home. You promised to deliver me – please do it!’

When she opened the door and entered the main terminal – a young man passed by who looked to be carrying a big, black Bible. She was afraid to stop him - - - but she decided to follow him. Maybe he was a student heading back to her campus – who knows?

She followed him through several long corridors to another part of the terminal and then up a flight of stairs to another platform where a bus was waiting that said, Angwin for the destination. It was the last to leave San Francisco that night.

The young man got on – one seat remained – he let her take it. Then the young man turned and got off the bus. Through the window she watched him go. He walked a few feet then simply seemed to vanish. It wasn’t foggy and the lighting was good - - - but he simply disappeared.

Charlotte was baffled - then she returned to her verse: 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.' The dean of women was right – it was a verse she needed!

God has given us His Word
He has given us prayer
He has given us everything we need

Trust Him / make use of His resources