

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Ephesians 6:18 (NASB)

¹⁸With 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,

In the **6th chapter of Ephesians** in the **18th verse** we read words which put the tremendous importance of prayer with startling and overwhelming force:

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

When we stop to weigh the meaning of these words, then note the connection in which they are found, the intelligent child of God is driven to say,

“I must pray, pray, pray. I must put all my energy and all my heart into prayer. Whatever else I do, I must pray.”

The Revised Version is, if possible, stronger than the **Authorized:**

“With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

Note the *alls*: “with *all* prayer,” “at *all* seasons,” “in *all* perseverance,” “for *all* the saints.” Note the piling up of strong words, “prayer,” “supplication,”

“perseverance.” Note once more the strong expression, “watching thereunto,” more literally, “being sleepless thereunto.” Paul realized the natural slothfulness of man, and especially his natural slothfulness in prayer. How seldom we pray things through! How often the church and the individual get right up to the verge of a great blessing in prayer and just then let go, get drowsy, quit. I wish that these words “being sleepless unto prayer” might burn into our hearts. I wish the whole verse might burn into our hearts.

But why is this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer so needful?

1. First of all, because there is a devil.

He is cunning, he is mighty, he never rests, he is ever plotting the downfall of the child of God; and if the child of God relaxes in prayer, the devil will succeed in ensnaring him.

This is the thought of the context. The **12th verse** reads: **“For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”** (R. V.) Then comes the **13th verse**: **“Wherefore take up the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.”** (R. V.) Next follows a description of the different parts of the Christian’s armor, which we are to put on if we are to stand against the devil and his mighty wiles. Then Paul brings all to a climax in the **18th verse**, telling us that to all else we must add prayer—constant, persistent, untiring, sleepless prayer in the Holy Spirit, or all else will go for nothing.

2. A second reason for this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is that prayer is God's appointed way for obtaining things, and the great secret of all lack in our experience, in our life and in our work is neglect of prayer.

James 4:2 (NASB)

² You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

James brings this out very forcibly in the [4th chapter](#) and [2d verse](#) of his epistle: **"You do not have because you do not ask."** These words contain the secret of the poverty and powerlessness of the average Christian—neglect of prayer.

"Why is it," many a Christian is asking, "I make so little progress in my Christian life?"

"Neglect of prayer," God answers. "You have not because you ask not."

"Why is it," many a minister is asking, "I see so little fruit from my labors?"

Again God answers, "Neglect of prayer. You have not because you ask not."

"Why is it," many a Sunday-school teacher is asking, "that I see so few converted in my Sunday-school class?"

Still God answers, "Neglect of prayer. You have not because you ask not."

"Why is it," both ministers and churches are asking, "that the church of Christ makes so little headway against unbelief and error and sin and worldliness?"

Once more we hear God answering, "Neglect of prayer. You have not because you ask not."

3. The third reason for this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is that those men whom God set forth as a pattern of what He expected Christians to be—the apostles—regarded prayer as the most important business of their lives.

When the multiplying responsibilities of the early church crowded in upon them, they **"called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word"** ([Acts 6:1-6](#)). It is evident from what Paul wrote to the churches and to individuals about praying for them, that very much of his time and strength and thought was given to prayer. ([Rom. 1:9](#); [Eph. 1:15-16](#); [Col. 1:9](#); [1 Thess. 3:10](#); [2 Tim. 1:3](#)).

All the mighty men of God outside the Bible have been men of prayer. They have differed from one another in many things, but in this they have been alike.

4. But there is a still weightier reason for this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer. It is, prayer occupied a very prominent place and played a very important part in the earthly life of our Lord.

Turn, for example, to [Mark 1:35](#). We read, **"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."** The preceding day had been a very busy and exciting one, but Jesus shortened the hours of needed sleep that He might arise early and give Himself to more sorely needed prayer.

Turn again to [Luke 6:12](#), where we read, “**And it came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.**” Our Savior found it necessary on occasion to take a whole night for prayer.

The words “**pray**” and “**prayer**” are used at least twenty-five times in connection with our Lord in the brief record of His life in the four Gospels, and His praying is mentioned in places where the words are not used. Evidently prayer took much of the time and strength of Jesus, and a man or woman who does not spend much time in prayer, cannot properly be called a follower of Jesus Christ.

5. There is another reason for constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer that seems if possible even more forcible than this, namely, *praying is the most important part of the present ministry of our risen Lord.*

Christ’s ministry did not close with His death. His atoning work was finished then, but when He rose and ascended to the right hand of the Father, He entered upon other work for us just as important in its place as His atoning work. It cannot be divorced from His atoning work; it rests upon that as its basis, but it is necessary to our complete salvation.

What that great present work is, by which He carries our salvation on to completeness, we read in [Hebrews 7:25](#), “**Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.**” This verse tells us that Jesus is able to save us unto the uttermost, not merely *from* the uttermost, but *unto* the uttermost, unto entire completeness, absolute perfection, because He not merely died, but because He also “**ever liveth.**” The verse also tells us for what purpose He now lives, “**to make intercession for us,**” to pray. Praying is the principal thing He is doing in these days. It is by His prayers that He is saving us.

The same thought is found in Paul’s remarkable, triumphant challenge in [Romans 8:34](#)— “**Who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.**” (R. V.)

If we then are to have fellowship with Jesus Christ in His present work, we must spend much time in prayer; we must give ourselves to earnest, constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer. I know of nothing that has so impressed me with a sense of the importance of praying at all seasons, being much and constantly in prayer, as the thought that that is the principal occupation at present of my risen Lord. I want to have fellowship with Him, and to that end I have asked the Father that whatever else He may make me, to make me at all events an intercessor, to make me a man who knows how to pray, and who spends much time in prayer.

This ministry of intercession is a glorious and a mighty ministry, and we can all have part in it. The man or the woman who is shut away from the public meeting by sickness can have part in it; the busy mother; the woman who has to take in washing for a living can have part—she can mingle prayers for the saints, and for her pastor, and for the unsaved, and for foreign missionaries, with the soap and water as she bends over the washtub, and not do the washing any more poorly on that account; the hard driven man of business can have part in it, praying as he hurries from duty to duty. But of course we must, if we would maintain this spirit of constant prayer, take time—and take plenty of it—when we shall shut ourselves up in the secret place alone with God for nothing but prayer.