

Becoming a Praying Leader

Detailed Outline Part 1 of 3

We are looking at the elder's personal life and growth in Christ. It is important for the elder to realize he must first of all guard himself spiritually. After he guards his own soul, he is able to guard the souls of other people. What we want to look at in our next three messages is the life of prayer as it relates to a shepherd elder and his shepherd ministry.

Acts 6:4: **But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.**

The word **devote** connotes "a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action."

Note that the first thing the apostles say is, "**we will devote ourselves to prayer.**" We often skip this first point.

Acts 2:42: **But they devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and fellowship and to the breaking of bread and the prayers.** The first church was marked by prayer. The leaders also have to be marked by and model prayer.

However, the first thing to go in a super-busy life is prayer. Thus, I want to look at a strategic verse for prayer for elders. But first the context: spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:10: **Finally, be strong in the Lord and the strength in his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.**

Ephesian 6:12: **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil and heavenly places.**

If you are a pastor elder, you are on the front line of spiritual warfare. And thus, everything you do in the Christian life is dependent on a life of prayer. Observe carefully how Paul ends his pointed message on spiritual warfare and spiritual armor:

Ephesians 6:18: **Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.**

I've broken this passage into six lessons for prayer. Lesson #1 for a leader's prayer life:

I. Always Be Creative in Your Prayer Life.

Ephesians 6:18 says, "**With all prayer and petition.**" In other words, with every kind of prayer and petition. There are all kinds of prayers, all kinds of positions and postures and circumstances:

"We may pray publicly or privately; in loud cries, or soft whispers, or silently; deliberately and planned or spontaneously; while sitting, standing, kneeling, or even lying down; at home or in

church; while working, while traveling; with hands folded or raised; with eyes open or closed; with head bowed or erect. The New Testament, like the Old, mentions many forms, circumstances, and postures for prayer but prescribes none.” (John MacArthur, Ephesians, 379)

Be creative in your prayer life. Don't fall into a prayer rut. Let me suggest some creative ideas from the prayer masters of how to bring new vitality to your prayer life.

1. Pray out loud.

To bring more life to your prayers, pray out loud. Don't just pray silently. Very often, it's hard to concentrate on prayer. Our minds wander; we think of all the busy activities we have throughout the day. Our minds go off, and we just repeat the same old words and phrases.

2. Walk and pray.

If you can, get out into nature and walk—under a tree, by a lake or a river, or on a mountainside. It will lift your heart in prayer.

3. Pray Scripture back to God.

If you feel you can't find better words or phrases to talk to God in prayer (you have fallen into the same old rut of vocabulary), remember that God loves to hear His Word prayed back to him. Take what you are reading in Scripture and use those words to speak to the Lord. You can't go wrong when you pray the Word of God.

4. Pray shorter prayers.

You don't have to pray eloquent, long prayers to please God.

5. Use a prayer guide or a prayer book.

There are wonderful prayers that have been written. You could use those to help you in your prayer life and bring new life and vocabulary to it. Don't be afraid to pray other people's prayers. Make them your own!

Also use a prayer guide to lead you in your intercessory prayer ministry, so you don't forget what to pray for.

6. Use hymns and Christian songs.

A wonderful way to enliven your prayers is to start by singing. Very often our hearts are cold, we are not ready for prayer, or we don't feel like praying. Start by singing.

The main thing is this: Do not fall into a prayer rut.

In closing, listen to this powerful quotation by D. A. Carson:

“What is both surprising and depressing is the sheer prayerlessness that characterizes so much of the Western church. It is surprising because it is out of step with the Bible that portrays what the Christian living should be; it is depressing because it frequently coexists with abounding Christian activity that somehow seems hollow, frivolous, and superficial.”
(D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, ix)

As shepherds of people, everything we do is dependent upon prayer. Guard your prayer life. Do not let busyness rob you of your prayers. Be like the Lord Jesus, a man of prayer.

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Detailed Outline *Part 2 of 3*

This is the second message on prayer and the second, third, and fourth lessons on prayer from Ephesians 6:18.

II. Always Be in a Spirit of Prayer.

The text says, “**Praying at all times**” (Eph. 6:18), literally at every opportunity. This addresses the frequency of prayer.

Acts 2:42: **They were continually devoting themselves to prayers.**

1 Thessalonians 5:17: **Pray without ceasing.**

Romans 12:12: **Constant in prayer.** (Also Col. 4:2; 2 Tim. 1:3.) All of these verses speak of the absolute priority of prayer in the Christian life.

How does one pray without ceasing?

1. We are to be giving thanks for all things at all times.

The Christian life is a positive life of thanksgiving for every little blessing from God.

2. We are to confess sin right away.

The moment we identify sin in our lives—rotten attitudes, wrong speech, jealousy, or improper responses to life situations—we must confess it to God and claim the blood of Christ.

3. We are to ask for wisdom.

James 1:5: **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all.**

4. We are to intercede for others.

There is the important ministry of intercession for others. Throughout the day, as we think of dear brothers and sisters suffering who need our prayers, we are to be intercessors. Think of yourself as a believer-priest. You are a part of a royal priesthood. It is our great privilege to be interceding for the Lord’s people at all times.

5. We are to be in constant communion with God.

There is the constant awareness that we live in the presence of our God. And we are to be in constant communion with him throughout the day.

III. Always Be Praying in the Power of the Spirit.

Jude 20: Pray in the Holy Spirit.

Through the Holy Spirit we have access to God the Father (Eph. 2:18). The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in the believer's prayer life. He inspires and guides our prayers. He makes our prayers more effective.

Romans 8:26–27 says that when we don't know what to pray for or how to form our words because of a severe trial, the Spirit of God is working in our prayers with groans that cannot be uttered

There is a living quality to our prayer life because the Holy Spirit is inside of us, and he aids our prayer to God. The Holy Spirit is illuminating your mind and moving your heart, giving you freedom of utterance, liberty of expression, understanding of things in the spiritual realm.

The opposite of Spirit-led prayer would be rote prayers or ritualistic prayers or forced prayer, lifeless, mindless prayers, repetitions. Listen to this quote from Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

"Always respond to every impulse to pray. The impulse to pray may come when you are reading or when you are battling with a text of Scripture. I would make an absolute law of this—always obey such an impulse. Where does it come from? It is the work of the Holy Spirit; it is a part of the meaning of 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:12, 13). This often leads to some of the most remarkable experiences in the life of the minister. So never resist, never postpone it, never push it aside because you are busy. Give yourself to it, yield to it" (The Preacher and Preaching [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971], 395).

Remember this: Everything we do is dependent upon prayer. It's a great privilege in the Christian life and a duty and obligation to pray.

IV. Always Be Watchful and Pray.

To that end [to this purpose], keep alert with all perseverance and petition. (Eph. 6:18) We must be vigilant in our prayer life. This teaching on prayer is in the context of the Christian soldier, putting on the spiritual armor, and the warfare against spiritual powers of darkness. We put on the Christian armor, and then we have to be awake. Think of prayer in terms of Christian warfare. You have to be alert watching and praying.

The Christian soldier is a person who is watching and persevering in petitions to God.

It is a very serious matter to be prayerless as a Christian, but particularly as a leader.

Peter O'Brien makes clear that *[t]he Apostle wants them to realize that a life of dependence on God in prayer is essential if they are to engage successfully in their warfare with the powers of darkness (The Letter to the Ephesians, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 484).*

Note the word *perseverance*. Watchfulness is to be accompanied by perseverance and petition. Why do we need to keep asking, knocking, and seeking? Well, there are different answers, and some of it is a mystery. But I know this: *God has told us to keep asking*. As we persevere in prayer, our prayers are sharpened in their focus, and we are drawn into deeper fellowship with God. So whatever it is, persevere in prayer. Keep asking; keep knocking.

Prayer is essential to spiritual warfare, and it is essential to your leadership among God's people. You are a shepherd of people. You are to watch over their souls. What an awesome responsibility that is! You are to do it with prayer, interceding for them, watching over them, and over your own personal life.

Be a shepherd who prays. Let the people see you as a praying elder. What a wonderful thing if the congregation sees their elders as praying elders, warrior elders engaged in the battle, using the weapons of Christian warfare.

Becoming a Praying Leader

Detailed Outline *Part 3 of 3*

This is the third message on prayer and the fifth and sixth lessons on prayer from Ephesians 6:18–19.

V. Always Be Praying for Others.

Ephesians 6:18: **Making supplication for all the saints.** The Christian has his armor on, and he's part of a large army of soldiers for Christ. Now, what do we do once we have the armor on? We pray for one another because the battle is severe. There's hardly anything better you can do for those under your pastoral care than to regularly and persistently pray for them.

1 Samuel 12:23: **Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you.**

As shepherds of God's people, you need to know this verse. Samuel thought it was a sin not to intercede for the needs of the saints. This is especially important for leaders. They should be models of prayer. Elders are to be intercessors for others.

Have some kind of systematic, orderly prayer procedure so that you can say, "I pray for all the saints." Be a praying elder. Remember what the twelve apostles said: **We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word** (Acts 6:4).

VI. Always Be Praying for Missionaries and the Gospel.

Ephesians 6:18–19: **Making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.**

Paul says, pray **for all the saints**. Well, he's a saint too. Thus he says, "As you're praying for all the saints, pray for me. I need prayer."

If you look at Paul's epistles, we see that he believed firmly that the prayers of the churches directly affect his success, his liberty in the gospel ministry, his gospel mission. Thus he calls upon the churches to pray for the advancement of the gospel through his ministry.

Paul has two specific prayer requests:

- 1. Paul wants to proclaim the mystery of the gospel with clarity and with the right words and concepts (v. 19).**

Paul is surrounded by elite Roman guards, who are all polytheists. They are very proud of their Roman gods and proud of their long history. How would you tell them that a Jewish Messiah died

on a cross at the hands of the Romans and that he is the Savior of the world? They didn't believe in a messiah or the Old Testament. How could you possibly convince them of the gospel?

2. Paul wants to proclaim the mystery of the gospel with boldness and courage (v. 20).

Even Paul sensed the need to be a bold and courageous ambassador for Christ before a Christ-rejecting world. He too needed to have courage to speak the Word of God to the enemies of the gospel.

VII. Practical Suggestions for Improving the Elders' Prayer Time Together

- 1. Use a prayer guide for elders' meetings.**
- 2. Appoint a prayer facilitator.** Someone needs to be appointed by the elders and authorized to take charge of the prayer meeting.
- 3. Pray shorter prayers.** By praying shorter prayers, more get to pray. Long prayers can put people to sleep.
- 4. Be alive and participate during the prayer time.** Don't sit there in silence, don't be passive. Say "Amen!" Say "Thank you, Lord!" See 1 Corinthians 14:16.
- 5. Use prayer request cards.** Ask people to give you prayer requests.
- 6. Break into small groups.** Maybe you pray for five or ten minutes and then break into groups of two and make it a special time to pray for one another and one of those families on your list.
- 7. Sing together.**
- 8. Be specific.** Pray for people by name.
- 9. Be creative and energetic in your prayer time.**
- 10. Evaluate your prayer time together.** Evaluate your prayer meeting in order to improve it. Be creative, be pressing forward.

Let me close with one of the greatest quotations I've ever read on prayer. It is by Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

"When a man is speaking to God, he is at his very acme. It is the highest achievement of the human soul and therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man's true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life. Everything we do in Christian living is easier than prayer." (Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, 2 vols., [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 2:46)