

Ephesians 6:18-24 — Why is Bible Reading and Prayer Important?

June 22, 2014

Good morning. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. I would like to welcome you to CrossWinds Church. As a church, we are studying the book of Ephesians. This morning, we finish the book. Today is the twentieth and final message in our study of Ephesians. I found myself very encouraged by this book. I hope God also did spiritual good in your life as we studied this book together.

I was especially encouraged in the beginning of the book when we learned that God chose us in eternity past. Out of his kindness, he put us together with his son even before we were born. He chose make us the most blessed beings in all of creation through Jesus. If you have trusted in Jesus, that is your identity. When you ask yourself, “Who Am I?” The answer is that I am the most blessed being in the universe as a gift from God through being adopted as a brother or sister of Jesus. As we live the pressures of life, as we pay the bills, mow the yard and go to bed tired, God’s words about our true identity are something every one of us needs to hear, especially when we feel overwhelmed and discouraged.

The second half of the book was also very helpful. It taught us how we live because of who we are. It talked about how our speech, our attitudes and our sex life. The way we live should reflect our privileged identity. We don’t live a different lifestyle so that God will save us but out of gratitude to God for having saved us.

Last week, we entered the third part of the book. It talks about spiritual warfare. Ephesus was a city filled with the occult, witchcraft, black magic and demon worship. It was the premier city for the occult in the ancient world. As Paul told people about Jesus, the church was born. As the Word of God spread, Jesus peeled Satan's grip off of the city one finger at a time. There was serious spiritual warfare.

Last week, we learned a bit about Satan and spiritual warfare. Today we look at the final two spiritual weapons we have in our life to defend against spiritual attack. They are offensive weapons. They are the Word of God and prayer.

My goal this morning is that each of us would commit to 15 minutes of prayer in the morning, reading one chapter of the Bible a day and committing one memorizing one verse of the Bible a week. That is the challenge I will end with so I am telling you now to prepare you for it.

Why is it important to read my Bible?

...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, Ephesians 6:17 (ESV)

The Word of God gives victory in trials and temptations.

The word of God is a powerful weapon when we are tempted toward sin and when we face the tough trials of life. Jesus used the Word of God as a weapon to fight against trials and temptation. At the beginning of his ministry, when he was in the wilderness for 40 days without food, he was hungry. He was exhausted. He dangled between life and death. He was near death from starvation. That is a trial. I can barely go for 40 minutes without food. Jesus

went for 40 days. It was at that time when the devil tempted him. The devil offered to give Jesus the rulership of the world without the agony of the cross. He tempted Jesus to use his divine power to turn stones into bread. Each time Jesus was tempted, how did he beat back the temptation? He did it by quoting the Bible. He quoted obscure verses from the book of Deuteronomy. In the same way, when the devil is tempting us, the way we defend ourselves is by quoting the Bible.

When I was in high school, I traveled with Teen Missions International on a summer mission trip. They made us learn one verse a day for the entire trip. As a teenager, I thought that was oppressive and unreasonable. As an adult, I wish I learned more. The verses I learned that summer are the same ones I use every day as a pastor. This is why I applaud the memorization of the Bible our kids do in AWANA. I find myself quoting Bible verses I learned as a kid. They are very helpful to battle temptation. One of my favorite is 1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

Memorize the Bible so that when we are tempted we can quote the Bible.

The Word of God brings conviction and repentance.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

Once again, the Word of God is described as a sword that pierces deep into life. It gets at our thoughts and intentions. It convicts us of sin. The Bible is different than a magazine. The Wall Street Journal does not do this. The Bible is

alive. It changes people. When we quote it, God uses it. When we memorize it, it change us.

One of the things I learned when counseling folks struggling with sin, is you never talk to them about your opinion versus their opinion. You put verses from the Bible on a piece of paper that pertain to the issue and let them read the verse. It is not your opinion versus their opinion. It is all about the Word of God. Let God's Word do the convicting.

The Word of God creates spiritual life.

since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)

The word of God is what creates spiritual life. If you are trying to lead somebody to Christ, you don't need an extensive book or elaborate game plan. Just get them reading the Bible. Take a New Testament book like Ephesians or Romans. Get an easy translation of the Bible to read like the New Living Translations and read the Bible together. God uses His Word to create spiritual life. The Word will do the work. Just get people into the word. That is why we teach the Bible at CrossWinds. The word will create spiritual life. That is the same game plan for each of us. The Bible is alive.

The Word of God sustains spiritual life.

But he answered, "It is written, " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

Not only does God's Word create spiritual life but it is what sustains us every day. As Christians, we need to be reading it every day. God will use it to guide our life. When we skip Bible reading we begin to follow the values of the

world, not the values of God. We become more arrogant. We become more selfish. We are less patient with those we love. The Bible describes the Christian's need for the Word of God like bread. Just as we need to eat physical food every day, we need to eat the Word of God every day to sustain our relationship with God.

Don't let my busyness push God's Word out of my life.

Read it. My simple challenge for you is to read one chapter of the Bible a day. Pastor Jordan began our year off with a challenge to read through the Bible. If you have fallen behind, I want to challenge you to pick it up again. My simple challenge is to choose one gospel, that is either Matthew, Mark, Luke or John and read through it one or two chapters a day. When you are done with that, read the rest of the book. I guarantee you that your life will be changed by the end of the summer.

Think about it. Don't just read the Bible to get it done. Read the Bible and think about it. Use a highlighter. Use a notebook to write down a special verse. Write in the margin of your Bible. Ask questions? It is as we think about God's Word that the Holy Spirit begins working in our hearts.

Memorize it.

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:11 (ESV)

Today everything needs to be portable. Everything needs to fit in a cell phone or tablet so you can access it on the go. There is a great way to access God's Word on the go without a cell phone. Memorize it.

God's Word will change you.

Why is it important to pray?

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, 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. Ephesians 6:18–20 (ESV)

Like many of you, I get prayer requests through the Caring Bridge or the City. Sometimes you wonder, “Why stop and pray?” Does it really make a difference? Paul tells us it does.

Pray whenever I have the opportunity.

...praying at all times...

Pray whenever you can pray. Pray when you are driving in the car instead of turning on the radio. Pray when you are shopping. Pray when you are paying the bills, especially when there is not enough money. When you are putting your kids to bed, pray over them and pray for them. As a husband, before you get out of bed in the morning, lean over and put your hand on your wife’s shoulder and pray for her out loud, just three or four sentences that she would have a good day, be patient and love the kids. Thank God for her. When you want something to do on these beautiful evenings, go for a prayer walk. Cindy and I do that as a couple and we do that as a family. We walk around the block and out loud pray for our kids, for the church, for their future for their spouses, for our struggles and every other challenge we are face. I really like prayer walks. To be honest, I don’t like to sit and pray. I am too ADD. I need to be doing something. Walking and praying works much better for me than sitting. One is not better than the other. Paul’s simple point is don’t always turn on the radio. Don’t always turn on

the television. Pray when you are walking. Pray when you are working. Pray all the time.

Too many people think prayer is confined to a dark corner in the early morning hours. If that is the only time to pray, not much of it would get done.

What does it mean to pray in the Spirit? Praying in the spirit means talking to God about what God's spirit brings to mind to talk about. It is a conversation. It is a two way street. We have something on our mind. We pray about it. As we pray about it, the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts. We listen to what he brings to our minds about things we should do and words we should speak and we try to obey. Praying in the spirit is like going out on a date with your spouse and having that give-and-take conversation that goes back and forth between you and breaths life into your relationship.

In Ephesus, which was steeped in witchcraft, there were a variety of spells you could cast. The idea was that if you knew the right prayer to say, you could cast a spell upon people. Paul says, that isn't what Christian prayer is about. It is not about getting the right prayer formula, like casting a spell, to get the right results. It is simply a conversation with God. Don't worry, you won't explode if you don't know how to pray. Just do it!

While this may seem rather obvious, mindless quotation instead of thoughtful conversation is something Christians have been guilty of over the centuries. Growing up, my parents would have my Aunt Kit over the house. We would ask Aunt Kit to say the prayer for the evening meal. She would say it in German. I thought it was really cool to hear her rattle stuff off. I even learned her

prayer in German. The problem is, I have no idea what it means. When I asked Aunt Kit, she didn't know what it meant either. That mindless recitation didn't do any good.

We saw this same thing a few years ago with the craze over the Prayer of Jabez. If everyone would just pray the prayer of Jabez every day, they would be a raging success.

That is mindless recitation, not thoughtful contemplation.

Pray about every need.

...with all prayer and supplication...

A supplication simply means a need. Pray about everything you need. Do you need patience? Pray for it. Do you need a house? Pray for it. Are you out of work? Pray for it. Are you in marital problems? Pray about it. Are you studying for a test? Pray before you study that God would help you remember what you learn. Are you about to take a test at school? Ask God to help you recall everything you learned. Is your car broken? Pray about how God would have you repair it. Are you struggling with anger? Pray about it. Are you married? Pray for your spouse. If you are not married, pray for your future spouse.

The picture Paul has is Christians are constantly going to God in prayer about everything. There is constant conversation. What happens is the tighter the conversation becomes, the closer we become to God. The more sensitive we become to him and the more like Christ we become.

I know what many of us think. Why pray all the time about everything? I haven't seen God change things. The Bible has an answer for that.

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. James 4:2 (ESV)

One of the reasons we don't see answers to prayer is because we don't ask for things in prayer. The Bible is very clear that God will respond to our prayer. If Paul wasn't convinced about the power of prayer, why would he spend so much time at the end of his letter begging us to pray all the time about everything?

When it doesn't look like God is answering prayer, don't be discouraged.

To that end keep alert with all perseverance,...

Do you ever feel like God isn't listening to your prayers? Of course. I will be honest. There are things I prayed about for long periods of time and it felt like nobody was there. It felt like nobody was listening. Prayer felt like a useless exercise. Paul says, "Keep Alert." Don't fall asleep. Keep praying. Drink coffee if necessary. Keep on praying even when it seems like nothing is happening. Prayer is not a useless exercise.

Luke 18 tells us the parable of the persistent widow. It is the story of how a persistent old widow eventually got justice because she became such a pest to a local judge by constantly asking him to give her the justice she deserved. Some people think this is telling us that if we are just enough of a pest to God, he will eventually answer our prayers.

That is wrong. This is not a parable of similarity, it is a parable of contrast. If a wicked earthly judge who doesn't care about a widow will eventually give her

justice, how much more a perfect heavenly judge can be counted on to answer the continual prayers of his hurting people.

And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:7–8 (ESV)

Don't give up praying about things. God will answer our prayers.

One thing I want to encourage you on is we need to remember that answers to our prayers are usually not microwavable. God works out our answers over time.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. James 5:16 (ESV)

Don't give up on prayer. Seek him about everything. Trust him. He will answer your prayers. He knows what you need. Many times he will answer our prayers just in the nick of time so you know he is the one who answered.

Pray about the needs of other Christians.

...making supplication for all the saints.

The prayer chain is biblical? This is exactly what the Bible tells us. Pray for the needs of other Christians. This means putting down prayer requests on the weekly cards is the right thing to do. This means getting on THE CITY and posting prayer requests is the right thing to do. This means in our Life Groups it is important to share our needs and to have other Christians pray for our needs. Having others pray for us is not weakness, it is wisdom.

I don't know how it works but the Bible says that when Christians come together to pray something special happens. Corporate prayer is powerful.

Pressley Cochran-Bray would agree on that one. Miraculously responding to chemo beating liver cancer and getting a donor liver are answers to prayer. The doctors consider her recovery miraculous. To me, that is the power of God's people uniting in prayer. Please don't underestimate the power of prayer and the power our prayer has in changing lives.

I want to recommend to you that you take on a little boldness. When someone tells you a particular challenge they are facing in their marriage or a challenge they have in their life and you offer to pray for them, do it on the spot. Don't be long. Don't be elaborate. Pray a few sentences over them and for them. Pray for God's comfort and strength. You may not be able to do anything for them but praying for them is not doing nothing. It is doing something. It is doing something that will make a difference.

Pray for your spiritual leaders.

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. Ephesians 6:19–20 (ESV)

Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for him. Pray for your pastors. Pray for your Elder Board and the Leadership Board. I can tell you that demons scheme to take down a church by going after its leaders. When it comes to spiritual warfare, I have been quiet about my own experiences in this area but I can tell you demonic attack is real and powerful. Demons try to influence spiritual leaders. Pray your pastors and leaders battle well, keep in the word and are rich in prayer.

Pray your pastors are equipped by God to preach the gospel clearly and boldly. I don't want you to walk out of here with a muddled message about Jesus. I want the Sunday sermon to be clear. Satan doesn't want you to remember it. Please pray for your spiritual leaders.

Conclusion

As we leave the book of Ephesians, Paul leaves us with a challenge. Read your Bible and pray. They are the power weapons of the Christian life.

I told you when I began that I would end with a challenge. I am challenging everyone to commit to praying for 15 minutes a day, reading one chapter of the Bible a day and memorizing one Bible verse a week. I am only asking you to make this commitment to the end of July. That is about one month. I hope the habits we begin will be the habits that stick.

In a moment I am going to ask you to stand if you make that commitment. We typically don't do that at CrossWinds but I think it is appropriate today. By standing you seal that commitment in your heart and by standing you encourage others around you who are considering making that commitment to join you.

If you desire to commit to praying for 15 minutes a day, reading one chapter of the Bible a day and memorizing one verse of your choosing for a week and committing to it for one month,... please stand.

(People stand)

Where do we go next week? Next Sunday we begin a small series called, *Alternatives to Christianity*. We will learn about other religions and how they stack up against the Bible. See everyone next week.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com.

© You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that:
(1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web address (<http://www.Christ2RCulture.com>) on the copied resource.

