

## **How to Accomplish God's Objectives in Your Life**

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Sermon—Sunday, July 31, 1994

Ephesians 6:17-20

This morning I am going to finish up the series that I have been doing now since April, I believe, on Spiritual Warfare. In a certain sense, I could preach on the subject of spiritual warfare for the next several years because really the Christian life is warfare. I have tried to communicate that to you throughout the series.

A few weeks ago I spoke about spiritual warfare and I said that a large part of spiritual warfare is just resisting. It is a defensive battle. It is holding the ground that God has given you. And I believe that Danny advanced that thought, at least I hope he did last week, and said that there is a second part of this truth to spiritual warfare and that is to move forward. Yes, we play a defensive game. Yes, we have to resist. Yes, we are salt, we preserve. It is just like football. There is a defensive side to this thing where we protect, where we defend, where we simply hold the ground against the other team. But, then, in addition we have to move forward and advance the ball if we are to win.

Now, it is important as we move forward, which is what I am going to be talking about today—playing the offensive side of the spiritual warfare game, it is important as we move forward that we understand that we move forward only by accomplishing God's objectives for our lives and for the church. Many people are moving, but they are not moving forward in God's objectives for their lives, or in a larger sense for their families and for the church, for the Vineyard, for the Kingdom of God. They are not moving forward in God's objectives.

See, what life becomes for us is, as one person put it, saying, "You know, I have spent my life climbing the ladder and now that I have climbed the ladder and am at the top, I have discovered that I had the ladder leaning against the wrong wall." How many people have found themselves in that position—climbing the ladder, climbing, climbing, climbing and discovering at the end of all of it that they have had the ladder leaning against the wrong wall? My goodness, I can't believe that I have spent five, ten, twenty years, my whole life, working like a dog in this particular job and what do I have really to show for it? I have a big house, or I have a lot of money, or I have achieved this position or have this title. Now where am I? Now that I got the divorce and I'm away from this person, now what do I have? And what do my kids have in terms of a future, of a foundation to build from?

See, folk's don't understand that it does no good to climb and move and change cities and jobs and spouses unless you have the ladder leaning against the right wall, the wall marked "God's Objectives for Your Life" and God has a plan for everyone of you. It doesn't matter how old or young you are, you can be moving forward in what he wants. And the church needs to be moving forward in what God wants. But unless the ladder is against the right wall, it is all fruitless.

Let me ask you a question, for each of you to think about. Do you spend time thinking about your own personal mission statement? “What am I here for, God? What do you want for me? What are my gifts and talents? What is the next step, God? Where do I invest for you? I am working like crazy, but is the ladder against the right wall or not?” Do you spend time thinking about that? I hope you do. And if not, I hope this message will stimulate you to think about what God may have for you.

See, the Christian life is not meant to simply be only a defensive holding pattern until the day we die. Well, you have it. Now just hold onto it. I never wanted to just hold the ground. You know, we as a church, each one of us taking our own individual places, but as a church we especially are called to tremendous things. We are called to release the captives from Satan’s grasp. To move the kingdom of God forward in central Ohio. To progressively take back more ground from the enemy in this community, in our own families and around the world. We were, at one point, faced with a decision to join a church whose motto was “Hold the ground!” I remember telling Danny. This goes back almost a decade. I said, “Danny, I don’t want to spend my life being a bulwark. I want to be a bulldozer. I want to change the world around us.”

This morning what I want to do in this last talk on spiritual warfare, is talk about driving the enemy backward by getting us to put our ladders against the right wall as individuals, but also as a church. I am going to spend the fall talking about what that wall looks like that we are going to be climbing. But this morning’s purpose as sort of an introductory thought, I want to talk about achieving God’s objectives in your life. Let’s pray.

Let me make this real practical for you. You say, “Well, this business of putting our ladder against the right wall and driving the enemy back - how exactly does that work?”

Let me give you the two practical weapons that the apostle Paul gives us in driving the enemy back. Do you realize, first of all, that that is a real possibility, for us as individuals and for the church? That it really is possible to drive the enemy back. To get him on his heels moving backward in your life and in the life of your family. To get more and more ground in your marriage. To take ground from the enemy in the whole way you have historically approached dating and your relationships with the opposite sex. To take more and more ground regarding an area of sin and character formation. That the Christian life is not just that you pray a little prayer and accept Jesus, but that there is a growth edge to it regarding achieving God’s objectives and pushing the enemy back.

So, making this practical in Ephesians 6 [and you can turn there] Paul has gone through a list of weapons that we are to put on. And now, Paul gives us two offensive weapons. The weapons up until now, the first five, are primarily defensive in nature. That has been pointed out by almost all commentators; they are primarily defensive in nature. There are some offensive aspects to them. But now he gives us the two offensive weapons that really drive the enemy back and put Satan on his heels. And he says here is the sixth weapon— “take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” and number seven, “pray in the Spirit on all occasions.”

As you want to drive the enemy backward on his heels, you want to get that offensive thrust, you want to achieve God's objectives in your life—here are the two weapons that you need to do that. Now, you need to play defensive ball and to protect. You need to hold the ground that God has given you. But offensively, here are the two weapons that the Lord has specifically given to the church and to you, Christian individual. "Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God and pray in the Spirit." You don't drive the enemy back with your own ideas and your own power, with your own philosophy of life, in your own strength. You drive the enemy back by taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God and you pray.

Now by the sword of the Spirit, Paul is thinking, as he has this picture of a Roman warrior in his mind, he is thinking of the short sword that the Roman soldier used to use in close hand-to-hand combat. The Greek is actually the "short sword." It is interesting that again, he is emphasizing the closeness of the struggle. Not the long spear, but the short sword that you fight hand-to-hand with. Inch by inch the kingdom of God moves forward. Inch by inch, little by little you overcome a sin area – not usually one massive deliverance and then no more problems. We all want that, but that's not the way it works. Little by little, in hundreds of interactions, you raise your kids. Little by little you get control of your finances, or lose weight, or control your temper. It's a short sword used in hand to hand combat.

You see, we drive the devil back with the words, with the ideas, with the battle plan that issues forth from God himself. And those ideas and words are found in the Bible - what wall you are to climb up; where you place your ladder must come from the mind of God. And driving the enemy back has to be done with the battle plan of God.

So the first offensive weapon that we take up is the word of God which Paul calls "the sword of the Spirit." Now, you see Jesus using that sword of the Spirit, of course, in driving the devil back in his temptation in Matthew 4. Every time Jesus was tempted, he drove the enemy backward by quoting the scripture. And eventually, it says, that the enemy fled.

Now, let me show you how this exactly works in your life. The scriptures are the sword of the Spirit. They are called that because they are inspired by the Spirit. They are all blade and very, very sharp. They are a sword, and when they are wielded as you become acquainted with the truth that is in the scripture—it may be only a little phrase; it may be one word from the mouth of God; but, when you employ these words or word from God, the Holy Spirit empowers those words to cut away the enemy's lies.

You say, "Well, what does the enemy lie about?"

Everything! He keeps us from achieving God's objectives in our lives by lying to us about God. That is the chief thing the enemy lies to us about. He blinds our minds regarding God. Do you know how many lies are in your mind and in my mind regarding the character and nature of God? For example, we say, regarding God, all the time that there are things that God simply cannot do. Isn't that what we say when we become hopeless, when we give up? We are saying that there are certain things that God cannot do. There is a family member that

we have come to believe that God cannot save. We have prayed for them for many years. They have regularly shown hostility to the gospel. They have thrown up all kinds of walls. God cannot save them. Might as well stop praying for them. Might as well stop witnessing. Here's a person God cannot save.

Or we look at a situation in our own life that we regard to be hopeless. Maybe it is an area of besetting sin. We have come to believe that God can't empower us to overcome that particular sin. God cannot do that.

Perhaps for you it is hope deferred regarding ministry opportunities. Maybe years ago the Lord spoke to you and called you to a particular task—missions, paid ministry, youth ministry, whatever. God spoke to your heart and you really felt a special calling at a certain moment in time to a ministry, but that door has not opened up. Or if it did, you failed once or had a negative experience, and now you find yourself in the Vineyard church and you say, "My goodness, God can't. He can't open up for me that door of ministry at this late date." We have hundreds of "cant's" regarding God.

And against each "God can't" in our belief system we take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and we drive the enemy back by quoting God's Word to him. And, perhaps, we would quote Jeremiah 32:27. Jeremiah 32:27:

"I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

So we remind ourselves and remind the enemy, is anything too hard for the Lord? The salvation of this person? Is that too hard for God? The overcoming of a particular sin and empowering me? Is that too hard for God? The opening up of a door to ministry? Is that too hard for God? The healing of a person? The deliverance of a person? The financial success of my business? Is anything too hard for God?

Or perhaps we would quote Mark 10:27:

"With man this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God."

With God all things are possible. Every time, in your mind, the character of God, particularly his power, his omnipotence called into question. You take the sword of the Spirit and drive that thought back. With God all things are possible.

Perhaps you have the forgiveness of God called into question regularly. All of us do, right? Surely, God can't forgive me again for this particular sin that I have sinned so many times and asked for his forgiveness so many times before. Surely, he can't forgive the size of this sin. Oh, what a mess I have made of my life and my family. I have done something so stupid. I knew better and didn't do anything in accordance with what I knew. I deliberately did this. Oh, what a mess I made.

And the enemy comes along and says that God's forgiveness is somehow limited. That God forgives certain sins, but not others. He forgives a certain number of times. And we drive the enemy back. We quote to him the Word of God, Psalm 103:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name who forgives all my sins...Who does not treat me [the Psalm goes on] as my sins deserve...As far as the east is from the west, so far has he put my transgressions from me."

And in all of the various ways that Satan comes to attack the character of God, you come at him with the short sword of the Spirit and you drive him back.

No, my God is forgiving. My God is powerful. My God is loving.

The enemy not only lies about God, but he lies about sin, of course. The way that Satan comes to us regarding sin is that he deceives us. He lies. The Bible regularly repeats the phrase, "The deceitfulness of sin." That's its power. Satan never comes along to you, does he, and says, "Go ahead and do this disgusting thing. You know, it is going to be like eating shredded wheat after a long run. You will just want to spit it out. If you do this, it will be utterly unpleasant for you both, in the moment and long term. Oh, by the way, you will be offending your best friend, God, and you will hate every minute of it."

No. Satan comes along and tells us that this particular sin is alluring and, "Oh, isn't this erotic and seductive? This will be pleasurable. And by the way, you know that God will always forgive you after."

That is absolutely true. God will always forgive. He always will forgive. Always. Even if you go into sin knowing that is your motivation, "Well, he will forgive me after," God will forgive you.

You say, "Well, why should I continue to do the right thing? Why seek after God's objectives if God will always forgive me even when I do wrong?"

Let me share with you a little story and deal with this question from the negative side. Philip Yancy, a Christian writer, in one of his books said that he was approached by a man who was on the edge of deciding whether he should go through a divorce or not. And the man spoke to Yancy and said to him, "You know, I know that the Bible tells me that God hates divorce. And I know that looking at it from a scriptural perspective, this is the mind of God. I know that I really don't have any grounds for a divorce. But, I tell you, this is what I want. I'm not happy in my marriage. Let me ask you a question, Philip. Isn't it the case that if I go ahead and get a divorce, won't God forgive me after?"

And Philip Yancy said, "You know, the issue is not whether God will forgive you. Because he will forgive you. The issue is whether you, in fact, will really want forgiveness."

Now, I want you to think about that for a moment. We are always saying, "Well, you know, I can sin and God will always forgive me after." But, that is not the question. The question is really whether we will want to be forgiven after we sin. You see, when you sin, when I sin deliberately, I don't stay in the same spiritual position as I was before I sinned. I move farther and farther away from God. I turn my heart more and more from God. The river doesn't keep me in the same place. When I choose to sin, I am moving downstream, away from God.

And it is absolutely the case in areas where I have repeatedly sinned, that it is more difficult for me after I commit that sin to really want to drag myself back to God. The truth is, as I look at my life, that when a sin first began, I felt very ashamed or my conscience was really touched. But after a period of time, that feeling goes away. I have learned to accommodate the sin in my life. You see, that is the question that the Lord asks you. Not "Will I forgive your sin?" but, "Will you really want my forgiveness? Do you really want to be forgiven for your repeated sins?"

You say, "Well, I think so."

The test in the Bible is, then, will you really want to put it away? The person who wants to be forgiven for their sins has come to the place of saying, "This thing is really odious to me. This thing is really distasteful." I don't only want to be relieved of the guilt and have the guilt of that taken away, but to be forgiven of sins means that I want to have the sin taken away from my life.

And so the Lord speaks to you and says, "Is that your position? Do you really want to be forgiven?" Meaning do you want this out of your life?

Ah, that is very different. Now, I can't just go ahead and sin and say that God will forgive me because the truth is that I really don't want to be forgiven. I don't want it out of my life.

If we really want sin out of our lives, a particular sin, then we will take the sword of the Spirit and carve away the sugar coating around that piece of poison that Satan hands us and expose the lie of it. We will do battle with it.

You want a particular sin out of your life? You want to be forgiven? Then I ask you this—have you used the sword of the Spirit against that particular sin?

The problem in your life is lust. Psalm 119:9:

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your Word. I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11.

Every time a lustful thought comes, you quote back Matthew 5:8

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Your problem is anxiety? I ask you, "Have you memorized, committed to memory so that you can keep your ways pure before the Lord and not keep sinning in the area of anxiety, have you memorized Philippians 4:4-9, and particularly verse 6:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

If you want to be forgiven, you show that by being willing to use the Word of God against the deceitfulness of Satan's lies.

He lies to us about God. He lies to us about sin. And he lies to us about ourselves—who we are. Let me quickly say this:

You know that the sword of the Spirit works and cuts away at the lies regarding sin, but the sword of the Spirit cuts us and the lies regarding ourselves real deeply. In fact, I would say that a good test of whether you are a Christian at all is whether God's Word has really ever wounded you deeply.

You know, there are lots of people who want to go to heaven. There are lots of folks who have agreed that the Christian perspective is the best and most reasonable world view in terms of looking at life. There are lots of folks who have taken on a Christian world view. There are lots of people who are intellectually convinced by the arguments regarding Jesus' resurrection that there is no plausible, rational alternative other than Christ rose from the dead. They agree. They have seen the truth that the Bible really is true, but they have never been wounded. They have never been run through by God's Word and I would say

that unless a person has been run through by the Word of God, unless the Word of God has just cut them to the core, that it is very doubtful whether they are Christians at all. Do you know that experience of the joyful wounding, the wonderful, joyful wounding of the Word of God in your life that you have experienced God through a teaching, through your own personal reading of the Bible, you have experienced God running you through to the very core of your being with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God?

Well, let me put it this way and then we are going to move on to this issue of prayer. Some of you are struggling with intimacy issues with God. Maybe you have said to God, "You know, one of the ways that I would like to take that ground from the enemy is that I would like to have a breakthrough, I would like to feel close to you, God." But you feel like there is this barrier up between you and the Lord and you just don't know him real well. Maybe you doubt if you have ever met God in the way that you hear others have done.

Now, I know that there are lots of issues connected with intimacy and there are issues from our pasts and parental issues and all of that. But one of the main things that I think is connected with intimacy with God is the willingness to allow God's Word to run you through. See, you can deal with your past. You can deal with your father-issues. You can deal with all of that. But unless you are willing to have the Word of God cut you through - your stuff, your issues, your sins, your problems - you will never get close to God and you will never hear his voice echoing and causing a trembling in your life.

I would ask you, "Do you ask for that? Are you willing for that to happen in your life?" Do you say to the Lord, "God, this morning, run me through with your Word, a joyful wounding."? This is not masochism. This is not, "I love guilt." I am not talking about that. I am talking about becoming intimate with God by being run through by his Word. Expose me, God; show me who I am; hold a mirror to my motives; show me my need for you. Hosea 6 tells us that the reason why the Lord runs us through, cuts us deeply, divides between soul and spirit is for the sake of intimacy with him. Hosea 6 says:

"Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces. But he will heal us. He has injured us, but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us and on the third day he will restore us that we may live in his presence."

We have to take the power of the Word in bringing about God's objectives in your life and the churches. It is not automatic. Paul says, "Take the sword of Spirit." We take it by reading it. We must have some time each day when we just sit down and read the Word of God. If you don't have a plan and one of the major reasons why people don't read is that they have no plan to read, I have printed up out in the lobby, just pick it up, a Bible reading guide. And if you just stuck with this Bible reading guide, you will be able to read through the Bible once a year. I have been doing it for years. It takes about twenty minutes, twenty-five minutes. You can do fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes at night and basically if you just did that you will read through the Bible in a year. You take the sword of the Spirit by simply reading.

And then you might choose one particular problem area in your life, to memorize a verse or two and to wield them the way I spoke about before. To cut away Satan's lies by memorizing a verse. "Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God."

Depressed? "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice."

Memorize the Word of God and meditate on it. Chew on a phrase and let it roll around in your mind. Take up the Word of God and pray.

Paul writes, as his seventh weapon, the number of perfection, the number of completion, the way he rounds out the armor of God, taking back the ground from the enemy, he ends up his whole wonderful epistle by saying,

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

And pray. I think what Paul is saying is that if you have not filled out the armor of God, you will not take territory from the enemy. You will not drive him back or achieve the objectives in your life or in the life of a church or in the life of the church worldwide. You will not beat the enemy back unless you pray. The other weapons are incomplete, in other words, without it being all topped off and pervaded by prayer.

Now, I want to underline this particular truth because I think many of us stumble at this point. And many, many of us as Christians have models of Christianity that are utterly incomplete and will ultimately fail when tests and trials come because we don't understand the vital nature of prayer. That is maintaining a living relationship with God.

For many Christians, especially for those of us who are coming from conservative evangelical backgrounds, and I include myself in that mix, we have been taught and we have had modeled to us this idea that the church is sufficiently defended against Satan and actually will drive Satan back if we simply possess and know the truth.

We have been told over and over again by our conservative evangelical church leaders, "Just gird yourself with the truth. The first six weapons are sufficient. Especially using the sword of the Spirit – that is enough. So long as you bind yourself up with the truth and you learn how to wield the Word of God as a sword - that is enough."

And I want to tell you this morning that it is not enough. That the apostle Paul did not say that it was sufficient to stop with the first six weapons, or even learn to wield the sword of the Spirit, all of it under the heading of the truth or under the heading of being orthodox. Just stop there and you are fully equipped. That is not enough! Now, I love being orthodox. And I spend my life studying the Word and trying to teach it to you accurately.

But we must, in addition to being orthodox, be in a living relationship with God if we are going to achieve God's objectives for the church and for our lives. I have seen this over and over again in the lives of individuals and in the lives of churches, but especially in conservative evangelical people and churches. People are trained to spot errors in the teaching of others. They are trained to spot errors in books that they have read. They learn all the arguments and yet they, themselves, in their personal lives [and you check this out for yourself] that



the amount of power that you have to overcome personal sin in your life, in your marriage, in your emotional life, I have seen over and over again that even though people are well trained and highly orthodox, they have very little power because they do not add to orthodoxy this idea of having to maintain a living, vital relationship with God through prayer.

We haven't had modeled to us, we haven't had emphasized for us, we haven't had training in. Verse 18: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions." And apart from prayer, I want to tell you that you have very little power against the enemy. We simply will not carry the day in our culture, we will not carry the day in the church, we will not see the renewal or the revival that the Lord wants to bring, we will not see it in our lives apart from prayer. Truth, itself, will not carry the day unless the truth is empowered by a vital prayer life.

Why do great churches; why do great leaders burn out? Why do you see these rises and falls of great churches and great leaders? Why? Why so much burn-out? Because their lives and the life of the church has not been undergirded by prayer. We simply have not practiced Ephesians 6:18-20.

Andrew Murray put it real well. He said that prayer is the link between man's impotence and God's omnipotence. Prayer is the way, the only way, God's only appointed way that we get the power of God in our lives to achieve God's objectives.

And Paul tells us how we are to go about praying. He says first of all, "Pray in the Spirit." What does that mean? We are learning; we are now saying, "okay, if prayer is what I need to drive the enemy back, if prayer is the way God's power comes to me, how am I to pray?" He says, "Pray in the Spirit." And that is the opposite of just praying a little prayer.

"Well, I am just going to pray a little prayer. I have this little Helen Stiener Rice greeting card and I am just going to pray it." Prayer is just a nice thought, a human idea, the expression of my wishes. No. Paul says, "I want your prayer to be controlled by, led by, empowered by the Holy Spirit who takes it and puts divine power on it and carries it right to the throne of God."

At the beginning of your prayer time, in other words, you say to the Lord, "Lord, lead my prayer. Send the Holy Spirit to lead and control the direction of my prayer." Now you may start with your prayer list. You may have a little formula. All of that is good. You may have a little formula and you pray through the Lord's Prayer. Or you can even be more formal and use the Book of Common Prayer. It doesn't matter what you do. You need to start somewhere and so you start with the Lord's Prayer as a guide. You adore the Lord for a little while. You declare his name to be Holy.

But then as you ask the Holy Spirit to lead you, you open yourself up to God, he begins to give you liberty and you find that as you are taking your little canoe out and paddling it out, whatever you use to paddle yourself out into the water, suddenly you are being carried along on a current that you didn't create. And anyone who knows anything about prayer has had the experience of being carried away with a greater fervency, at greater length for a person or a situation than they intended.

“Oh, I just want to pray for my spouse and I have my little list. I have two or three items and I am just going to pray for my spouse or my friend.” But suddenly you are praying with a greater fervency and at a greater length. And he starts giving you the Father’s heart for your spouse or for your friend or for a certain situation or for the church or your work place. And pretty soon you are just carried away. The Holy Spirit is leading the prayer and you are praying bolder things. You are praying for greater things. You are praying about the whole situation at Ohio State. You are praying for the President of the University. You are asking God for wonderful things that only he can deliver that you would never have thought to ask in your prayer list.

The Christian life is a dance and we simply respond to God’s leading. Yes, we dance. We get up and we do our little dance, but it is the Lord who leads the dance. That is what it means to “pray in the Spirit.”

Some of us don’t know very much about that. Don’t let that discourage you. Some of you say, “I don’t know that much about that. My prayers are real cold and mechanical and I just go down my list.”

Well, you can learn to pray in the Spirit. You ask the Holy Spirit to direct your prayers and perhaps just take a little bit of time after you go through an item on your list, or however it is that you pray. And you say to God, “God is there anything else that you would have me to pray about? Is there anything else that is on your heart?”

And do something that is a little unnatural. Stop talking—and just listen for 20 seconds, for 30 seconds, for a minute. I know it will seem weird and you think you are not hearing anything. But sometimes the Lord will really speak to you and surprise you and start giving you his heart.

See, we are not trained. We are not trained in praying in the Spirit and we need to be.

I read a story about a group of scientists that took a fish out of the water and trained the fish to only enjoy the land. They gave it lungs to breathe with and the fish just got used to being on land. He was taken around and was on talk shows and everything. “Wow, we have never seen a fish out on the land.” The fish just got used to being on land.

Then one day the fish was in a boat and just rowing along. The boat tipped and the fish fell in the water. He froze. He just stayed absolutely still and sunk to the bottom afraid to move and breathe. But then he took a little bit of a gasp and was able to breath under water. His little flipper moved and he suddenly realized that he could breathe down there and move. He began to swim. He swam and leaped and breathed and jumped for joy.

That is what it is like to discover the beauty of prayer in the Spirit. We have become trained apart from moving in the Holy Spirit. Most of the input that we have gotten and most of the people we know, know nothing about moving in the Spirit. But you know, it can become something that is a joyful thing that you can actually learn to move in. We can learn to hear God’s voice and swim and move and breathe like that little fish and it would be absolutely refreshing.

Paul says that if you want to move forward in the things of God, pray in the Spirit. And pray on all occasions. You say, "Well, why do I need to pray on all occasions?"

Let me ask you something, is there anything that you do that wouldn't work out better if God was involved? Anything you are involved in, in terms of God's purposes, in terms of your family, in terms of your business, is there anything that wouldn't work out better if God was involved?

I heard someone say once, "When we work, we work. But when we pray, God works."

I saw this on vacation, you know. The difference in the atmosphere in my family, in the kids' fighting and just the overall stress level was really different when I prayed and when I didn't pray. When I prayed, the Lord did answer me and give us peace. Some of you are struggling with peace in your home. You just want it to be peaceful. Ask the Lord for it.

Pray on all occasions. There are so many problems in the church and there are so many problems regarding the church's unity. We always must pray because Satan always hates us. There is never a time when Satan doesn't want to ruin you. So you are to pray on all occasions. He comes after you when you are on top of the mountain. He comes after you when you are on the bottom. Do you notice that? He never stops working.

You pray on all occasions. When you are on the phone with a friend that is a Christian friend, and before you hang up, one of the really lovely things to do is to say to your friend, "Hey, how about if we have a word of prayer right here just for a moment? Let me pray for you." I find nothing more encouraging than having someone suggest that to me. "Can I pray for you just for a moment and ask the Lord to bless you?"

Some folks have certain places where they like to pray and they enjoy being alone in their bedroom when everything is silent. They like to be on their knees or they like to be in a church building. I like to take walks. I walk around my neighborhood and talk aloud and let everyone know that I really am as crazy as they thought I was. But praying on all occasions means that we get beyond just praying at our favorite times and at our favorite spots. All of us have favorite ways that we pray. But we have to get beyond that to say that even if I can't do that, which is one of Satan's favorite traps— "Well, you know, you can't pray in your favorite time and in your favorite place, in the favorite posture that you are in. The baby is crying so now that is ruined. Since you like to pray in the morning and the morning is gone, you can't pray now until tomorrow!"

Don't listen to that lie: pray in the afternoon. "I wanted to pray in the morning, Lord, you know I did. You know I intended to. But I couldn't, so I will pray in the afternoon. I will pray in the evening." "I love to pray walking around. I can't walk around right now, I will pray on my knees."

Satan will throw a thousand excuses in your way because he knows this is the way he is driven back - by praying Christians. And he will throw a thousand excuses. You are too busy. I saw a sign once that said, "I am too busy today to pray. Signed, Satan." Where do you think that thought comes from? Do you

think it comes from the Lord? “Oh, you’re busy, don’t pray. You are depressed, don’t pray. You are doing great, you don’t need to pray.”

On all occasions, especially as the church is making its plans, how dare we, as a church, have a leaders’ meeting and not pray. God forgive our presumption for taking his church and doing what we choose to do. How dare we, as individuals, strategize about our future and what those objectives are that God wants us to accomplish and don’t pray. Whether it is our business and what we are to invest in or our family or our children or our marriage partner or what God wants to have happen in a dating relationship—how dare we take the next step without saying, “God, what is the next step? Lead me in it.” In all occasions, but particularly when we are strategizing about the future, pray!

Paul says, “...with all kinds of prayers.” See, there is a full range in our praying as we come before the Lord because we want a full relationship. Sometimes we come before the Lord and it is “Daddy,” or “Friend, Pal and Companion” and sometimes it is “Awesome, Terrible, Awful God who rules the universe and before whom all creatures will tremble.” All kinds of prayers. Formal prayers, informal prayers. Confession, adoration. Quiet prayers, speaking prayers. Joyful prayers, broken prayers. Long prayers, short prayers. Conversational prayers, topical prayers. We don’t just pray about ourselves, we pray for others. We don’t just confess all the time, we say thank you to God. All kinds.

If you need a little formula to think through the all kinds of prayers, many people use the formula Acts—ACTS. They start with adoration of God with worship. Then “C” they move to confession. “T”- they remember to say thank you to God. And “S” - supplication. They pray over their needs and the needs of others.

We are to pray with all kinds of prayers and requests. “With this in mind,” Paul says, “Be alert and always keep on praying.” Always. The Lord Jesus in Luke 18 gave us a little story about how we are to always keep praying and never give up. Some of us have prayed for people for years. I have prayed about a situation for years, God. I have prayed for my father’s salvation for twenty years. That ought to be an encouragement, you know, rather than discourage us when we have been praying for a long time. That ought to be an encouragement to us where we say, “I would not be praying this way for so many years, except that the Lord has laid this burden on my heart.” How could I keep it going humanly? I couldn’t. But the Lord could. And so that must be some sign that the Lord wants to bring about his requests.

I know that the reason why I am saved is because of the prayers of my wife, Marlene. When we were just friends, every single day she said the Lord laid me on her heart and she just prayed and prayed and prayed that somehow God would get through to me. And that is why I am a Christian. She prayed me into the kingdom of God.

Some of you are Christians because you had a grandmother or you had a friend who prayed you in. That is the typical thing that happens. Now, not always, but most Christians can point back to somebody who prayed them into the kingdom of God. Prayed for their future spouse. See how we take the

ground away from the enemy? We pray it away from him! Give me this person, God, for Jesus' sake. Give me this situation, Lord, for Jesus' sake.

We are going to order a film from James Orr about revival. One of the most inspiring little films that you could ever watch about the effect of prayer in terms of bringing renewal, in bringing revival. We pray the ground out from under Satan's feet.

We pray always and we pray for all of the saints. I love that. I love that little phrase. "For all the saints." This takes our prayer, our always prayers, our about everything prayers, our prayers with all kinds of prayers and it takes it away from just an individualistic concern where we are simply praying about us. So much of American Christianity is just about us. My needs; my world; my problems; my family.

And what Paul is trying to do in the letter to the Ephesians is tell individualistic Christians that their lives are connected up with the lives of the church. You don't simply live the Christian life with just you and Jesus. It is you and Jesus in the context of God's people. That the welfare of God's people affects you, and your prayers affect them. So, we pray not just about ourselves, although it is absolutely right to pray for yourself, but we pray not only about ourselves, but Paul tells us to pray for all the saints.

Do you know what that means? Well, for us in the Vineyard, it means that we just don't pray for the sick saints. We have become pretty good at emphasizing, and I think that it has been a neglected truth and one that needs to be recaptured by the church, we have become pretty good at communicating to people to pray for sick people. And we need to keep doing that and doing it better and doing it with greater sensitivity and doing it with more power.

But it ought not to be the case in the Vineyard church that you need to be sick or out of work to get prayer. You know, we have a five-step prayer model for praying for the sick. I think someone ought to come up with a five-step prayer model for praying for the healthy. The healthy need prayer. It is not enough for us just to pray for felt needs. The healthy, the well, need to be empowered to accomplish God's larger objectives in the city and in the world.

"God, you have placed this person in a strategic position in the government, in a law firm, at a school, at their job, in their neighborhoods. God, empower them to accomplish your purposes. God, give them vision for this mission. Fill them with a sense of the larger goals of the kingdom."

We must not spend all of our time praying for the felt needs. Some of our time must be spent in praying for the empowerment of people to accomplish God's larger goals.

And then Paul says, "...and oh yes. I round the prayer out by saying, 'Pray for me.'" Pray for me. Your prayer is not complete unless you have prayed for Christian leaders.

You know, Satan really targets Christian leaders. He does. As I look over the last 10 or 15 years, and perhaps you would agree with me on this, my own sense is that there has probably been nothing that has hurt the cause of Christ in the United States more than Christian leaders falling into sin and bringing the gospel into disrepute.

Now, I know that there are lots of other problems that Christianity has in America. And I know that there are the forces of secularism and atheism and a radical anti-Christian approach to education and to politics and everything else that has really hindered the moving forward of the gospel. But I would say that at least near the top of the list, if not at the top, is fallen Christian leaders who have brought the message of Christianity into disrepute. And if you are like me, you watch Christian leaders fall and it is very discouraging. It hurts your trust. Can I trust this particular Christian leader to not be stealing money or to not be involved with somebody else's wife? It hurts your trust.

But in addition, there is another reaction, and I noticed this as I was praying over this passage, I have this sort of thing inside that says, "Well, I never really liked that person anyway. And I have never really liked their preaching. And it is no surprise that they were involved with this particular sin." And we cluck our tongues and allow those shots from the enemy to be mortal and to take them out completely.

And I think how rarely, how rarely do we mourn regarding our own failure to pray for those who have been taken out? How rarely do we say, "Oh, God. Will you forgive me and forgive the church that that particular person was ministering to, forgive that church for failing to pray?"

Now, I know that every individual is accountable for their own sins and I am not trying to lay someone else's sin on the church, but I will tell you that there is something to an intercessory prayer cover of protection. Paul says that it was the prayer of the Corinthian saints in 2 Corinthians 1 that led to his deliverance. Paul said it was the prayer of the Philippians that led to his deliverance. Paul understands the power of prayer in the life of a leader by saying, "Pray also for me."

And I would say the same thing to you. Pray for me. You see an area of weakness in my life as you are going to see hundreds of areas of weaknesses, pray for me. Pray that God would mature me. Pray that God would cleanse my sins. Pray that God would protect me as a leader and the pastoral staff here from immorality. Pray that God would protect us from greed and pride. Pray that God would keep us sensitive to people and their needs and allow us to hear what folks are saying, even criticizing, that is true and to repent where we need to repent.

Pray that God would still be the leader of this church and that as the church grows that we wouldn't become proud. That we wouldn't seize it for ourselves and seize the glory for ourselves.

Pray for me. Pray for my family. Pray for my kids. Ask God's protection.

I will go a step further and make this practical. I have a sign-up list out in the lobby. Some of you are already praying for me. Some of you may say today that you will pray for me. I have seen across this country that the pastors and churches that have done the best are pastors and churches where there is some organized prayer for the leadership of the church. I would like to start that. I will ask some of you to sign up. This is certainly not a call for all of you. But if you can pray, we are going to organize that and every once in a while give you a call or send you a postcard and say, "Pray about this for one of the pastors" or "Pray

about this for Rich.” We will just ask you to do that. If you sign up, we will send you a little note and say, “Here is what you are to pray about.” We accomplish God’s objectives for the church by praying for its leaders!

And Paul finishes that business and this, by the way, applies particularly to pastors and I think to missionaries, “Pray also for me that whenever I open my mouth words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might declare it fearlessly as I should.”

Do you notice what Paul is asking for in prayer above everything else? Paul says, “Pray for me that I might continue to be bold.” In verse 19, “Pray that words may be given to me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. [And verse 10] And pray that I might declare fearlessly.” Two times he uses the word “fearless.” Other translations call it boldness. The Greek word is “*parasia*” it means “frankness, openness, freedom in my speech.”

Is there anything that a Christian leader needs more than the ability to be courageous? To keep being frank and honest in their declaration of the Word of God?

Paul understands the incredible pressure and conforming power of wanting to be well-liked and wanting people’s approval. And not wanting to offend anybody by saying anything offensive. So you have the tendency to balance everything out and to nuance everything so as to lose its impact and effect.

Paul says, “Help me. Pray for me that I would overcome the temptation to be a total people-pleaser.” And I would say the same thing. Pray for me. I know that controlling power in my own life that would keep me from declaring to you the whole counsel of God so far as I understand it.

“Pray for me,” Paul says, “So that I can speak it fearlessly.” This is what made men of God and women of God great in the past. This incredible boldness and courageousness in achieving the objectives of God. They were so bold. John the Baptist was crying out from his prison cell about the sins of King Herod. Paul stood before King Agrippa, bold and fearless and laid the gospel of God out.

George Fox, founder of the Quakers, it is said that the King of England used to tremble when George Fox began to speak. He was afraid of George Fox. He had him locked up in a tower in the winter. They tried to get rid of George Fox and his preaching. George Fox stood up [this is a true story]. He was up in a tower in the winter. Snow was blowing in the windows. And George Fox from that lofty tower preached the gospel so loud that the whole town had to listen to it. He declared the sins of the people.

Pray for that kind of boldness. Pray for that kind of boldness for your leaders. Pray for that kind of boldness in your own life. Dare to believe that God would use you to drive Satan back on his heels. That you actually could put your ladder against the right wall, and spend your life accomplishing wonderful things for the kingdom of God.

That is what God wants for you. And that is what God wants for this church, The Vineyard. Let’s pray.