

Paul's closing comments Ephesians 6:18-24

Scripture reading:

Please stand to honor the reading of God's word. After 35 sermons, we have finally arrived at the end of our sermon series on Ephesians. I hope you have enjoyed this letter as much as I have.

Ephesians 6:18–24 (ESV) — **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, **19** and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. **21** So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. **22** I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. **23** Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **24** Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Sermon introduction

I'm going to read some famous closing lines. If you recognize the book, shout out the title!!!

"It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both." (Charlottes Webb)

"He turned out the light and went into Jem's room. He would be there all night, and he would be there when Jem waked up in the morning." (To Kill a Mockingbird)

"The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which." (Animal Farm)

"Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the person who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them." (Pride and Prejudice)

"He loved big brother." (1984)

"The Scar had not pained Harry for 19 years. All was well." (Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows)

Good authors chose their closing lines carefully. Good closing lines have a way of capturing the passion and thrust of the entire story.

The closing lines of Ephesians are no different. They capture the thrust and passion of the letter to the Ephesians. These are not throw-away lines.

In the closing lines of Ephesians, we see....

Paul's passion for prayer

Paul's passion for fellowship

Paul's passion for the gospel

First, Paul's passion for prayer

Paul is passionate about a specific type of prayer! Like what?

Paul is passionate about frequent prayer!

Ephesians 6:18 (ESV) — 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,

Paul writes, “praying at all times in the Spirit (we pray to the father, through the son, in the power of the Holy Spirit), with all prayer and supplication (that is, with different types of prayers, consider ACTS). To that end, keep alert with all perseverance (don’t stop praying- Kent Hughes tells the story of praying for his brother’s conversion for thirty years. After thirty years of prayer, his brother came to faith in Christ), making supplication for the all the saints (praying for all of your fellow soldiers).”

I want to back up and focus on the first few words of verse 18. Paul writes, “praying at all times”

When Paul exhorts us to pray at all times, he is not suggesting that we must pray every waking moment. How do we know? It is impossible to pray while sleeping, eating, reading a book, or talking with someone else. If you are super spiritual, I suppose you could pause in the middle of some of these activities for prayer. But I think you get the point.

Most scholars think “praying at all times” means praying in all types of situations. The word “all” literally means all. This means we must pray at work, at home, at school, on the golf course, at the lake, and while driving around town. While happy, sad, depressed, lonely, joyful, scared, and nervous. While in a group, while alone, at church, on vacation, and while rollerblading.

Paul is passionate about frequent prayer! Why???

Because Paul understands that Christians are constantly engaged in a deadly battle with no breaks, no rest, and no time off. Don’t forget that verse 18 comes at the very end of a critical discussion on the armor of God. In fact, verse 18 is part of verse 17. In other words, Christian prayer is absolutely essential for the Christian soldier.

Prayer enables the Christian soldier to put on the helmet of salvation.

Prayer enables the Christian soldier to wear the breastplate of righteousness.

Prayer enables the Christian soldier to wear the belt of truth.

Prayer enables the Christian soldier to use the shield of faith.

Prayer enables the Christian soldier to put on his or her gospel boots.

Prayer enables the Christian soldier to use the sword of the Spirit.

Prayer energizes every aspect of Christian warfare!

Without prayer, we have no chance of defeating Satan.

We see this very clearly in the gospels.... When Jesus casts a demon out of a young boy.

Mark 9:25–29 (ESV) — 25 And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” **26** And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” **27** But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. **28** And

when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” **29** And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

Application:

Because we are in a fierce battle, we must pray frequently!

John Piper says that-

“Prayer is a wartime walkie talkie” (Piper, Let the Nations be Glad)

Piper, like the apostle Paul, understands that we are doomed apart from frequent prayer.

Let me encourage you with this thought, our prayers don't have to be long winded prayers, just frequent prayers... “Lord help me with this conversation.” “Lord help me humble myself.” “Lord help me be bold.” “Lord help me battle this temptation.”

Why don't we pray? We don't sense our need, do we???

One scholar writes,

“A great military disaster of the early Middle Ages was the defeat of the knights of Charlemagne. . . What makes the story so poignant is that the defeat was unnecessary. Roland, the commander of Charlemagne's rear guard, could have called for help from the main body of the army merely by sounding his great horn. But he would not do it. Pride held him back. Because he failed to call upon his secret resource, Roland's troops were massacred. Likewise, many Christians can trace the secret of a defeated life to prayerlessness.” (Boice, 260)

We don't pray frequently, because we don't see our need for prayer. Let's pray that God would help us see our need for prayer.

Paul is passionate about frequent prayer! In addition...

Paul is passionate about evangelistic prayer!

Ephesians 6:18–20 (ESV) — 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, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Illustration:

Dr. Alexander Rotencough was a Christian living in the former Soviet Union. As a result of following Jesus, He was shipped off to prison.

Right after he arrived at the prison, he was placed into a very crowded cell, filled with non-Christian inmates.

On his way into the cell, he looked at all the inmates staring at him and said, “Peace be with you.” One of the inmates asked him, “are you a Christian?”

He said, “Yes.”

Someone else said, “Prove it.”

Another inmate said, “we are the scum of the earth, we don’t even have cigarettes. If your God will give us cigarettes, we will all believe in him.” Everyone laughed!

Dr. Rotencough said to his fellow prisoners, “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and smoking ruins the temple. But God loves you so much that I believe that he would even give you cigarettes as a sign of his mercy.”

Dr. Rotencough asked them to all bow their heads and join him in prayer for cigarettes.

Of course, everyone laughed when he suggested they pray for cigarettes.

Yet, they stood respectfully as he led them in prayer...

He said, “the cell was very quiet as I led them for about fifteen minutes in a prayer.”

Then he told them that the prayer was over, and they could sit down.

At just that moment the cell door opened, and the guards threw a bunch of cigarettes in the cell.

Then the prisoners began shouting in unison, “God exists, He exists!!!”

As result of this incident, Dr. Rotencough was able to tell all of these prisoners on death row about the hope of everlasting life in Jesus Christ. (From *Live Not By Lies* by Rod Dreher)

Dr. Rotencough was bold! He spoke boldly and he prayed boldly.

Exposition:

In Ephesians 6:19-20, Paul asked the saints to pray that he would have more evangelistic boldness. This request is amazing for two reasons. First, it is amazing what Paul did not ask for. He did not ask for prayer for his release, or his comfort, or his overall prosperity. Paul is literally chained to a Roman Soldier 24-7, under house arrest, in the city of Rome for preaching the gospel.

Second, Paul’s request is amazing because of all people, Paul seemed the least in need of boldness. Just read the book of Acts. Here are a few highlights...

He boldly proclaimed the gospel to a rioting mob in Ephesus.

He boldly proclaimed the gospel to kings (Agrippa, Felix, and Nero).

He boldly proclaimed the gospel knowing that it might cause him to get beaten, stoned, or put to death.

Paul knew he was a coward in in his own strength.

In **1 Cor. 2:3** Paul says that he was with the Corinthians in “**weakness and fear, and with much trembling.**”

Paul’s boldness came from the Holy Spirit and he knew he was in desperate need of more of it.

Application:

Here is the takeaway...

You don’t need to be seminary trained to speak boldly.

You don’t need to have a huge personality to speak boldly.

You don’t need to have years of Christian experience to speak boldly.

You just need to ask the Holy Spirit to help you speak boldly. In the book of Acts God used incredibly ordinary people to turn the world upside down. People like you and me!!!

Imagine what could happen if every member of GCF boldly shared the gospel with one person this week?

Let's pray for boldness.

First, (we see) Paul's passion for prayer.

Second, Paul's passion for fellowship.

This raises the question—what is fellowship? Fellowship involves a few things.

Fellowship involves informing others!

Ephesians 6:21 (ESV) — 21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.

Paul wants the Ephesians to know how he is doing while chained to a Roman Soldier. As a result, he sends his beloved coworker, friend, and faithful minister to tell them “everything.” We know from the rest of the NT that Paul and Tychicus spent many years laboring together. They were close friends. Paul calls him his beloved brother. Paul was not a rugged American individualist. Paul was a man who deeply valued friendships.

Paul sends Tychicus, his good friend, to Ephesus to inform them about how he was doing.

Application:

Is there anyone who knows how you are doing?

Is there anyone who knows your temptations, struggles, trials, hopes, and fears?

Why is this so important? Christians languish in isolation, but flourish in community.

Why don't we tell others how we are doing? Lack of relationship (understandable), pride, fear of rejection, and many other things. Yet, if the great apostle Paul told others of how he was doing, for the sake of prayer, how much more should we?

The best way to engage in meaningful fellowship at GCF is by participating in our small groups and discipleship groups.

Fellowship involves informing others! But there is more...

Fellowship involves encouraging others!

Ephesians 6:22 (ESV) — 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

Paul wanted Tychicus to encourage the hearts of the saints in Ephesus. He probably wanted Tychicus to encourage them specifically with news of his pre-prison missionary travels, the progress of the gospel, the health of the church plants, answered prayers, and many other things.

When was the last time that you were really encouraged by a fellow saint? Do you remember what that was like? (receiving an email, a letter, or a small gift).

Application:

We are involved in a fierce battle, but we are not alone! There are others fighting with us. We must encourage each other with words.

Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV) — 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **25** not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

What can you do this week to encourage a saint? Consider sending a text, writing a letter, sending an email, making a phone call, inviting someone to breakfast, or taking someone some coffee, etc...

One of the best things you can do to encourage a friend, is to remind them of the good news of the gospel. *This brings us to the last point....*

In these closing lines we see...

Paul's passion for prayer

Paul's passion for fellowship

Third, Paul's passion for the gospel

Paul is passionate about the gospel... can you be more specific?

Paul is passionate about gospel peace!

Ephesians 6:23 (ESV) — 23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul prays for peace for the brothers and sisters. Where does this come from? Look at verse 23 again. Paul writes, "Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

This peace comes from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Before conversion to Christ, none of us had peace with/from God. On the contrary we were enemies of God. But God wanted to be at peace with us. As a result, he sent his son to earth to suffer and die in our place.

Once we have peace with God the father (Eph. 2:14-17), we can have the peace of God the father. This peace surpasses all understanding and guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

How many of you want this peace?

Illustration:

"Some time ago now a retired couple, alarmed by the threat of nuclear war, began a serious study of all the inhabited places on the globe. Their purpose was to determine where in the world would be the place to be least likely affected by nuclear war — a place of ultimate security. They studied and traveled and traveled and studied. Finally, they found The Place. And at Christmas they sent a card from their new home to their friends in the States. It was the **Falkland Islands — the soon-to-be battleground between Britain and Argentina!**" (K. Hughes)

Application:

People search high and low for peace!!! That feeling that everything is going to be ok!!! The Bible refers to it as Shalom.

Do you have peace??? It does not come from a large bank account, perfect health, or political freedom. Peace in our souls is the result of being at peace with God. Are you at peace with God? Only the gospel brings this peace.

Paul is passionate about gospel peace! In addition....

Paul is passionate about gospel grace!

The apostle Paul loves grace. Paul begins and ends this letter with a word of grace.

Ephesians 1:1–2 (ESV) — 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: **2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 6:24 (ESV) — 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

What is grace? Grace is favor freely given to those who don't deserve it. The word freely is the key word. Grace is what distinguishes Christianity from every other world religion.

If you are a Muslim you have to work really hard to earn salvation.

If you are a Hindu you have to work really hard to release your soul from the cycle of reincarnation.

If you are a Buddhist you have to work really hard following the eight fold path to achieve Nirvana.

If you are a Jew or a Mormon you have to work really hard to get to heaven.

If you are a Christian, you can't do anything to earn salvation. You simply receive it as a gift!

Imagine this scenario with me.

A man named Frank appeared at Heaven's gates and was met there by an angel who told him, "I will take one million points to get into heaven. Tell me about yourself so that I can start assigning you some points."

The man smiled and said, "I went to church my whole life."

"Excellent," the angels said. "That will give you three points. What else?"

The man was shocked. "Three points. That all I get for a lifetime of church attendance?"

"Yes," said the angel. "What else did you do?"

"Well, I lead a small group and served on the church finance committee."

"Excellent," the angels said. "That will give you two more points. What else?"

At this juncture in the conversation, Frank was deeply distressed.

He said, "I gave money to the church, did not swear much, told the truth, and I never cheated on my wife."

"Excellent," said the angel, "that is 3 more points."

At this point, the man threw his hands up in the air and said, "I will never get into heaven unless I'm relying entirely on the grace of God."

"Exactly," said the angel.

Now this illustration breaks down at several points. Even our best works are stained by sin, therefore they are worth zero points. We don't do our part, while God does his part. He does it all. He saves us entirely by grace.

We must trust his grace entirely!!!

Let me conclude this long sermon series by reading one of my favorite verses from Ephesians. These verses capture the very essence of grace and the very heart and soul of Christianity.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV) — 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Lets pray...