



# Message **Transcript**

## Pray in the Fight

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Pastor Jeff:

Our Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise for who you are. Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead, and for your Holy Spirit, who indwells every single one of us who believe. We thank you, Lord, that you give us the privilege of coming together before you to worship and give glory and honor to you because you're the only one that deserves it. And we praise you, Lord, because we believe that every time that your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed that you speak directly to us. Lord, one of the reasons we've gathered today is for you to speak directly to our hearts. So our prayer is, speak Lord, for we are ready to hear.

Now, for all who have gathered who desire to hear the Lord speak directly to you, who will believe what he tells you and who will by faith put into practice what he shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

Amen. I've learned over time that one missing element can make a huge difference. Even if you are in the kitchen and you put together the greatest recipe in the world, but you go to put it in the oven and the oven doesn't work, it really doesn't matter how much work you put into that recipe. Or you may have the greatest car in the world, but unless it's fueled properly, it's not going to go anywhere. Even for you

green people out there, if you have a Tesla, if it's not plugged in, it's not moving anywhere either. You can have a light bulb that has all the right function and plug in just right, but without electricity, it does us no good. One missing element can make all the difference in the world.

When it comes to God's people and the church of Jesus Christ, I find that the one missing ingredient is prayer. We talk about prayer, we preach on prayer. We do everything sometimes except pray.

Now, we've been in this series called *Waging War Against Our Enemy*. We've been taking a look at our attitude and how to get in the fight. We've learned how to stay in the fight. Then last week, we took a look at six pieces of armor that the Lord has given to us to go ahead and put on. But I'm going to tell you this, without prayer, we're hopeless. Without prayer, nothing matters.

Today, what I want to talk to you about as we kick off our 21 days of prayer is prayer. I want to encourage you that no matter where you are in your prayer life with Jesus Christ, you can go deeper. No matter what you've seen God do in prayer, you can see him do more. I want today to be an encouragement to you to take a step, that no matter where you are, that prayer becomes a more vital part of your life.

To do that, today we're going to be in the book of Ephesians 6. We're going to take a look at verses 18, 19 and 20. Ephesians 6:18-20. As you're turning there, you'll remember the reason that prayer is so important is because we're not in a physical battle. We've read that our battle is not against flesh and blood at all, but our battle is

against those rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. If the battle is spiritual and it's taking place in the unseen spiritual realm, then that's where we need to attack it before we're ever going to see it in the visible, real realm. Prayer plays an important role.

Hear the word of the Lord this morning. After he tells us about this armor that we need to take up and these six pieces and why they're so important, he says this. He says in verse 18, "With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit. And with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. And pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me in opening my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I in proclaiming it may speak boldly as I ought to speak."

What we learn from God's word this morning is he's telling us that apart from prayer, we are powerless. We are powerless. Prayer is the glue for all the armor staying on. Prayer is the atmosphere for the believer in which they are to walk. Prayer is what gives us the strategy for warfare, for where we are going. Nothing may be more important on our mission of warfare than prayer.

Yet for many believers, prayer is oftentimes an afterthought, isn't it? I've been to numerous prayer meetings where people take prayer requests and then at the end, somebody looks at their watch when there's five minutes to go, and they say, "Oh, you know what? Somebody better pray." Then one person prays to close it out.

Prayer is way more than that, and we study this if we open our Bible and see. How essential was prayer to the ministry of Jesus Christ? We find him when he's 12 years old back in the temple telling his parents, "Did you not know I needed to be in my Father's house?" We see him very early in the morning while it was still dark going out to solitary places where there he prayed. After he fed the 5,000 and they were going to celebrate him as king, he said, "No, I'm going to go up on a mountainside all night long," to do what? Pray. Before he selected his disciples, what did he do? He prayed. Before he did miracles, he prayed. In the night he was with his disciples, they prayed. He took three along with him in the garden while he was praying. He said, "Could you not stay awake with me for at least an hour?" When he was on the cross, what was he doing? He was praying. Everything that was essential to the life of Jesus was the connection with his Father. That's why he said, "I and the Father are ...

Congregation:

One.

Pastor Jeff:

... one. If you've seen me, you've seen my Father."

Now, Jesus spent his entire ministry praying, so much so that the only thing we have recorded that the disciples wanted to hear how to be taught is, "Lord teach us to pray." You think about all that Jesus did, you would've think it would've been recorded, "Hey, teach us to cast out demons. Teach us to heal people. Teach us to raise the dead." We don't have those things recorded. "Lord, teach us to pray." He taught

people how to pray. Prayer is essential to the ministry of Jesus, even when it came to a picture of Jesus that we're uncomfortable with, where he gets so angry, where he's driving people out of the temple. Why was he so angry? Because he said, "My Father's house is to be a house of prayer, but you've turned it into a den of thieves." Did Jesus model prayer? You can't make it through the gospels without seeing that prayer was an essential element of what allowed the Spirit of God to work through him. Now, Jesus is the eternal Son of God. How much more do we need prayer?

But what about Jesus' disciples and those that came after him? Did they believe in prayer? The Apostle Paul that wrote about two-thirds of the New Testament, he believed in prayer. Even in this book of Ephesians, we read that he was praying for them. In Ephesians 3:14, he says, "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." He continues and continues and continues. What was he doing? He was pleading with them.

But it wasn't just the church in Ephesus. When he wrote to the church in Philippi that he loved ... He says in Philippians 1:3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." Even when he was locked up and it was midnight after being beaten, what do we find him doing? Worshiping and praying. It was the essential part of the Apostle Paul's life.

We see him address the church in prayer in the book of Colossians. I could spend all day doing this, but let me show you. Even Paul's disciples prayed. In Colossians 4:12, he talks about one of his disciples, Epaphras. He says, "Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bond slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers so that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God." What do we see the Apostle Paul doing? He's praying. What do all of his disciples do? They pray. Why? Because that's what Jesus Christ modeled. Prayer is an essential ingredient, an essential element to all that God is going to do and all that he's ever gotten done.

He's given us the privilege of prayer. The Bible says, "There's one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ." That means when you pray, you don't have to pray through dead people, ancestors. You don't have to pray through saints. You don't have to pray all these rituals. You go right through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and have direct access to his throne.

So Jesus modeled prayer. Paul and his disciples modeled prayer. What about the early church? Was there any prayer modeled there? When you read through the book of Acts, we always like to start in Acts 2, don't we, where the Spirit of God comes in power and flames of fire rest on their head and they speak in all different tongues and they proclaim the gospel and 3,000 people get saved. We are like, "Why don't we see that?" Well, go back to Acts 1. What are these people doing? Jesus told them at the end of Luke's gospel, "Go and wait in the upper room and pray." Why did all this happen? Because they were having a prayer meeting. They were praying and

seeking the face of God.

Here's a pattern that I see in the New Testament. It's a pattern I see in the book of Acts. Here's what you see. You see praying. Then you see presence when the Holy Spirit comes and manifests the presence of Jesus. Then you see proclamation, where they speak the word boldly. Then guess what you see? Power.

Now, when we read through the gospels and the Book of Acts, there's a lot of people that say, "Well, that was then. It's just a historical book." I don't see that because my Bible says Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

But the reason we don't see God's power is because we leave out the essential element of prayer. We think that's an add-on, where we're just going to go ahead and preach, and then God's going to do work, and if he doesn't, oh well. But no, you see, prayer, then presence, then preaching, then power. That's what the early church did. You see patterns repeated over and over and over and over again. People are praying. They're waiting on the Spirit to show them direction. They're boldly proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, and God is moving in power. That's the essential elements of how ministry grows, how the church grows, how God is on the move. Yet we forget that prayer is the essential ingredient.

Prayer is not just to get God to move. Prayer is aligning our hearts with who he is and what he wants so that he can use us.

If you study church history, any great move of God, I promise you, I promise you ... I haven't exhausted this. I'm not a scholar, but in the ones that I've studied, prayer is



the essential element of everything that came before the incredible move of God. You know what that gives me? Hope. It gives me great hope to say that our God that's the same yesterday, today and forever is looking for a group of people who will seek him and believe him so his Spirit can move in power as we share the word of God with boldness. Amen?

This is what the great 19th century pastor and author E.M. Bounds stated. I used this when I did my doctoral thesis. I put it in the first paragraph when I was writing on prayer. Here's what he says. He says, "The preacher is commissioned to pray as well as to preach. His mission is incomplete if he does not do both well. The preacher may speak with all the eloquence of men and of angels, but unless he can pray with a faith which draws all heaven to his aid, his preaching will be as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal for permanent God-honoring, soul-saving uses. In other words, he's saying this, the most important purpose in a minister's life, a pastor's life, is what? Prayer.

The apostles got this, because in Acts 6 when they started dealing with some of their first problems in the church, because problems have been in the church from the very inception of the church, in Acts 6, there was a food distribution problem and some of the widows were not getting the same amounts of food. This problem arose, and here's what the apostles said. "Choose seven men filled with the Spirit. This is a problem. We got to deal with this, but let's let the body of Christ deal with it. But as for us, we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Why? Because they understood the pattern. Prayer, presence, proclamation, power. They said, "We can only control two of those. We can't control the Holy Spirit's presence, and we can't

control the Holy Spirit's power. What we can control is our seeking after the Lord in prayer, praying for his power, praying for our people, praying for the saints. What we can control is the boldness with which we herald the word of God. So we're going to give all our time to that."

Future pastors, your number one job as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to pray, seek the face of the Lord, intercede for others and to boldly proclaim his word. That's your job. If you don't do that, you can do a bunch of other things that don't really count for anything. You can fill a church with a lot of people without doing those things. You can have a lot of strategy without doing those things, but you can't change a life without doing those things. Amen? That's what God calls us to. He calls us to pray and be courageous about sharing his word with others.

That's why BRAVE models prayer. BRAVE has always modeled prayer. Before we ever launched this church and we lived in Central Illinois, my wife and I started praying. Then we started gathering with a group of people who were considering moving here with us, and we began to pray in the living room.

Then when we launched the church, we started to hold monthly prayer gatherings. They weren't like our first Tuesdays, where we have 1,500 people showing up and praising the Lord and doing all that. I remember our prayer meetings when it was me with a guitar and 15 people. I would leave so energized because people were seeking the face of God. I'm not doing that anymore because God has used other people to grow our ministry and what we're doing. Amen?

I watch it all the time because I think prayer is more caught than it is taught. We hear testimony after testimony after testimony of people that say, "I was scared to death to come to first Tuesday. I had never prayed out loud in church. It freaked me out when you broke out into prayer groups the first time I ever came to BRAVE. That was scary for me. Now I can't get enough. Now I understand what was missing in my life."

When we made the move as a church to incorporate prayer into our services occasionally, we were a church of about 1,000 people at the time, approximately 250 people left. I started getting emails and letters from people saying, "I like the church, like what you're doing, but I'm uncomfortable praying out loud, so we're going to go somewhere else," which is okay. But when you're trying to grow a body of people, there's something in you that wants to say, "Well, don't go, don't go. We'll change it for you." But we never did. We said, and I believe with my whole heart, that the greatest gift I can ever give you is to teach you how to seek the face of the Lord. If you know how to hear Jesus, that's the greatest gift I can give you. Amen? So we pressed in, and now we have more people coming to our prayer meetings than we had in our whole church at the time.

For me, as we do 21 days of prayer and fasting to start the year and as we do weekly prayer meetings and as we do 21 days of prayer to start the fall, you need to know, we're a church that prays. We're a staff that prays. This week as a staff ... We pray every Thursday morning for three hours after we do first Tuesday. We prayed this week for three hours. It was a blink. It went so fast. We praised and worshiped. We

celebrated the Lord. We prayed for one another, we interceded, and then we begin to pray for each and every one of you that during this 21 days, you would grow in your heart for prayer and you would love Jesus more than you ever have loved him. We started praying that you would see people return to the faith. We had our prayer for prodigals a week ago Sunday. There were over 400 people just in Inglewood alone lined up waiting to get prayer for their children because we believe that God moves through prayer.

Now, this may not sound like a big deal to you, but I've served on church staffs. Several of our staff have served on other church staffs. I've been on church staffs, and you would be amazed at the number of church staffs that don't pray, that don't seek the face of the Lord. Yeah, they might pray before a service. They might pray during a meeting, but it's not given intentionality that, "Hey, pray. This is your job. Pray. Pray for our people." I promise you that these cards that are all over the platform this morning and all over the platform in Westminster, we will pray for those every day for 21 days. I promise you that because we're a church that prays.

This week when we're praying for you, I just got fired up because I'm saying, "God, you're going to grow these people." It's more caught than taught. Over the years of 30 years of being in ministry, when I get around people, you can almost sense this person spent time in the presence of Jesus. I'm not that awed anymore by people that speak really well or have big ministries. I'm incredibly drawn to those that have the presence of God in their life.

I remember going to a camp when I was a youth pastor in Dallas and heard about this camp. It was out in West Texas. Believe this or not, this is the name of the town, Happy, Texas. That's where it was. It was in Happy, Texas, and there was this little camp in this canyon. One week out of the summer, all the evangelical Spirit-filled people dumped themselves and dropped there. They said, "You got to go. It's awesome." I remember going and was blown away at the intensity of worship and what happened when preaching happened. It wasn't because the worship was so crisp and the preaching was so good, but there was a presence of the Holy Spirit in a way that was so tangible I wanted more of.

I remember going and talking to the speaker, and I said, "Listen, I don't want to learn how to preach like you. I don't want to learn how to do anything like you, but tell me your story and why there's so much presence of God in your life." He began to walk me through his story, brokenness in his marriage. He and his wife had been separated, all of these different things that had gone on and how God had brought them back together.

Then he began to tell me about his daily routine, and he said, "I'm not telling you this to make you feel bad or to try to tell you this is what you need to do. I'm just telling you how much I love Jesus." He goes, "Every day, I wake up at 4:00 in the morning, and I spend two hours in prayer with my word open to seek his face. Then I shower and I get to work." At the time, he was running a ministry at the University of Georgia. He said, "I go into my office, and from 7:00 to noon, I pray." Then he goes, "I have somebody on my staff, and we pay them from 8:00 to 5:00 to pray for me and to pray

for our ministry and all these different things." They were telling stories about how they were sending hundreds of kids out in the mission field. They were seeing healings of all kinds. I said, "I want that. I want presence." Presence comes when we pray.

You may have come into church this morning and said, "That's not why I came. I came to get seven steps to how to have a better marriage." I'm telling you, the presence of the Holy Spirit will do more for your marriage than any teaching that I could ever give you. Amen?

I've seen it over time. I got the privilege of traveling out to Brooklyn Tabernacle in 2005 when Kim and I were helping with a Billy Graham Crusade. We went to a prayer meeting at Brooklyn Tabernacle, and I thought I was walking in there and there'd be 50 people. I walked into an auditorium a little bit bigger than ours, and there were 3,000 people already in there screaming at the top of their lungs. I was like, "What did we just walk into?" They were praying for healing of brain cancer and people set free and missionaries to ... We were so blown away that I remember we were going to go hang out with friends afterwards, and 9:00 came and we're like, "I'm going to bed." We were worn out from praying so hard. We'd never seen anything like that.

Having met Pastor Jim Cymbala and many people in his congregation, they've devoted their entire ministry to prayer. If you want to read a great book on prayer, read *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*. It came out a number of years ago. I've read it umpteen times, and I can't read through it without crying every single time I read it because that's the presence and the power I want to see in our church.

Now when I meet guys like Pastor Larry Stockstill that I met a couple of years ago that's a Spirit-filled man that knows how to pray, I want to be around him. I was down at a church in Alabama last week, 60,000 people that attend in person, 100,000 that attend on Easter, 24 campuses all across the South. It was really interesting to listen to him at his conference say, "People don't take home what we talk about. The number one thing you need in your ministry is build a prayer culture." He taught on prayer, and I said, "Yes, want to be around these guys," because prayer is what changes everything. This is why we go for prayer. This is why prayer is essential.

With that as a background, let's talk about three ways that you can pray coming out of the text today from Ephesians 6:18-20. Three ways that you can pray. The first is this, pray comprehensively for all the saints. Pray comprehensively for all the saints. Notice what he says. You're going to see this word all four times. "With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit. And with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." He's comprehensively saying, "If you don't know where to start, just pray about everything. Pray for the saints, pray for everything going on in your life." Here's what he's saying, nothing is too small or too big to pray for. Sometimes we make the error, well, that's too small. It's not a big deal. I got this one. Read stories in the Bible of God's people when they thought that they had it and didn't need to seek him.

You remember back in the book of Joshua, the Gibeonites tried to form a peace treaty with Israel and God had told them not to? But when the Gibeonites came, they looked and saw their bags. They thought this is a good deal, and they got into a

partnership with them because they didn't seek the Lord. Everything went bad for them for a long time because of it. There's nothing too small. There's never a time in your life where you can say to the Lord, "I got this. I don't need to pray. This one's easy.

Making a decision about where I'm going to go to school, where I'm going to live, what job I'm going to take, I got this one." Don't do that. Everything matters. God wants you to pray about all things. Nothing's too small for him.

But then we make the opposite mistake too, don't we? Nothing's too big for him. There's no way you can lob a prayer request at the Lord, and he says, "I can't handle that one. That's way too big for me."

I heard a quote recently, I don't know who to give credit to, but it's definitely not mine. But I love this. "How can we ask small things from a God who can do all things?" God can do way "more than we ever ask, imagine or think according to his glorious power that works within us." Why do we pray small prayers? Pray big ones. Pray big ones that are impossible, that you would say there's no way this can happen unless God moves. Those are the kind of prayers God wants us to pray too. There's nothing too small. There's nothing too big. So pray all the time about all things. Pray for your family. Pray for your children. Pray for your marriage. Pray for people in the church. Pray for people outside the church.

Then he says this, "Pray at all times in the Spirit, in the Spirit. Pray at all times in the Spirit." In the Spirit means to pray with the alignment that God has. John 15:7-8 says, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will



be done for you." Some of us think, "Well, that scripture's broken. That one doesn't work." It does. It's just that sometimes we're not aligned with what the word of God says, and we're praying selfish prayers. James says, "You do not have because you do not ask, and when you do ask, you ask so you can spend it on selfish things for yourself." You're not asking for alignment with God. So part of prayer, praying in the Spirit means, God, I'm praying in alignment with what you want. Lord, I want to know your heart. You know everything about me. What are you looking to do? How do you want to do this? How should I be praying about this? Teach me to pray, Lord. That's alignment.

Some people think praying in the Spirit is praying in tongues. I would say this, if God did give you the spiritual gift of tongues as a prayer language that you have, by all means use it. Pray that way. That's great. But the Bible makes clear not every single believer has that gift, but every single believer is to pray in alignment with the Spirit of God, and all of us can do that. So I'm asking God when I'm praying this, "God, is this for your glory? Is this for your best? Is this really what you want to do? Or Lord, do you need to change my heart and my prayers and my redirect so that I'm praying what you want to pray? Because Lord, I want what you want." Sometimes we forget that God's sovereign and he's doing things. He's moving mightily. He's changing the circumstances because that's what he wants to do. Let me give you an example.

Many times as Christians when we pray for other believers, we pray for the bad things in their life to be removed. But here's what I've discovered in my life, and I know it's true of yours. Sometimes those situations we're going through, those seasons that

we're in, those circumstances we would've never asked for are what grow us the most. Yet so often we're praying for other believers, "God get this out of their life." God says, "I'm the one that brought it! I'm the one that's doing it!"

Now, I don't think it's wrong to pray for health for somebody that's sick. I'll give you an example. If my wife was told she only has six weeks to live, I promise you I would be praying fervently for all those six weeks until she went to be with the Lord that she would remain alive for another 50 years so I could be with her. I love her. But if he didn't answer my prayer, I know what's going to happen. Kim would be in heaven saying, "Thank God Jeff's prayer didn't work because I love this man way more than I love him."

We as Christians attempt to spend too much time praying Christians out of heaven, rather than attempting to pray sinners out of hell. We tend to pray for comfort for everybody because we think comfort is God's will, even though we know it's not. Sometimes even when we're interceding for others, we need to ask the Lord what he's doing because sometimes even the trial and tribulation that somebody's going through, it's not necessarily a bad thing. It just feels really, really bad when we're going through it. It's okay to cry out to the Lord and say, "I hate this situation that I'm in, and I don't like it, but, Lord, not my will, but thy will be done." Isn't that how Jesus prayed? That's what he said. So pray comprehensively for all of the saints.

Pray small things, pray big things, pray in alignment with the Spirit. Then he says this, "Keep on the alert with all perseverance." That means to watch. When you pray, keep your eyes open and see what God might do. Pray and watch, pray and watch. If

you're praying for rain, grab an umbrella and a raincoat. Pray expectantly. Keep on the alert. Watch what he's going to do. You're praying for somebody to move and you feel like God's called me to pray this way, open your eyes, see what he's doing.

Also, open your eyes this way. When you start to pray, open your eyes because the enemy hates it when you pray, and he will attempt to lob some things in your way. For those of you, you're going to hear this message today and get all fired up about prayer, and you're going to say, "Tomorrow morning, 7:00, I'm praying," I promise you there's going to be so much distraction whatever time you pick, tomorrow morning at 7:00. When that happens, just know this, the Bible's true. God wants me to seek his face. I'm going to have to fight through this. I'm going to have to persevere to get in his presence. I'm going to need to work at this.

I've been praying to the Lord fervently for a number of years now, and not a day goes by when I wake up and automatically just be like, "Oh man, we're synced." As soon as I sit down to pray, a million things come into my mind. So I have to journal them away, or I have to pray them away. It sometimes takes 10, 15, 20 minutes just to get the clutter out so that my heart can be rightly related to the Lord. Why? Because the enemy is not afraid of you, but he's afraid of Jesus in you. He doesn't want you to be rightly related to him.

So the Bible tells us to pray. Pray at all times. Pray for small things. Pray for big things. Pray in alignment with the Spirit and pray with perseverance. Don't you ever give up. If God's called you to pray for a prodigal, if God's called you to pray for

somebody that's lost, don't you ever give up because here's what the enemy's going to whisper in your ear. "They're apostate. They went too far. They transgressed. They should've known." But you never stop praying. You pray and you don't give up.

Luke 18 tells a parable about a woman that needed justice done. She goes to the judge, and the judge says, "I don't want anything to do with this." But she's so persistent, he's like, "I don't agree with her. I'm not even just, but it's just so she shuts up, I'll do what she wants." The Bible says, "How much more your heavenly Father who loves you, when he hears his children call on him, will answer." But it's just sometimes not going to be in your timing or in your way. But don't ever give up praying. Don't ever give up praying. If God puts something on your heart that you're to pray for, you keep praying for it. If it's for somebody that's lost, if it's for something in your life you haven't seen, just keep praying and keep praying and keep praying.

You know what perseverance means? It means you're going to get kicked in the gut sometimes. It means you're going to feel like quitting your prayer life. This doesn't work. I prayed for my grandma to live. She died. God doesn't work. That's not how it works. I'm praying because I want to know God's heart and I'm going to seek after him and I'm going to grow in his heart and I'm going to grow until I have a delight in his heart. I'm going to continue to do all those things so that God can work in and through me and I'm never giving up.

Prayer is the hardest work I find in the church. Even teaching on tithing, tithing's easy compared to prayer because prayer takes your whole thought, your whole mind, your whole emotion, your whole will. You have to be willing to hear what the Lord says

and do what he wants you to do. Many of us don't want that. We just want to add on little prayers and little things to say, "As long as you're doing what I'm doing, as long as I'm getting done what I want to get done, I'll pray." But it's not intense prayer. Prayer is when we're going after him with all perseverance.

Then he says this, notice what he says, "Pray for all the saints." Not just circumstances like we talked about, "Pray for all the saints." Saints are people. Pray for all the believers. We're called to pray that all would come to Christ, but pray for the believers. Here's what happens in church sometimes. "I don't like them. They're annoying. I don't want them in my group. They got what should've happened to them. I know why." Forget all that. Just pray blessing over the saints. Pray for them. Pray for me. Pray. Pray.

You look at this altar, and this isn't even all the prayer requests we're going to have over 21 days, and there's some that you have silent in your heart. Just pray. God hears. Pray for others. It's a delight. Amen? Because the purpose of the church is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The more you're aligned with the Lord, the more he will use you for his glory. Amen? Pray comprehensively for the saints.

Number two, pray specifically for the mission. Pray specifically for the mission. Don't forget that Jesus commissioned us to go into the world and make disciples. So he says, "And pray on my behalf." Now, think about this. This is the Apostle Paul, friends. This is the one that most Christians say, "I can't wait to meet the Apostle Paul. There's no greater missionary or theologian in the history of the church." Maybe there

hasn't been, other than Jesus. And here's what he's saying. "Pray for me. I need your prayers."

The greatest gift you can ever give me as your pastor is pray for me. Some of you come up and say, "Pastor Jeff, I'm praying for you and I'm praying for Kim and I'm praying for your family." My own response is, "Thank you. I need it." Pray.

Paul says, "Pray for me." Now, what does Paul need prayer for? "... that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness," which really means courage, "the mystery of the gospel. So here's what Paul's saying, the one that penned two-thirds of the New Testament with the help of the Holy Spirit. Here's what he's saying. "Pray for me that I know what to say and that I have courage when I say it." Now, if the Apostle Paul's asking for that, how much more do we need it?

We get nervous about talking to anybody about Jesus because we think, "Well, if I do that, I'm not going to know what to say." Good, the Apostle Paul didn't know what to say either. He knew Jesus died for his sins and rose from the dead, but he didn't know how every conversation was going to go. So he's saying, "Pray for me that utterance may be given, that I know what to say, and when I get the opportunity, I do it with courage and I wouldn't chicken out because of the relationship." In other words, he's saying this, "That even if it's a family member and I know that they're going to be mad at me, I wouldn't worry about that, or a friend that's going to leave me, I wouldn't worry about that, or the judge that may behead me if I don't say it just right, the king that's in charge of me. Help me be bold enough to say what I need to say even if it

means a relationship or costing my life." That's what he was saying. "Pray for me."

We're on a mission here. Here's our mission. Our mission is to go and tell as many people about the gospel of Jesus Christ and for those of us who believe to build as many of us up so that we have great delight in the Lord and more fire to go out and tell more lost people about who Jesus is. That's our mission. One day, that all comes to an end. We get to heaven and we get to be in the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and Jesus presents us faultless before the Father. We're singing songs and high-fiving one another. It's going to be incredible. What's coming is greater than anything we'll ever experience here. But until we get there, we're still on mission. There's a mission, and if we miss the mission, we miss the whole intent of what the Bible's trying to teach us.

See, when people ask me, "Is God a prospering God?" here's my response, "100% yes." He's the most generous being in the entire universe. He gave his only Son to be slaughtered on our behalf. Does God bless his saints? Yes. Can God prosper his saints? Absolutely. Can we rejoice when we see that? Most certainly.

But that's not prosperity gospel. Prosperity gospel believes this, that God's job is to bless me so I can hoard everything he gives. That's not the gospel. Gospel is, as God prospers me, I'm using it to bless others. God's prospering me with a house? That's not my house, that's God's house that he's going to use to bless others. God's given me a car? That's not my car, that's God's car. I'm just a steward of it to use to bless others. God's given me a spouse? That's not my spouse. God gave me her, God

gave me him so that we as a couple can be used for God's glory to go and do what he wants us to do. Everything you have, resources, money, can God bless your resources and give you more? Yeah, for what purpose? Not so you hold onto it, so that you can use it as a blessing to bless other people. That's why God blesses. That's the mission. The mission is loving God and loving others. It's honoring the Lord and serving others. It's loving other people the way Jesus loved. It's all relationship. Amen? So God wants us to stay about the mission. So Paul's saying, "Pray for me in the mission. Pray for me in the mission." It takes courage to do that.

We can pray about anything. We started the church. I remember here were some of the prayer requests. "Pray that we get a bass player and a drummer before our launch date on November 7th, 2010." So we prayed for a bass player and a drummer. And guess what? Both of them came. When they did, I said, "Check. God, you're answering prayer." That bass player now is in heaven with Jesus, and the drummer got saved on our very first service. Amen? God hears prayers. God hears prayers.

When we were meeting at Cherry Creek High School, the reason we ended up there is because we prayed for a place to meet. I'm not from Denver. I didn't know whether God wanted the church north, south, east, west. One day, I was out jogging and I was saying to the Lord, "Lord, it's presumptive of us to assume we know where you want to gather. We don't even know anything about this city." That day, it just so happened we had a meeting at Cherry Creek High School. When we went there, it was the right price, it was the right place. Everything just worked out. They said, "You can



meet here every week." It was a great space to be. We saw God answer that prayer. We saw God answer a prayer for office space. I remember when we got our first website, God answered a prayer that way. Everything we prayed about because nothing existed before we prayed.

Then when it came time to move, I remember casting vision and doing all that, but we'd been praying about a building forever. I remember that south building that we have here in Inglewood, praying over that thinking it was one of the largest buildings I'd ever seen as a church at the time. It was a miracle when we got it because we had to raise \$1.73 million in six days with about 400 people in our church. God answered that prayer and did it. It was a miracle. We saw him move. Amen? It was interesting because about two weeks before ... I never told this story until now. About two weeks before, I was sitting with one of our elders at the time, and we were praying because we used to walk around the building and pray for it. I just kept hearing in my heart, "It's too small. It's too small." I'm like, "What are you talking about, it's too small? I already told the people we're going to buy it." Too small. But what I realize in hindsight is, the building's not too small, my vision's too small. Don't think you're just going to hunker down here.

Now, even this building and that building, and if you're sitting in Westminster, look around you, that's an answer to prayer. If you're in Inglewood, look around you. This building's an answer to prayer. But I'm not holding onto buildings. The only purpose of a building is to bless more people of God. If we outgrow this and do something, I don't care about a building. I care about souls and people coming to know the Lord and

growing in him. Amen? These are just blessings for people. So everything that we've done, we've seen through prayer.

Three years ago when I started praying about a school during 2020, I started thinking, we're ready to go. The only thing we didn't know how to do was start a school. We didn't have any teachers, any administrators or any students or a building. But other than that, we were set. We just prayed and prayed and prayed. You know what? God's brought the right people. Now we have administrators. Now we have teachers. Now we have students. Two weeks from Monday, August 22nd, 2023, BRAVE Academy will launch in BRAVE Academy Building. Amen? That's prayer. That's prayer. I still don't know how to run a school. I'm just excited we're doing one.

We're praying for expansive radio ministry and podcasts for more people to hear the gospel. We're praying so that more and more people come to know the Lord. If you ask me this question, "Pastor Jeff, when are you going to stop praying for expanse?" here's my answer: when everybody in Denver and everybody in Colorado and everybody in America has had the opportunity to respond and worship the Lord Jesus Christ and has either responded to him or rejected him, then we'll stop. Until then, we're going to go for the glory of God. Amen? That's our goal. That's our mission. That's why we pray for the mission.

We pray to keep you on mission because guess who God wants to use? It's not me. It's y'all. It's us. God wants to use each and every one of us in our sphere of influence in a special way to pray and to share the good news with boldness, to pray

and allow the Holy Spirit to shape you so you can share the good news of boldness.

Then that's when we hear these incredible stories that we have in the Bible. Amen? So not just pray comprehensively for all the saints, but pray specifically for the mission.

Then third is this, pray personally for the responsibility. Pray personally for the responsibility. Notice what Paul says. He goes, "...for which I am an ambassador in chains, that in proclaiming I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." Now, ambassador in chains is really a unique word. He's Christ's ambassador. Ambassadors normally have diplomatic immunity. If you're an ambassador and you go to another country, we expect that that's on American soil and you're protected and taken care of, and you can do the things that you need to do while you're there. How much more being sent from heaven by Jesus Christ should Paul have received fair treatment? Yet he said, "No, I'm an ambassador, but I'm chained up. I'm in prison. I'm not being treated well. So my lot in life and the way I see myself," Paul says, "is I'm an ambassador for Christ, but here's my lot in life right now. Right now, I'm in chains. Here's my sphere of influence. I'm not trying to get out of it. I'm trying to make the most of it."

In 2020, when we had all the lockdowns and different things, I remember I used to pray with my wife before service in October of that year and everyone following me because there was threats of maybe me getting locked up or carted off. We told all our kids, "If Daddy does, just know, it's just a different place for him to go share the gospel for a while, and he'll be back home later."

Sometimes we take too much care in our own circumstance. "What's happening to me? This isn't fair." Life's not fair. Just because you're a Christian doesn't mean

you're not going to face tribulation. As a matter of fact, it's something that Jesus Christ promised is going to happen to you. Hardships, heartache, all the things that you've gone through that you would've said, "I would've never guessed in a million years we'd ever be here. I never would've guessed this would've ever happened. We did all the right things and," blah, blah, blah, all those things. Why? Because God's growing you to get more intimate with him, and he's building you so that you can be even more effective for the gospel. What I find is when God takes me through a season like that, it gives me a sweetness on the inside that cares about people in a way I never otherwise would've been able to do it. Paul's not trying to get out of his situation. He's praying specifically for his responsibility in that situation. He says, "I'm an ambassador in chains, that in proclaiming it, I may speak boldly or courageously as I ought to speak."

Friends, whatever situation you're in, God's the one that put you in it. He's not necessarily wanting to take you out of it right now.

My first experience with that really was when I started walking with the Lord in college. Things were going well for me, and I was building my way up the chain as a quarterback and really thought that one day I would be the starter. Then when I really started walking with the Lord, then I knew it was going to happen because God owed me. Because I told the Lord, "Lord, you let us win the Big 10, you let us win the Rose Bowl, I'll be the guy that stands in front of the camera and says, 'Hey, before you interview me and think about how awesome I am, let me just thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.'" I was willing to do that if the Lord did all these wonderful things for me. I

thought that was a pretty good deal for both of us.

But the Lord had another plan. Right when I thought things were going to go well for me, things went south for me. I remember in spring practice, my quarterback coach sat me down and I thought it was between me and another guy, which it should've been. He basically said, "Hey, we're going to make you fourth string because we got to build some other guys up. You're a senior. It's not going to work for you this year." I thought, "I've been on this team for four years to play one, and this is not fair." I remember just weeping. I'm like, "Whose decision was it?" It was this big whole thing. I was just angry. I was not only angry at the coaches, I was angry at God because now I'm walking with the Lord. Like, "God, I'm mad at you because I was ascending the ladder, but now I'm walking with you and I love you and you're doing this stuff to me." I was mad at Jesus. So I told the coach, "I'm not going to play on this team," and I quit in the spring before my senior year.

I was at home and upset with the Lord. Finally after about two weeks, I remember coming to my senses and say, "Okay, Lord, I'm done yelling at you, being upset with you. I'll do whatever you want. Fine. I'll go into the ministry. I know that's what you want." Here's what I heard the Lord say to me in my spirit. "I'm not asking you to go into ministry. I'm just wondering if you would humble yourself and be my servant on the team." I remember thinking, "Are you kidding me? They're going to bring in a freshman, and I'm going to be a fifth year senior, and I'm going to be running the scout team? Lord, that'll be humiliating. That'll be embarrassing." Before I could even

get the words out of my mouth, the Lord's like, "I know exactly how that feels. I know what it feels like to be humiliated. I know what it feels like to be embarrassed. I was just wondering if you'd be my servant on the team." He had me.

So I went back to my coach, who was a Christian. I said, "Hey, I just want you to know, here's what the Lord told me. I will come back to the team. I promise you, I will only support you. I'll never say anything bad about you. I'll only support my teammates, and I'll be a champion of anything that goes on, even though you know I don't agree with what happened." That's what I said. He said, "Well, the coaches need to vote on it." That afternoon, it was unanimous. They called me back and said, "You can be part of the team." I went back. Can I tell you? That fall, I led more people to Jesus and had a greater impact for the kingdom than I'd had all my other years combined. It wasn't because I was good, it was because God was working through me.

Here's what I discovered. I thought I needed a platform. If I was all this, then God could use me. What I discovered is the platform sometimes God gives is pain, humiliation, embarrassment, and all these things because everybody can identify with that. Amen? That's what he did in my life.

Whatever your lot in life is, here's what the Lord wants. The Lord wants you to seek him. Here's when you know it's true, when hard things happen and you're looking to him first.

I told you about my daughter a couple of weeks ago. She was in a little bit of a bicycle accident and was going up a hill and the handlebars got turned and hit her right

in the abdomen pretty hard. She couldn't stand up straight. She couldn't really walk. I went down the street because my son came home and said, "She's not doing well." I went down there and we walked all the way home and realized we probably need to get this checked out. I come from the line of just spit on it, rub a little dirt, it'll be okay. But this is my little girl, and I'm like, "We got to check this out."

We got in the car to go visit a nurse to see should we go to the emergency room and check this out? As soon as we got in the car, she said to me, "Daddy, would you just pray for me?" I'm like, "Yeah." So I put my hand on her and prayed for her. She's like, "Daddy, would you turn some worship music on? Let's just worship Jesus." "Okay, let's do that." We started worshipping the Lord. "Hey daddy, would you call some of your friends and have them pray over me too?" "Yeah, we can do that." I'm just so proud and beaming as she's shaming her dad.

We realized we needed to go to the hospital just to get everything checked out, which it was fine. We were in the emergency room. She's getting an IV. She's like, "Daddy, just hold my hand. Just pray for me." She's getting a CT scan. "Hey daddy, just pray it's going to be okay." I'm with her the whole time. All we're doing is praying to Jesus. At the end of the night when she's getting ready to get discharged and told everything's okay, she says, "Daddy, isn't it so cool that Jesus heard everything we prayed and he cares about me? Isn't that awesome?" I'm driving home that night, and I'm like, "Man, your mom has done a great job with you." You know what I mean?

But that's when the rubber meets the road. The rubber meets the road when pain comes and when trial comes, because it's easy to get fired up and say, "Okay, Lord, I

want to be part of a church that's reaching the world. That's awesome. I'm going to pray." But what about you and your sphere of influence? What about those places that are uncomfortable? What about the place in your life circumstance right now that you would do anything to say, "I don't even know how I got here. It wasn't even my fault. I don't want anything to do with this." In those situations, how are you seeking the Lord? How are you delighting yourself in him? How are you growing in what he wants to teach you? What I find is that sometimes God bruises some of the greatest saints because he can entrust you with a trial that he can't entrust with just anybody. Amen?

That's what he's doing in our lives. That's what he's doing in my life. That's why nothing is perfect on this side of heaven. That's why many of us have stories. If we're on this platform, we could tell it, and all of us would sit there and weep and say, "That's horrible." But if you can tell it in a way and say, "That's a horrible thing, but I want to tell you something. In the middle of all that, here's one thing I know for sure. My Redeemer lives and his name is Jesus, and he still loves me and has a great purpose and plan in my life." That's a testimony. Amen?

Prayer is the essential element of everything good that happens on this side of heaven. Prayer is the essential element that grows your faith in Jesus Christ. Prayer is essential to all that we're going to do. That's why as we embark on this 21 days of prayer, I'm just encouraging you. If you can make it out one of the 21 days between noon and 1:00, come. If you can't, stream it. If you can't do either of those, just pray.

You know what? Start with baby steps. Perhaps you've never sat down and



prayed for a half an hour by yourself. Don't start there. Don't make it about the amount of time. Make it about the relationship that you have. Tell the Lord, "Lord, I'm new to this, and I want to grow in this and get me around some people that know how to do this a little better than me," because prayer is more caught than it is taught. Amen?

But I believe that our best days are ahead, and I believe God's doing some amazing things through BRAVE. He's doing some amazing things at other churches that are gospel-proclaiming churches. But we want to be a catalyst for prayer, not only at BRAVE, but in the hearts of all the other churches across our country because it's what grows people in their faith the most. God's called you to himself. The calling that you have is to seek his face. If you'll seek his face, I promise you, there's great delight in that. Amen? Amen.

Would you stand with me? Our Father in heaven, we give you glory, honor and praise, and we thank you. Lord, as we pray for revival, as we think about revival, as every saint and every generation has always thought about it, Lord, we realize we have a responsibility, and the primary responsibility we have to see revival come is persevering in our prayers. Lord, we trust you for all the great things that you're going to do. We trust you with our lives individually. We trust you to keep us on mission. Lord, would you just move mightily and be in and through us everything that the scriptures declare that you are so that we could experience a move of you in this generation through us, that we would marvel at, that we would worship you for because of how great you are? Lord, let us become less so that you can become more. We give you all glory, all honor and all praise in the mighty and matchless name

of Jesus. Amen and amen. Would you praise God this morning with me?