

All Kinds of Prayer
Ephesians 6:18

Richard Tow 01.24.16

Intro

Both the AFC and NFL playoffs are scheduled for today. How many plan to watch at least one of those games? I enjoyed watching the second half of the Broncos/Steelers game last week. The thing I like about watching football is the variety of plays that can happen in one down. The ball snaps and you're watching to see what play the offense is going to use, and then how the defense will react to it. Will they run the ball or throw a pass? Which receiver will they pass to and will the quarter back have time to get the ball thrown? Tennis is not as exciting for me to watch because it seems like they're just trying to hit the ball back and forth over the net and within bounds. However, I don't know much about how tennis is played. People who know more about it, find it interesting because they understand the dynamics of where to direct the ball, where the player positions himself, and a whole lot of other details.

How does all this relate to my subject this morning? First I want to say that prayer is boring if you don't know very much about it. Tennis is boring to me because I don't understand the game very well. I know a little more about football and all the options that are available. The more you know about prayer, the more interesting it is. And of course, it's more interesting to *play* a football game than to just *watch* the action. You can make that application to prayer for yourself.

There will be four very good teams on the field in these championship games today. One reason they are in the championships is that each one has a variety of play options in its arsenal. A one-dimensional team cannot make it to the playoffs. A team that is only able to throw the ball, but has no running game, is at the mercy of a team that can do both. Great teams have to have a strong defense and a strong offense. Can you imagine a team trying to win one of these championship games with only one good play? Every time they get the ball, they run a sweep to the right. That team would be lucky to ever get any score on the board. The ability to maneuver in a variety of ways is essential for an effective football team.

My favorite sport is Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fighting. Not that I do any of it myself at 67 years of age. But I like watching the sport for the same reason I like football. You never know which move the fighter is going to make. A one-dimensional fighter in MMA is not likely to win his match. MMA fighters have to be good boxers; they have to know how, when and where to kick; wrestling skills and jiu-jitsu can be important when the fight goes to the ground.

How does that relate to my subject? In Ephesians 6 Paul compares the Christian life to a battle. Like it or not you're in a battle. Satan is opposing the kingdom of God and we are in the middle of the fray. You can wish it weren't so; but that will not make the reality go away. So instead of telling us how to avoid the battle, Paul tells us how to win it. In verses 10-17 he tells us how to arm ourselves for the battle. I preached on the armor of God a couple of months ago.¹ After listing the pieces of armor, Paul makes this statement in verse 18, "*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.*"² That is our text this morning. My primary focus will be this phrase: "...with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Both the Amplified and New

¹ See my message, "Equipped for Battle," preached 11.01.15.

² All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

International versions make this a little clearer. The Amplified says, "...with all [manner of] prayer and entreaty." The NIV translates the phrase, "...with all kinds of prayers and requests...." Do you pray "...with all kinds of prayers...." Or are you one-dimensional in your prayer life? Using the football analogy, would you like to learn some new plays; not just on paper but to be used on the field? Someone might answer, "But I pray." That's the same thing every losing team in the NFL can say. They play, but they lose because they have not developed their skills and tactics as well as the other team. Of course, our opposition is "*not flesh and blood, but... spiritual wickedness in high places*" (Eph. 6:12 KJV).

What are the kinds of prayer available to us? I want to begin to answer that question. This will not be an exhaustive list and each category is not mutually exclusive of other descriptions. My goal is to alert you to the possibilities and encourage growth in our prayer lives.

1. Petition

That's probably the most common type of prayer and the one that many Christians rely on almost entirely. This is the bread and butter of prayer. Jesus told us to ask and it would be given to us and James said that we "*have not because we ask not.*"³ Petition is asking God to meet my need. Jesus taught us to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" That's petition. It's not selfish to ask God for help. It's not selfish to ask God for things. It actually honors God and His relationship with us.

Jonah found himself in a fix of his own making. Because of his disobedience, a storm came and he wound up in a fishes' belly. It was a matter of life and death. Jonah later testified, "*I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me*" (Jonah 2:2). Even though Jonah hadn't done everything right, God still heard his prayer and helped him. Petition is the most natural kind of prayer. When we're in trouble or when we have a need, it is normal and right to call out on God for help. Most of us understand this kind of prayer. We just need to use it more.

2. Thanksgiving

Phil 4:6 tells us to "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*" Instead of worrying about things, we should take them to the Lord in prayer, make our requests known unto God (that is the prayer of petition). But notice those two additional words in this passage: "*with thanksgiving.*" Thanksgiving does not come as natural as petition. Our kids don't have to be taught to petition. As soon as they're out of the womb they're screaming for something. But we have to teach them to be thankful. When we have learned to mix thanksgiving into our prayers, we are maturing and making some progress.

Why is thanksgiving so important? God doesn't need His ego stroked. He is completely sufficient within Himself. He delights in us; but He is not dependent on getting accolades from us. We benefit when we develop a grateful heart. Our faith is strengthened when we take time to count our blessings and thank God for His goodness to us. All petition with no thanksgiving orientates us toward problems, rather than toward God. It's when we lift our eyes toward heaven and give thanks that we are assured of His faithfulness. If He answered that prayer, He can and will answer this prayer. Of course, the most common prayer of thanksgiving is over our meals. I try to pray over every meal because that is three times a day that I pause and thank God for His goodness. Are you being thankful for what God has already done for you?

³ Luke 11:9; James 4:2.

3. Worship

In thanksgiving we are appreciating the things God has done for us. In worship we are appreciating who God is to us. Ps 99:9 “*Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His holy hill; For the LORD our God is holy.*” Thanksgiving is good preparation for worship. It’s difficult to worship God from a heart of ingratitude. So if you’re having trouble entering into worship, take time to count your blessings and thank God for some things. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; then worship at His footstool.⁴ Then turn your attention on the Source of all the goodness in your life. Then exalt Him for who He is. The Seraphim in heaven cry, “*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty.*”⁵ Worship is a response to God’s goodness and love. “*We love Him because He first loved us.*”⁶

I’m not trying to expound on each one of these; but I am suggesting that this should be part of your personal prayer life. We don’t just worship God 30 minutes a week during the Sunday morning song service. We make it a lifestyle. Then when we come together it culminates in a powerful experience of God’s presence.

My working definition of prayer is “communication with God.” We live and breathe prayer in all its various forms and expressions. Worship is one of those expressions. If we’re singing songs and we’re not communicating with God in the adoration of Him, then we are not praying. But if I’m singing a song that says, “Come Holy Spirit we need you; come sweet Spirit I pray...” I’m genuinely asking the Holy Spirit to do that. I’m not just singing words, I’m praying. I am amazed at how many people go to church and just watch the song leader sing and don’t actually sing themselves. That is such a sad waste of time. What’s being offered is a time to communicate with the Lord in worship.

4. Confession

You probably said a prayer of confession when you were born again. Typically people will confess their sins and ask the Lord to forgive them; then ask Him to come into their lives as Lord.

Psalms 51 is a beautiful example of confession. There David confesses his sin with Bathsheba and asks forgiveness. The psalm opens with these words, “*Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions....*”

Jesus taught us to pray daily, “*Forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone that is indebted to us.*”⁷ It’s best to not rush through that prayer too quickly. Don’t just make it a general statement like, “If I’ve done anything to offend you, I’m sorry.” No, what did you do that would be displeasing to the Father? How have you grieved the Holy Spirit? Just as we name our blessings one by one, we also deal with our transgressions one by one. Why? because you cannot turn from something you haven’t even identified. And repentance (turning from it) is a part of the confession process. How should I behave differently next time? Is there a person I also need to confess this sin to? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you keep a clean slate.⁸ Make it a part of your prayer life. Step 10 of our Overcomers Outreach says, “Continued to take personal

⁴ Psalm 100:4; 99:5.

⁵ Isaiah 6:3 NIV.

⁶ | John 4:19

⁷ Luke 11:4

⁸ Psalm 139:23

inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.”⁹ This is a key to living above the power of sin. *“The blood of Jesus ...cleanses us from all sin.”*¹⁰ 1 John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* God’s part is the cleansing; our part is the honest confession.

5. Conversation

Prayer is a conversation with God. We talk to Him about what’s going on in our lives. We talk with Him about our work and how to get it done. We talk with Him about our families and concerns we may have. Throughout the day, we’re carrying on a conversation with God. You can do that and still get your work done. In fact, you’ll likely do a better job. How many are able to listen to the radio and work at the same time? Most of us can. And if we can do that, we can also be talking to and listening to God while we go through our daily routine.

Prayer includes asking God questions. In Psalm 10 David asked God, *“Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide in times of trouble?”* It’s ok to process your feelings with God. He knows them already. It’s ok to ask Him what’s going on. When Moses first went to Pharaoh with the word God had given him, Pharaoh made it worse on the Israelite slaves. He added the task of gathering straw and demanded the same production. This was the opposite of what Moses expected. Listen to Moses’ prayer in Ex 5:22-23 *“So Moses returned to the LORD and said, ‘Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? 23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.’”* There’s the question. The answer from God comes in the next verse, Ex. 6:1 *“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.’”*

When you ask God a question, listen for His answer. Listening is a big part of prayer. We must learn how to listen and not just talk at God. We must learn how to carry on a conversation with God in prayer. Sometimes we’re intense, as was Moses in Exodus 5. Most of the time, it is a casual conversation during our day. We spend a lot of time in conversational prayer with God.¹¹

6. Contemplative

Sometimes prayer is wordless. Sometimes it’s waiting on the Lord. Sometimes it’s stilling our hearts before the Lord and getting Him in focus. Ps 46:10 *“Be still, and know that I am God...”* There is a time to speak and a time to be silent.¹² Silent prayer is meditative in nature. It ponders who God is and what He does. It rests in His all sufficiency. If my mind is coming up with the grocery list, I have not yet entered into contemplative prayer. Waiting in God’s presence requires a disciplined mind; but it can be very rewarding. It can bring blessed assurance. David said in Ps 62:1, *“Truly my soul silently waits for God; From Him comes my salvation.”* Waiting, waiting in the presence of a holy, all-sufficient God.

Contemplative prayer can lead to precious intimacy with God. *“I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.”*¹³ Basking in the love relationship you have with the Lord; simply enjoying His presence is a mode of prayer.

⁹ This is the tenth step in the Alcoholics Anonymous twelve step program.

¹⁰ 1 John 1:7

¹¹ 1 Thess. 5:17 tells us to pray without ceasing. Conversational prayer is a big part of doing that.

¹² Ecclesiastes 3:7

¹³ Song of Solomon 6:3

7. Corporate

Listen to Jesus' promise in Matt.18:18-20, "*Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

There is an authority in corporate prayer that is not there in individual prayer. We need one another in order to fulfill the mission God has given us to do. When God's people gather in sincere unity and agree in prayer, Jesus said "*it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.*" Yes, we pray individually. There is something special about a husband and wife praying together. But authority is especially released when God's people gather in one accord and pray. We saw that happening in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church. You see it happening later in Acts 4 when Peter and John were threatened by the Sanhedrin and Acts 12 when Peter was imprisoned by Herod. God intervened powerfully in those situations because the church came together in prayer.

8. Tongues.

In 1 Cor 14:15 Paul talks about four expressions of prayer. "*What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.*" In the context, Paul unquestionably equates "*pray with the spirit*" as praying in tongues and he equates "*sing with the spirit*" as singing in tongues. Do you pray in tongues? Do you sing in tongues? This is a particular kind of praying that Paul urged believers to participate in. He said in 1 Cor. 14:18 "*I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all.*" Where did Paul do most of his praying in tongues? The next verse makes it clear that he mostly did that in his private prayer life.

But why would a person want to pray in tongues? 1 Cor. 14:4 "*He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself....*" Edify means to build up or strengthen.¹⁴ When I pray in tongues my inner man is strengthened. Out of that strength I can then minister to others. Paul said he prayed in tongues more than any of the other believers. He knew the value of building his own spirit in preparation for building up others. Praying in tongues opens the spiritual realm and enables a person to pray mysteries beyond what they rationally know.¹⁵ It is a powerful part of one's prayer arsenal. Don't leave home without it.

9. Groanings

Rom 8:26-27 "*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*"

The Living Bible says, "*...but the Holy Spirit prays for us with such feeling that it cannot be expressed in words.*"

Amplified says, "*...pleads in our behalf with unspeakable yearnings and groanings too deep for utterance.*"

¹⁴ EDIFICATION, EDIFY, EDIFYING (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

¹⁵ 1 Cor. 14:2. In this chapter Paul is correcting some misuse of tongues by the Corinthian church; but he also affirms the value of this kind of prayer (1 Cor. 14:39).

The Holy Spirit moves in your spirit, expressing a cry to God that does not come out in words; but you most certainly know it's happening. I have had times when I would literally double up from the internal pressure I felt. About all you can do is groan; but it is all getting communicated to the Father.

10. **Intercession**

Sometimes intercession is in the form of groanings. Sometimes it is expressed in tongues. It can be gentle or it can be intense. Petition is prayer for yourself. Intercession is prayer for someone else.¹⁶ We have several examples of Moses interceding for the children of Israel in the wilderness. Daniel interceded for the nation of Israel in chapter 9. He based his prayer on biblical revelation. He identified with the nation and confessed their sin. He asked God to fulfill His promise to bring them back to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity. In Genesis 18 Abraham interceded for Sodom.

Now let me tell you about the greatest intercessor of all time. His name is Jesus. Heb. 7:25 tells us we have a Great High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us. Don't think you're wasting time when you're interceding for others. You're doing the same thing Jesus is doing. It must be pretty important if the Lord of Glory spends His time doing it. Amen? So we get to join in with Him.

11. **Command**

Sometimes we pray against the obstruction. Sometimes we say to the mountain "*Be removed and cast into the sea.*"¹⁷ Sometimes we say to the demon, "Go and do not return." In Luke 4 Jesus commanded an unclean spirit to come out of a man. Paul commanded a spirit of divination to come out of a girl in Acts 16. Jesus rebuked the winds and brought calm to a storm.¹⁸ All of those prayers set boundaries in the spiritual realm and on nature. They are authoritative in nature.

Sometimes prayer is invading the enemy's territory; taking ground;¹⁹ telling the devil to turn loose of captives. Sometimes in prayer you're speaking directly to the enemy by the authority of the Holy Spirit. We never command God; but under God's authority we can command other things.

12. **Declarative**

I demonstrated that last week from Psalm 23. I had a friend who prayed Psalm 91 as a declarative prayer over his family every morning. With declarative prayer you're not asking God to do it; you're declaring it done by the word of the Lord. I know "*the Lord is my shepherd.*" Therefore I declare that "*I shall not want.*" Therefore, I declare that "*goodness and mercy will follow me.*" If you have prayed about something and gotten a 1 John 5:15 assurance that God has heard you on the matter, it may be time to switch from petition to declaration in that prayer.

In Numbers 6 the priests declared a blessing on the people.

Scripture plays a big part in all these expressions of prayer. Learn how to draw from the authority of Bible verses as you pray.

¹⁶ Jesus story in Luke 11:5-8 is a powerful example of intercession.

¹⁷ Mark 11:23

¹⁸ Matthew 8:23-27.

¹⁹ Matthew 16:18

Sometimes in prayer the Holy Spirit brings us into a prophetic mode where we are declaring what God is doing about an issue. The best way to move into a prophetic ministry is to first learn to pray prophetically. Learn how to partner with the Holy Spirit in prayer so that the prayer is flowing out of His unction rather than your own thinking.

Come back to our text in Eph. 6:18 “*praying always with all prayer* (NIV says all kinds of prayer) *and supplication in the Spirit.*” Note the phrase “*in the Spirit.*” We all want to grow in our capacity to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in our prayer lives, regardless of what kind of prayer we’re praying. That only happens in the doing. You can hear about it; you can read about it; all that is helpful—but we learn it best during hours of prayer. In our prayer time we learn to submit ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

My objective has been to encourage you to grow in your prayer life. Venture out of your comfort zone and try another expression of prayer that you don’t often operate in. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you. He is the best of all teachers. He will lead you into all truth.²⁰

Pray

²⁰ John 16:13; 1 John 2:27.