

Finally, if we want to lose the battle, point number 6.5 says we must be Derelict in Prayer.” Notice verses 18-20, “....”

The wealth of any church is in its prayer life. Big budgets and buildings can't undo the poverty of a prayer-less church. Prayer is the horse that pulls the carriage of ministry. Callous knees make a soft heart, but soft knees make a callous heart.

Last month 4 of us guys from EFC went to a conference in Cleveleand Ohio. At this conference 2 statements were made that absolutely pummeled me. Two different main speakers each said something about prayer that I am going to share with you. Daniel Henderson said: *“Prayerlessness is my declaration of independence from God.”*

What does your prayer life right now declare about you and God? Are you prayerless? I'm not talking about “grace” before a meal or quick bed-time prayers with kids. I'm talking about alone time, by yourself, where you don't let anything distract you because you are so determined to get alone with God and worship Him, get alone and beg Him to answer your requests, get alone and pour out your heart to Him for yourself, you wife, your children, your church family, your lost friends and relatives. Prayerlessness is my declaration of independence from God. Are we prayerless? The strength of the Church is measured by the private prayer life of its people. Our corporate prayer life is not the engine, but the expression of our prayer life. If we are weak at home alone we are weak at Church together. The whole is only as strong as the parts. If we are prayerless we are saying to God *“We don't need you, we can do this on our own.”*

This is where the 2nd statement I heard at that conference comes in. I heard this and I almost got up and left the rest of the session to go and pray. I should have. Christopher Ash said, *“Many churches can continue to run without the blessing of God.”*

Oh. My. Did you hear that?! Oh, if we grew to 1000 members, if we had foreign missionaries all over the world, if we had money coming out of our ears, if we were turning away volunteers because we had too many, if we were building a bigger church and planting more churches and if we had a name in West Michigan and we were really something but God never once had anything to do with it let us weep! Let us weep! Did you hear that?! *“Many churches today can continue to run without the blessing of God!”* If God is not with EFC and it is

not His grace and His power and His Spirit that is blessing us and it is all of our own doing then let each one of us weep! Psalm 127:1 says “**Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain!**”

Our prayer is our proof of our dependence upon God and if we are prayerless and successful at the same time, WOE TO US! Like the temple in Jerusalem of which Jesus wept over, not one stone of our monument will be left upon another. It will all burn. Jesus Christ said, “**I will build my Church**” (Matthew 16:18). WOE TO US if we build something of which He has no part in.

I want to draw out 5 points regarding prayer from these verses.

First, prayer is according to the will of God. Notice he says to **pray in the Spirit**. To pray in the Spirit means to pray with the Spirit. Paul just said in Ephesians 5:18 to be full of the Spirit, meaning to be under the control of the Spirit. Our prayers should be led by and guided by the Spirit of God. How does that happen? By letting our minds be controlled by the Spirit. Romans 8:5, “**Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.**” When we set our minds on the things the Spirit desires – righteousness, holiness, peace, wisdom and so on – then we will pray according to God’s will. Be led by the Spirit and then you will be led to pray in God’s will.

Second, prayer is the atmosphere of our lives. He says in verse 18 **and pray in the Spirit on all occasions...** and at the end of the verse he says, “... **and always keep on praying...**” Let me offer 2 ways to keep prayer as the atmosphere of your life and to always be praying.

First, pray throughout the day. When you’re at home, at work, in the car, especially in traffic, let every setting be a prayer room. Let every environment be a prayer altar. The key to this is keeping your mind on God. When your mind is on God your mouth is open. In other words, the more you are conscientious of God the more you will speak to Him.

The 2nd way to always keep on praying is to have set routines of prayer. You can’t live on the multi-tasking prayer-life just described. You need to have what the older generations called a “prayer closet” and you need to get in it. [*Illustration – Spurgeon, pg. 35, wouldn’t let anyone interrupt his prayer time*]

You need to be like Daniel who set aside 3 times a day to pray. He went into his room, closed the doors and windows, turned off His iPhone and prayed. “*Daniel’s not as busy as me.*” Baloney, he was the 2nd highest official in Babylon, he had more things to do than any 3 of us in here today. I hear a lot of people doing the Daniel Plan or the Daniel Diet or Daniel Fast. Is anyone doing the Daniel Prayer Plan? You don’t have to set aside 3 times a day, but, have you thought about setting aside just 3 times a week? You say, “*I’m too busy.*” Then let me suggest that is exactly what you are – too busy. And let me suggest also that being too busy is a sin. If you allow your busyness to keep you from praying, you are sinning. After all, it was the prophet Samuel who said, “***Far be it from me to sin against the Lord and not pray!***” You neglect God in prayer ? for what? Yes, I am guiltling you. Guilt is what you should feel, perhaps it will compel you to start praying. Better to get back on track with prayer due to a guilty conscience than not get back on track at all. It’s high time we get too busy in prayer to be able to do some of these things that have kept us from praying.

Third, use an assortment of prayers. He says, “***with all kinds of prayers and requests***”. Paul said in Let me offer you some ideas for different prayers.

First, praise God. Psalm 33:1 says, “***Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.***” This will mean you have to get to know who He is. If we don’t praise God we don’t know God. God is to be known, and, knowing Him gives birth to praise

Second, give Him thanks. Praise God for who He is, thank Him for what He has done. Praise Him for how good He is, thank Him for how good He has been. Start a blessing list. I started one. Ephesians 5:20 says, “***always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.***”

Thirdly, confess. If you’ve said or done something and then confess it. First John 1:9, “***If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.***” Name the sin specifically to God. The Holy Spirit and your conscience will go to work on you if you’ve sinned and need to confess.

Fourthly, ask. Request things of God. James said ***you have not because you ask not.*** Jesus said, “***Ask and it will be given to you.***” He told the parable of

the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18 to teach the disciples that they should always pray and not give up. In other words learn the art of perseverance in prayer. Shame on the man or woman who says, *“Well, I did pray about it and nothing happened.”* Like God is a slot machine and you just pull the lever and all your dreams come true. As though God is obligated to jump when someone who has nothing to do with Him flips a half-hearted prayer laced with doubt up to Him.

Learn the sport of wrestling with God in prayer, and like Jacob saying ***“I will not let you go until you bless me.”*** Learn to be like the prophet Samuel who said, ***“Far be it from me to sin against the Lord and not pray!”*** Learn to be like your Lord who according to Mark 1:35 ***“got up early before it was light and went somewhere alone to pray.”*** Or as in Matthew 14:23 when he stayed up at night to pray. When was the last time we lost an hour of sleep because we were burdened to pray for someone in our family or in church? We lose sleep to play on FB and watch TV and be at our kids’ games. Have we lost sleep because we just *had* to pray?

Fourthly, prayer must raise your alertness. ***“Be alert!”*** the apostles says in verse 18. So often prayer is connected to the command to be ready and be alert. Colossians 4:2 says, ***“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful...”*** First Thessalonians 5:6 says, ***“let us be alert and self-controlled..”*** First Peter 5:8 says ***“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”***

We need to be ready and alert for 2 things. First, we need to be ready for the enemy’s attack. Satan is looking to attack and he is watching us to see when we are vulnerable. The more we neglect prayer the more vulnerable we are.

Secondly, we need to be ready for our Lord’s return. We are taught again and again in Scripture to be ready for the Lord’s coming. Philippians 4:20 says, ***“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** In 1 Corinthians 1:7 Paul said, ***“Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”*** There is a reward for those whose hearts are like this. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:8, ***“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.”*** Let us devote ourselves to prayer that we may be alert to the enemy’s attacks, and ready for our Lord’s coming.

Fifthly and finally, prayer accompanies the advancement of the Gospel. Notice Paul's plea for the advancement of the Gospel. Pity on us if we do not evangelize, and we are twice as pitiful if we do not pray for the lost. Why should we ever expect God to go to the lost in our lives if we don't go to Him for them? If God only cared as much about them as we do how much would God care?