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## A Soldier's Prayer

*“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6:17-18)*

As a young boy, I would spend hours “playing army.” If I was not in the back yard with neighbor children, playing with our toy guns, then I was in my house spending hours meticulously setting up my army soldiers on the floor and carrying out mock battles. I don’t want you to think that I have this streak of violence within me. I just liked soldiers and all that went with it.

It is no surprise, then, that I have always been attracted to Ephesians 6. Since my childhood, my imagination was captured by Paul’s description of the Christian as, well, what else—a soldier.

*“Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:13-17).*

What is not to love in those verses for a sixth-grade boy who loves to play army? Years later, I looked more closely at that verse. One would think that when someone is equipped in such a way, they would then

go immediately into battle. Take a look at the verses that follow:

*“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me . . .” (Ephesians 6:17-19a).*

Pray. Three times Paul mentions to pray. Is this why the Christian gets suited up with the armor of God? There I was, expecting to see some reference to the Christian rushing into battle wielding the sword with fierce determination. Instead—pray.

To be honest, it seemed at first a little like a letdown. All this cool armor, and I am told to pray. That doesn’t sound very spiritual, but it was honestly my first thought. As time went by however, I saw it from another perspective.

I once heard it said that, “Prayer is not preparation for the battle; prayer *is* the battle.” I did not understand what that meant at first. How is prayer a battle? I thought back to Ephesians 6, and the lights began to come on, especially when I looked earlier in the chapter:

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and*

*against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand”* (Ephesians 6:10-13).

Stand your ground against spiritual forces! When the day of evil comes, stand your ground. Finally, it dawned on me. The battle is against Satan and his demonic forces, and the battleground is prayer. Satan hates it when we pray. Listen to what some have said about prayer (taken from “The Book of Positive Quotations”, J. Cook):

“Prayer is a strong wall and fortress of the church. It is a goodly Christian’s weapon” (Martin Luther, p. 160).

“We can do nothing without prayer. All things can be done by importunate prayer. It surmounts or removes all obstacles, overcomes every resisting force and gains its ends in the face of invincible hindrances” (E.M Bounds, p. 127).

“Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays” (Soren Kierkegaard, p. 127).

“Prayer is an end to isolation. It is living our daily life with someone; with him who alone can deliver us from solitude” (Georges Lefevre, p. 127).

“God shapes the world by prayer. Prayers are deathless. They outlive the lives of those who uttered them” (E.M. Bounds p., 128).

“God has so constituted things that prayer on the basis of Redemption alters the way in which a man looks at things. Prayer is not a question of altering things externally, but of working wonders in a man’s disposition” (Oswald Chambers, pg. 130).

“The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray (Samuel Chadwick, p. 128).

Satan hates it when we pray. He knows all too well the words and truth of the hymn, “What A Friend We Have In Jesus” (The Lutheran Hymnal, #457):

Have we trials and temptation?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged,  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a Friend so faithful,  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness,  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,  
Cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge,  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer;  
In His arms He’ll take and shield thee,  
Thou wilt find a solace there.

The last thing Satan wants is for us to pray, finding comfort and strength in the arms and presence of God. Maybe this is why those who have spent a lot of time in prayer testify as to how hard it is. Martin Luther said, “No other work requires more labor and effort and therefore is more efficacious and fruitful” (Luther’s Works, Vol. 25, p. 460). Centuries later, Richard Foster echoes a similar thought:

“We today yearn for prayer and hide from prayer. We are attracted to it and repelled by it. We believe prayer is something we should do, even something we want to do, but it seems like a chasm stands between us and actually praying. We experience the agony of prayerlessness” (1992, p. 7).

Prayerlessness—that wilderness of having no energy or even desire to commune with God in mutual conversation. It is an all-too-familiar place for some, but not safe. Martin Luther said, “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.” Prayer is the battle. As I ponder that thought, my mind is drawn to an Old Testament story that speaks volumes to me regarding prayer. It is found in Exodus 17: 8-13:

*“The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.’ So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.”*

Israel was facing a deadly enemy, intent on destroying them. Moses calls together his leaders to devise a battle plan. When all was said and done, Moses tells Joshua to choose some men and go out and meet the enemy. Moses will then take two others with him and go up to the top of the hill. There he will pray. He would pray for their victory. He would pray for their courage and their perseverance. What follows is enlightening. As long as Moses has his arms extended in prayer, the Israelite army is victorious. As soon as his hands tire and he lowers them, Joshua’s troops are defeated. Moses raises his arms again, and Joshua and the army are victorious. He lowers them, and they are defeated. Eventually, Aaron and Hur will hold his arms up and the

victory is secure. As much as the battle was being fought with the Amalekites down below, behind the scenes, the other battle being waged was with Moses in prayer. That kind of battle can be very tiring. As I consider Moses, it raises within me two questions: First, who supports me and holds me up in prayer? Just as important is the second question: Who am I supporting and lifting up in prayer as they go through their battles?

Paul’s words in Ephesians 6:17 urge us to stand firm and pray, not only for ourselves, but also for all the saints. Certainly there are many saints who we know personally that we can lift up their arms in prayer. Let us not forget, though, to pray for the saints throughout the world. Paul writes not only to Christians of his day, but ours as well:

*“Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you”*  
(2 Thessalonians 3:1).

We may not all be “missionaries” in the sense of God calling us to journey to distant lands and live in a foreign culture; however, we are all mission responders when we support those whom God has called and gifted for that purpose. The third stanza of “Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling” (The Lutheran Hymnal, #496), teaches us how we can support LCMS and other Christian missionaries with our prayers and our resources:

If you cannot be a watchman,  
Standing high on Zion’s wall,  
Pointing out the path to heaven,  
Offering life and peace to all,  
With your prayers and with your bounties,  
You can do what God demands;  
You can be like faithful Aaron,  
Holding up the prophet’s hands.

The weariness I see in Moses is the same kind of weariness I hear in Jesus’ voice in the Garden of Gethsemane as He asked His disciples to stay awake and watch in prayer

with Him. The battle ahead was fierce and He was weary. The fierceness of this battle was portrayed so vividly in the movie, “The Passion of The Christ.” The movie created quite a stir within the hearts of many believers, and certainly at a different level among the public. The scene of Christ’s beating and crucifixion was riveting for some and repulsive for others.

As dramatic and emotional as some of those scenes were, the opening scene gripped me more than anything else in the movie. The opening scene shows Christ in the Garden wrestling in prayer. There is an intensity that goes deeper than the physical beating that grabs at my heart in the first frame of the movie. As they prepare to leave the Garden, Mel Gibson takes license to show something that Scripture does not record—an encounter between Jesus and Satan. An ugly snake slithers toward Jesus. Slowly, Jesus raises His foot and stomps on its head. I wanted to cheer at that moment. There is no written record of that happening in the Garden (at least not in the Garden of Gethsemane). In another garden, however, that very scene was foretold. In the Garden of Eden, God would declare to Adam and Eve and the serpent,

*“And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).*

The battle for Jesus was fought on the Cross as He endured the shame and even the rejection of His own Father. Hours before

the Cross, there was another decisive battle. This one was fought with Jesus on His knees in prayer. When Jesus declared, “*Not my will, but Your will be done,*” the head of Satan might as well have been crushed.

This one thought gives new meaning for me when I end my prayers by saying, “In Jesus’ Name.” Not only is His name the only way I gain access to the Father, but also when I close my prayers in this way, it is as if I were saying, “Jesus you understand.” You know all too well what it is like to wrestle in prayer. You understand the difficulty in surrendering one’s will.”

Prayer may well be the battle, but rest assured the war is won. The head of Satan has been crushed. Now when you find yourself wrestling with God in prayer, know without a doubt that God hears. Through the prayers offered by His Son, both those at the throne right now and those offered in the Garden, He promises to hear you. He will help you stand firm. He turned a deaf ear to His Son once. He has bound Himself to never do that again to anyone who comes to Him in the name of Jesus.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, for your night of agony and prayer in the Garden, I thank you. You hungered for someone to watch with you that night, but you were left alone. Now, as I come to you with my burdens and the needs of others, my joy is in knowing that you will take me in your arms and shield me. Satan will assault me, but the victory is secure through your death and resurrection. For this and so much more, I love you and praise you. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** Ask three people in your inner circle of friends and family what you might pray about on their behalf. This may be a good time to expand your prayers for those three people for whom you have been praying.

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 26

**From the Book of Concord:** “This should be kept in mind above all things so that we may silence and repel thoughts that would prevent or deter us from praying, as though it made no

great difference if we do not pray, or as though prayer were commanded for those who are holier and in better favor with God than we are. Indeed, the human heart is by nature so desperately wicked that it always flees from God, thinking that he neither wants nor cares for our prayers because we are sinners and have merited nothing but wrath. Against such thoughts, I say, we should respect this commandment and turn to God so that we may not increase his anger by such disobedience. By this commandment he makes it clear that he will not cast us out or drive us away, even though we are sinners; he wishes rather to draw us to himself so that we may humble ourselves before him, lament our misery and plight, and pray for grace and help. Therefore we read in the Scriptures that he is angry because those who were struck down for their sin did not return to him and assuage his wrath and seek grace by their prayers” (The Large Catechism, The Lord’s Prayer, pp. 441-442.10-11).