

Series: “Battle Plan – Prayer” Sermon: “Basic Training” – Ephesians 3:14-21
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Brothers and Sisters in Christ: In war or human conflict, if you are going to be successful, you have to have a plan, a battle plan. And to successfully carry out that plan, you need people who are trained. That’s why all soldiers go through a period of basic training.

The same could be said for our spiritual lives and disciplines. I think we can all agree that there is a spiritual war going on in our world between God and the church with the forces of evil. God or even a mention of Him is being systematically eliminated from most spheres of human activity, especially schools, government, morals and values. The Apostle Peter said, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...”

In other words, there’s a battle going on out there, and you have to be ready. So, as we begin a series on prayer, we know that prayer can be a powerful weapon. So, we need some training on how to use it effectively and powerfully as soldiers of the cross of Jesus Christ. So today, we begin with a little basic training in prayer.

A businessman was troubled about an upcoming important deal for his company and so he went to church to pray for God to help him. By chance, he knelt down next to a man who was praying for \$100 to pay an urgent debt. When he overheard the poor man’s prayer, the businessman took out his wallet and pressed \$100 into the other man’s hand. Overjoyed, the man got up and left the church. The businessman then closed his eyes and prayed, “And now, Lord, that I have your undivided attention....” When I pray, I want God’s attention. I want to “feel” that God is there and He’s listening.

What kind of prayer would accomplish that? What kind of prayer would absolutely get God’s interest? Well it’s recorded in Ephesians 3. In verse 8 and 9 Paul tells us that God gave him grace so that he could “preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things.” And then in verse 14 he says: “For this reason I kneel before the Father”

What Paul is saying is this: The reason I’m praying this particular prayer is because God has a goal... God has an agenda. God wants everyone to know the riches that can be found in Christ. God wants everyone to know His incredible love which sent Jesus to our fallen world to buy us back from sin through His suffering and death, and bring us forgiveness, life, and salvation through His resurrection. AND He wants the mystery of His salvation to be so plain and so obvious that others will understand it and want what we Christians have. That’s what God wants...and Paul is praying a prayer focused on achieving that objective. Everything in Paul’s short prayer concentrates on God’s goal.

Most often when we talk about prayer we tend to focus on MY prayers... about the things that I want when I pray. Let me ask you a question: When you’re in a

conversation with someone and you want their attention, what should you talk to them about? What will get them interested in what you have to say? You talk about them... about the things that they care about! You talk about their kids, their grandkids, their spouse, their job, their home...the list could go on and on. That will get someone to pay attention to what you have to say faster than anything else you can do.

Jesus said that our relationship with God works much the same way: He said in Matt. 6, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

In other words, if our lives... and our prayers... are focused on seeking God's Kingdom 1st then we'll get God's attention. And when we get His attention then He promises He will give us what we need.

Even Jesus prayed that way. Do you remember the night that Jesus was betrayed? He prayed three times that God would remove the cup of His suffering, to remove the cup of His impending crucifixion. But each time Jesus ended His prayer with one very important phrase: "Not my will but yours be done."

So, when Paul prays this prayer, he's asking for God's Will to be done. He's praying for something he knows God wants done.

- God wants everyone to know how wonderful Jesus is...What He sacrificed for us...
- AND God wants that message to be so plain and so obvious that others will understand it and want what we Christians have.

So what does Paul pray for? What can he pray for that will make God's message powerful and vocal and appealing to the world? Well, he prays for the church. Paul prays for the local congregation at Ephesus, and for Mount Olive, Anoka.

Paul prays 3 things for that church (and our church)

1. He prays that God will strengthen them by His Spirit
2. He prays that Christ will dwell in their hearts by faith
3. And he prays that they be rooted and established in love.

WHY? Why would Paul pray for this? Why not just simply tell the church to do it?

Well, two reasons occurred to me, and they kind of overlap. 1st Paul prays for God to do this for the church because he realizes the church isn't designed to operate as a purely social organization. The church can exist and it can survive without God's direct involvement... but it can't thrive and fulfill its mission. The church was not designed to run merely on its own strength, or on its own efforts and abilities.

2ndly, IF a church does try to go it alone... without praying for God's presence and power, then that congregation runs the risk of having all kinds of problems. In order for a church to be everything God intended it to be, it MUST HAVE God's Spirit empowering

it AND it MUST HAVE Christ's presence surrounding it and pervading it.

Charles Spurgeon was a rather famous Baptist preacher in London during the middle 1800's. Once, five young college students were spending a Sunday in London, so they went to hear the famed preacher. While waiting for the doors to open, the students were greeted by a man who asked, "Gentlemen, let me show you around. Would you like to see the power plant of this church?" They were not particularly interested, for it was a hot day in July. But they didn't want to offend the stranger, so they consented. The young men were taken down a stairway, a door was quietly opened, and their guide whispered, "This is our power plant." Surprised, the students saw 700 people bowed in prayer, seeking a blessing on the service that was soon to begin in the auditorium above. Softly closing the door, the gentleman then introduced himself. It was none other than Charles Spurgeon.

5 Steps in Prayer

1. Where is my relationship with God? (John 15:7)
"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."
2. How is my attitude toward others? (Hebrews 12:14)
"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."
3. Willing to help the lost. (Proverbs 21:13)
"Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered."
4. Believe that God will DO IT! (James 1:4-6)
"Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."
5. Pray in Jesus' Name! (John 14:13)
"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

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