

# ***The Sending Church, Part 2: “Praying for Gospel Work”***

## **Ephesians 6:16-20**

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[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

### **Introduction**

Hello church family and friends joining us today! We are in the midst of our annual Missions Month. We try our best to keep missions on the forefront of the consciousness of our church and Missions Month is when we focus our teaching and corporate gatherings on a specific theme regarding missions.

The theme for us this year is *The Sending Church*. Last week, we started with how the sending church is a witness of Christ to our respective mission fields- “Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth.” Today we will learn how the sending church prays for Gospel work. I want to read what Eddie Byun wrote in his book *Praying for Your Missionary* regarding the need for the sending church to pray for their missionaries:

“In general, it’s ‘out of sight, out of mind.’ A number of missionaries shared that when they came back to their sending churches they felt discouraged because no one had read their updates, and some congregation members didn’t even know who they were. I want this book to be a means of getting our missionaries back on our radar on a daily basis. They need our prayers. They need our support.” – Eddie Byun, *Praying for Your Missionary*

This is so true, isn’t it? It’s easy to just get swept up with the busyness of our own lives that we can forget about the partnership we have with missionaries and our important role in missions work to pray. This is what we’ll be addressing today from Ephesians 6:16-20, entitled “Praying for Gospel Work.” We will learn what God’s Word says about being a sending church that prays biblically, persistently, faithfully, and corporately for Gospel work because they see themselves as participants in God’s mission through their ministry of prayer. May God instill this into our church today and as we learn how to be an awesome sending church!

### **Scripture Reading**

Let’s start by reading our Scripture for today. This is the end of Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church, and he is giving his final charge for Christians to put on the “armor of God” and engage in the spiritual battle in front of them. This is God’s Word...

Ephesians 6:16-20 (ESV): *16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Amen.

### **Proposition**

Here’s the “one thing” that summarizes the Paul’s main point from Ephesians 6:16-20:

***Stand strong in prayer as a church  
for Gospel work to the nations.***

## Organizational Statement

From this Scripture, we'll see two responsibilities the sending church has as we *stand strong in prayer as a church for Gospel work to the nations*: (first) the church engages in spiritual battle by praying and (second) the church partners with Gospel workers in prayer.

1. The church engages in spiritual battle by praying (16-18).
2. The church partners with Gospel workers in prayer (19-20).

## Prayer

Let's pray and ask for God's grace to transform our hearts and minds through this Scripture, Amen?

Heavenly Father, may you give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of you, having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, that we may know what is the hope to which you have called us, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe (Ephesians 1:17-19). We ask that you do this today in Jesus' name, Amen.

**Transition:** We'll start with the first responsibility of the sending church, focusing on verses 16-18, which is...

## Sermon Outline

### **I. The church engages in spiritual battle by praying (16-18).**

**A. Paul wrote that the church was to be strong in the Gospel, armed for battle all the time with the armor of God and their ministry of prayer. There are two truths I want to point out...**

1. First, we stand strong together in the Gospel in the midst of the spiritual battle (16-17).

Ephesians 6:16-17 (ESV): *16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...*

- a) The *shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit* are part of the "armor of God" that Paul wrote about starting in verse 10. This is what he wrote:

- o Ephesians 6:10 (ESV): *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.*

As Paul wrote this final section of his letter to the church of Ephesus, he stirred up his readers' hearts with this imagery of fighting in the spiritual battle. His main message was that Jesus Christ reconciled all of creation back to God through his ministry on the cross. Now they were to live out this Good News in their lives- this body of Christians were to stand strong and firm in what Christ did for them, in the midst of this spiritual battle.

- b) Paul told them in verse 16 that they would certainly face *the flaming darts of the evil one* as they followed Christ. In ancient warfare, fire-tipped arrows were used as a scary and affective long-range weapon. Therefore, Roman soldiers were outfitted with tall, wooden shields covered in leather and soaked in water, so that they could absorb the impact and flames of the "arrows" aimed at them. The church in Ephesus needed to be aware that they would face an aerial assault of fire-tipped arrows launched from the devil: casting doubt or shame, tempting into sin, or luring away

from the narrow road. But these Christians in Ephesus had a sturdy shield- their faith in Christ Jesus- that they could use to protect them from these *flaming darts*.

- c) Now I need to mention something really important here. When Paul talked about the *shield of faith*, it was never meant to be for a solo fighter on his own. A Roman soldier holding a shield like that in front of himself, but standing alone, was still vulnerable to getting hit by arrows from the top, sides, and back. But Roman soldiers never went into battle alone- they went as a group. *Show roman-testudo.jpg*. The Roman Empire had many military innovations, and the “testudo” battle formation was one of them. The “testudo,” was a group of soldiers forming a 360-degree shell with their interlocking shields, so they were almost impervious to arrows that came from all directions.
- d) Context: I think this is a wonderful illustration of how the church works too: Christians come together and provide 360-degree coverage of faith in the midst of the devil’s “arrows” that he shoots in scores at us. The Bible says that the spiritual battle is real: the devil himself prowls like a hungry lion, trying to prey on God’s children (1 Peter 5:8). The devil’s “arrows” can be anything that throws us off track: doubting in God’s goodness and care for us; getting entangled in fleshly desires, trusting in idols instead of God himself; having a spirit of unforgiveness or bitterness towards others; being distracted or divided in our attention upon God and his will...I could go on and on. If you stand alone, chances are high that you will get shot and wounded! But if we stand together with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we can move forward in living out God’s calling for us. We cover each other by calling out sin (lovingly of course), by chasing each other down, by speaking truth and encouragement into each other, and by praying for one another. This is what the local church does when we gather together and in the relationships that are formed! We cannot be lone soldiers!
- e) Context: Here’s another connection- but specifically to being the “sending church.” When we “send” Gospel workers to bring the Gospel to unreached people groups (like our disciple-making movement hub will be doing), they are going into the strongholds of the enemy, where unreached people and places have yet to ever receive the Gospel message. But they are not going alone! First and foremost, the Holy Spirit will be with them, as Jesus himself promised in the Great Commission. But also, we as HMCC, their sending churches, will also be standing strong with them in the Gospel, our shields of faith forming 360-degree protection around them. So, from verses 16-17, we stand strong together in the Gospel in the midst of the spiritual battle- as a church and as we send out Gospel workers from our church. Let’s talk about the “how” we stand together a bit more specifically now.
2. Second, we stand strong together in the Gospel by being committed to prayer (18).
- Ephesians 6:18 (ESV): *18 ...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...*
- a) From verses 16-17, the church was to stand strong together in the Gospel. Verse 18 isn’t a new sentence- it is a continuation of Paul’s train of thought! So, one crucial way that the church was to wield the shield of faith together in “testudo” battle formation was by *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication*. The church in Ephesus was to engage in the spiritual battle that they faced by praying! This is what one New Testament scholar wrote with respect to verse 18: “Theological grasp of the gospel (from verses 14-17) that does not result in prayer...is a dead carcass.” In other words, praying is an important way to bring the theological truths of the Gospel to life!
- b) Context: What is “praying” anyways? Let me just give a simple definition of prayer from Tim Keller:

- o “Prayer is both conversation and encounter with God. ...We must know the awe of praising his glory, the intimacy of finding his grace, and the struggle of asking his help, all of which can lead us to know the spiritual reality of his presence.” – Tim Keller, *Prayer*

So Keller says that prayer is conversing with God *and* encountering God. Within our prayers, we worship him, we enjoy intimate relationship with him, we express our dependence on him, and we experience his real presence with us. Prayer is awesome!

- c) Context: Now let me explain what makes prayer distinctly Christian. In and of ourselves, we cannot stand before God who is supremely glorious and infinitely holy. Our sin not only breaks relationship with God, it violates the righteousness of God and deserves eternal wrath! But the Gospel says that Jesus Christ endured the punishment of God's wrath on the cross *in our place*! He paid for our sins! But that's not it- Jesus also resurrected (that is, he rose from the dead three days after he died on the cross). He defeated sin and death, making new, eternal life possible. A person who is a Christian- in the biblical sense of this word- is someone who believes that Jesus did this for them and receives this gift of new, eternal life. This is what it means to say that a person is “saved by faith in Christ alone,” and anyone who professes this can stand before the one and true, glorious and holy God of the universe, enjoying this kind of conversation and encounter with God. Unlike the “prayers” of other religions, Christian prayer is most definitely not a requirement to earn merit or get right from God; prayer is a means of enjoying the benefits of the Gospel- relationship with God, provision and care from our Heavenly Father, and experiencing the changing of our hearts and wills.
- d) Now going back to verse 18, Paul says something subtle but super-important: *praying at all times in the Spirit*. This is also what makes Christian prayer distinct: a disciple of God the Son is connected directly to God the Father through God the Spirit living in them (Romans 8:11). In the Spirit we can pray at any time to receive guidance, wisdom, and strength. *Praying at all times* means that through the Holy Spirit, we have an open line of communication with God. It's the difference in communication just 30-40 years ago: *Show landline-telephone.jpg*. When I was a kid, the only way we could communicate to people far away was through a landline telephone. For our kids today, I have to explain what one of these things is! But now we have handphones that we can take almost anywhere and connect with people all over the world! The only difference is that our connection to God in prayer works *everywhere*- we never have a bad signal in Christ through the Spirit!
- e) Also, *praying at all times* doesn't mean that we must be super-spiritual, praying every moment of our waking hours...and even in our sleep! That's impossible! The word “time” in the phrase *at all times* isn't *kronos* time (which is biblical Greek for chronological time), but *kairos* time (which is biblical Greek for special, God-ordained opportunities). So I could rephrase *praying at all times* in this way: we can pray at all the God-given opportunities that he wants us to pray because of our connection to God through the Holy Spirit. This is an amazing weapon when we consider the spiritual battle we face as we strive to stand strong in the Gospel, isn't it?
- f) Context: I think that this is where we often fall short. We lose that sense of urgency; we drop our guards over time and we get too busy to pray; we are not ready to engage in the cosmic fight against the enemy; we are not standing strong in the Gospel and all the implications this has in our lives. But this is disastrous! This is like what happened in the first major battle in the American Civil War, called the First Battle of Bull Run in 1861. *Show bull-run.jpg*. It's famously nicknamed the “picnic battle” because spectators from the North (the two sides of the American Civil War were the Northern states versus the Southern states) showed up with sandwiches and opera glasses, expecting a casual and entertaining battle. Instead, these overconfident and clueless spectators were sent running for their lives as their army was

embarrassed and almost 5,000 total soldiers lost their lives. Unfortunately, this is often how we approach our lives as disciples of Christ as well- like we expect it should always be a party when actually it's always a spiritual war. Now don't get me wrong- this doesn't mean that we have to always be intense and serious- but I think this should make us at the very least more *prayerful*- being alert and persevering, consistent and urgent in our prayers.

- g) Context: Church, can I speak directly to us? I fear often that we are not standing as strong in the Gospel as we need to be because we do not stand *together* and because we do not have a strong ministry of prayer for ourselves or for others. If we truly understand the gravity of the spiritual battle and also that our victory is in Christ, why wouldn't be urgent and persevering in prayer? Why wouldn't we be committed to gathering together consistently in corporate pray- despite being busy and a million other reason not to? As we send our own brothers and sisters in Christ into the spiritual battle of the mission field, will we not stand behind them with all of heaven's weapons wielded as we pray? Remember, we stand strong together in the Gospel by being committed to prayer! Before we move on, let me share the first "life application" for us now.

→ **Life Application #1:** What do you envision your ministry of prayer to be? Take steps to develop your ministry of prayer.

- I don't consider myself as a super-spiritual person and I've never felt like I was awesome at prayer. But I also know that I want to be a man of prayer- intimate with God; drawing strength and conviction from him; and being used by God through my prayers for my family, church, and the world around me. So I try to pray 30 minutes to an hour every day. But I fail at this more than I succeed- which is totally my point! It is by grace that we pray- we don't need to be perfect as we pray; we pray in Christ and in the Spirit and then receive more of God's grace as we learn to pray!
- So envision what your prayer ministry will be and take steps to develop. Set aside a time and place to pray; make it a goal to pray for a certain amount of time; pray with others and join church prayer gatherings to learn and to persevere in prayer. This past year I've been writing out various prayer topics on notecards and praying through them- it's an idea I got from a book called *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller, which I'd recommend. And there are a lot of other resources to draw from as well.

**Transition:** Let's move on to the second responsibility of the sending church as we *stand strong in prayer as a church for Gospel work to the nations*, focusing on verses 19-20, which is...

## II. The church partners with Gospel workers in prayer (19-20).

**A. Paul wrote, asking the church to be his prayer partners as he and his team proclaimed the Gospel to unreached people and places. There are two more truths I want to point out...**

1. First, we can partner with Gospel workers by praying for their ministry of God's Word (19-20).

Ephesians 6:19-20 (ESV): 19 *...and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

- a) Paul understood that he was *an ambassador in chains* and that his ministry was to *proclaim the mystery of the gospel* to people and places who had not yet heard or received it. He expressed this in another letter he wrote as well:
  - 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 (NLT): 19 *For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful*

*message of reconciliation. 20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"*

This was Paul's calling and he dedicated his life- as we see in his four missionary journeys in the book of Acts- to this cause. He was the "apostle to the Gentiles" and one of the ground-breaking, pioneering missionaries who brought the Gospel to many unreached people and places in the first century.

b) So, we can see that Paul's ministry was primarily a ministry of God's Word: proclaiming it, modeling it, teaching it, and studying it with others. And he asked for prayer regarding his ministry of God's Word with others! In other places, with other prayer partners, he also had similar prayer requests. Look carefully at this:

- o Colossians 4:3 (NLT): *Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains.*
- o 2 Thessalonians 3:1 (NLT): *Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we ask you to pray for us. Pray that the Lord's message will spread rapidly and be honored wherever it goes, just as when it came to you.*

As we can see from these appeals, Paul asked for other kinds of prayers regarding his ministry of the Word. He asked for prayers for God to open doors and provide opportunities to explain God's plan of saving people through Jesus Christ. He also asked for prayers that the Gospel message would spread rapidly, multiplying, and that people would respond with faith and obedience wherever it was preached. You see, Paul coveted his fellow believers' prayers because he knew God used them to advance the ministry of God's Word to unreached people and places!

c) Context: The Gospel workers that we are sending out this June are also entering- quite literally- into a frontier situation. There are 3.2 million people in this unreached people group. According to the website, [joshuaproject.org](http://joshuaproject.org), only 0.08% of this population (which is about 2,500 people) are known to be Bible-believing Christians. As of now, there are only a handful of Bible-believing Christians working to bring the Gospel to this people group, so our Gospel workers will be a very small team in the midst of this vast mission field. They will sow the seeds in virgin soil- into hearts that have never heard of Jesus before; they will sow the seeds by proclaiming it, modeling it, teaching it, and studying it with others. So, although this place has a long history of spiritual darkness and there will most certainly be spiritual battle, we can also be praying for the ministry of God's Word among this people group. We can partner with Gospel workers by praying for their ministry of God's Word!

d) Context: We can pray specifically according to these Scriptures we just read:

- o Pray that the Gospel will spread and multiply rapidly among this people group, leading to faith and obedience (2 Thessalonians 3:1).
- o Pray that God will give them many opportunities to speak about God's salvation in Christ (Colossians 4:3).
- o Pray that they will speak the Word of God boldly in those opportunities as faithful ambassadors of Christ (Ephesians 6:19-20).

These are really solid prayers because they are biblical! And we can partner with Gospel workers by praying for their ministry of God's Word. Let's move on to the final truth from verses 19-20.

2. Second, we can partner with Gospel workers by including them in our prayer ministries (19-20).

Ephesians 6:19-20 (ESV): 19 ...and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

- a) Looking at verses 19-20 again, Paul's request is so interesting, isn't it? Some of the specific ways that Paul asked the Ephesian church to pray for him were stated in verse 19 (...that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel...) and then again in verse 20 (...that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak). When most of us think of Paul, we think of a guy who seemed super-confident, don't we? And yet here he is, asking for prayers that the Holy Spirit would give him the words to say when he was sharing about Jesus to people. Sometimes he felt like he didn't know what to say! And again, here he is, asking for prayers that the Holy Spirit would make him bold when he had the opportunity to preach the Gospel! Sometimes he felt timid or scared or unsure!
- b) In addition, as a Gospel worker, Paul faced all kinds of encounters with evil spirits, demon possessions, and other very weird spiritual phenomena. He faced push back, opposition, and even violence from people when he and his team preached the Gospel. He encountered natural disasters and all kinds of other dangerous situations. He experienced the heartache of people wandering away from Christ, betraying him, and poisoning the church with false teaching. He himself was imprisoned many times, including as he wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus. He *needed* the prayers of his partners in the Gospel for boldness, courage, perseverance, and strength!
- c) Context: So, the final implication for us is that we can partner with Gospel workers by including them in our prayer ministries. This is what it means to be the sending church! I hope that I've presented this Scripture clearly enough that God is convicting you deeply that we should be praying for our Gospel workers! There is an illustration that some dear friends of ours use regarding their prayer partners. *Show belaying.jpg*. In rock climbing, there is the glorious task of climbing up sheer walls of rock and stone, using small crevices for your fingers to squeeze onto and your toes to squeeze into. It is dangerous of course, but there is critical safety measure that rock climbers usually use- a system of ropes and carabiners (carabiners are these metal loops with spring-loaded gates) that are held on the ground by another person, called a belay. If that rock climber slips and loses his grip, he will not fall to his death if he has a belay. The belay will "catch" that falling climber and can hold the climber on the rope while he regains his footing. Prayer partners are "belayers" that hold the rope for fellow Gospel workers.
- d) Context: Now I use *fellow* Gospel workers intentionally here. As we learned in "part one" of this Missions Month series, we are all called to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. As you know, at the end of every Sunday Celebration, the presiding pastor says this: "HMCC, you are now sent out to transform the world!" The reason is because as the church "gathered" on Sunday becomes the church "scattered" from Monday through Saturday, we are *all* Gospel workers who have the ministry of God's Word to serve others: proclaiming it, modeling it, sharing about it, and even studying it so that others can discover who Jesus is through the Bible. We're *all* sowing the seeds of God's Word into the hearts of those around us in our households, neighborhoods, and city! In this way, we are a "sending church" that sends out all of its members for this Gospel ministry. Be encouraged, my brothers and sisters, that God can use us as Gospel workers in this way despite sometimes feeling like we don't know what to say and despite sometimes feeling timid, scared, or unsure.
- e) Context: Additionally, for those Gospel workers that we are sending specifically to the unreached and unengaged, we know *what* we can be praying for them, as they sow God's Word into their hearts. Let's pray that in those God-given opportunities- intentional or spontaneous- that the Spirit will give them the words to say as they testify about Isa Al Masih to the people in that city and province. Let's pray that God

will give them boldness- despite often feeling timid, scared, or unsure. Let's pray that they will stand strong together in the Gospel, despite the spiritual battle they face there. Let's pray that God will give them many opportunities to share the Gospel with the people there and the life-changing influence of the Gospel will multiply among that people group so that we can witness churches of this people group starting and growing! Amen and amen! So here's the second life application for us as we conclude this sermon.

- **Life Application #2:** Who are some Gospel workers that God is leading you to partner with in prayer? Think of how to incorporate them into your prayer ministry.
- A few months ago, I was convicted by God to pray every day for the team members of the disciple-making movement hub that we'll be commissioning in June. The reason was because I know of the spiritual battle they are facing even now; I also know that it can only be the all-powerful Spirit of God that can penetrate into the darkness, spread the Gospel to people, and to birth a church comprised of this people group.
  - For you personally, listen to the Holy Spirit 'snudges. Maybe it will be for the DMM workers- jump on those opportunities to join the prayer room or prayer drive this month. Maybe it will be for other Gospel workers that you know personally in Indonesia or in other parts of the world. Maybe it will be for someone's Word ministry in a specific unchurched or unwanted community, or in their workplace, or in their homes. Let's partner together in this way and get started with some small steps that we can take to pray for them consistently.

**Transition:** Well, that's it for Ephesians 6:16-20 and being a sending church that stands strong in prayer for Gospel work to the nations. Let's continue the conversation God has started with us by going back to our live Zoom gathering to respond to God's Word together!

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