

Well, good afternoon again. We come to our last sermon in Ephesians 6. Next week, we'll be going to the temptation of Jesus, I think, in Luke's gospel. And we'll finish out the temptation of Christ, and then we'll have two weeks left before the summer, and we might go to some of the later Psalms and look at, like Psalm 91, for example, a good battle Psalm to round off our study in spiritual warfare. Let's pick up our reading this morning in verse 16 of chapter six, and before we do, let's pray. Father in heaven, we bless you for your word. Its entrance brings light and life and strength to our hearts, clarity to our mind, and it puts backbone, oh God, in our spiritual skeleton. We pray this evening, this afternoon,

Lord, you will bless us as we come to your word, that you will equip us and teach us and strengthen us to be strong in the Lord and to hold the line against the forces of wickedness standing against us and around us. In Christ we pray, amen. This is the word of God. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, 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, And also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. Amen. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of God endures forever. Well, last week we left our spiritual warrior, as it were, in the quartermaster's office, clothed with the gospel, rooted in the truth of the Christian word and life view with a shield of faith and his sword, but he's all dressed up with nothing to do. And being in the quartermaster's office dressed like a soldier is one thing, but actually going to the front lines and fighting as a soldier is entirely another. And this morning in our text, The writer Paul is bringing us to the essence of what it means to actually engage in spiritual warfare. We are to pray. Prayer is the way we call down the power of heaven. Prayer is the way we resist the forces of hell that are set against us as Christians in the church. We're gonna be praying. That's what it means to be in the fight. Been thinking recently a lot about the book, Lone Survivor, that I read some years ago. You may have read that book, you may have seen the story. Marcus Luttrell, the lone survivor of a four-man Navy SEAL team who were ambushed behind enemy lines and assaulted by hundreds of irate Afghans. The Taliban coming down and ambushing them and attacking them in their thousands. And there was, let's see, there was Michael Murphree, he was the leader, the captain. There was Matthew Axelson, they called him Ax. There was Danny Dietz, and there was Marcus Luttrell. And when they were ambushed, they were kind of retreating through the forest. The Navy

SEALs, when they're ambushed, they're told to lay down withering fire. Those four-man fire teams can put down as much fire as a full platoon of ordinary soldiers. And so they're attacking, they're launching an attack and then retreating. And they're backing through the forest and they get to this escarpment. It's not quite a cliff, but it's practically a cliff of rocks and boulders down into the valley. And they've got nowhere else to go but down. And so they basically take a gulp and they jump off this escarpment and bounce and tumble down. And they get about halfway down the escarpment. They're badly bashed and bruised and wounded. And they get into a kind of a place of little cover, and the Afghans are all at the top, shooting down at them, and they're firing back. And Danny Dietz takes a round in his chest, it goes through just beside the arm piece of his chest plate, goes into his chest, takes out his right lung and his spine, so he's paralyzed from the waist down. He's mortally wounded. He's dying, but he's not yet dead. And one of the men run across to them, and it was the constant refrain in this awful battle that they were engaged in, as one by one they died. But the other men ran to him and said, Danny, are you still in the fight? Are you still in the fight? And Danny says, yes. And they turn him over, and they prop him up against a rock for cover, and they find his AR-15, put it into his hands, and Danny keeps on returning fire in his last moments as he's dying on the side of that mountain. But those words, are you in the fight, haunt me. And this morning, as we look in this battle of spiritual warfare, I wanna ask you each one, are you in the fight? You're dressed for war, you have the armor on, you go to church, you read your Bible, but are you in the fight? And the way you engage in the fight is by praying. And I wanna think with you this morning about that. This morning, as you're calling down, as it were, armament from the heavenly C-130 flying above us, those great, those death from above planes, the SEALs call them, and they've got gatling guns in them, and they've got howitzers and other artillery pieces that can just rain down death from above. And when we pray, we're calling down heavenly armaments, mercy for God's people, and destruction upon God's enemies, the devil and his angels. And prayer matters, and it's how we fight. And are you in it this morning? I want you to think about that with me this morning. First of all, I want you to think about the way of war, the way of war. Paul uses two words, prayer and supplication. Actually, the first two words in the Greek, in verse 18, it's with all prayer and supplication, praying at all times in the spirit, is actually the way the Greek is structured. With all prayer and supplication. The Greek word prayer means talking to God. Now, that sounds pretty elementary.

When we're praying, we're talking to God. It's the most noble thing you can ever do with your mouth. Our mouth is full of bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking and malice, Paul says earlier in Ephesians. And we can speak terrible words to our spouses, to our friends, to our brothers and sisters in the church. Sometimes God forgive us. But with our mouth when we pray, it's the most noble thing you can ever do with your tongue and with your lips. You're speaking to the creator of the universe. the giver and sustainer of life, the governor, the gubernator of human history. He holds all things in his hands and governs all creatures and actions from the least even to the greatest and all for his glory. We often think of prayer, don't we, as the people we're praying about, and the things we're praying about. Our prayer lists, as we kind of engage in Aretha Franklin's view of prayer, what she sings, the moment I wake up, before I put on my makeup, I say a little prayer for you. Prayer for you. We think about the people we pray for, and the things we pray for. Don't put on makeup, you'll be glad to know in the mornings. We can often think as well of prayer sometimes as the people were praying against Satan. The charismatics do that. They'll talk to Satan. We bind the spirit of whatever in this place. But did you ever see Paul do that? Did Paul walk into Corinth and say, I bind the spirit of pornography in this place? Did he walk into Athens and say, I bind the spirit of idolatry? It ain't as much scratch our heads. Who do you think you are talking to the devil like that? Now in prayer, first and foremost, we're talking to God. Now that's obvious, but you can forget that. Like when you're praying for your meal, dear God, thank you for this food, thank you for this day, we pray a blessing to our bodies, in Jesus' name, amen. And we say what the Puritans call a few weary words of thanks before our meal. And I can do that with my children. God, I wanna get them a food, right? But one of the most important things to do when you're praying is to settle yourself and still your soul and remind yourself you're talking to God. And heaven stops to listen when you do. In Jesus' name. praying, talking to God, and then supplications, it's the athos in the Greek, it carries the idea of making your needs known. It presupposes the goodness and generosity of God, that you're praying to the Father heart of God who is ready and willing to help you. When Luther prayed, he prayed with such reverence. They said you'd have thought he was praying to God, but he prayed with such boldness that you would have thought he was a child praying to his father. You pray to the giving hand of God. He feeds the sparrows, the scruffy little sparrow. He opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing. You go into Starbucks and you get your coffee and your biscotti, you sit outside on a spring day and you bite into your biscotti, and it's so hard, the crumbs

go everywhere. And you have to brush it off, it's annoying, right? And then a little scruffy sparrow drops down from the fence and runs across, white on rice, and gobbles up the crumbs. And to you, the crumbs falling are an inconvenience, but it's actually the goodness of your heavenly Father stooping to give the sparrow, the scruffy little sparrow, his morning breakfast. And he who feeds the sparrow, will he not feed you? He who helps the ravens, will he not help you when you pray? He's the one who gave his son, he looks out at this world, lost in the darkness and loving the darkness. And what does God think? I know, they've killed all of my prophets, but I'll send my son, my only son whom I love. Surely they'll listen to him. James calls him the giving God. If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally. The Greek actually is wonderful. Let him ask of the giving God, the God who continually gives. Jesus says, ask you shall receive, seek you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. What man of you, if his son asked for a piece of bread, would give him a stone? Or if he asked for a fish, would give him a serpent? Here, chew on this, son. It's a rattlesnake. And if you're evil and you know how to give good gifts to your children, will not your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him, Jesus says? If you doubt the goodness of the Father, look at the Son. Jesus said, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Did you ever see a person go to Jesus in need and Jesus turn them away? Was he ever too busy or too tired? No, he embraced everyone who came to him, even on the cross when the Roman soldiers took sledgehammers and drew rusty nails through his hands and his feet, and lifted him up on the cross and plunked him down into place, and the explosion of pain that went through his body. And Jesus sensed the fury of his father against those people. And what did Jesus say? Let them have it, father. No, he said, father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And the angels are looking down saying, isn't he just like his father? He that has seen me has seen the father. He never turned anyone away who did come, and when people wouldn't come to him, he wept. Outside Jerusalem, you see him, his arms open, and tears rolling down his face. Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I long to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. This is the God we come to in prayer. Large petitions with you bring. He's the giving God. We talk to him and we present our needs before him. The way of war. Secondly, the when of war. The when of war. In all, sorry, I'm reading the wrong verse. Praying at all times in the spirit. At all times. When you feel full and when you feel empty, when you feel strong and when you feel weak, exhausted, you can't put one foot past the other. When all your circumstances seem as if they're going for you and when all of the circumstances

of life seem to be against you, at all times, pray. When men abandon you on earth, pray. When God seems to be abandoning you from heaven, pray. Like Psalm 13, Lord, how long will you abandon me forever? He's praying. to the God who seems to be hiding and who seems to have abandoned him at all times. When you're terrified, Psalm 18, remember, I call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised and I am safe from my enemies. The cords of death encompassed me and the torrents of ungodliness terrified me, terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me, feel he's been lassoed by the grave and has been dragged toward the black depths. of the tomb, the cords of death surrounded me, the snares of death confronted me. He's trapped in my distress. I called upon the Lord and cried to my God for help. And he heard my voice. And out of his temple, my cry for help came before him into his ears. The earth shook and quaked and the foundations of the mountains were trembling and were shaken because he was angry. Pray at all times. When you feel love for God rising up in your hearts and when you feel resentment to God rising up in your hearts, at all times, pray. In the morning, first thing. In the evening, last thing. Matthew Henry says, the great secret of spending the day with God is beginning the day with God and ending the day with God. The when of war, at all times. The high of war. the high of war, don't go alone, pray in the spirit. Praying at all times in the spirit. That's why we so often go wrong, we try to pray in our own strength. in our own spirits, can't be done. We need the Holy Spirit to help us. Like when you swim, you swim in the water. When I was a child, I loved swimming, but we didn't live near a swimming pool, and I couldn't go there very often, and so I would pretend to swim across the living room carpet. All I got from my trouble was carpet burns. But it's right, it's much easier to swim through the water than through the carpet. You'll find it much easier to pray with the Spirit's help. He's our prayer partner. Remember how Paul puts it in Romans 8, it's wonderful. We have two prayer partners, one in heaven, Jesus, who always lives to pray for you, and one on earth, the Spirit of God, who always lives to pray with you. Jesus praying for you in heaven, and the Spirit praying with you on earth. I love this verse in Romans 8, where is it? Likewise, verse 26, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we, isn't it wonderful? Paul doesn't say you, you weak Christians. You don't know what to pray for, you poor people. But not me, I'm the apostle. "I know what to pray for, but not you." Now Paul says, "We do not know what to pray for as we ought, "but the Spirit himself intercedes for us "with groanings too deep for words. "And he who searches hearts and minds "knows what the mind of the Spirit is "because the Spirit intercedes for the saints "according to the will of God." I forget who it was said, "The Spirit fixes our

prayers on the way up.'" She's wonderful. Think about a little girl gathering flowers for her mummy in the garden, and there's buttercups and there's bluebells in the bouquet, and there's grass, there's weeds, there's even a worm in the bouquet, and some poison ivy, and she brings them to her daddy and goes, daddy, do you think mummy would like these? Daddy goes, yes, I think mummy would like these. And he takes the bouquet, out comes the worm, out comes the poison ivy, out comes the weeds, out comes the grass, and he adds a daffodil or two, and maybe some of the chrysanthemums from the front yard, a sprig from the azalea bush, he ties it up with string, it's a string, gives it back to the girl and says, you take these to your mummy, she'll love it. And she brings it in to her mummy, and mummy's heart is so happy, right? And it's like that with the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers full of worms and poison ivy and selfishness, and the Holy Spirit takes them out, and paints those faded, bruised petals we bring that are representative of our own righteousness, and he paints them with the blood of Jesus, and they become sparkling and beautiful. And he then brings our prayers in a bouquet to the Father through the Son, and they're acceptable in his sight. Don't pray by yourself. You have the Spirit's aid alongside you. And the best way to get the Spirit's aid, of course, is to bring the Spirit's word. Pray the Bible back to God. That's wonderful. You never run out of stuff to pray. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith and love and perseverance. Lord, help me be temperate. Help me be dignified. Help me be sensible, Lord. Help me be sound in faith and love and perseverance. Older women, likewise, are to be reverent in their behavior. Father, help me to be a reverent woman, not addicted to much wine. Help me to enjoy a glass of wine, but not too many, Lord. And you've got stuff to bring to God constantly. Younger women, likewise, are to be, sorry, teaching the young woman to be sensible, pure, kind, workers at home, being subject to their own husbands and so forth. And you've got all these prayer requests to bring to God. Every command is a request, Lord, give me the grace to obey this. Every promise is something you can claim before God's throne in heaven. You're never at a want of things to pray. Open one of the epistles and just start praying it back to God, and you'll find the Holy Spirit so delighted, because words that begin in heaven are the best words to bring to heaven. Pray the Bible back to God. Don't go alone. Don't fall asleep. Paul says, be on the alert. Like a sentry on the post in Afghanistan, and the intel has told him an attack is coming tonight. He's not checking his Facebook. He's not doing a selfie for Instagram. He's not texting his wife. He's on the alert. Watching every bush, is it moving? Watching every shadow, is it shifting? He's on the alert. Because he knows there's an enemy out to get him and you have an enemy out to get you who is tireless. He's a plan to

destroy you. He knows he's going to a lost eternity. And his one plan, his one priority is not to go there alone. He never sleeps. He's always proving your defenses. He's forever planning your downfall and mine. He's seen young ministers, I'm not young anymore, but he's seen middle-aged ministers like me a thousand times. He knows exactly, I know exactly how to lead this monastery. how to unbalance him, how to discourage him. I've done this a thousand times before. He's more intelligent today than he was when he, he's grown in skill and knowledge better now than when he persuaded your parents to exchange paradise for an apple. Don't give up. Don't give up. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance. Jesus, remember, told the parable of the persistent widow, that men would learn to pray and not lose heart. And yet when I come, Jesus says, will I find faith on the earth? It's easy to give up. God is so unpredictable. We pray to God that he would fulfill our dreams, he sends nightmares. We ask him to act now, and he sends patients to wait. We say, Lord, remove this burden, and he gives strength to carry it. And it can be very difficult waiting for God when he has the slows, as Dr. Davis would say. But we need to endure. There's a wonderful scene from that book in Lone Survivor. Matthew Axelson was shot through the face by an AK-47, which is a devastating round, high velocity. They thought he was dead. Then to make matters worse, an RPG landed where his body was laying, blew him off an escarpment 30 or 40 feet down into the valley. He was lying there lifeless and they thought he was dead. They had to run for their lives themselves. When they came back a week or so later to kind of take over the scene, they found Matthew Axelson's body 200 yards away from where he was seen lying. And they assumed that the Afghans drugged him, dragged him. But then they noticed his Sig P226 was locked back and empty. And strewn on the ground from where he died at last to where he fell at first, there were six empty 17 round magazines. He'd gone through six more magazines, he was in the fight, he persevered. And does not our father deserve more perseverance from his children than that dear soldier gave his last full measure of devotion? We gotta be on the alert, don't give up, don't fall asleep, gotta be persevering in prayer. And that can be hard. We've been looking for a house for nine months. It's a tiny trial, we just can't find a house, and it's driving me crazy. And it's so easy just to stop praying and just give up and become discouraged. And for trials small like that one and big like some of the ones you're going through, we've got to persevere in prayer. God might not have acted yet, but that does not mean he won't act yet in a little while. The how of war, don't go alone, don't fall asleep, don't give up. And then lastly and briefly,

the who of war. You need to pray with all your brothers and sisters. Keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints. We need your prayers. Each of you need the prayers

of your brothers and your sisters around you in this room. At times they will grow weak and they'll stop praying. Don't you stop praying. Isn't it wonderful in marriage? Often when I'm down, Catherine's up, and when she's down, I am up. It's rarely we're both down at the same time. We need to bear one another's burdens. Pray at all times for all the saints. That's overwhelming. Well, it is, but you can have your daily prayers for your inner circle. You pray every day. You can have your weekly prayers, your Monday list, your Tuesday list, your Wednesday list, your Thursday list, your Friday list, have a few on that list. Then you can have a monthly list, have a list of 1 to 31 and you put your people in there. If you prayed for 5 people a day on your monthly list, that's 155 people a month. And the problem is we try to put too many things on our daily list and you get overwhelmed and you stop praying. But if you have a monthly list, you just go to your day of the month, what day is today, 17th, you go to your monthly list and you look at your three or four or five people on that day and you can pray for them. And it's amazing how many people you can cover if you have a daily list, a weekly list, and a monthly list. Pray at all times. for all the people, and pray for your pastor. We need it, the pastors in this, not just me, but the rest of your pastors too. Pray also for me, he says, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly and to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. Paul prayed that words be given to him. Paul, you've written half the Bible. You don't need God to give you words. No, he does. And you have no idea how often I'm in the pulpit with a few pieces of fish and a few pieces of bread and think, how am I gonna get a sermon from this? And it's as if the Holy Spirit says, Neil, say this, and say this, and I say this as well. This is good, say this as well. And I'm going, thank you, keep it coming. And the reason it happens is because you're praying for me, right? Pray that I'll not be a coward, and I'll not be confusing, that I'll speak boldly. There are too many ministers in this world, and their supreme gift is boring people with the word of God. And there's nothing worse. I'll leave you with this, pray I'll not be this man. This is the pastor that Trollope described in Barchester Tower's Obadiah Slope. He describes him in most unflattering terms. His hair is lank and of a dull, pale, reddish hue. It's always formed into three straight, lumpy masses. His face is nearly of the same color as his hair, though perhaps a little redder. "It's not unlike

beef. "'Beef, however, one would say of a bad quality. "'His nose, however, is his only redeeming feature. "'It is pronounced straight and well-formed, "'though I myself should have liked it better "'did it not possess a somewhat spongy, porous appearance "'as though it were to be made cleverly "'out of a red-colored cork.'" Oh my goodness. Then he describes his preaching. There is perhaps no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilized and free countries than the necessity of listening to sermons. No one but a preaching clergyman has in these realms the power of compelling an audience to sit silent and be tormented. No one but a preaching clergyman can revel in platitudes, truisms, and untruths, and yet receive as his undisputed privilege the same respectful demeanor as the words of impassioned eloquence or persuasive logic fell from his lips. Let a professor of law or physics find his place in a lecture room, and there pour forth jejune words and useless empty phrases, and he will pour them forth to empty benches. Let a barrister attempt to talk without talking well, and he will talk but seldom. A judge's charge need be listened to perforce by none but the jury, prisoner, or jailer. A member of parliament can be coughed down or counted out. Town councillors can be tabooed, but no one can rid himself of the preaching clergyman. He is the bore of the age, the nightmare that disturbs our Sunday's rest, the incubus that overloads our religion and makes God's surface so distasteful. We are not forced into church. No, but we desire more than that. We desire not to be forced to stay away. We desire, nay, we are resolute to enjoy the comfort of public worship, but we desire also that we may do so without an amount of tedium which ordinary human nature cannot endure with patience. That we may be able to leave the house of God without that anxious longing for escape, which is the common consequence of common sermons. and we laugh, but it's true. I hear so many men preach in our churches, and I think, do you believe what you're saying, man? Can I believe what you're saying? Is there anything to be believed there at all, right? It's like that actor, oh, I forget his name, Whitefield knew him. And this Episcopal clergyman said to him, I can't understand it, he said. I speak about reality to the people, and they leave unmoved, whereas you speak a fantasy to them and they leave weeping. And the actor said, well, I can explain that in a moment, because you speak about, I speak about a fantasy as if it was reality, whereas you speak about reality as if it was a fantasy. Pray for me, pray for your pastors, that we'll have the aroma of Christ with us and we'll speak about things that are more real in the world in which we live in a way that will grip the minds and command the attention of the hearers, saved and lost, and that we will see revival come to our city as we proclaim the word of God to the people

of God in the power of the spirit of God and all to the glory of God. That's what we need and I don't have that in here. One of the dangers of having a long list of gifted pastors like Dr. Thomas, and Dr. Ferguson, and Dr. Connect, and the other guy, he was also famous, is that you think, I don't need to pray for Dr. Ferguson, he's so gifted, he's got that encyclopedic knowledge, and Dr. Thomas has got this wonderful, his voice, his words are just so, I'd kill for a voice like Dr. Thomas, and his mind, and his heart, and just the power of his preaching. And you think, we just don't need to pray for them, they don't need prayer, they've got all the gifts. No, if the apostle Paul said, pray for me, that words will be given to me, then you better believe it, you better also pray for us, or words won't be given to us and you'll be left very much the poorer without them. Sermons must come from heaven. They mustn't start in here or in here. They must come from up there, through the preacher to the people. I can't give what I haven't got. Pray I'll stay close to God and the other ministers too, and then when we speak, we'll speak as men, speaking the oracles of God. And you'll stand back and watch what God will do in this city. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the privilege of prayer. How the angels must gasp that we approach the throne of grace and mercy so infrequently and so coldly. And that's true of me, O God. and I'm sure many here as well, give us grace to be praying always with perseverance and endurance in the Spirit, O Lord, to a God, our Father, who is ready and willing to help us. Give us strength to pray, and give us strength to live for Christ, and give us strength to resist the enemy of our souls, oh God, in our hearts, in our homes, in this place, in this city, that the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. In Jesus' name, amen.