

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

To Live a Life of Faith, You'll Need This:

21 Days of Prayer: Day 15

"It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one--the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

- Uncle Screwtape, *The Screwtape Letters*.

The Screwtape Letters, by C.S. Lewis, is a series of letters from one demon to another explaining how they interact with a human - the patient - in attempts to draw him away from God. The "attacks" the demon levels against the human aren't what we'd imagine. Instead, this "warfare" seems to be a subtle one. While it is a work of fiction, it interestingly explores what spiritual warfare might look like.

While many have different thoughts about what "spiritual warfare" means, what we can know is that Scripture clearly teaches there is a sort of spiritual battle going on that we can't necessarily see, and it's important that because of this truth, we seek God and ask for his help. This will be our focus for the third week in our 21 Days of Prayer.

This week, we're going to be looking at different prayers that help us stay focused on God in the midst of the many struggles, spiritual or otherwise, that we will face on this earth. Some might call these "warfare prayers." Today, we are going to look at a passage from the book of Ephesians. In chapter 6, Paul writes:

Ephesians 6:13-17:

¹³*Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.*
¹⁴*Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.* ¹⁵*For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.* ¹⁶*In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.* ¹⁷*Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

In this passage, Paul describes what he calls "The Armor of God." Here's what the pieces of this armor include:

- The belt of truth
- The body armor of God's righteousness
- The shoes of the Good News

The shield of faith
The helmet of salvation
The sword of the Spirit (the word of God)

No matter what we might face in life, these are the elements of our "armor" we need to "resist the enemy." When we are tempted to sin, we can know the **truth** that it is not our **righteousness** that saves us, but God's. When we feel like we're stuck, we can take one step forward knowing the **Good News** that Jesus died and rose for us to live in his kingdom is true. When we feel under attack, we can rely on our **faith** in God to protect us, our **salvation** to guide us, and the **Word of God** to defend us.

This past weekend, Josh Whitlow spoke about the different generations and how whether you are the current generation or the next generation, you play a pivotal role in the church. For those of us in the "current" generation, we can live our lives with this armor, showing the next generation that no matter the situation, we rely on God and his promises to guide us in our lives. It doesn't matter what stands against us, we are fully covered in the love of Jesus and have all that we need. For those in the next generation, when you want to **step up**, you'll need to rely on the armor we talked about today and the examples that those ahead of you have set.

Today, we are going to pray that we would live our lives with this armor, that we would all don the elements of the godly armor so that we can live out the faith that God has so graciously given to us.

Which element of God's armor do you need to lean on more (do you need to remind yourself of the promises of God, or the salvation he's given you, etc.)?

Prayer:

Gracious and Heavenly Father, you are so good to me. I know that you've given me all I need to do your will here on earth, and I also know that there are forces outside my control that want to stop me from following you. Help me to wear your armor and rely on your promises so that I can grow closer to you and help others to do the same. I ask all this in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Weapons of War Are Not What You Think.

21 Days of Prayer: Day 16

Religion and warfare make strange bedfellows, or at least they should. Unfortunately, religious fervency has been at the root of most of many atrocities. However, God's commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39) is clearly in direct opposition to the very notion of waging battle against our fellow man.

The motives and merits of earthly war are topics for another time (and forum). But the subject of **spiritual warfare** is front and center in this week's portion of our 21 Days of Prayer journey.

Yesterday's edition of *LivingItOut* introduced the topic of spiritual warfare through a discussion of the Armor of God. In Ephesians 6:13-17, the Apostle Paul employs the metaphor of a soldier's armor as a means of helping us "resist the enemy in the time of evil." Donning the Armor of God, Paul suggests, helps us to appreciate the existence and value of God's many protections against the evils we face every day.

God's armor – the belt of truth, the body armor of God's righteousness, the shoes of the Good News, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit – provides a worthy defense against our enemies. Today, we pivot from defense to *offense* as we consider **God's mighty weapons**.

In 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, Paul exhorts the people of Corinth to use God's weapons to defeat the forces that seek to derail us from our walk with him:

2 Corinthians 10:4-5:

⁴We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. ⁵We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.

The weapons Paul references are not weapons of man, but spiritual weapons to defeat forces such as pride, human reasoning, and false arguments that can undermine our faith in God.

The *Life Application Study Bible* suggests that these spiritual weapons – prayer, love, faith, hope, God's Word, and the Holy Spirit – are both powerful and effective:

"We, like Paul, are merely weak humans, but we don't need to use human plans and methods to win our battles. God's mighty weapons are available to us as

we fight against the devil's 'strongholds'... When dealing with people's proud arguments that keep them from a relationship with Christ, we may be tempted to use our own methods. But nothing can break down these barriers like God's weapons."

When I step back to consider the obstacles that I encounter in my own walk with God, a number of items quickly become apparent.

First, I must acknowledge that **spiritual warfare is, in fact, real**. This is to say that many of the issues with which I contend – pride, spiritual laziness, temptations, and other obstacles – are not merely the result of my own failings; they also involve forces beyond my earthly experience. This is not always an easy, or even natural, step for me. I can be too easily drawn into thinking that the worldly issues I face are my responsibility and thus mine alone to solve.

In her Bible study titled, "The Armor of God," Christian author and evangelist Priscilla Shirer examines the reality and the deceitful ways of Satan, the enemy. "The enemy's attacks are always wrapped in the packaging of deception, always designed to manipulate the truth about God, and about your value in him," she writes. "He [the enemy] desires to lead you into sin so that fellowship is broken between you and God – this way you'll be disconnected from the source of true power and strength."

In acknowledging that the spiritual battle is real, I must also **recognize the identity of the enemy**. I will freely admit that I find it disturbing to even consider the existence of Satan and his forces of evil. I find it far more appealing to devote my thoughts and energies to worshipping and serving a loving God. This is not surprising as my God has given me life in this world and the salvation to be with him eternally in the next. At the same time, I must realize that I cannot hide from the enemy.

And this leads me to a final, and more comforting reality: **I am not alone in this battle**.

The 2015 faith-based movie, "War Room," explores the power of prayer in virtually every aspect of life. The movie's central character, Miss Clara, is an elderly woman who constructed a prayer closet, or "war room," in her home to help deepen her relationship with God and combat the forces of evil. One of the movie's pivotal scenes involves a conversation between Miss Clara and Elizabeth, a younger woman played by Priscilla Shirer (as mentioned above), who is experiencing struggles in her life and marriage. In endorsing the power of prayer, Miss Clara tells Elizabeth, "God showed me that it wasn't my job to do the heavy lifting. No. That was something that only he could do. It was my job to seek him, to trust him, and to stand on his Word."

As we trust the 21 Days of Prayer experience is demonstrating, prayer is not only an invitation to dialogue with God but a powerful weapon for overcoming challenges in both the physical and spiritual worlds.

Author Max Lucado drives this latter point home with emphasis in his book *Before Amen*. “Prayer slaps handcuffs on Satan,” Lucado writes. “Prayer takes problems out of the domain of the devil and into the presence of God. Prayer confesses, ‘God can handle it. Since he can, I have hope!’”

Prayer:

Father God, I thank you for granting me the gift of this life and the accompaniment of your love and companionship. As I walk with you, I ask that you give me the ability to recognize the enemy when he crosses my path and the wisdom to call on your mighty weapons of prayer, love, faith, hope, your Word, and the Holy Spirit to prevail on your behalf. Help me also to leverage the gifts you have afforded me as I seek to make an impact for your kingdom and to serve as a worthy example for the next generation. Amen.

Last weekend, Josh Whitlow challenged us to think about how we – depending on our generation – can either step up or show up. On top of the prayer above, pray for God to reveal to you how you can do one of these two things.

What You Should Pray Each Morning:

21 Days of Prayer: Day 17

Protection Prayer is so powerful and so necessary to our walk with God, especially these days with so many distractions and diversions to help us stray off of the righteous path. There is so much lying and deception, so much wrong, impure, ugly, and deplorable behavior in this world, it is easy to fall into it without really realizing it. I mean, if everyone, including many of the world's leaders, is behaving this way, why shouldn't we?

One of the things I love the most about reading the letters that the Apostle Paul wrote to the early churches is that so often they prove to me that we are not much different than those early believers! Even though we have changed a lot since Paul wrote this letter, and we differ from generation to generation, all in all, we are still fighting the same demons, and we need God.

In these verses from Philippians Chapter 4, Paul tells us that one of the best ways to protect ourselves from the evils of the world is to fix our thoughts on the positive. In verse 4:7, he says that if we pray these prayers of protection, God will guard our hearts and minds.

When we focus on what is good, our perspective improves because the God of peace will be with us. To keep that focus, Paul gives us a clear list. When I find myself worrying or brooding over some problem, I can turn to this list and ask myself if it fits. If not, I need to give it to God and let go. Moreover, if I find myself talking about someone, or talking to someone about events in my life, I can use this list. If my speech does not line up with it, I should be quiet! Before I do or say anything, I can look at this list for guidance.

When I start my day by praying a prayer of protection, it helps me to move forward positively. When I look at this list from Philippians throughout the day, I can realign my thoughts if they start to turn negative. I have written out Philippians 4:8 on sticky notes and posted them in places that I can see throughout the day.

Philippians 4:8-9:

⁸And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. ⁹Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

The other directive Paul gives is to put into practice all the other things that he taught, "everything you heard or saw me doing." This is the role of the church

now - to show the love of God to everyone we encounter. We do that not only through the weekend message but by helping people to connect with each other on a deeper level. That is why we talk so much about serving, not just because the church needs volunteers to run well, but mostly because it is a great way for people to connect.

This is why we all need church! From generation to generation, there are lessons we all need to learn to live a better life. We need church to help remind us of the lessons in the Bible and to help us hold one another accountable for those lessons. But we also need it as a community of fellow believers to connect us in deeper, more meaningful ways.

What action can you take to realign your thoughts if they start getting negative?

How can you remember to pray prayers of protection to start your day and guard your heart and mind?

What next step can you take to become more involved with the church body and to serve out God's purpose for your life?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us your word, for the instruction that it contains and for helping us to live a better life. Thank you for your Son, who lived out your word perfectly as an example for us to follow. Father, thank you for your church that gives us community with one another, helping each other live out your purpose for our lives. Help us to remember to pray prayers of protection when we are feeling negative or overwhelmed by the evils of this world. Help us to focus on the positive, to be a light for your glory. Amen.

Last weekend, Josh Whitlow challenged us to think about how we - depending on our generation - can either step up or show up. On top of the prayer above, pray for God to reveal to you how you can do one of these two things.

Living Free Requires This:

21 Days of Prayer: Day 18

Have you ever tried to lift weights that were too heavy for you? So heavy that you couldn't even get them off the ground, or caused you so much trouble that you needed someone to help you? Well, that is what it is like to carry around your sin. Without confession, we can feel trapped under the weight of our sin, unable to move, unable to lift.

Growing up Catholic as a child, my experience with confession included the dread of having to tell a priest all the things I had done wrong and then waiting for my penance, which to a 10-year-old boy seems a lot like a punishment. My perception and understanding of confession changed drastically once I entered into a relationship with God.

Confession is the acknowledgment of our sin – the recognition that we have done something we should not have done. It is simple but often terrifying. When we sin, the last thing we want to do is tell someone about it. Many people live in fear of someone else discovering the wrong they have done because of the consequences that may be associated with it. They carry their burdens like a weight around their neck, dragging them down and preventing them from living the life God has given them.

The thing is, God already knows what we have done. We can't hide it from him. Fortunately, he doesn't dwell on those wrongs because he loves us, but he also wants us to understand that we have gone against his will.

Romans 10:9-10:

⁹If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Professing our faith goes beyond saying that we are Christians or going to church, or even telling others about Jesus. It includes the confession of our sins, both to God and to others. In the same way, we can't lift heavy weights alone, and we can't carry the burdens of our sin alone.

James 5:16:

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Living this command out from James can have incredible results. I attended a men's retreat several years ago with 30 men I had never met. It was well out of

my comfort zone even to go to an event where there would be no familiar faces, and I quickly realized this was a weekend getaway unlike any I had ever attended. In 48 hours, I grew closer to many of those men because we spent a majority of the time confessing our sins to one another and praying for each other. We told complete strangers things we had never told anyone else. Grown men cried like children, not out of sadness, but out of the joy that comes with freedom from captivity to sin.

How does confession affect future generations? As Josh taught from Psalm 78, each generation is called to “tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done” so that “they would not be like their ancestors - a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.”

Exodus 34 refers to the "generational sin" where unconfessed and unforgiven sin has an effect not only on that individual but their children and grandchildren as well. (For more on this, click [here](#) to read John Piper's teaching.) By admitting that we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we are welcomed by our Creator with open arms. Jesus did the hard work through his sacrifice, and now we can reap the benefits. But it does require us to deal with our sin and bring it into the light by telling someone else, or even through an audible prayer to God.

Today, we are praying prayers of confession:

Prayer:

God, I confess that I have sinned against you. I have done what is evil in your sight, and I was wrong. I have done unspeakable things that I am ashamed to admit, and even more afraid to tell anyone about. But you already know that, and you love me anyway. Amen.

Last weekend, Josh Whitlow challenged us to think about how we – depending on our generation – can either step up, or show up. On top of the prayer above, pray for God to reveal to you how you can do one of these two things.

When You Don't Want to Forgive.

21 Days of Prayer: Day 19

Ah, forgiveness. Do we really have to do that? It's certainly not something that comes easy for the majority of people.

On September 11, 2001, four planes were hijacked, two of which crashed into the World Trade Center towers in New York City. As a result of the horrific events on that single day, more than 3,000 people died, and many more lives were forever changed.

I'll never forget that moment. I was in class in Dam Neck, Virginia at the Navy Marine Corps Intelligence Training Center (NMITC), when someone turned on the news, and we watched as the second plane collided with one of the towers.

I was shocked, burdened, and sick all at the same time. How does someone even begin to forgive something like that?

Jesus tells us in **Matthew 6:14-15**:

If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Ouch! Jesus is saying that if we can't forgive others, then he won't forgive us. While this doesn't mean that we lose our salvation, it does mean that we will experience the negative results of our choice to withhold forgiveness from someone here on earth. When we choose not to forgive, we are ultimately hurting ourselves. Bitterness eats away at our hearts. It festers and oozes out of us like foam from the mouths of rabid dogs.

We start to talk and act like Mama Fratelli from the Goonies. We just can't let go, and eventually, it takes a toll on us.

If we really want to understand forgiveness, we have to look at the life of Jesus. His only mission was to die on the cross for the **forgiveness** of our sins. He knew how wretched our hearts were going to be, and he knows all of the things we are still going to do, and he **forgave** us anyway.

Chris Tomlin sings these lyrics in his song "Indescribable":

You see the depths of my heart, and You love me the same

When we choose to forgive, we might see or understand the depths and destructiveness of what a person is capable of and choose to love them anyway.

At the end of Jesus' life on earth, he said, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do."

Even on the cross, after being beaten, speared, nailed, betrayed, cursed and asphyxiated, he still wanted us to be forgiven.

When we see forgiveness through the eyes of Jesus, then we can forgive.

Today, think about the people in your life you need to forgive. Spend time praying for them.

Prayer:

Lord, you are the author of forgiveness, you designed us for the capacity to love others as you love us, and to forgive others as you forgive us. Help me view others through your eyes. Amen.

Last weekend, Josh Whitlow challenged us to think about how we – depending on our generation – can either step up, or show up. On top of the prayer above, pray for God to reveal to you how you can do one of these two things.

The Importance of Humility.

21 Days of Prayer: Day 20

“A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

What is pride?

Many would define pride as the "sin of sins" or the root of all sin, or the rejection of the wisdom of God because you think you might know better.

In James 4:6, James writes, ***God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.*** You should not be prideful because this sin will kill you forever. This sin will keep you from having an intimate relationship with Christ, and sin hurts God.

James continues in verses 7-10:

⁷So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. ⁹Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

These verses are instructing us to live a life where we have a relationship with God and resistance to Satan. God is not the only force that is trying to work in our lives. We must not compromise with the enemy of our souls; we must resist him and submit to God. It is human nature to drift away from our faith and blame God for the bad things that happen to us. God is always trying to teach us something, and if we put our faith and trust in him, he will draw near to us. When we resist Satan, he will pull away from us. We should also repent and confess our sins. We cannot live both a Christ-like life and a worldly life. We need to be broken-hearted for the distance that our sin has caused between God and us. Just imagine if you go to heaven and God asks why you should be admitted. The prideful person would say that I did this and I did that; I did, I did, I did. That is not being humble. That is saying that we did all the good things we could do to earn our own way to heaven. We do good works because we are children of God, but our salvation is based on grace and grace alone. He needs us to get down so that he can lift us up. The ultimate show of humility is that we believe in the one whom God sent.

Matthew 23:12:

'But those who exalt themselves will be humbled; and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

What struggles in your spirit or circumstances in your life you can attribute to the Evil one?

We've all heard the word "hypocrite," when discussing Christians. Does your life reflect the life of humble Jesus, or does it look more prideful? What step can you take toward humility?

It is important to show the next generation that God is the controller of our lives. We can make plans, but ultimately God is in control of every circumstance. They are the future of the church and should be shown the importance of humility. At the 2017 Global Leadership Summit, Bill Hybels stated that leaders must set the example without demonizing. I am in a previous generation, and it is my responsibility to show the next generation how to win, and winning is entering the kingdom of God.

Prayer:

Dear Great and Glorious God, thank you for the gift of salvation. Help us to release all our anxiety and go to Christ for rest. Give us wisdom that you are the way to eternal life if we accept Christ as the Savior that died for our sins. Help us to fight pride in every way we can and to know that we are not in control. We realize we need to confess our sins and feel remorse for them because they separate God from us. Please forgive us of these sins. It's in your precious name we pray, Amen.

This post was written by Jenn Macke, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

What to Do About Worry.

21 Days of Prayer: Day 21

Philippians 4:6 says, *“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.”* During the past 21 days, we’ve prayed as a church for a lot of things. This week alone, we’ve prayed for the next generation, for strength, for protection, and for humility; we’ve prayed to resist temptation, and we’ve prayed for forgiveness. What’s left for us to pray about?

Peace and freedom.

Philippians 4:6-7 continues, *“Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand.”*

We’ve prayed for what we need and should continue to pray for these things as needed - our walk with God is, of course, a journey rather than a race and requires constant care as we traverse the hills and valleys. But once we’ve prayed for what we need and asked for forgiveness, all that’s left is to thank God, trusting that he will handle the rest.

That’s it. That’s all there is to it.

Of course, sometimes it doesn't feel that simple, because we worry.

Yes, I prayed for strength, for protection, for humility. But what if I stumble? I prayed to resist temptation, but what if I fail? I prayed for forgiveness, but has God really forgiven me? Is it really that simple? Isn’t there anything else I need to do?

Maybe we need to stop.

The point of prayer is to place our struggles in God's hands. When we worry, we try to take all our struggles back into our own hands, but it's more than we can hold. When we worry about our failures and whether we're forgiven, we forget the price paid for salvation and who paid it. We're placing our trust in the law and in our ability to uphold it.

We can’t, but we don’t have to.

As **Galatians 5:1** says, *“So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law.”*

Yes, we should try to follow God’s commands out of love for him. But if we fail, after we have prayed for forgiveness from him, sometimes we need to pray for

help forgiving ourselves. Even when we're following all the rules, sometimes we need to pray for faith that goes beyond playing the part.

Sometimes we need to pray for freedom.

God wants us to be free, both from sin when we break his law and from loveless devotion to the law. Once we find this freedom, placing our problems in God's hands, we can experience the peace that "exceeds anything we can understand."

Many Christians wonder why the younger generations are leaving the church. Although this is a complicated question with no simple answer, part of the reason is that these young generations are searching for something: authenticity. When we display a caricature of Christianity that emphasizes obedience to the law over a relationship with God, we hide this authenticity from the generations after us.

This can come in multiple forms. We can hide the true message of Christ by displaying an enslavement to the law in our own lives and thus set a hollow example for those looking up to us. We can also hide the truth by expecting those younger than us to follow the rules perfectly. By doing so, we forget to teach them that the message of Christianity is not about being perfect, but about a God who loved us so much that he saved us from our imperfections.

So please, be authentic with your children, your students, your younger coworkers, and so on. Don't be ashamed to show them your faults, and don't shame them for their faults. For only when we're honest, do we show the authenticity of Christianity, and only when they see the authenticity of Christianity will people of any age come to Christ.