

Prayer: Re-opening an Old Well

Eph. 6:18

Intro. Please find **Gen. 26** in your Bibles. If you're without a Bible, you should find one in the pew rack in front of you. To prepare my heart for our meetings with the Life Action team, I listened to about a dozen messages on the subject of revival by Dr. David Martin Loyd-Jones. In one of his sermons he cited a parallel between a crisis in the life of Isaac and the essence of revival. I want to begin this AM with this analogy from **Gen. 26**.

Gen. 26:12-18 - Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him. The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth. Then Abimelech said to Isaac, "Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us." So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them.

The Philistines were the enemies of God's people from the earliest times until King David finally subdued them centuries later. While living among them, the Lord prospered Isaac and the Philistines became jealous. Abimelech, the Philistine king, ordered Isaac to relocate to another area because he felt threatened by their increasing numbers and growing prosperity. So Isaac moved and settled in the Valley of Gerar. Because of his livestock, Isaac immediately faced the need for water. But the Philistines had filled in the wells dug in the time of his father Abraham. Clogged with earth and debris, the wells were useless. The water was still down there, but it was inaccessible. Since the need was immediate, Isaac didn't have time to bring in diviners to locate water or dig new wells. So he relied on the wells his father had dug earlier. And when the wells were reopened and water was found, he gave them the same names his father had given them.

Now you're beginning to wonder...where in the world is he going with this? You know I'm not big on spiritualizing, but Isaac's story illustrates the essence of revival. We know water isn't a luxury item. Water is absolutely essential. Life depends on it. We can't survive long without it. Look at all the folk walking around with a water bottle in their hand. In the analogy, Dr. Loyd-Jones compares water to the life blood and spiritual vitality of the church. It represents the supernatural supply we need to live and minister to others. Jesus used water as analogous to life from God in **Jn. 4**. To the woman at the well He said, **"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."** Just as Isaac's family, his servants, and his animals needed water to survive, the Church is completely dependent on the spiritual supply of grace from God. The Apostle Paul frequently spoke of his dependence on the grace of God. In **I Cor. 15:10** he wrote, **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.** Yet just like Isaac's situation, forces are working against the church...forces that threaten its very existence. In **Lk.18:8** Jesus asked a rhetorical question...He said, **"When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"** In the letter of Christ to the church of Laodicea, which many believe represents the church of the last days, the church is decline because it is self-sufficient instead of God reliant.

So what does the church need to be dynamic and revived in a world that is increasingly godless? What is the answer to declining attendance and commitment?

We've experimented with slick programs / state of the art technologies / and all sorts of gimmicks. We've tried new teaching methods / prodding / and we've even resorted to guilt-tripping believers to be more enthusiastic about the things of God. But none of these have worked and time is running out. The church in America is drying up and we need grace like rain from above.

So in his crisis, what did Isaac do? He didn't dig new wells. He didn't experiment with new theories of how to find and produce water. He reopened the old wells his father dug years earlier...wells that faithfully provided water for Abraham and his flocks. And guess what he found at the bottom of his father's wells? He found water. He found water for his family, his herds and his crops. He found the life sustaining supply he so desperately needed in an old place. But remember...those wells had been filled in and stopped up by the enemies of God's people. They had to be reopened.

How many will admit they felt some resistance to the messages we heard from the Life Action pastors? I think we all did! When they quit stomping on my left foot, they jumped on the right one. Talk about meddling! We laughed at a comment one of our deacons made when our leadership team met with Gregg and Wilson last Sunday afternoon. They asked us to describe the impact the summit had on us to that point. Our deacon spoke up and said, "*The first thing you need to do is get rid of that 'Complete Spiritual'.*" Remember that convicting hand out? It worked like a shredder...shredding things like spiritual pride and self-righteousness. My godly Bible teacher wife went home wondering if she was saved. (She made that comment, but she didn't mean it.)

So what was the team doing besides irritating the bejeebers out of us? What was their objective and why did we feel some resistance to it all? They were helping us find water. God sent them to remind us where the water is located and how it can be accessed. They didn't point us to new wells, they pointed us to sites that were tested and proven. God brought them to help us reopen some old wells the enemy had plugged up with dirt and debris...impediments that are common to Christians universally. You see, the enemy wants to cut off our supply lines. He wants to impede the channel through which grace flows from God to us. He clogs the well shaft with things like...ego and pride / disobedience / unconfessed sin / immorality / an unwillingness to forgive / failure to love and respect our mate / idolatry / self-sufficiency etc. Like the Philistines, we have an enemy who stops at nothing to keep us from God and the supply of His Spirit. We need to remember **Eph. 6:12 - For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**

Now I know I'm insulting your intelligence...but how did the ancients draw water from a well? They lowered a rope with a bucket tied to it. That was their method. So how do we access the spiritual water of life? How do we access the grace we need to be spiritually vibrant and on track with God? Instead of lowering a rope and bucket...we lift our hearts in prayer. There's something we must do. We must humble ourselves, admit our needs, and run to God's throne of grace. We must resort to that old but reliable spiritual discipline called prayer. But here's the thing...just as Isaac couldn't get water from a stopped up well, we can't access the grace we need if there are sin issues between us and God. The fellowship we were created to enjoy is quenched by things we allow that displease the Lord. So if revival is like tapping into a fresh supply of water, the old wells have to be reopened. **I Pet. 4:7 says, The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.** That's what the past two weeks were about. They were about clearing the mind, the conscience the heart. We heard nothing new...just a full strength rerun of some old and basic truths we've heard many times before. How old is this revival formula? Just listen again to what God said to His people in **II Chrn. 7:13, 14 - "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.**

One thing is certain...revival, whether personal or corporate, is God's business. It can't be manufactured, packaged or delivered in a semi. Revival is a refreshing...a re-awakening that comes when God's people humble themselves / turn from sin / and seek the Lord in prayer. For Isaac it meant re-opening old wells...wells his father dug. And the same is true for us. We have to reopen the conduit by eliminating those things that hinder the filling of God's Spirit in our lives. That, in a nutshell, was the message and ministry of the Life Action team. The supply is where it has always been, but we need to face our need and ask God to help us unclog the channel. Did our flesh nature resist and react? Did our conscience bother us about something? Did we feel our toes were being stepped on? Did some of us nit pick this and that and write off some of what these men said? Yes, by all means. That's to be expected. Clearing out a clogged well shaft takes effort and surgery is painful! **Gal. 5:17** says the sinful nature (we all have) is in conflict with the Spirit. Oh, but listen...the effort and pain is soon forgotten when the enemy is defeated and the water starts flowing again. So I'm trusting God did a work in your heart as He did in mine. I'm trusting you were spiritually refreshed as I was. So let's return to our study in **Eph. 6**.

As this letter comes to a close, Paul wants us to know we're in a spiritual battle that can only be fought in the power of the Lord. We took 4 or 5 Sundays to consider the armor God has provided to prevent defeat and enable us to stand in victory in the evil day. We now come to the final exhortation of this letter. **v.18** says, **And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.** As many have observed, prayer isn't an additional piece of armor. Instead, prayer is the constant, ceaseless activity of believers who have put on the armor God has provided. In other words, prayer is something we must do as we wear the armor. We must pray. This fact is captured by the hymn writer who wrote, *"Put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer."* The armor is the defensive protection God provides, but prayer is the expression of our utter dependence on Him. MacArthur observes, *"This letter to the Ephesian believers that begins by lifting us up to the heavenlies, ends by pulling us down to our knees."* As believers, we must pray! Our lives / our relationships / our testimonies / our church / and the success of our ministries depend on it. The glory of God depends on it!

Dr. D. Martin Loyd-Jones said, *"Our ultimate position as Christians is tested by the character of our prayer life."* It bugged me to hear that because I know how much I need to improve in this area. Last Tuesday night, Wilson hammered us in regard to our prayer lives. The statistics are very indicting. The average Christian only spends 2-3 mins. in prayer each day. It's really quite ironic that we have to be prodded to pray as we should. Reduced to basics, prayer is simply conversing with the perfect Father who loves us and wants to do for us. Yet if ever there was evidence for the spiritual war that wages against us...its right here. Satan knows that prayer is our link to spiritual life and vitality. He knows that prayer changes things. He trembles when believers pray! So what does he do?...He does all he can to clog the channel and keep us from accessing the grace we need. His objectives are best achieved when believers are prayerless / powerless / and dying of thirst.

So this exhortation to pray is last but it certainly isn't least. Prayer isn't just another weapon in the Christian's arsenal. Prayer is the very air the Christian soldier breathes and depends on. You've probably heard the comment made by a lady when the pilot of a commercial airliner informed his passengers the plane had a mechanical problem. He assured the passengers he thought the plane could be landed safely. But he added this, *"If you're a religious person, it would be a good time to pray."* Hearing this, the lady shrieked...*"Oh my, has it come to this?"* Unfortunately, that's what prayer is to many of us. It's a last resort. It's what we do when all else has failed. Paul seeks to address this weakness with his final exhortation. Let's read it again...**v.18 - And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.** Prayer is the bottom line...the difference maker between spiritual dryness and vitality...the link between God's grace and our needs.

As you see on the sermon notes, I've extracted four points right from the exhortation of **v.18**. Unlike some other verses in this letter, this one is really quite simple and straight-forward. Here's how it connects with exhortations that precede it. **v.14** instructs us to **stand firm**. Now **v.18** tells us what to do as we stand firm. It echoes the words of Jesus who told His disciples... "**Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.**" - **Matt. 26:41** To **be alert** ties in with the military analogy of this closing chapter. Like a sentry on duty, we must be attentive to people and circumstances where Satan may be at work. More could be said about staying alert, but this AM I want to focus on four phrases that qualify the manner or the way we should pray.

1. Pray in the spirit - The mystical and charismatic believer tends to camp on this part of the verse. Some think praying in the spirit is tongues-speaking, but it isn't. It isn't a trance-like state where our mind is disengaged and the Spirit has overtaken us. Paul corrected this misunderstanding in **I Cor. 14**. There he insists that whether a believer is prophesying / praising / singing / or praying, their mind is never disengaged. In **v.15** he wrote, **I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind**. So that's what praying in the Spirit isn't...it isn't some trance-like state where the Spirit takes over and speaks through our voice.

Let me simply make two comments about what praying in the Spirit is. **First**, to pray in the Spirit requires that there be no unconfessed sin in our lives. **Ps. 66:18** - **If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened...**Whatever sin God may bring to mind...sin we may have pampered and excused...that sin must be confessed. Unconfessed sin chokes our prayer life as effectively as dirt and debris plugged up Abraham's wells. God knows our hearts. We shouldn't expect him to answer prayer if we're secretly involved in pornography / if we're stealing from our employer / or if we are mistreating our wife. Sin quenches the Spirit. An example is found in **I Pet. 3:7** - **Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.**

Second, to pray in the Spirit is to pray according to God's will as revealed in His Word. There is only perfect agreement between the Word of God and the Spirit of God. It's futile to ask God for something our flesh wants but His Word forbids. The NT also instructs us to pray in Christ's name. This isn't using the name "Jesus" like it's a magic password or charm...it means we have submitted our desires and requests to Christ's authority. True prayer isn't persuading God to do what we want Him to do. Instead, it's asking God to do what He wants to do. It's aligning our desires with the will of the God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So the first thing about prayer is that we must pray in the Spirit.

Notice that each of the next three instructions contains the word **all**. We're instructed to **pray on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and for all the saints**.

2. Pray on all occasions - Like this verse, **I Thess. 5:17** says, **Pray continually**. The greek verb translated **continually** or **without ceasing**, describes a man with a chronic hacking cough. It also described repeated military assaults. A person with a chronic cough doesn't cough every minute... he just can't stop. He coughs repeatedly and never goes very long without coughing. In the military use of the term, an army will often launch an assault and then regroup before attacking again. The attacks are repeated until the city is taken. That's how we should pray. We should pray often and pray repeatedly. To pray **on all occasions** is to have a perpetual God consciousness. It's talking to God throughout the day. It's remaining perpetually aware of our insufficiency while continually laying hold of God's sufficiency. It's knowing how much we need the Lord and consequently, involving God in every issue and situation, not just the emergencies. This is my downfall. I fire off many emergency prayers. But I don't take time for sustained seasons where I quiet myself and commune with the Lord. My excuse?...I'm too busy.

Yet when I'm thinking straight, the fact that I'm so busy should be an impetus to pray all the more! But what does **pray on all occasions** mean? It's obvious we can't do life with our heads bowed and eyes closed. I almost crashed my little truck (as Marion calls it) several times while looking for Darwin. Imagine how poorly I'd drive with my eyes closed and head bowed! So what does all occasions mean? Are you tempted?...pray. Are you frustrated?...pray. Are you needing to make a decision of some sort?...pray. Do you have a specific need?...pray. Has some unexpected blessing come your way...pray. Is someone in your circle unsaved?...pray. Are you scheduled to be with some people who need a gospel witness?...pray. Are you about to make a major purchase? ...pray. Are you sick?...pray. Has God exposed an area in your life He wants to change?...pray. Have you sensed a need for wisdom?...pray. Are any members of your family or friends experiencing difficulty?...pray. Are you thankful for God's goodness?...pray.

Prayer is to be an every-occasion activity for the child of God. It isn't a mere formality before supper or a recitation at bedtime. Prayer isn't for Sunday only. We are privileged as Christians to commune with the all wise and all powerful God in an intimate and uninterrupted way. Pastor Stephen Cole writes, *"Prayer isn't rushing into the bank to get some needed funds and not going back until you need some more. Prayer is going into the bank many times throughout the day because you're in love with the banker. You enjoy talking with him!"* Next Paul writes...

3. Pray with all kinds of prayers - My dad taught us to pray before our family set out on a trip. It wasn't a long drawn out prayer that included all the missionaries. It was short, simple, and to the point. *"Father, please go with us as we travel, and give us safety along the way."* He taught us to ask God. Much of our all occasion praying will be just like that. When I'm about to enter a hospital room, I always ask the Lord to make me a blessing to the patient. These short bursts are different from the pastoral prayer offered in a worship service. And the pastoral prayer isn't the same as intercessory prayers offered for someone who is sick. It isn't like the praise we might offer the Lord in our personal time with Him. Some prayers are short, some are long. Some prayers express our thankfulness and others praise the Lord for who He is. Some prayers express confession of sin while others petition God for help in perplexing circumstances. Some prayers are joyful while others are the sober supplications of a grieving heart. The psalms contain all kinds of prayers and God is pleased with them all.

The Lord's prayer provides a helpful outline of several different kinds of prayer. In **Matt. 6:9** Jesus said, **"This, then, is how you should pray:** He then expressed what is commonly known as the Lord's prayer.

- **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name** - this is worship...it's exalting the glory of God above everything else
- **your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven** - this is prayer for God's will to be done through the advancement of His kingdom. This is prayer for missions, evangelism and discipleship
- **Give us today our daily bread** - this is prayer for personal needs
- **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors** - this is prayer for interpersonal relationships
- **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one** - This is prayer for holiness both for ourselves and for others

One of the hindrances to praying as we should may be the false idea that prayer can only happen in a formal setting or in a long extended prayer meeting without bathroom breaks. That's not true. Prayer is the privilege of every believer. It's to be as regular and necessary as breathing...in fact that's what it is...its spiritual breathing. Sometimes we take short breaths, yet other times we breathe deeply.

So the Holy Spirit says, **pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayer.**

4. Pray for all the saints - Paul's favorite metaphor for the church is a body. In Christ, He is the head and we are one body having many parts. According to this metaphor, each part should be concerned about the other parts. Each member should show care for the other members. **I Cor. 12:25- 26** says ...**there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.** A marine slogan insists no soldier left behind. That's the sort of commitment we should have for each other.

Now I want you to see the stack of prayer and praise cards we turned in last week. I read through them Thursday. We're a mess! I don't mean that. We're a needy people. We all have issues and needs. We're all going through trials that test our faith.

So Paul writes, **always keep on praying for all the saints.** Prayer for other believers is typically called intercessory prayer. It's going to God on behalf of a brother or sister in need. Over the years it's been very disappointing to see the midweek prayer service decline in participation. The needs of believers and the prayer list has significantly increased... but the level of participation has significantly decreased. I wish I had an answer for this. We've tried a variety of formats, yet the situation remains the same. We're busy. We're involved in other things. We pray in other venues. I know all that's true to some extent. But I think we'll recognize revival if it comes because it will show up in our desire and commitment to pray...to intercede for ourselves and for others. If the midweek prayer meeting isn't your cup of tea, consider a Life Group. The point is, we need to connect with each other and pray for each other.

So this is the final exhortation of Paul's letter. **And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.** At the very end of his letter, Paul directs our attention to an old well...prayer. He knows where the water is. He knows what we need and He knows God's grace is available only as we humble ourselves and pray as we ought. Like Isaac centuries earlier, we need to reopen the well our enemy hopes will remain clogged.

As we finish this AM I want to revisit one other passage shared with us during the Life Action Summit. In Rev. 2, Jesus addressed the church at Ephesus...the same church this letter was written to. The church at Ephesus was fundamental / separated / and very active. But Jesus said this...**Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. - vs. 4, 5a** I remember one of the things I did when Peggy and I first fell in love. We burned up the phone lines talking to each other. I think her dad relinquished and let me marry her to reduce his phone bill! When we weren't talking on the phone, we were writing letters. And when we were together, we talked continually. But did you ever watch an old married couple? They often sit together in silence a restaurant. They eat their meal without exchanging a word. It's rather sad.

Jesus said, **remember the height from which you have fallen.** Remember how awesome it was to commune with the Lord and sense His presence with you and concern for you. Remember how good it was to lean on Him and take everything to Him in prayer. If we're not doing that like we used to, we need to repent. We need to do a 180 and start doing it again. We need to reopen that old well. We need to return to our first love. Prayer isn't a duty. It isn't something we should have to be prodded or guilted into doing. Prayer is a delight and privilege for those who love the Lord and are loved by Him. May God help us to remember this and to reopen this old well that we might be refreshed and revived.