



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu

“Can You Hear Me Now?”

(Unclear and Present Danger Series)

October 24, 2004

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Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

1Th. 5:17 pray without ceasing,

Eph. 6:18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

We continue our series on spiritual warfare, and today is part five. So far in the series we have said that we are in a serious spiritual war where people's lives, our lives, and our souls are at stake. If we do not turn to Christ we are lost forever. There is a clear and present danger to us.

The world beckons us to turn away from Christ. And it has already trapped many people in the webs of money, sex, or power.

So what do we do?

In week one of our series we learned that we must fight back like the ship Carpathia, which, in saving the Titanic survivors, was called to help others, just as we are called to help people find hope and meaning. We must do that in Jesus Christ.

In week two we learned how Satan is for real and how he and his demons work 24-7 to take people away from Christ.

In week three we learned that we must fight back as intercessors, where we sacrificially live like the people we are trying to save in order to help and rescue them.

In week four we learned that fasting can help us fight back as we cleanse our

souls so that we have better control of our body and soul in order to be clean vessels for God's power and love.

Next week I will preach on sacrificial living. But today, as we begin week five, we learn that in any spiritual battle we must fight back with prayer.

I will be upfront about the goal of today's sermon. This is the behavioral objective. I want us all to be persuaded to pray constantly, to pray all the time.

And I'm going to repeat this until we get it.

If we pray constantly, our lives will be enhanced; our church life will be enhanced. We will all be infused with power, love and wisdom. We will have courage. We will become resilient. We will discover hope! We will receive a vision from God.

I would say that the spiritual temperature of our hearts may be measured on how much prayer is shown on our spiritual thermometer.

What is prayer? It is simply communicating with God. How can just talking and listening to God be that important? Why is it that critical?

Jesus told us to pray ALWAYS. The apostle Paul told us to pray ALWAYS. Those who wrote the Psalms said to pray ALWAYS. Those who wrote the book of Proverbs said to pray ALWAYS. Why?

How can just communicating or often talking to God be powerful and helpful for the "pray-er" and the "pray-ee?"

Think about this. Imagine a police officer on duty. He is driving at night in a neighborhood looking for a suspect who is a threat to citizens.

The intelligent police officer stays in contact with the police communications center, commonly known as the dispatchers, via his radio. He tells them where he is, what he is doing and where he is searching

The dispatcher informs him where the suspect was last seen. If possible, the center tells him what the suspect looks like and how dangerous the person is.

If the police officer finds the suspect and gives chase, the officer again tells the communications center what he is doing and where he is. He asks for back up. Then the dispatcher tells him that help is on the way.

As the officer gives chase on foot, he might keep his two-way radio active on his lapel so that he is in constant contact with the dispatcher, so that he might be successful, so that he might not needlessly get hurt and so that help might find him.

This is the same as when we pray constantly. Prayer gives us directions and guidance from God. Prayer protects us from needless hurt. Prayer helps us. Our prayerful connection with God is like that of a police officer's and his dispatcher.

In fact, police have a shorthand language or code, which is a great model for prayer.

Much of the code involves numbers starting with the number "10." Imagine employing these same shorthand codes as we talk with God.

Take "10-1," shorthand police language for "Return to the police station." A "10-1" in prayer would be like God saying, "Come back to church. Come back to Me."

In police lingo, "10-2" means, "Telephone (someone)." When God gives us a "10-2" He's saying, "I want you to talk to someone. Comfort them. Tell them about Me. Confront them."

"10-3" means, "Meet me or someone (and then give a location)." That is like when God says, "I need you, Moses, to 10-3 Pharaoh in his palace."

"10-4" is "I understood your last message," a nice thing to say in prayer.

"10-5" is "What is your location?"

"10-6" is "Repeat your last message (I didn't hear your last message)." Noah probably gave God a "10-6" when he was told to build an ark. "Uh, 10-6 on that, God. Could you repeat that one? You said to build an ark or go to the park? 10-6, God. Was that 'I'm insane' or it's really gonna rain?"

"10-7" is "I've reached the location to which you (the dispatcher) sent me." Imagine Joshua saying, "Hey, God, 10-7 on that Promise land."

"10-8" is "I'm back from the last assignment you sent me to and am available for another assignment." (Nice kind of missionary spirit there waiting for God's call)

"10-9" is "I'll be off or out of my vehicle."

"10-10" is "Ambulance needed for injured person."

"10-11" is not used.

"10-12" means, "I'm going to the restroom."

"10-13" is "Call home" (usually when a police officer's family member is trying to get hold of him or her, they call dispatch).

"10-14" is "Off having a meal." Saying grace before a meal is really saying, "10-14, God. I'm about to eat now."

"10-15" is "Officer in trouble; need help ASAP." It's a distress signal for a threat on one's life.

"10-16" is "Cancel my last request," a message sent by the dispatcher to the police officer after a call sent is withdrawn by the person requesting for it.

Now why do I mention all of this? It is incredibly critical for an officer to be in constant contact with the dispatcher,

even if she is off having a meal, even if he is off using the bathroom and even if she is going out of her vehicle.

In the real world, which includes the spiritual world, the Bible says it is imperative for us to be in constant contact with God. Our lives depend on it. Our souls depend on it. The lives of our loved ones depend on it.

The Bible says it is imperative for us to be in constant contact with God. Our lives depend on it.

When fighting crime, an officer will not survive without constant communication with the dispatcher. When in a spiritual war, we cannot, not MAY not, but CANnot survive without prayer, without continually talking to God.

Pray constantly as if you have a radio on your lapel. Tell God what you are doing. Talk to Him before you eat. Talk to Him if you are walking to work. Talk to Him while you are driving to work. Talk to Him as you wait in a grocery line.

Tell Him that you're in trouble. Ask Him to send help on the way. Ask God for wisdom. Talk to Him while you are doing that business deal, before or during that medical procedure and while you are talking to that friend.

And if we are in trouble, ask God what the suspect, or the temptations of life might be. What will they look like? How will they sneak up on us? If we get wounded or ill, ask God to send help.

It would be foolish for any officer to not be in contact with a power higher and wiser than they.

Police cars today here in Honolulu have laptop computers in them to facilitate better communication between the office and the dispatcher. In some cities, dispatch centers even have huge video screens that enable dispatchers to see where each and every officer is. Some mainland city police departments have the equipment to watch over our officers to direct them, guide them, help them, and protect them.

Talk about safety and coordination!

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know where I am going in this metaphor.

God is the ultimate, magnificent, and loving dispatcher who knows where we are every second of the day. He watches over us.

He knows what we are doing and why we do it. He offers us His help, His strength, His guidance, and His protection.

It is foolish for any Christian not to be in constant contact with our Lord to receive His instruction and wisdom of how to live. It is simply foolish.

If we were to squeeze all the prayer we do in one day and discover it to be only two minutes, then change that starting today. And since we're fasting till November, this is a great time to change.

Yet, many of us still say that we are so busy to pray for even just two minutes. Mercy!

Just as it would be dangerous for an officer to not be in contact with his dispatcher, so it would be dangerous for us not to be in constant dialogue with the Almighty God.

Some people say they don't want to pray constantly because it's like becoming a monk or a hermit who prays for hours in a dark cave or cell.

I am saying what the Bible and Jesus say. Just pray constantly, little tidbits here and there through each hour. And later, on a regular basis, put aside a longer appointment with God. But whatever we do, let's pray always.

God hears us wherever we are. Like the Verizon TV commercial where the guy keeps asking, "Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?" He's checking if his wireless service can get good reception.

We must know that when we pray to God, He can hear us right now and right here. The challenge is not if God can receive our calls but whether we are even sending Him transmissions.

Our transmissions should not only be for requests or complaints, but should also be conversations with God on affirmation, confession, and thanksgiving.

When we are making an important business decision or reacting in frustration to a neighbor or colleague, that is the point when we should call on the Lord for wisdom and say, "Can you hear me now, Lord? I need your help."

When we are tempted to do some - thing harmful to ourselves or to our family, it would be foolish not to talk to God right then and halt all other communication.

When an officer is in trouble, it is imperative that he sends out a call for help.

When I was in the news business, we ran to our cars immediately every time we heard "10-15" on the police radio because that's the code for "an officer in trouble." We would rush to the scene to find out what's going on and get it on the news.

If any other officer in that area heard a "10-15," they would jump in their cars, sound their siren and put the pedal to the metal to help that officer in distress. All available officers rush to the scene.

In the Mel Gibson movie, *We Were Soldiers*, a film about American soldiers in Vietnam, there is a scene in which the soldiers are outnumbered in battle and about to be overrun by the enemy. They had fought long and hard with all of their strength, but were now about to be defeated and killed.

There was only one thing left to do, their last hope. Mel Gibson's character, an Army Captain and the leader of the troops, asked for a walkie-talkie, a two way radio from the back of a soldier. He shouted these two words into it over and over again - "Broken Arrow! Broken Arrow! Broken Arrow!"

"Broken Arrow" meant, "All is lost. We can do no more. We are undone. Help if you can."

But "Broken Arrow" also meant that if any plane or any military help was nearby they have to come now or it will be too late.

In the movie, the moment "Broken Arrow" was heard, commanders shouted out orders, aircraft carriers turned into the wind, and every possible fighter was sent to their air. Helicopter bases sent every gun ship possible to go into harm's way to save the surrounded soldiers.

In the end they were rescued.

They were rescued because the soldiers kept in contact with the base of operations. They were in contact when they were strong and when they were weak. No false bravado or macho mania. They told it like it is. They had to for their survival depended on it.

And so it is with our prayer life.

We must talk to God constantly, all day. Tell the Lord how you might fear the day's agenda, that presentation you need to make at the office, that relationship that needs reconciliation, that child who is sick, that disease that is giving you anxiety, the strength that you need to carry on for one day, that hope you need so that depression does not overwhelm you.

Talk to Him like He is your best friend. For in the Bible, Jesus even said that we are His friends.

The more we pray and talk to God, the more we will receive hope, gain wisdom for alleviating suffering, resisting temptation, handling disappointment and managing success.

Prayer is essential in the face of a clear and present danger.

There is no question in my mind that when we pray, God WILL tell us what to do. When we pray God WILL give us wisdom. When we pray God WILL give us hope, especially when we are in trouble; especially when we want to call out "Broken Arrow!" when all seems lost.

I can't tell you enough how important it is to pray all day long. I can't tell you how important it is to have friends pray for you especially in those Broken Arrow times. When we pray and when we are prayed for, we always gain strength and perspective no matter how bleak life may be.

Here's a challenge question to write down: What if your friends prayed for you as much as you pray for them, will you be in good shape or are you in trouble?

If you pray a lot for your friends and it is reciprocal, then you are blessed. But if you hardly pray for others, then maybe you don't want to be prayed for as you pray for others. The golden rule is: "Pray for others as you would like to be prayed for."

Does God really hear our prayers? ("Can You hear us now, Lord? Can You hear us now?" The answer is yes.)

Will God be so gracious to hear my prayers even if they are few and far between? You bet.

God hears us even when our prayers are few and far between. But it is

always better to have a good, clear and constant communication system with Him.

Let me explain this last point with this famous story of Scott O'Grady as a metaphor for prayer.

The date was June 2, 1995. Captain Scott O'Grady was in an F-16 fighter jet patrolling NATO's "no-fly zone" (set up to deter Serb combat planes) over western Bosnia when his F-16 was shot down by a Serb surface-to-air missile.

O'Grady parachuted to earth. For six days he hid while enemy soldiers searched for him. He ate grass, leaves and ants and drank rainwater.

Day and night, he tried to use his beacon or his radio to let the US and NATO forces know that he was alive. He had to use it sparingly for his batteries were low. He had to be careful for if the enemy was scanning his area they would have picked up his signal. His transmissions were few and far between.

Meanwhile, day after day F-16s were flying over the area hoping against hope that they might hear some kind of signal from O'Grady. Like angels sent from God, the planes were sent out from the command post to search for the lost pilot.

One time they heard his beacon signal but when they tried to talk to him to find out if he was O'Grady, they couldn't hear him though O'Grady could hear them.

It was the ultimate frustration to be that close and yet not be able to confirm that he was alive.

O'Grady said what got him through that scary, hard time was his faith in

God, which he said was a "trust repaid a thousand fold." (*Return with Honor, by Scott O'Grady, Doubleday, New York, 1995, p125*)

When he was dying of thirst and was able to get even just a few ounces down his parched throat from rainwater collected off of leaves or a sponge, and even his socks, he said, "God heard my call once more, and I prayed now to thank Him. I never stopped praying while I was in Bosnia, day and night. If I'd used a calling card to reach heaven that week, I'd have run up one whopper of a bill." (*Ibid. p. 122- 123*).

Pray for others as you would like to be prayed for.

On the sixth night, Scott's prayers were answered. He sent off a short message signaling his location and that he was alive. An F-16 pilot who happened to know O'Grady heard it. Help was now to be on the way. They pinpointed his location.

Scott O'Grady modeled the principle of praying constantly. He modeled being open, clear and honest with our needs.

The command post couldn't prevent him from getting shot down for a pilot ultimately is on his own. But when he was shot down, they did all they could to help him.

God does not promise that we will never suffer or get shot down, but He does promise that He will do all in His power to sustain us and help us.

Now that they knew where he was, the NATO and US command did all they could to help Scott O'Grady. It was as if a "Broken Arrow" call was made.

By dawn, two Super Stallion helicopters, filled with 30 marines, and two Cobra gunships took off from an aircraft carrier to rescue O'Grady. They circled for 40 minutes while their support gathered in the sky.

They were backed up by F-16 and F-15 fighters, plus A-10 Warthogs to take out any tanks in the area, FA-18 Hornets to take out any missile sites, EF-111 Aardvarks and EA-6 Prowlers to jam enemy radars, as well as flying tankers to help refuel planes.

By 5:42 am that day all of these assets, this huge armada was racing into the sun to find O'Grady. By 6:21 am enemy Serb radar activity was detected. The enemy was waiting for them. They would have to be quick.

Scott lit some flares when he saw his rescuers dive from the clouds to retrieve him. He ran 200 yards from his hiding place to the landing site as 15 marines formed a protective perimeter.

As Scott got to the helicopter one of the marines picked him up with his *victorious* hands and threw him inside.

They flew off at 200 miles per hour and he thought someone asked him about taking fire.

He said, "Yeah, I took fire."

The Marine next to him said, "No, we're taking fire now!"

Surface-to-air missiles had launched to take out the helicopters carrying O'Grady and so the choppers quickly dropped down over trees to a mere 50 feet above the ground.

They moved low and fast hugging the roofs of barns and houses, missing power lines and trying to now escape more fire from enemy soldiers.

But enemy fire caught up with them. One round tore through the main rotor of O'Grady's helicopter, a second one struck one of the tail rotor blades, a third ripped through the cabin from back to front and bounced off the roof and hit a marine in the lower back sending him forward. Fortunately it was the marine's canteen on his back that got hit.

The Cobra helicopters responded with their guns blazing trying to protect O'Grady's Stallion helicopter. O'Grady looked at the brave Marines in front of him seeing how they hated not to have any control over the situation.

The captain prayed, "Please God, let none of these good men get hurt. Let us all make it home again." (*Ibid.* p. 172.)

Five minutes later they were out of Bosnian airspace.

And this is how the Christian life is. This is what our series is about. There is a clear and present danger. We are engaged in spiritual warfare. We are safe, then in danger. Safe again, then in danger, then safe.

Our job is to rescue people who are like downed pilots from this unsafe and adversarial world and bring them to Christ.

We need to pray always to make it in this spiritual warfare.

And this is how prayer works. God and His angels are searching the skies hoping from some signal from us, looking for some request for help, for some request of constant communication of where are we and what our condition is for that moment.

If we do not communicate with God, we are in trouble. But when God hears even a faint signal from us, God always responds.

For when we say, "Do you hear me now? Do you hear me now? I need help," God responds and sends his angels as strong as Michael, as clear as Gabriel, as mighty as the heavenly host of a thousand angels, as powerful as the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ Himself who is far

greater than any military weapon.

When we pray and give our "10-15" or "Broken Arrow," God does respond

He can't promise we won't be in a war and that there won't be suffering for that is what war and life is all about. But He promises that if we pray constantly, if we abide in Him, truly trust Him not with lip service but devote our lives to Him, then when we pray, ask whatever we want and He will hear and act on it.

He will be there for us, no matter what.

As one of my favorite verses says, Isaiah 41:10– the verse for us in spiritual warfare: *Is. 41:10 do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

Amen!

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Sunday worship sermons can also be heard on "Strength for the Journey," First Prez's weekly radio show on KGU 760 AM. Sunday mornings at 10.