

“A Father’s Legacy” (Ephesians 6:18)

This morning, I’d like to ask a very important question. The question is this: “What is the most significant thing you do during the course of your day?” How would you answer this question? Don’t worry about “right answers” or what anyone else may think. I want to know what YOU think is the most significant thing you do each day!

I spend my days serving the church. I preach, teach, lead, administrate, disciple, and visit. Now I’m sure no one here would deny that those are significant tasks. Yet, none of these ministries rank supreme in my mind. The most significant ministry that I do is to pray. Every morning and evening I spend time praying for and with my wife and children. For me personally, this is by far the most meaningful thing I do during the course of my day!

Now some may think this is an overstatement. It may be suggested that this mentality is a bit extreme, but I’m convinced this is the heart of our heavenly Father. While I am a pastor, I’m first and foremost a husband and a father. Therefore, if I don’t succeed with Lori and my three children, in an ultimate sense, my life has been unsuccessful! This truth applies to every father. No amount of ministry or vocational success can replace family success. Whether you’re an engineer, a mechanic, a teacher, or a small business owner, your most important job is leaving a legacy for your children. The legacy the Scriptures herald is one founded on prayer. Therefore, I submit to you, *a father’s legacy is forged through prayer*. Whether you’ve raised your kids, are currently raising your kids, or have no kids, you can be a biblical father by praying for those children whom the Lord places in your life. Ladies, this message is for you too, because we can all benefit from taking a closer look at prayer.

This morning, I want us to learn *how* to pray for our children. If our children are to be successful in life, we must know how to effectively pray for them. Billy Graham says there are three keys for having a successful evangelistic crusade—prayer, prayer, and prayer. The same is true for effective fathering. We could say there are three keys for successfully passing down a legacy to our children—prayer, prayer, and prayer. Ephesians 6:18 tells us how we are to pray: **“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”** This single verse teaches us five ways that we can pray for our children.

1. We are to pray comprehensively¹: Paul writes that we are to pray **“with all prayer and petition.”** All prayer² and petition³ refers to general and specific requests. Note the word “all” is mentioned four times in this verse. Paul is saying that our prayers should be all encompassing in their scope, yet direct, insightful, and specific.

A wonderful verse that guides me in comprehensive prayer is found in Luke 2:52. Four areas of development are mentioned here, and they are all areas in which we would like to see our children grow. We can and should pray that our children will:

- ***INCREASE IN WISDOM.*** Biblical wisdom is the ability to apply God’s knowledge to the issues of life. We are to pray that our children will grow up in their reverence for the Lord and in their ability to know right from wrong and choose to do what is right.
- ***INCREASE IN STATURE.*** This refers to physical growth. We should pray for our kids’ safety and good health, so they can develop to the full extent of their God-given abilities.
- ***GROW IN FAVOR WITH GOD.*** This is a clear reference to spiritual growth. We must fervently pray that our children will always have tender hearts toward the Lord. This means that we continually pray that knowing Him, walking with Him, and serving Him will be their greatest desire. We should pray also that true Christ-likeness will be developed in them as time goes by.

- *GROW IN FAVOR WITH MEN.* This refers to social growth. We should pray that our kids would learn to get along with others and be true friends without compromising their values. Pray that God will bring them good friends who will be a positive influence. Pray that even now God would be preparing the boys and girls who will grow up to one day be godly mates for our children.

Fathers, why not pray this verse over your children every night? Almost every night, I walk into our boys' room and pray with them. I try not to ever go to bed without praying over my children. Joshua makes sure of this—he doesn't want to go to sleep until Daddy prays for him. Last year, Lori and I were awed as Joshua put two of his dolls in his bed and then got down on his knees and prayed for them. Nothing could have brought me more satisfaction or fulfillment. I want my boys to grow up to be men of prayer! Praying over them every night will help to make this a reality because *a father's legacy is forged through prayer.*

2. We are to pray consistently: Paul writes that we are to “**Pray at all times.**” Is continual prayer possible? It is if we understand what Paul means. The prayer called for here is not so much the articulation of words but the posture of the heart. Are you ready to pray at the drop of a hat? If there is a need in your home, do you immediately turn to prayer? Prayer ought to be the lifeline of your home. Your children ought to be able to say, “My dad is a man of prayer. He's serious about God!” I want to ask you a question: Can your children honestly say that you are a godly man? Would they describe you as a man who loves to pray? This is what it is to leave a legacy.

When we were candidating at Emmanuel, Lu Simonson and Val Brase came over to our hotel to spend some time with us. I don't remember much of anything we talked about that evening but I do remember what they said about their dad, Blythe Stanton. These two adult women raved about their father like schoolgirls in love. In fact, Lori and I have never heard two adult children speak so highly of a parent. While I was listening to Lu and Val share, I said to myself, “I want my children to love and respect me like this.” I also said, “I need to know what makes Blythe tick.” As I've had the opportunity to get to know Blythe, I've observed him as an exemplary elder, a good friend, and a wise counselor and mentor. However, the thing that is the most impressive to me about Blythe is his deep love for children. Blythe and his wife Joyce absolutely love children.

3. We are to pray confidently: Paul tells us to “**pray in the Spirit.**” What does this mean? In this passage, Paul is referring to Spirit-empowered and Spirit-directed prayers. Instead of praying according to our flesh, we must rely upon the Spirit. In Luke 11:11-13, Jesus said to His disciples, “Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or *if* he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” We can and should pray with confidence.

4. We are to pray carefully: Paul continues with the phrase, “**be on the alert.**” The word translated “alert” means to “to keep oneself awake.”⁴ This word is used three other times in the NT.⁵ Mark and Luke use the word to motivate believers to be on the lookout for Christ's return. Since we don't know when Christ will return, we are to be prepared and on guard at all times. In Heb 13:17, the word is used again of the responsibility of church leaders to watch over and care for the people of God. This verse is sobering because it says that church leaders will have to give an account for how careful they have been to “watch” out for those God has entrusted to us.

In the same way, God has entrusted us with the lives of our children. One day we will have to stand before Jesus Christ and give an account of how well we invested in God's good gifts. Therefore, as we pray for our children, we must do so with our eyes wide open. This means we are to be always watching out for our children, bringing to God their personal needs and struggles.

Our children are constantly being confronted with all kinds of evils, pressures, and temptations. Spiritual warfare demands that we be in prayer for them with all alertness. *A father's legacy is forged through prayer.*

5. We are to pray constantly: Paul writes that we are to pray “with all perseverance⁶ and petition⁷.” I don’t know about you, but I give up too soon in prayer. If I don’t see immediate results, oftentimes I quit and fail to carry through with it any further. I bet you can relate to this. By nature we can be impatient can’t we? That’s why Paul concludes this verse by saying, “pray with all perseverance.” This does not say “some” perseverance or “much” perseverance. But “ALL perseverance.” We are to stay after it in prayer, never letting up. God’s delays are not God’s denials. We think our requests must not be God’s will if we pray once and it is not immediately answered by sundown. If God’s answer is not according to our time schedules, then we want to give up and move on to something else.

Maybe you heard about the woman who accidentally left her expensive diamond brooch, an irreplaceable family heirloom, in a hotel restroom. When she got home, she discovered that her brooch was missing and immediately called the hotel. She told the manager of her desperate situation and he immediately went to look for it. After searching for a few minutes—what seemed to be an eternity to the frantic woman—he found her brooch, placed it in the hotel safe, and returned to the phone to tell her the good news. But to his amazement, when he picked up the phone she had hung up! In her impatience, she didn’t wait long enough for the positive answer, which was on the way.

The truth is, fathers, we are like this when we pray. We aren’t willing to persevere on our knees and wait on God. Honestly, I’m sure it would astound us to know how often God is on the way with the answer to our prayers, but we grow impatient and hang up too soon, failing to receive what God has for us. The Lord wants us to persevere in prayer. He wants us to be diligent.

Unfortunately, many of us don’t pray more because we can’t pray more. We aren’t spiritually strong enough for the exercise of prayer. Now we have the strength to watch the Mariner’s, go hunting, spend time on the computer, or work in the yard, but we don’t have prayer strength.

Several years ago, we went to Roseburg, OR to spend some time with Lori’s family. Now, you need to understand that Lori’s family is really into hunting and fishing, and I’m not! They even consider these activities sports. I don’t. Basketball, football, and baseball are sports. I know I’m on dangerous ground here. Anyway, my father-in-law, Dwight, is an exceptional bow hunter. One afternoon he took me out on their property for some bow practice. I was excited to shoot some arrows since I had never done this before. I watched my father-in-law shoot several arrows and then he handed me the bow. I lined up and took aim; I pulled the bow back and then, all of a sudden. . .it happened! There was a hitch. I couldn’t pull the bow all the way back! This was humiliating! So what did I do? I kept trying, but I met up with the same result every time. Every son-in-law wants to impress his father-in-law but I couldn’t. I said, “Dwight, I don’t understand this, why can’t I do this? You’re pulling the bow back like it’s nothing and I am physically incapable of doing this. What gives? I’m the weightlifter here. How many pounds of pressure am I dealing with?” He said, “60 pounds.” I thought to myself, “I can still curl 60 pound dumbbells in each hand, why can’t I do this?” Dwight read my mind and said, “This movement requires you to use your muscles in ways that they’ve never been used before.”

I couldn’t pull this bow back because I had never performed, much less practiced, the necessary exercise. The same is true for many of us when it comes to prayer. It’s not that we lack the necessary strength; we just haven’t constantly tapped into it. When we trusted in Jesus Christ, we were given all of the spiritual muscle necessary to pull off great feats of strength, but we must utilize and exercise the muscles that we possess. So men, how can we bulk up our spiritual muscles and forge a legacy through prayer? I would suggest the following four strategies:

- PROMISE: Make a commitment to pray for your children on a daily basis.
- PREPARATION: Find a quiet place and a specific time. It may be during your lunch break or on your commute to or from work. It may be in the morning before you leave for work or it may be in the evening.
- PRAYER LIST: A prayer list tames wandering minds. It also ensures that we will not neglect that which is most important. If you do not have a prayer list, start small. Simply list your most important relationships on a 3x5 card. Then post this card, put it in your Bible, or carry it around on a ring for daily reference.
- PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY: It is crucial that you find an accountability person. The mere mention of prayer suggests one thing—discipline. It is especially difficult to be disciplined in prayer because Satan knows how critical it is. Therefore, it is critical that you find a friend who will hold you accountable to fulfill your promises.

A spiritual legacy can only be passed down by God's strength in prayer, not our own. And that requires prayer. George McCluskey understood this. As a young husband, McCluskey made the commitment to invest one hour a day in prayer for his family, not yet born. He prayed that his children would come to know Christ personally and would follow Him closely. Eventually, George expanded his prayers to include future grandchildren and great grandchildren. In an amazing way, God answered those prayers.

George had 2 daughters who committed their lives to Christ and each married men who went into full-time ministry. Between them, the 2 couples had 4 girls and 1 boy. Each of the 4 girls married a minister and the boy became a pastor. But the power of McCluskey's prayers didn't stop there. The first 2 grandchildren born to the next generation were boys. And upon graduation from high school, the 2 cousins chose the same college and became roommates. During their sophomore year, one of the boys decided to go into the ministry. The other didn't. Understandably, he felt some pressure because he chose not to continue the family legacy. Instead he chose to pursue psychology. This young man earned his doctorate and eventually wrote books to help parents raise their children, which became best sellers. Although he didn't enter the pastorate, he has ministered to millions through a radio program heard on more than a thousand stations each day. Today, his influence upon the family is felt around the world. His name? James Dobson.

Incredibly, George McCluskey's prayers have been answered many times over. Not only are they still influencing his family four generations removed, but families around the globe as well. On his knees his family legacy was prepared, passed on, and preserved. This can be your story as well, if you remember, ***a father's legacy is forged through prayer.***

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Notes

¹ The following five points were taken from: Steven J. Lawson, *The Legacy* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1998), 197-209.

² Gk. *proseuches* (This is the primary word for “prayer.” A form of this word is used 36 times in the NT.)

³ Gk. *deseos* (A form of this word is used 18 times in the NT and is elsewhere translated “supplications” entreaties,” or “prayers.”)

⁴ Gk. *agrupnountes*, BAGD, 14a

⁵ Mark 13:33 and Luke 21:36

⁶ Gk. *proskarterese* is only used this one time in the NT. It can also mean “patience” (BAGD, 715d).

⁷ Gk. *desei* (A form of the same word is used in 6:18a.)