SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Warfare Prayer

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Pray Like Jesus | September 20, 2026 | Psalms 11:6; Mark 14:36; Psalms 16:5; Luke 22:39-44; Psalms 23:5; Matthew 26:36-46; Isaiah 51:17-22; Isaiah 53:10

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Amen. I want to invite you to take God's Word and turn to Matthew chapter 26. We're going to go ahead and get into it this morning. The title of the message, if you're taking notes today, is "Warfare Prayer."

I was looking at some old sermons this past week in my file, and I preached a message back in 2011 by this same title. Although it didn't have anything to do with the prayers of Jesus, which is what this series is all about, it was based out of Ephesians chapter 6, that great chapter that talks about the invisible battle that is going on all around us in the spiritual realms.

Part of the armor of God, the weaponry of God that He gives us, is prayer. He says to pray at all times and in all circumstances. I chose this title, "Warfare Prayer," today because the forces of darkness, as we look at Matthew chapter 26, are at an all-time high in the life of Jesus. In fact, Jesus would say that He is experiencing the hour of darkness.

At this moment in time, Satan had already entered into Judas's heart. We learned last week that Jesus was praying for Peter because Satan had come wanting to sift him like wheat. We see the ruler of the world, the enemy, the devil, is on the prowl as the cross looms.

From the very beginning, Satan had been trying to tempt Jesus to avoid the cross. Go back to the wilderness temptations. All of the temptations that Jesus faced were temptations to get glory without going to the cross.

Here, on the eve of the cross, with it actually upon Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, this temptation to go any other way than the cross is stronger than ever. In order to fight this temptation, in order to fight the battle, Jesus goes to one of His favorite places to pray.

You know, we ought to all have a favorite place where we pray. For Jesus, this was the Garden of Gethsemane.

Every word that we're going to read in Matthew chapter 26, I want you to notice, is directed to the Father. This is at the end of His earthly ministry here in the latter chapters of Matthew. It's very different from the beginning stage of His ministry in the wilderness, where He was in a back-and-forth with the enemy. Every word He prays in this prayer is directed to the Father.

At its root, this prayer is about the will of the Son, the human will of Jesus, 100 percent man and 100 percent God. It's about the human will of Jesus being in line with the will of His Father. This is the battle. It was a fight of the wills. The enemy wants the Son's will to lead away from the cross. The Father's will leads straight to the cross.

This warfare prayer that Jesus prays is all centered on this one question: Whose will will win the day?

It was true for Jesus, and it's true for me and you. Whose will is going to win the day in our lives? Is it going to be what we want and what we desire, or is it going to be the will of the Father?

Let's look at the text together. We'll work it out. Matthew chapter 26, starting in verse 36, the Bible says this:

> *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to His disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee,*
>
> *- Matthew 26:36-37a*

That's James and John. Many refer to this as the inner circle of Jesus.

> *He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me." And going a little farther He fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."*
>
> *And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*
>
> *Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done." And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.*
>
> *So, leaving them again, He went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand."*
>
> *- Matthew 26:37b-46*

Spurgeon called this scene in the garden "the Holy of Holies of our Lord's life here on earth." It really is sacred ground that we're treading upon.

It's interesting that, of the seven or eight prayers we have of Jesus in the Bible, His direct words that He prayed, five of them are right here together in the last two days of His physical life on earth: John 17, which we looked at last week; this warfare prayer here in the garden; and then three prayers on the cross that we'll look at next week.

The setting of this prayer, we need to get this picture in our minds. Jesus goes to, as mentioned earlier, one of His favorite places to pray. Luke's account of this same story has these words:

> *And He came out and went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed Him.*
>
> — Luke 22:39

You remember, from week one when we talked about prayer, you need to have a routine, a regular rhythm. Get to a place where you seek the Lord. This was one of Jesus's favorite places to pray. Evidently, He went regularly to it.

Gethsemane was located right across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem. When we take our trips to the Holy Land, and Lord willing, we're going to take one here at the end of 2027 if everything works out, we'd love for you to go. You'll be amazed when you're in the Holy Land at how close in proximity everything is.

Gethsemane means "olive press." Picture these olive trees representing the Garden of Gethsemane. Those olives would be crushed, and it's in the crushing of the olives that the oil is released. It was oil used for medicinal purposes, oil used for cooking and meeting daily needs, and oil used for anointing.

I just want you to get this picture in your mind. It's in this place of crushing that Jesus is being crushed. It's in this place where olives were pressed that the Son of God was being pressed like never before.

His first inclination when being pressed was to pray, get to His place where He prayed, and be with His Father. It's a good question of application as we get going this morning: What is your first inclination when you're pressed? Is it to scream out in frustration? Is it to go talk about your problem with someone else? I understand there's a time and place for all of that, but Jesus's first inclination was to pray.

Let prayer be our first response, not our last resort.

The prophet Isaiah saw this time in the garden coming 700 years earlier:

> *Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him.*
> — Isaiah 53:10

Don't miss that. It was the will of the Lord to do what? Crush Him. That's exactly what's taking place. This crushing was the Father's will.

Again, in this garden, that's what this warfare prayer is all about. Whose will will win the day?

The Scripture says, look at it again in verses 36 through 39:

> *He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death."*
> — Matthew 26:37-38

Now, catch the intensity here. This is anguish. He uses the word "sorrowful" twice. He uses the word "troubled." If you're not using the English Standard Version, which I'm preaching from today, some of your translations may use the words "distressed" or "horrified."

Again, it's a picture of being surrounded by grief. Darkness is pressing in, and it's almost overwhelmingly so. Luke's account of what's going on in the garden says that Jesus was sweating drops of blood as He prayed.

This is a real moment in the life of Christ. It's so heavy, with so much weight, that all three of the Gospels emphasize that Jesus fell on His face and prayed.

What do you think the disciples are thinking in this moment? They've traveled with Jesus for three years. They've seen Him in all sorts of situations. They've seen Him behind closed doors. They've been in some pretty tense times with Jesus.

One time, they came to a place and a demoniac who had been living in the cemetery came screaming. Jesus confronted that man and cast the demon out.

They had been with Jesus when He was on the Sea of Galilee. These are seasoned fishermen, and it begins to whitecap. The boat begins to take on water, and these disciples are fearful for their lives. They're screaming out, and what is Jesus doing? He's asleep.

They were with Jesus in Nazareth when the crowd wanted to push Him off the edge of a cliff. The Bible says that Jesus walked right through the crowd, and nobody put a hand on Him.

These disciples had been in some tense moments and conflict, and never once was Jesus flinching. Yet here He is sorrowful, troubled, and deeply anguished. What for?

His prayer tells us. Look at the first part of verse 39:

> *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.*
>
> — Matthew 26:39

Warfare Prayer Begins With Honesty

Here's the first thing I want you to notice about warfare prayer: Warfare prayer begins with honesty. We tell the Father what we really want.

This is what Jesus is doing. With the cross rapidly approaching, He tells His Father what He really wants. Mark's account tells us the exact words of Jesus in this prayer:

> *Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.*
>
> — Mark 14:36

Remember that? "Abba" was week two, talking about intimacy. When He's in pain, when He's hurting, and when darkness is closing in, His first inclination is to cry out, "Abba." Intimacy.

In this honest prayer, "Let this cup pass," it's wrapped in faith. He says, "All things are possible for You."

If there had been any other way than the cross to save me or you, the Father would have granted the request of the Son. But there was no other way. This unanswered prayer to remove the cup is proof that the cross was the only way.

What's this cup language Jesus is talking about here? This is familiar language in the Bible. The Old Testament speaks of a cup, and often it denotes one's lot in life, what you've been assigned by God.

Let me give you some examples:

> *The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;*
> *You hold my lot.*

> — Psalm 16:5

I was reading this morning in my Psalms reading:

> *You prepare a table before me*
> *in the presence of my enemies;*
> *You anoint my head with oil;*
> *my cup overflows.*
>
> — Psalm 23:5

It can speak of the good that God gives, but more often than not, when you read of the cup in the Scriptures, it speaks of God's wrath. It speaks of His judgment.

> *Let Him rain coals on the wicked;*
> *fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.*
>
> — Psalm 11:6

The prophet Isaiah writes and says:

> *Wake yourself, wake yourself,*
> *stand up, O Jerusalem,*
> *you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord*
> *the cup of His wrath,*
> *who have drunk to the dregs*
> *the bowl,*
> *the cup of staggering.*
>
> — Isaiah 51:17

If you keep reading there in Isaiah chapter 51, there's this major reversal that takes place just a few verses later:

> *Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering;*
> *the bowl of My wrath you shall drink no more.*
>
> — Isaiah 51:22

Why shall they drink it no more? Because Jesus is going to drink it.

This cup language continues in the New Testament. Do you remember Matthew chapter 20? Jesus is on His way to the cross, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, the same ones who are with Him in the garden, have their mom come to Jesus and say, "Jesus, when You get into Your kingdom, will You remember my boys? And don't just remember my boys. Would You let them sit, one on Your right and one on Your left?"

What a bunch of mama's boys, letting their mama do their bidding for them!

Do you remember what Jesus said?

> *You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?*
> — Matthew 20:22

Earlier, at the Lord's Supper, He gave them a cup. What did He say?

> *This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*
> — Matthew 26:28

Jesus was about to drink the cup of God's judgment and wrath against sin.

I just want us to take this in. You know, pun intended, drink it in. What's happening? Jesus is drinking this cup. He knows that's His assignment. He's going to bear the judgment of the sin of mankind, past, present, and future. Every sinful act. Every evil deed.

Just get a picture of it in your mind. Every profane thing. All the perversity in the universe. The judgment for every sin ever committed is in that cup. Jesus knows that when He drinks it, He incurs the full wrath of God. He's going to partake of something that He has never experienced before: judgment of sin and broken fellowship with the Father.

Do you see why we're calling it warfare prayer? It's a real battle going on. The human will of Jesus, as the night gets darker and the burden gets greater, says, "Father, I don't want to drink this cup." Essentially, He says, "If there's another way, please provide it."

That's amazing. Jesus knew the will of God. On three different occasions in the Gospels, He says, "I'm going to the cross." He knew this was the way. He said one time in John:

> *My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.*
> — John 4:34

He knew the will of God, and yet He was still honest about what He wanted. He said, "I do not want this cup."

Let me highlight this fact: You do know the Lord can handle your honesty, right? When you're mad at Him and want to shake your fist at God because He's not answering a prayer or doing something you want Him to do, He can handle your honesty.

He can handle your confusion when you're not figuring out what He's up to or what He's doing. He can handle your disappointment. He can handle your honesty.

We see the psalmists in the Psalms of lament all the time being honest before the Lord. He knows your heart. He knows everything, so you might as well be honest with Him, right?

We've said throughout this series that prayer isn't checking off a box. It's a life to share with the Father. You can't share life with someone if you're not honest with them. Jesus can handle your honesty.

The psalmist says:

> *Trust in Him at all times, O people;*
> *pour out your heart before Him;*
> *God is a refuge for us.*
>
> — Psalm 62:8

We ought to pour out our hearts to the Lord. Be honest about what we want.

This is always important, but it's especially important when we don't know what the will of God is. Think about that. Jesus knew the will of God, knew the will of His Father, and was still honest about it. Sometimes we don't know God's will, and we need to be honest.

That job means moving, and you don't want to move. Be honest with the Lord. "God, I don't want to move. I love living in 110 degrees in September in Houston. I want to stay here. My family's in a good spot. The kids are in a good spot." You don't want to move, so you pray.

Have a bad diagnosis? Have surgery coming up? Get honest with the Lord. "God, I want to be healed. Lord, I don't want this disease that my loved one has to continue to progress. Remove this cancer." Get honest with the Lord.

You're in a relationship, and you want it to go to the next level, and that guy just didn't do it. "Lord, change this bozo's heart." Get honest with the Lord. Tell Him what you want.

This is where warfare prayer starts. It starts with honesty, but get this: It doesn't end there.

Warfare Prayer Continues in Persistence

This is the second point about warfare prayer: It continues in persistence. We keep coming back to the Father until the battle is won, the battle of the wills.

Both Matthew and Mark note that Jesus kept praying this prayer. In fact, He prayed it on three different occasions.

He prays:

> *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*
>
> — Matthew 26:39

We'll work that statement out in just a moment.

> *And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*
>
> — Matthew 26:40-41

It's very interesting when you study this prayer in the garden and line it up with the Lord's Prayer. Jesus used some of the exact same wording. He uses "Father." We've already noted that. He talks about not entering into

temptation, which is part of the Lord's Prayer. He says, "Not My will, but Your will be done," which is part of the Lord's Prayer.

It's almost as if Jesus purposely - imagine this - had a design to this when He was teaching the disciples how to pray. Now He's purposely living it out within earshot. They can hear Him putting into practice what He taught.

This is what we've said about prayer: Prayer is caught and taught. Jesus is no hypocrite. He's just practicing what He's preached.

He tells these disciples, "The spirit's willing, but the flesh is weak." He comes for a second time:

> *Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done."*
>
> — Matthew 26:42

There's a little subtle change there. We'll work it out in just a minute.

> *And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.*
>
> — Matthew 26:43

Now, don't read condemnation into this, like, "What's wrong with y'all? Wake up!" You know, that's what I want to say to some of y'all on Sunday morning: "Wake up!" All right?

No, no. Don't read condemnation into this. This is an invitation. Peter's already said, "Jesus, if all of them fall away, I'll never fall away," and here he is sleeping on the job.

Jesus is saying, "Man, this is battle." He felt the intensity of it. Don't go to sleep. This is warfare prayer right here.

Warfare prayer costs. If you've got a need in your life that you want to bring before the Father, I'm just telling you, warfare prayer costs. It's on your knees. It's persistent prayer, bringing it to the Lord over and over and over again.

> *So, leaving them again, He went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.*
>
> — Matthew 26:44

Persistence. He just keeps coming back to the Father over and over again.

I wish I had time to go into this, but I don't. Read Luke 11 in your own time. There's the disciples' prayer, teaching on prayer, and a parable on prayer. He even says, talking about continuing in prayer and persistent prayer:

> *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*
>
> — Luke 11:9-10

These are present imperatives. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking. Keep on asking. Don't give up.

Go over to Luke chapter 18. He teaches the same principle. There's this widow who wants justice, and she keeps going to the judge day after day after day after day after day. The Bible even says she was bothering the judge. It uses that word, "bother."

The lesson is persistence. We ought always to pray and not lose heart. In Luke 18, this earthly judge rewards her persistence. How much more will a good and loving God reward our persistence?

That doesn't mean He's going to answer our prayer. Exhibit A: He didn't answer the prayer of Jesus here. By the way, aren't you glad He didn't answer the prayer of Jesus right there? We'd be in bad shape.

I don't know why God doesn't answer our prayers. I was talking about this with our director of operations, Mike Haney, a couple of weeks ago. We were in a conversation. I wish I had an answer for you about why God's not answering the desires of your heart as you bring your honest prayer to Him. I don't know.

His ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. I don't know.

I do know that while the cup didn't pass, He did give the Son strength to drink it. I think that strength came as a direct result of His prayers.

Notice this, though: In the garden, persistence didn't change the Father's answer. The cup still didn't pass. What persistence did was change the prayer of the Son.

I need you to hear this. This is amazing. Think about this. Sometimes God will use our persistence and answer our prayers. He'll give us the desires of our hearts, and He'll change our circumstances because of persistent prayer, His mercy and grace, and His sovereign plan.

But sometimes God will use our persistence in prayer to change and shape us. This is what happens. Jesus comes back to His Father again and again and again.

Notice how His prayer changes. At first:

> *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.*
> — Matthew 26:39

Then:

> *My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done.*
> — Matthew 26:42

Do you see it? The first asks for a way out. The second accepts that there's not one. It's in persistence, coming back to the Father again and again and again, that a prayer of surrender takes place.

That's a key word. Jesus is putting on a clinic here in persistent prayer, and His disciples are sleeping.

Three times, in the second part of verse 39, verse 42, and verse 44, He asks His Father and closes each prayer out the exact same way: "Not what I will, but what You will. Your will be done."

Warfare prayer begins with honesty. We tell the Father what we really want.

It continues in persistence. We keep coming back to the Father until the battle is won, the battle of the wills.

Warfare Prayer Ends With Surrender

Third and finally, warfare prayer ends with surrender, where we yield our will to the will of the Father.

Do you know what I think the most important word in verse 39 is? What do you think it is?

"Nevertheless."

That's the heart of Jesus. He says, "Here's what I really want." But as He persists in prayer over and over and over again, He says, "But what I really want, more than the cup to pass, is for Your will to be done."

Don't misunderstand, from a theological standpoint, what's going on here. This is not the Father against the Son, as if they're on opposite sides. Jesus was 100 percent man and 100 percent God. What He's bringing is His real human will into alignment with the will of His Father.

The struggle in the garden was real. This warfare prayer was real. It was in surrender, yielding to the Father and His will, that the victory was won.

This is where Jesus wins the battle, and this is where you and I win the battle. It's when we come to the Lord in prayer and we don't just pray it, but we mean it from our hearts: "Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours be done."

It was at this point, this moment of surrender, that Jesus, according to verse 46, gets up and says:

> *Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand.*
> — Matthew 26:46

He starts in the garden on His face. Through prayer and surrender, He leaves ready and resolved to face the cross.

I wrote the sermon out in a sentence. It goes like this: Warfare prayer is honest about what I want and keeps praying until I surrender to what my Father wants.

That's the secret of the garden. It's Jesus's warfare prayer of surrender.

A Nevertheless Kind of Prayer

As I bring the message to a close, go back through all these weeks. In week one, we talked about a routine and a rhythm. In weeks two and three, we gave you the Lord's Prayer and gave you a 10-minute challenge.

We asked you to spend 10 minutes just praying through the Lord's Prayer, sitting in His presence for 10 minutes.

Week four was about praying to the Holy Spirit. Remember that prayer? We said, "Holy Spirit, shape me more

and more and more. Lord, let Your Holy Spirit shape me more and more and more."

Last week, we came back and talked about intercessory prayer. We asked you to pray for two or three people, to pray for them by name, and to pray God's Word over them.

At this point, we're at about 12 to 15 minutes of personal time with the Lord, legitimate prayer before the Lord, 12 to 15 minutes.

I want you to add one prayer this week. I'm calling it a "nevertheless" kind of prayer.

Here's the prayer I want you to bring to the Lord this week. I want you to be honest. Whatever situation you're in, or your loved one's in, bring it before the Lord and be honest about it. Tell God what you want.

Be persistent. Keep coming back to the Lord day after day, all throughout the day. Tell Him what you want. Be honest. Be persistent.

But in that prayer, just like Jesus did, pray, "Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours be done."

"Nevertheless" prayers are not cop-out prayers. They ensure victory in warfare prayer.

I close with this illustration. You remember, the garden is the place of crushing. Jesus would go to His favorite place, the Garden of Gethsemane, filled with olive trees.

When we take our groups to Israel, we'll always take a moment in the garden there. Some of these olive trees, as you see on the screen, are 2,000 years old. We'll take our groups into the Garden of Gethsemane, and it's quiet and secluded. We'll have a little devotional there, and then we'll break up and let families go into the Garden of Gethsemane and pray together as a family, or break off as individuals to pray.

But we always, at least when I lead the groups in, always, always, always are going to worship.

Do you know what song we sing in the garden? It's the song we're going to close by singing right now. It's a song of surrender, and I want you to sing it with me.

All to Jesus I surrender, All to Him I freely give; I will ever love and trust Him, In His presence daily live.

Make it your prayer.

I surrender all, I surrender all; All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

Would you pray with me?