

Series: Colossians	Reference: <i>Colossians 4:1-18</i>	Title: Effective Prayer	Date: 2.07.2021
Website Writeup:			
Do our prayers center on personal comfort or the desires & calling of Jesus? Do we see ourselves as on a battlefield with a walkie-talkie connection to our Commander & Chief with unlimited firepower, and strategic planning from above as Paul did? Or is God a golden retriever we've simply trained to get us a beer out of the fridge?			

Let me begin with a poem concerning how we might pray...

*I asked for strength that I might achieve,
He made me weak that I might obey.
I asked for health that I might do great things,
He gave me grace that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy,
He gave me poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men,
He gave me weakness that I might feel a need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life,
He gave me life that I might enjoy all things.
I received nothing I had asked for,
He gave me all that I had hoped for!*

Let me pray for us...“Lord, please make your desires, our desires, amen.”

This is our last sermon in Colossians, next week Dawn Woods will speak to you as Kim & I will be out of touch canoeing & camping with the alligators & dolphins for 60 miles through the Florida Everglades! Pray we don't get eaten or lost! We're in chapter 4 (P806) if you'd like to turn there in your pew Bibles. It begins...²Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful & thankful. ³And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Paul wraps up this whole book with a call to prayer - to be devoted, watchful & thankful. He mentions over 100 people he's partnered with in the Gospel throughout his NT letters & the book of Acts. One of the greatest preachers/evangelists who ever lived needed the Church to pray for him. There's humility in that. His prayer wasn't about him or his blessing, rather about Jesus & the Kingdom call - the Children of God petitioning their Heavenly Father to move on behalf of others to open doors for the Gospel. Paul relies on God moving through the prayers of His people asking a door be opened. What goes through the door? The message & mystery of Christ.

Writing from prison along with Aristarchus, Paul's a man who's given all for this mystery in Jesus, enduring a great deal for Gospel advancement. **Let's hear from his own mouth what he's endured as he's forced into an argument with critics in 2 Corinthians 11:21-30. He's not out to brag, as you will see from the language, but forced to because of the arguments some were bringing against him...**

What anyone else dares to boast about - I am speaking as a fool - I also dare to boast about. **22**Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. **23**Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more.

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again & again. **24**Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. **25**Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, **26**I have been constantly on the move. **I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.** **27**I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. **28**Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. **29**Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? **30**If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

Is that a successful life of peace, wealth, health & personal fulfillment? Would you go to school, get a masters degree, spend time & money to pursue a career only to be impoverished, beaten, left for dead & live in risk, all for the sake of Jesus? From a worldly modern point of view this is a guy who should've given up on prayer a long time ago - it didn't seem to do him much good! Prayer didn't seem to bring him the good life! But that's not what Paul sought. If he were a modern American, he'd not be pursuing the American Dream! He calls the Colossians to pray & prayer he's talking about isn't prayer like the one of our poem, which is so often the case! Paul's focus in life isn't on himself, it's on Jesus' desires & commands. Often our prayer's focused on our desires as if God's a golden retriever we've trained to bring us a beer from the fridge so we don't miss a minute of the Super Bowl.

John Piper defines prayer this way... 'Prayer isn't designed as an intercom between us & God to serve the domestic comforts of the saints. It's designed as a walkie-talkie for spiritual battlefields. It's the link between active soldiers & their command headquarters, with its unlimited firepower, air cover & strategic wisdom.' Are battlefields comfortable? No, you get shot & beaten up. Piper's right. Paul doesn't seem to put much focus on himself, his interests coincide with those of his battlefield Commander, Jesus. If Paul's desire's to get out of jail at all, it's only that he may continue to advance this mystery of Christ through open doors. We see this happen throughout his ministry.

In Acts 14:27 Paul reports to the church at Antioch a door was opened. It says... **27**On arriving there, they gathered the church together & reported all that God had done through them & how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. In 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, Paul tells of a door which had been opened which is extremely fruitful, but hard... **8**But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, **9**because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me. In **2** Corinthians

2:12, Paul tells of another door opened for him...*12Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ & found that the Lord had opened a door for me...*

Paul's modeled a prayerful devoted life proclaiming the mystery of Christ. If anyone has the right to tell us to pray devotedly, watchfully & thankfully, he does. Prayers, constant, consistent, wakeful & aware of what actually needs intercession. Thankful prayers. Because as we pray for open doors for each other so that the Gospel may advance through us, we can't help but to be thankful for what Jesus has done in our own lives.

My wife led me to a few stories in the January 2021 issue of Voice of the Martyrs. One in which a young muslim convert to Christ by the name of Bassam in an Arab country who'd been growing in Christ for years, but without sharing his faith. He finally went to his spiritual mentor & said, "I've been spiritually asleep all these years, I can no longer keep my faith in Christ to myself - I feel strongly compelled to share Christ, the one true God, with anyone I can." He began with his family. His wife promptly disowned him, took his daughters away, and proceeded to petition his boss & coworkers to punish him. She used the courts to get all his income directed to her. Her brothers began to beat him daily, often putting him in the hospital. Long story short, over the years he led man people to faith, including some of his own family members, including his daughters. He continues to thankfully share his faith everyday knowing that each could be his last.

Paul knows where true joy & satisfaction lie, which is in serving Jesus, despite discomfort. Prayers of the saints are effective, especially when they're focused on the business of Jesus & not personal comfort. Let me tell you a story of answered prayer in this vein (Story of Dallas Theological Seminary, Baker, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. p274).

Shortly after Dallas Theological Seminary opened in 1924, it came to bankruptcy & was to be foreclosed on a certain date. That morning the leadership gathered to pray. Henry Ironside prayed this... "Lord, we know the cattle on a thousand hills are yours, please sell some & give us the money!" While they were still praying a tall Texan walked into their business office & said... "I just sold two carloads of cattle in Fort Worth, and have been trying to make business deal work, but it has not. I feel God's compelling me to give you the check, don't know if you need it, but here it is." Apparently, God not only answers prayer, but sometimes has a sense of humor in doing so! God wanted the door of Dallas Theological Seminary to be open for the Gospel to advance in the world. Countless numbers of people have been prepared through that institution to go out & advance the Kingdom over the years. That wasn't a selfish, 'make me feel better' prayer. That was a prayer which concerned the greater purposes of Jesus & His Kingdom.

What would happen if our wakeful, watchful, thankful prayers were set to those heights all the time instead of personal comfort? The last time I preached at my former church it was on this passage. I asked them for prayer as I set out to plant this church, because we needed it. Notice Paul doesn't just ask for himself, but also for his companions working alongside him. So, at that time I asked for prayers for the Church Plant team as well. Prayer for doors to open in our geographical area for the message of the Gospel to walk

through. That we'd proclaim the Gospel clearly as we should, and that they'd pray verses 5-6 for our team & themselves which says...*5Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

It's hard to dismiss gracious salt-filled words, they are tasty, and last, not bitter or rotten. They bring life. Other stories in that Voice of the Martyrs magazine tells of how the Holy Spirit gave words to people to calm anger in their opponents & allow the Gospel to be preached boldly - it's encouraging, I would urge you to subscribe to it.

Let's take a few minutes & pray for our church now & also for the witness of other churches in this community. If you want, come to the mic & pray for doors to open for us to bring the light of Christ to others in this community. If you don't like microphones, then pray in silence in your seat.

In verses 7-18 which I won't read, Paul lists no less than 12 people & a few house churches in partnership with him. As we wrap up our service let's remember all the people which make up the Church over the centuries. Let's remember, no one person does the work of the Gospel alone. Paul's comforted & receives ministry from his brothers & sisters in Christ. They've walked with him through all kinds of ups & downs. Some people have been disappointing at times, others have been faithful & encouraging.

He mentions Tychicus who we see in Acts 20:4, the envoy of Paul carrying Ephesian letter to its various places. Most likely representing his Church in Asia to carry the offering to the poor. A traveling companion & encouragement who served when most wanted to be served. Onesimus, whom Paul calls a faithful & dear brother, one of them. Onesimus images what we've been talking about for the past few weeks - a slave's equal to his master, or anyone else in Christ. Onesimus was the runaway slave of Philemon who'd eventually return to him. He'd made his way to Rome, found Paul. Some believe Paul led him to faith, then returned him in full standing. Onesimus here is introduced not as a slave, but as a dear brother.

Then Aristarchus, whom we also see in Acts 20:4. Faithful, who didn't run away when things got hard. He was there when the riot broke out in Ephesus in the Temple of Diana & was captured by the mob. There with Paul when they set sail for Rome in Acts 27 with Paul as a prisoner on the ship. It's believed he may have even enrolled himself as Paul's slave to make the trip. Now he's here in Rome in prison with Paul.

Then Mark, the author of the Gospel, the guy Paul & Barnabas fought over in the second missionary journey & disappointed Paul. He reveals to us community's hard as we've been saying. But 12 years after that incident Mark's mentioned by Paul a couple of times, and even in 2 Timothy he says Mark's very helpful to him in ministry. A reconciled relationship. Paul goes to lengths here to erase that past problem & have the Colossians receive him with open arms. Justus, we know nothing about, other than Paul says he was part of the crowd which was a great comfort to him. There was Epaphras

who may've been the overseer & minister in Colosse, Hierapolis & Laodicea. Another man who's taught (1:7), marked by a servant's heart towards others.

Then Luke, the doctor who gave up so much of a lucrative life to minister along side Paul & was with him to the very end (2Tim 4:11). Then Demas who in Philemon 24 was listed as one of Paul's fellow workers, but now is simply Demas & who later on in 2 Timothy 4:10 becomes Demas who loved the world too much & deserted Paul - a study in the fact that the community of faith doesn't always experience good things. Some fall away, people come & go. He mentions others, but we get the picture.

I always wondered as a young Christian why God would put lists of names like this at the ends of these letters. But now I see it gives us a glimpse as to the community of faith & how it works. It makes it down to earth & real. We have names, histories & personal stories of the early Church. I could write letters like this & mention your names. You are also friends walking alongside & enduring hardship with me for the sake of the Kingdom on the Eastern Main Line.

When I ended my sermon over 12+ years ago, I invited the plant team forward. A small group of people committed to walk together for the sake of the Gospel on the Eastern Main Line. People who came to that church for a time & that were now going out to do kingdom work as a new body of Christ. Altogether there were about 40 people involved in this endeavor. That church, along with the new senior pastor, took the time that evening to pray for us - and look where we are now!

For over 12 years we've ministered the Gospel to thousands of people a hundred at a time! You may think this church is small, but it's historical footprint is huge!

It's good we end on this passage today given you should've gotten an email from me about 21 Days of Fasting & Prayer for the Vineyard National Restructuring & discernment of the next National Director starting tomorrow and going through the 28th. Add to that, leadership at Six:Eight is formulating plans for our future, there's a growing desire in our crowd to up our game in this community in the area of evangelism! We're considering certain moves to enable that to happen, and have made many already. Pray for your leadership, that we discern the Spirits lead well during this time!

I began with that poem revealing what we usually pray for, but what if we prayed for the things which actually really matter to God's heart? That we would be willing to endure all things for the sake of Christ in this world, in order to see His kingdom break through at greater levels in the lives of people around us, and across the world? Maybe that would get more done, be adventurous, and make God pleased! It would be a true spiritual act of worship to seek His will in all things! Let me end with a prayer from the Voice of the Martyrs (p12)...

'Lord Jesus...Thank you for our persecuted Christian brothers & sisters who faithfully stand as witnesses of Your grace no matter the cost. When they are beaten & delivered to

courts, may they gain confidence through Your presence in all situations. As they stand before any opponent, whether family members, former friends or government authorities, replace their anxiety with peace, love & faith. When they face slander, allegations & legal charges, may they speak boldly, lovingly & truthfully with wisdom. Give our bold & faithful persecuted brothers & sisters courage & endurance as they recall Your promises that Your followers would face persecution. Thank You for their sacrifice & faithfulness. We join them in joyful praise to the name above all names, Yours, Jesus Christ, our Lord! Amen!