

Prayers for One Another  
Colossians 4:2-6  
Newton Bible Church  
August 11, 2019

Years ago, the China Inland Mission discovered that the number and spiritual strength of the converts at one station far exceeded anyone's expectations and could not be accounted for by anything exceptional about the missionary personnel there. The mystery remained unsolved until Hudson Taylor visited England. There, at the close of Taylor's message, a man from the audience stepped forward to greet him. In the ensuing conversation, Taylor learned that this man had detailed knowledge of this station.

"How is it," asked Taylor, "that you are so conversant with the conditions of that work?" "Oh," he replied, "for four years I have corresponded with my missionary friend there. He has sent me the names of inquirers and converts, and I have daily taken these names to God in prayer." Taylor realized the answer to the puzzle: the daily, specific, prevailing prayer of this man had brought eternal fruit for God's glory.

As we near the conclusion of our studies in Colossians, we will consider a portion today that reflects Paul's understanding of the priority of prayer in the mission we have all been called to join. In order to fully grasp what this text is about; we need to remind ourselves of its setting.

As Paul did in many of his letters, the first half of Colossians is doctrinal instruction focused upon the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ. The second half is instruction on how we are to live transformed lives as we allow Christ to produce His life in us. There is a clear pattern of movement in this practical instruction: it starts at the epicenter; the church, and how transformed believers should relate to one another. That is the Scripture portion that we have been memorizing these last number of weeks. It then moves into the home, showing how transformed lives are able to follow God's design for relationships that bless. That's what we considered last week. The final chorus of this movement moves into the world, showing how transformed lives engage in the mission God has called and equipped them to join. Transforming prayer is at the heart of this movement into the world!

**Colossians 4:2-6 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup>Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup>At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— <sup>4</sup>that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

<sup>5</sup>Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup>Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

The opening section of this portion details how we ought to pray for one another. The remainder of the portion, by informing us as to how we are to engage in this mission details what we ought to pray for one another. We begin with how:

## 1. How to pray for one another (2-3a)

### a. Pray persistently (2a)

- Paul began this section of his letter with a command that touches upon an often-overlooked aspect of prayer, that of perseverance.
  - Paul used the imperative *proskarteite* – 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural imperative of *proskartereo* – a compound word with a wealth of meaning: adhere to, persist in, spend much time in, always stand ready.
  - The verb form means to be courageously persistent, and to hold fast and not let go – illustrated in Jacob’s night long wrestling match with the preincarnate Christ.
- This is a theme Paul addressed on several other occasions:
  - Pray at all times: **Ephesians 6:18** (ESV) <sup>18</sup>praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,
  - Pray without ceasing: **1 Thessalonians 5:17** (ESV) <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing,
  - Be devoted to prayer: **Romans 12:12** (ESV) <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.
- This is a theme that was so important to our Lord that He addressed it in two parables:

#### **Luke 18:1-8** (ESV)

**18** And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ <sup>4</sup> For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

#### **Luke 11:5-10** (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; <sup>7</sup> and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup> And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

- The point of both of these parables is that if unwilling and sinful humans will honor persistence, how much more will our holy, loving heavenly Father?
- That sort of prayer does not come without cost. Virginia Stem Owens wrote the following about wrestling with God in persistent earnest prayer:

“Christians have always interpreted the splitting of the temple veil during the crucifixion as symbolic of their liberation from the mediated presence of God. Henceforth they were “free” to approach Him directly – which is almost like telling someone he is “free” to stick his head in the lion’s jaws. For once you start praying, there is no guarantee that you won’t find yourself before Pharaoh, shipwrecked on a desert island, or in a lion’s den.

This is no cosmic teddy bear we are cuddling up to. As one of the children describes Him in C. S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*, “He’s not a *tame* lion.” Ellul is convinced that prayer for persons living in the technological age must be combat, and not just combat with the evil one, with one’s society, or even one’s divided self; it is also combat with God. . .

Consider Moses, again and again intervening between the Israelites and God’s wrath; Abraham praying for Sodom; the widow demanding justice of the unjust judge. But in this combat with God, Ellul cautions, we must be ready to bear the consequences: Jacob’s thigh was put out of joint, and he went away lame. However, the most usual experience will be God’s decision to put to work the person who cried out to Him. Whoever wrestles with God in prayer puts his whole life at stake.”

- This stands in marked contrast to the glib, self-centered prayers of our day. True prayer is a persistent courageous struggle from which the believer may come away limping. Such prayer, however, gives the believer a holy boldness to pray forcefully when convinced of God’s will. Martin Luther provided an example of such prayer:

In 1540 Luther’s great friend and assistant, Friedrich Myconius, became sick and was expected to die in a short time. On his bed he wrote a loving farewell note to Luther with a trembling hand. Luther received the letter and sent back a reply: “I command thee in the name of God to live because I still have need of thee in the work of reforming the church . . . The Lord will never let me hear that thou art dead but will permit thee to survive me. For this I am praying, this is my will, and may my will be done, because I seek only to glorify the name of God.”

Those words are shocking to us, but they were certainly heartfelt. Although Myconius had already lost the ability to speak when Luther’s letter came, he recovered completely and lived six more years to survive Luther himself by two months.

- John MacArthur concludes; “There is a tension between boldness and waiting on God’s will. That tension is resolved by being persistent yet accepting God’s answer when it comes.
  - First, we must pray persistently for one another. Then we must:
- b. Pray watchfully (2b)
- Paul’s second exhortation used the word *gregorountes* – 1<sup>st</sup> person plural present subjective of *gregoreo* – to be or keep awake, be on the alert, be watchful, be wide awake.
  - In its most basic sense, this means to stay awake and not fall asleep during prayer.
  - Praying watchfully is broader than physical alertness. It also involves looking carefully for those things about which we ought to be praying.

- Praying vague, general prayers may ease our conscience that we at least prayed, but they are difficult for God to answer in a way that truly honors Him because they do not ask anything specific.
- We will never persistently pray for something we are not concerned about. To be concerned, we must be alert to specific needs!
- We will need to do some groundwork before we approach the throne – like that person in England who regularly corresponded with the missionary to discover specific names and needs of those for whom he was asked to pray. A phone call or text conversation may be needed to gather the information necessary to bring heartfelt specific requests to the throne of grace!
- We need to pray persistently and watchfully. We also need to:
- c. Pray thankfully (2c)
  - Paul’s third exhortation used the word *eucharistia* – dative singular of *eucharistos* – thankfulness, gratitude, the rendering of thanks, thanksgiving.
  - When we pray, we can begin with gratitude for the following spiritual blessings and privileges:
    - We ought to be thankful for God’s presence: **Psalm 75:1** (ESV) We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds.
    - We ought to be thankful for God’s provision: **Acts 27:35** (ESV) <sup>35</sup> And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat.
    - We ought to be thankful for God’s pardon: **Micah 7:18** (ESV) <sup>18</sup> Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.
    - We ought to be thankful for God’s promise: **1 Corinthians 15:57** (ESV) <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - To pray thankfully is to pray in faith, especially when circumstances are not what you would have chosen.
    - We are instructed to give thanks in every situation; even when we cannot get ourselves to be thankful for the situation, we still are to be thankful that He is working in that situation and that all of His promises are still true!
  - We need to pray persistently, watchfully and thankfully. We also need to:
- d. Pray inclusively (3a)
  - Paul asked the Colossians to include him in their prayers.
    - Our natural inclination is to pray for ourselves and our immediate family. And we should be faithful in prayer for them!
    - Paul knew that our prayer horizons need to be expanded beyond “me and mine.”
  - Paul specifically asked the Colossians to pray for the team that was working with him to spread the gospel.
    - Paul’s request was to “pray also for us.”

- Even though Paul was in prison, and part of his team was in prison with him, there were others that were working with him to coordinate the meetings that were held in the house in which Paul was confined.
  - Still others served as his representatives to the churches that had been planted across the region. Several of them had been entrusted with this letter.
  - We will learn in our next and final portion of Colossians that one of these team members, Epaphras, was a consistent prayer warrior on the Colossians' behalf.
  - The extent of that team is indicated by the number of people Paul mentioned in the closing portion of this letter. Since Paul probably only mentioned those with whom the Colossians would have had some passing acquaintance, the team working with Paul was larger than the group mentioned here.
  - Paul considered all of them vital to the mission and wanted the Colossians to persistently, watchfully, and thankfully pray for each one of them!
  - Our prayer circle needs to include fellow church members, especially those who are involved in serving the body, and our church's supported missionaries. We certainly ought to pray for others as God brings them to mind, but those who are directly connected with our church family should head the list.
  - We need to pray persistently, watchfully, thankfully and inclusively. By describing how we best engage in God's mission in the world, Paul also informed us what we ought to pray for one another.
2. What to pray for one another (3b-6)
- a. Pray for open doors (3b)
- Paul's specific request was that the Colossians pray "that God may open to us a door for the Word."
    - A door in the New Testament usually refers to an opportunity. An example of this is:
    - **1 Corinthians 16:8-9** (ESV) <sup>8</sup> But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup> for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.
  - Believers are to pray for open doors because it is God who opens them.
    - Upon the conclusion of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey, according to **Acts 14:27**, "when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."
    - We are told by our Savior Himself that He is the one who opens and closes doors: **Revelation 3:7** (ESV) <sup>7</sup> "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.
  - The open-door Paul specifically requested was "to declare the mystery of Christ."
    - The term "mystery" refers to something that was hidden in the Old Testament but made clear in the New. Here this refers to the content of the gospel.
    - Paul wanted open doors to present the full truth of the gospel. What he asked the Colossians to pray for him, we ought to pray for one another!

b. Pray for clarity (4)

- Paul further asked the Colossians to pray that when God opened a door for the gospel, that “I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”
  - Paul recognized that a lack of clarity would result in wasted opportunities. He wanted to be ready to clearly explain the gospel when God opened a door.
  - A person involved in a prison ministry related the following story that illustrates this need: “I was teaching a group of prisoners about prayer, using what is commonly called The Lord's Prayer as a model. I was explaining the opening words, "Our Father," telling the men that though they are God's "offspring" because He created them, they can become God's "children" only when they place their trust in His Son, Jesus Christ. Then God truly becomes their heavenly Father. As I struggled to get the point across, one of the men said, "Let me tell it." He said, "Listen up! God made you, okay? But that doesn't mean you aren't going to hell. You can only become God's child if He saves you. To get that, you gotta trust in Jesus. If you haven't done that, you better get it done now." After the lesson, three prisoners trusted in Christ.

I learned a lesson that day. When we present the gospel, we need to use terms and concepts that are familiar to our audience. We must express it clearly, simply, accurately, and in ways that our listeners will be able to comprehend.”

- When we pray for one another we should pray for open doors and for clarity. We also should:

c. Pray for wisdom (5a)

- Paul knew that if we are to be effectively engaged in God’s mission, we must “walk in wisdom toward outsiders.”
  - This is because what we are gives or diminishes credibility to what we say. If we are to clearly share the gospel, we must not compromise the message by the way that we live!
  - Only if believers live wisely will the watching world recognize the power of God at work in them.
- To walk in wisdom toward outsiders we must base our daily lives on the wisdom found in God’s Word.
  - In the Old Testament, “wisdom” comes from the word for “skill.” Just as a carpenter has the skill to take rough materials and craft a beautiful piece of furniture, spiritual wisdom is the skill to build a beautiful, godly life.
  - Scripture reveals the source of wisdom: **Colossians 2:2-3** (ESV) <sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
- To walk with wisdom toward outsiders means that we are to live in line with God’s Word so that those who are not Christians may see the beauty of Christ in our lives and our relationships. A godly walk is the foundation for effective witness.
- When we pray for one another we should pray for open doors, for clarity and for wisdom. We also should:

d. Pray for best use of time (5b)

- Paul knew that if we are to effectively utilize open doors, we must also be “making the best use of time.”
  - The Greek word here means to buy up or grab the opportunity.
  - One commentator wrote: “If we had to buy time, would there be any difference in how we would spend it? Would the days of our lives be used more wisely?” That’s what time management consultant Antonio Herrera asked the participants in a seminar he conducted on the subject. Then Dr. Herrera became more specific. He asked, “What if you had to pay in advance \$100 an hour for the time allotted to you? Would you waste it?” The answer should be obvious.”
- Paul expressed the urgency of making the best use of time in **Romans 13:11-14**:  
<sup>11</sup> Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. <sup>12</sup> The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. <sup>13</sup> Let us walk properly as in the daytime, . . . <sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.
- When we pray for one another we should pray for open doors, for clarity, for wisdom and for the best use of time. We also should:

e. Pray for winsome speech (6a)

- Paul knew that if we are to effectively utilize open doors, we must “let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.”
  - Believer’s speech must always be with grace as was Christ’s. To speak with grace means to say what is wholesome, fitting, kind, gentle, purposeful, truthful, loving and thoughtful.
  - **Ephesians 4:29** (ESV) <sup>29</sup> Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.
- In light of Paul’s repeated emphasis upon grace this means that our presentation of the gospel should be permeated with God’s grace.
  - The message that God gives salvation as a free gift to sinners who deserve His judgment must be stated graciously!
- When Paul said to let our speech be seasoned with salt, he didn’t mean “salty” language!
  - Salt was used as a preservative from spoilage, so our speech should be pure and free from corruption.
  - Salt was also used to enhance flavor, so our speech should be interesting enough to make people want to hear more. It ought to add charm and wit!
- When we pray for one another we should pray for open doors, for clarity, for wisdom, for the best use of time and for winsome speech. We also should:

f. Pray for sensitivity (6b)

- Paul concluded this section with the qualifier; “so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”
  - Believers need to know how to respond to each person – they need to be able to say the right thing at the right time.

- Peter echoed the same theme in **1 Peter 3:15**:<sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,
- In order to do this, we must be sensitive to where the other person is at and what they need to hear.
  - This will require wisdom that God alone possesses and is delighted to share if only we ask!
  - When we pray for one another we must pray that we will seek this sensitivity from Him so that we may be effectively involved in His mission!

You will have noticed by now that many of the things that we commonly pray about; health issues, employment matters, relationships, etc. did not make this list. That is because Paul's first and most fervent passion was involvement in God's mission. This does not mean that we should not pray for all of those other things. A woman asked G. Campbell Morgan, "Do you think we ought to pray about even the little things in life?" Dr. Morgan, in his typically understated British manner, replied, "Madam, can you think of anything in your life that is big to God?" We ought to pray for all of the "small stuff" but we also need to be praying these things Paul held so dear for each other so that we may be effectively engaged in that mission as well. May God help us to pray persistently, watchfully, thankfully, and inclusively that He will use all of us as He desires!