

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

August 21, 2016

“Praying for Others”

Love to Pray, part 6 (based on the sermon by Al VanderGriend)

Colossians 1:1-14

You are in the right place this morning. You are not here by accident. You might think it's a coincidence, but God knew you would be here. God is in fact the one who called you to this place, so that together, you and He could work on your relationship of love. Even if you thought, “Hey, that building looks like it has air conditioning and good coffee; I think I'll go inside,” I want you to know that the real reason any of us is here is to worship God. And we are stronger when we are together. So take a good look around this morning. None of us is perfect, but we know that God has called us to this place, and God has a revelation for us.

I invite you to pray with me, with your hands open in front of you. It's a symbol to God that you are ready to receive whatever God has for you this morning.

Holy God, thank you for the presence of your Spirit in this place. We come to you exactly as we are: broken, in need of healing, in need of encouragement, in need of salvation. Give us your Word right here, right now, that we can know the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Help us to follow Him. And help us to take serious the task of praying for others. We want to be part of your kingdom here on earth. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

How do you feel when others pray for you? Personally, I think it's great. At our wedding thirteen years ago, we had a bunch of people praying for us. My family. My friends. We had three pastors officiating – one to do the vows, one to translate, and one to bless us and the meal. It was really cool.

But I can also remember times when I was really broken and needed someone to pray for me. During a very rough time in ministry, I went to a winter retreat at Lake Louise, and I remember sitting in a chair while my friends and fellow counselors circled me and prayed for a breakthrough. As recent as three weeks ago, I sat in the middle of my Formation group at United Theological Seminary and listened as others interceded to God on my behalf - for my family, for my ministry, and for my church. That's right: they prayed for you on my behalf! It was powerful. I was nearly overwhelmed with tears.

The thing is, when others pray for you, it is a mighty act of worship to God. And if you've ever had that experience, you know how wonderful it is. Praying for others is something we should be doing ALL THE TIME.

The question is, how? Honestly, sometimes praying for others comes down to knowing just what to pray for. What sorts of things does God want to do in someone's life? We want to know so that we can target our prayers appropriately.

In Colossians, the Apostle Paul gives us a model for how to pray for others. Go ahead and open your Bibles with me to chapter 1. Let's look together at this letter to Paul's beloved brothers and sisters in the church in Colossae, and see if we can glean some ideas on how we should pray for others.

Paul begins with a wonderful word of thankfulness. "We always thank God for you when we pray for you." Do you thank God for someone's life when you pray for them? This might be easier to do with a friend than someone with whom you have a conflict! Regardless, thanksgiving is a great place to start.

Paul goes on to remind the Colossians of who they are. Paul reminds them, they have faith in Christ. They have hope. They have the truth inside them. They

are seeing the gospel bear fruit in their lives and in the world. What a wonderful way to pray for and encourage someone, by simply reminding them of who they are in Christ.

I also find it interesting that Paul reminds them that Epaphras was the one who taught them about Jesus. When you are praying for someone, you can also thank God for those who brought them to faith. You can ask God to send more Christians into their lives. Watch out, though: God will send you to someone!

After his thankfulness, Paul starts to get very specific. Starting in verse 9, Paul lays out the areas in which he desires God to work in their lives. First, Paul wants the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. Now when we pray that someone will "know" Christ, it's more than just information. It goes beyond specific Bible stories, church history and doctrines. Paul doesn't want the Colossians to have head knowledge of God, he wants them to have heart knowledge of God: to know God's will, to have the love of Christ in them, to be wise and to be filled with the Spirit. It's great if you are in Sunday school or a small group, but if your brain is filled and your heart is empty, then you need someone to pray for you to be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

Paul also prays that the Colossians will live lives worthy of the Lord. What does that mean? Aren't our lives worthy already? It depends on how we use them. F. B. Meyer explained it this way: "A bar of iron worth \$2.50, when wrought into horseshoes is worth \$5. If made into needles it is worth \$175. If into penknife blades it is worth \$1,625. If made into springs for watches it is worth \$125,000. The more it is manipulated, and the more it is hammered and passed through the heat, beaten, pounded, and polished, the greater its value."

(<http://classic.net.bible.org/illustration.php?id=8195>) In the same way, Jesus has

invested in our lives; he is refining us. We have intrinsic value, of course, but we are also of great value to God in building in kingdom. We are saved to serve. So when you pray for others, pray that their lives will reflect the huge investment Christ has made in them and that they would realize their full potential.

Next, Paul prays that the Colossians might please the Lord. This is a simple prayer – that we pray for others to be obedient to God. So often we think, it's money or intelligence or popularity or even a good sermon that pleases the Lord. But it's not. Obedience is what pleases the Lord. All of us as disciples must learn this. We just said we want to pray that they will know God's will and live worthy lives – it follows that we should pray for someone then to follow God's will.

What else does Paul pray for? He prays that the Colossians will bear fruit in every good work. I love blackberries. They are aggressive, hardy plants that seem to flourish everywhere. I found a whole bunch on a trail this week. I love that fact that in certain places, one branch can have dozens of sweet berries on it. The fruit of the Spirit should grow in our lives the same way. We should see the results internally – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). And we should see results externally – new believers coming to Christ through our prayers, relationships being healed, churches growing, poverty eliminated, justice and mercy for all. We need to pray for spiritual fruit in others and in ourselves.

I think this is one point we fail to remember when we pray for others. Jesus told his disciples that he wanted them to remain in him and bear much fruit. (John 15:5) It's one thing to pray that someone will be know God, live a life worthy of God, and be obedient to God, but how often do we remember to pray that they will bear fruit? Every one of us has a ministry. By virtue of our baptism, we are all

ministers in Christ. God has a purpose for every single one of us, and it involves reaching others and bearing fruit for the kingdom – Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, as our mission states. This must become part of our regular prayers.

Finally, Paul prays that the Colossians will be strengthened with God's power to have patience and endurance. Like all early churches, the Colossians were facing hard times. Persecution. Even factions in the church. So Paul prayed for them to have the strength to overcome. But note that this strength came according to God's glorious might. We often pray for someone to be strong, or to heal quickly, or to overcome a problem. For example, I prayed for my dad this week; he is recovering from a major skin surgery. But honestly, it didn't occur to me to ask God to give my dad God's power and God's strength. We try to do so much on our own, instead of tapping into the eternal power.

There is a difference, I believe, between asking God to help someone be strong, and asking God to strengthen someone with all power according to God's might. What is the source of the strength you are asking? Is it internal, or external? Paul prays for the Colossians to have God's might, not their own. Shouldn't we do the same?

Paul shows us so many ways to pray, it's hard to remember them all. And really, this message is not about giving you a list to memorize or a formula to pray. If you remember one new way to pray for others, great! The important thing is to pray that God's will be done in someone's life. And that we would pray for all people, whether they are Christians or not yet. God does amazing things in people's lives when others pray for them. God moves in the church when we go to Him with fervent, passionate, deep prayers.

Think about your loved ones for a moment. Your friends, your children or grandchildren, and other believers in your church. What do you want for them? Isn't it all the things that we have been saying? Fruitful, obedient, patient, strong and worthy lives? Of course it is. My highest hope for my children is not that they would be safe. I pray for their protection, of course. But I also pray that Jesus will get ahold of their lives and doing amazing things through them. I pray that they will be even more passionate about Christ than I am! But the point is, I pray for them. I pray for all of you.

Nothing God wants to accomplish in our lives is going to come about by wishful thinking. It's not going to come about by mere hoping. These things God wants to do come only by prayer—faithful, urgent, passionate prayer, like the prayers of Paul for his friends in Christ.

Memory verse

Colossians 1:9 "...since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you..."

Reflection questions

1. Who do you pray for? Why?
2. What is your greatest hope for your family? Does it involve Jesus?
3. What is one "fruit" you would like to see God grow in someone's life?
4. Are you a wishful thinker? Or a passionate prayer-er?
5. Ask the Holy Spirit to move your heart to pray for someone who needs it desperately. Make a commitment to pray for that person daily for at least a month. Use a journal to record your prayers and God's response.