

SESSION 5

Committed to Pray



QUESTION 1:

What's your favorite way to communicate?

THE POINT

Commit to pray for the salvation and spiritual growth of others.

THE PASSAGE

Colossians 1:3-12

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

If you need to call the president of the United States, the White House switchboard number is 202-456-1414—just don't expect to actually talk to the president.

That hasn't always been the case. The White House originally had just one phone—and it was down the hall from the executive office. If you called the White House in 1893, President Grover Cleveland answered the call personally.¹ It's a quaint picture in light of today's smartphones. In 1893, the United States was on the cusp of being a formidable player in world politics, but anyone with a phone could call and talk to the president himself.

Long gone are the days when the president might pick up the phone, but that's not the case with One far more powerful. We have a direct line to the sovereign, all-powerful God and Creator of the universe, a connection we often take too much for granted. God calls us to talk to Him—He invites us to talk to Him. It's called prayer, a wonderful privilege God has given us to talk directly to Him.

Colossians 1:3-5

3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,

5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

In the Book of Colossians we find one of the most important passages in Scripture about prayer and what it should look like in our lives. The apostle Paul showed us that prayer is more important to the life of the church than probably most of us realize. In this passage we see three ways we can pray for the glory of God and the health of the church.

1. Pray with thanksgiving for other believers.

“We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.” Paul’s prayers and thanksgiving for the believers in Colossae were unceasing and unchanging. Far too many believers take God’s unfathomable gift of prayer and only use it when they get into trouble or maybe before a meal. For Paul, though, prayer was a regular, consistent part of his daily walk with Christ.

Paul gave thanks for the church because of their “faith in Christ Jesus.” He had heard of their love for one another and the hope that they had—a hope rooted and founded in the truth of the gospel that had come to them.

It’s important to pause here and remember a simple truth. We were never meant to sit on the sidelines, applauding Paul, and saying, “Wow, Paul! You were so thankful that the church is healthy that you prayed continually to God.” Yes, Paul was awesome, but he was also giving us an example of how we are to live our lives. Many

of us just pray about matters that impact our own lives. We pray about our needs and the needs of those we love and are close to us. That's not a bad thing. God wants us to do that and we should, but our prayer lives were never meant to begin and end with us alone. We should also pray for and remember what God is doing in the lives of other believers. And with those prayers should come thankfulness for how God is at work.

QUESTION 2:

When have you been encouraged by the prayers of others?

Colossians 1:6-8

6 Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:

7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Paul wasn't just thanking God for what He had done in the lives of the Colossian believers; he was also thankful for what God was continuing to do. Just as the gospel was "in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit," Paul acknowledged that same gospel had flourished "also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth." The church's faith wasn't staying stagnant, but it was growing, increasing, and bearing fruit.

One might wonder how much the consistent, growing faith and fruit of the believers in Colossae were directly tied to Paul's unceasing prayers for them. James wrote, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16), and God longs to answer our prayers. God loves to answer prayers that align with His heart and will for our lives. "This is the confidence that

we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14). One thing that aligns with His heart and will is for Christians to bear fruit and increase in the gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ. After all, God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). God’s desire and will is for us to come to Him and to grow in the truth of the gospel. So when we pray in line with this, His will, He responds.

2. Pray for those who minister and spread the gospel.

A second way we can pray for the glory of God and the health of the church is connected to those whom God uses to help us grow in Christ. Paul did not *explicitly* mention praying this way, but his reference to Epaphras reminds us of the important role others play in ministry and evangelism. It reminds us that, as we express thanks to God for how He works in the lives of other believers, we also should pray for those God is using to accomplish His work in our lives.

We know little about Epaphras, the man who played a key role in the life and growth of the Colossian church. He apparently had been in prison with Paul during part of the time the apostle was first imprisoned in Rome, since Paul mentioned him in his brief Letter to Philemon (Philem. 23). Epaphras, however, likely came from the ranks of those in Colossae; he not only ministered to them while in their presence, he continued to minister through his prayers. “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12).

Even as our leaders and mentors pray for us, we also should pray for them, those who serve as “Epaphras” in our own lives. A healthy, outwardly focused prayer life should include those who help us grow spiritually and labor to spread the gospel.

Think of the person who led you to faith in Christ. While some may happen across a copy of the Bible and give their lives to Christ

because they read the gospel for themselves, the overwhelming majority of us had at least one individual who, in one way or another, shared the gospel with us. Maybe it was a preacher, a Sunday School teacher, a coach, or a trusted friend. Those who spoke into our lives did so from the vantage point of a life dependent on God through prayer.

Let's add to that. Those who prayerfully shared the gospel with us were themselves the recipients of other people's ministry and prayers. The person who shared the gospel with you didn't get to that place apart from the prayers and impact of others. No doubt parents, grandparents, friends, spouses, pastors, or teachers prayed for them, asking God to protect them, grow them, and give them wisdom. And those pray-ers in turn had received the ministry and prayers of others before that. You have been blessed through a historical chain of prayers.

That beautiful reality ought to change us and move us to pray for others who minister and serve. God may never call you to be a preacher, worship leader, or international missionary, but you certainly can pray. You can pray for your pastor and leaders of the church to preach and teach with boldness. You can pray for those who are in full-time vocational ministry to be protected and never lose their first love for Jesus. You can pray for those who lead your Bible study group. You can pray for those who are speaking into the lives of our children and students. And beyond that, you can pray for yourself, that God would empower and embolden you to be that person who brings the good news of Christ to those around you.

QUESTION 3:

Why is it important for us to pray for church leaders here and abroad?

Colossians 1:9-12

9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

3. Pray for the spiritual growth of other believers.

The third way we can pray for the glory of God and the health of the church is tied to *what* we pray for those in the church family.

Here's a breakdown of specific prayer requests:

- ▶ **Pray they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will.** To “be filled” by something is to be controlled by it. Even as we are to be filled with (and controlled by) the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), we should pray that believers will let the knowledge of God's plans fully lead and control them. This includes comprehending God's truth and plans (“wisdom”) and applying that truth (“spiritual understanding”).
- ▶ **Pray they would live lives worthy of and pleasing to Christ.** In his prayer, Paul mentioned two things that please Christ. First, it pleases God when we are “fruitful in every good work.” The good works we do are not to earn our salvation, but they result from and grow out of our saved relationship with Christ. Second, it pleases the Lord when we are “increasing in the knowledge of God.” As we grow in our understanding of His nature and character, we live out that understanding through the fruit of what we do.

- ▶ **Pray they would be fully strengthened by God.** No believer is to rely on self, so we ask God to work in others' lives so that they find strength in Him. In the face of life's challenges, believers need the strength for "all patience and longsuffering," and that only comes through the strengthening presence of Christ, "according to his glorious power."
- ▶ **Pray they would give joyful thanks to God.** We should pray that other believers never lose sight of God's work and role in their lives. Such continual awareness leads us to live with gratitude toward Him.

Imagine what your church would look like if each follower of Christ lived in that way. These images should drive our prayers for one another. The church grows and God is honored as the church prays for one another with that kind of specificity and power.

Many believe the influence of the American church is diminishing. I wonder if that is because we're becoming a people who don't pray as we should for one another. The church is exploding in places like Korea and Brazil, places where believers love to pray. They pray hard and they pray often. Their church worship gatherings don't use prayer as an add-on to the worship and preaching; prayer is central and just as important as anything they do when they gather, and God is blessing them powerfully.

QUESTION 4:

What's the relationship between prayer and God's work in us and through us?

We could argue until we're blue in the face about the challenges the American church is facing. But one thing is clear: the church is strengthened and Christ is honored when His people pray unceasingly for one another—and when we make such prayer a priority. Let's become people who are committed to coming before the Lord in prayer.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group better pray for one another?

ENGAGE

On each step, write the names or initials of believers for whom you will pray according to Paul's example from Colossians. Write a brief prayer for each one. Commit to voice those prayers every day this week.

Pray for believers'
spiritual growth

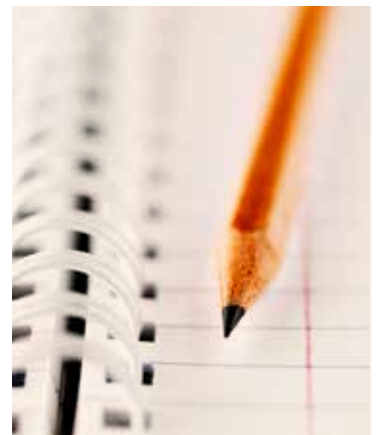
Pray for ministers

Pray with
thanksgiving

LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out your commitment to Christ through your prayers?

- ▶ **Morning prayer.** Prayer is like a muscle; if you don't use it, it atrophies and gets weak. If you never or rarely pray, commit to begin each day in prayer this week. Before you get moving each morning and before you pick up your smartphone, pause and pray. Pray that God would strengthen and use you throughout the day. Pray for your pastor and leaders in your church. Then pray for believers around you.
- ▶ **Deeper prayer.** Commit to a regular time of prayer each day that is not rushed or hurried. Carve out an extended time of prayer where you can sit quietly and talk to God without the demands of your next appointment. Keep a journal of your prayers. Over time, you can look back and see how God answered them.
- ▶ **Focused prayer.** Create a detailed list based on the three ways this session identified that we can pray for each other. List people in your life for whom you want to pray these specific prayers.



END NOTES

1. "Grover Cleveland," *Presidents of the United States*, <https://www.potus.com/grover-cleveland/>.