

Prayerful Epaphras

Reading: Colossians 4:12-13 *Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.*

Introduction

Prayer is available to all people. But is especially a wonderful privilege for Christians. Psalm 34:15 *The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry.*

Philippians 4:6-7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* This is a peace that comes from prayer.

Prayer is the highest activity of the human soul. **So why don't we pray more?** The quality of every relationship is determined by the quality of communication.

ChristiaNet.com, a large Christian portal with eight million monthly page loads, recently asked, **Do you pray at least one hour a week?** Most surveyed said they

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prayed well over one hour.

From the large number of Christians surveyed here, 82% said that they prayed daily upon rising and before going to bed which totaled, "well over one hour a week." Reasons cited included, **"Praying is the way we communicate with God, if you don't pray to Him, then you don't have much of a relationship"** and **"I pray for others mostly, because they need it."** Some in this category said that they only pray when they have a problem or need something, but it amounted to over an hour a week, **"I pray if I really need to talk to God about something important, or if something good happened and I want to thank Him."**

11% said they did not feel that their week totaled even an hour. The most popular reasons given were that they were too busy in life, or just plain forgot, **"I wish I could remember before I go to bed, but I am just too tired."** Some wish they could pray more often, **"I really want to pray more, but I just don't."** Others just say small prayers, **"I say quick and short prayers, I doubt it amounts to an hour a week though."**

7% say that they pray, but it is just not consistent, **"I try to pray, but some days I do and some I don't. It's**

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hard to keep track."

I wonder how we would answer the question? Which category do we fit in.

Many Church members often regard the prayer meeting as an optional extra rather than the most important. **I wonder has a godless cynicism invaded the church that prayer doesn't work?** People who feel distant from the Lord commonly admit to chronic prayerlessness. Do we run around trying to change the world, when change will only come when we ask the Lord of all creation to change it?

When we pray there is a joy of drawing close to God.

Epaphras was not exactly a well-known name. But Paul's description of his prayer life is an inspiration for us today. Paul commends him with a title as **a servant of Christ Jesus**. In Colossians 1:7 Paul says he was a faithful servant, reliable and trustworthy. Paul reminded the Colossian Church that Epaphras was constantly praying for them.

Paul said that he was regularly wrestling in prayer for them. The original word is like our word agonizing.

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Clearly he put enormous effort into praying. The same word we have translated here is used of Jesus praying earnestly in the garden the night before his death.

So often in life we can wrestle or struggle on with things, maybe a job, maybe a relationship. Do we struggle in prayer in the same way and perhaps give up.

Epaphras struggled in prayer for others. Most of us manage to pray for ourselves but do we pray for others. He prayed on behalf of others as well as for himself. He interceded for them. Are we willing to wrestle in prayer for others?

Jesus commended that we do so. **OUR** Father, give **US** our daily bread, forgive **US** our sins.

Jonathan Edwards the American Theologian said [there is no way that Christians can do so much to promote the work of God and advance the kingdom as by prayer.](#)

Epaphras was praying that the church would stand firm. There was false teaching infiltrating some churches. This hadn't happened to the Colossian church so Epaphras prayed beforehand, preventively, rather than afterwards.

So often we pray after something has happened.

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Prevention is better than cure. We can and must pray preventatively for our brothers and sisters in Christ, that they will be strong and sound Christians and the church will to be strong and free from false teaching. That God will protect and provide. If we don't know what to pray for then pray for this.

So often I find myself praying for people in their need. This year I want to prioritise my prayer time to pray more preventatively.

Epaphras regularly wrestled in prayer for the church. Paul wrote to the Colossian church in Colossians 4:2 to *devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful*. I think that if Paul wrote to OCC he would encourage us to in this way.

Luke 5:16 *Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed* and from the account in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:39 *Once more he went away and prayed the same thing*, Jesus often prayed about the same thing. I think Jesus prayed a lot for His disciples. He intercedes for us now at the right hand of the Father. Paul prayed three times for his thorn in his flesh to be removed.

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Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 *pray continually*. This is because prayer is relational. Like sitting and talking with someone.

How often have we found out that someone has been faithfully praying for us! Andy Hawthorne talked about how he was invited to meet some little old ladies who had been regularly praying for him every Friday night to become a Christian and then for his ministry team for many, many years. He understood how his ministry had prospered. **Through sustained prayer.** One of those ladies said how she had prayed for her husband to become a Christian and he became a Christian at the age of 99. So never give up.

He wrestled in prayer for others to stand firm so that they would not be deceived by fine sounding arguments. (Colossians 2:4). The Colossians were in danger from people who wanted to deceive them with human philosophy, human rational thinking. Paul urged the church to stand firm in their faith Colossians 2:6-7 *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.* Paul was writing about what Epaphras was praying for.

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We too need to be praying for our Christian brothers, sisters and churches to stand against liberalism and supplementing Jesus Christ with human reason, or experience. We don't need supplements - only Jesus!

He prayed that they would stand firm in the will of God. Literally be filled with everything that is God's will. Human Philosophers were teaching that Jesus was not enough. Paul taught the Church that Christ is everything. To the human philosophers he responded if we have Christ we lack nothing. Stand firm in Christ – He is all people need.

He prayed that they would become mature and fully assured. Epaphras was praying that the Church would be complete. Paul had explained that wholeness, perfection and completeness are to be found in Christ alone. Epaphras prayed that the church might become more like Jesus. What a great thing to pray for people. How about, instead of praying that Pastor Robin doesn't preach for so long, pray he will become more Christ-like.

Epaphras taught us to wrestle in prayer, to pray for others, to pray for Christ-likeness. Epaphras worked hard for the Colossians Christians. Prayer is hard work as well

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a privilege that must be practiced regularly.

Hymn - What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. O what peace we often forfeit, o what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

Personal Study Questions on Epaphras

-  How can we encourage one another to wrestle in prayer more?
-  How could we encourage one another to pray for others more?
-  How could we encourage one another to pray more about standing firm in Christ?