

Prayer: The Fuel for Missions: "Gospel Opportunities" Colossians 4:2-4, 2/23/20

Intro: Our primary goal has been to increase our Missional Prayer Life- that in addition to praying for our upcoming test...which we do a lot in our house, especially math, in addition to praying for finances, and our health....all things that we should be praying for, we need to be increasingly praying outward, God-centered prayers. Prayers that align with the mission of God in the world, to introduce people to Jesus Christ and help them follow Him. Prayer is a wartime walkie-talkie to call to headquarters for supplies to be sent where the spiritual battle is fiercest. Over 450 of you have been receiving missional prayers to pray every day and my hope is that we will continue in that pattern in our daily lives past February. Today we close missions month with Paul's request for prayer in Colossians 4. We want to see **Four Traits of a Missional Prayer life.**

Colossians 4:2-4

² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And 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. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

A Missional Prayer Life...

Trait #1 Prioritizes Prayer

² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Devote- means to be steadfastly attentive to. A term that speaks of priority and perseverance. Back in 2008, I decided I was going to be part of an **expedition team to climb Mt. Elbrus** in Russia, the highest peak in Europe. I knew that if I had any chance of summiting I had to be devoted to training. So for 6 months I went into an rigorous training regimen. Hour stair climber with 50 lb. vest was my regular routine. My mentality was that if I only accomplished one thing that day, it was going to be to train. That's the idea of devoted.

Slide This word is used 10 times in Scripture, 6 of which are used to describe prayer. This does not come as a surprise now, does it? If prayer is so great and central to God's purpose for the universe and for your life, it is not surprising that God would tell us, "Devote yourselves to prayer."

We are devoted to all kinds of things: our careers, our families, our friends, golf, poker club, Fortnite... but are we devoted to prayer? Do you have the perspective that if you only accomplish one thing for the day it is prayer? What if you prioritized prayer in your day? Instead of grabbing your phone first thing in the morning... what if you grabbed a prayer journal and wrote down a prayer for the day? What if on your commute you turned off the radio or a podcast and your spoke to the Lord? What if before bed you and your spouse or family spent some time in prayer? You would begin to see God move in ways that you never experienced before.

Trait #2 Prays for Gospel Opportunities

³ *And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message.*

I take this phrase “God may open a door” to mean 2 things- **1) Impact**: when we pray, God works in the circumstances and attitudes and receptivity to the Gospel so that instead of the message hitting a brick wall, the message finds an open door and becomes unusually effective. **2) Location**: Open door means new opportunities in new places that the gospel had never been.

Pastor Steve- God has used him in so many amazing ways, 40 baptisms in Eburru, people coming to know Jesus, church has grown tremendously. School, feeding program. I was talking to him about what he sees God doing with him over the next 5 years. He said there are so many places just like Eburru in Kenya that have great need and have never heard the Gospel, or the Gospel they have heard is false. I would like to go on a gospel campaign throughout the entire nation, town to town. His prayer is for God to open new doors. We need to pray for open doors to locations in the world where the gospel and grace and love of Jesus is not known. **IMB- 2019 Report, Unengaged, unreached people groups- 3,157 people groups, 280M people.** We must pray for open doors in these places and these people.

Pray for open doors of impact with our neighbors, friends, coworkers, family members. Let me tell you a prayer Jesus answers. For months every week a member of our new church plant in NoVA asked for prayer for a friend named Kevin to come to know Jesus. **Here’s Kevin**- He was controlled by partying, drugs and he loved to race motorcycles and his friend was just worried that one of these days he is going to die from all this never knowing Jesus. And so we prayed for Kevin for months. I always had to drive by the exit to Dulles airport on my way home, I knew that we were sending a missions team to Haiti around the same time and so I decided to stop by to see if by chance I could catch them before they go and pray for them...I just sensed it was what God wanted me to do. Sure enough the team was just arriving to prepare to check-in. And so family and friends are saying goodbye, and I’m standing next to this guy I didn’t recognize and so I introduced myself and he said, “I’m Kevin, Sarah said she needed a ride to the airport.” And all of a sudden it clicked who this Kevin was that we were all praying for. He must have thought we were some weird cult because I was like, “Kevin! I know you and I have been praying for you by name.” So we talked for a few minutes and I invited him to get coffee. When I met Kevin for coffee he was already so primed to come to the Lord. And within a few weeks Kevin became a Christian, I had the privilege of baptizing him and eventually officiating his wedding ceremony to a wonderful **Christian girl, Emily.** They are leaders in that church.

This is prayer for open doors and God loves to answer these prayers. Anyone who comes to a saving relationship with Jesus, you can be sure it was the answer to someone’s devoted prayers for an open door. **Are you praying for an open door for gospel opportunities?**

Trait #3 Prays for Gospel Clarity

⁴ *Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.*

I find it encouraging that even the greatest evangelist to ever live, Paul needed prayer for clarity when sharing his faith. Because I don’t know about you but there are times I’m still anxious and

feel ill-prepared when I am in a conversation and faith/religion comes up. In a leadership cohort I was a part of last year, I was talking with a few people at lunch and someone said, I wish more religious leaders could be like you, you don't seem judgmental, and you are normal...ok so far, and you know that all faiths are basically the same anyway and they all get to the same God. Umm....nope. And so there I am, this guy makes an assumption about me, trying to complement me, and I am about to disappoint him...because I am about to sound really narrow. I would like to tell you I was super prayed up, and I brought a response in a super articulate, winsome, thoughtful way, and everyone at the table came to know Jesus and had their first communion together. Wine on the table became the communion wine, baptized some guys in the kitchen sink...that's not what happened. I fumbled for words, was unclear, indecisive... I did later follow-up with the guy who said that and felt like I was able to be far more clear next time.

If Paul needs prayer for clarity, if your pastor needs prayer for clarity, listen- WE ALL need prayer for clarity. Because the reality is most of the time we aren't going to get a heads up that the opportunity is coming. It's just going to happen when you are in the middle of your bite of steak. We need to be prepared as the Bible says, in season and out of season.

And let me tell you, I think this world is craving clarity. In a culture of grey, a culture that has many "truths" but no TRUTH. You have your truth and I have mine. A culture of fake news and hedging bets, and political correctness... we need a beam of clarity. This is what we believe. Yes, do it winsomely, do it relationally, but say it clearly and with conviction.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Trait #4 Doesn't Waste Gospel Circumstances

v.3b so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

Paul was writing this letter from a prison cell. Now if I was write a letter from prison I would probably be writing, "Get me out. Signed Nate." He doesn't ask the God would release him FROM his circumstances but rather asks for prayer that God would use him THROUGH his circumstances. Paul sees his circumstances as divinely arranged for the sake of the gospel.

Not just here, we see this throughout Paul's letters, to the Ephesians and he says this explicitly to the church in Philippi.

Philippians 1:12-14

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of

the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

While under incarceration in Rome, Paul would have often been chained to a Praetorian guard, which were highly trained soldiers that protected Caesar. Here's the incredible thing, some of those around the palace, including soldiers who Paul preached to while chained became Christians!

Philippians 4:22

²² All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

He asked for prayer that he wouldn't waste his circumstances and use them for God's missional purposes and this is exactly what God did.

OpendoorsUSA.org

2,625: Christians detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and imprisoned in the top 50 WWL countries.

1 in 9: Christians worldwide experience high levels of persecution

Here's the amazing thing- often these countries are seeing the highest levels of people coming to Christ in the midst of the persecution. These are Christians praying that God would use their circumstances for the sake of the Gospel. While we should pray for their release and safety, pray that God would use them through their circumstances. Most of you are not in chains... But the point is, what if all of you, regardless of your situation, saw those circumstances as divinely arranged for gospel purposes? **What if every setback is a set-up?** That's the promise of being a follower of Jesus! All things in your life may not be easy, but they are all directed for gospel purposes!

Maybe you are sick... Maybe God wants you to demonstrate to family members and friends or even your doctor that you have a hope that goes beyond your condition. Maybe you didn't make the team or get the job...may God wants you to show your friends that your identity is not wrapped up in having the great job or being on the team—you have a better and more secure identity as a child and servant of God, and that God has a different assignment for you. Not only bad circumstances...Maybe God has prospered you or given you access to lots of wealth and privilege. Praise God for that! Have you ever asked, "Why?" Why has God given me this privilege, the influence, this wealth?

One of my favorite unknown Christian history stories is that of Humphrey Monmouth. Many have heard of **William Tyndale**... he was the one who bravely translated the Bible into English. But you would never have heard that story was it not for William Monmouth who was a wealthy merchant and funded the first printing series of the Bible in English. God put Monmouth into Tyndale's life at just the right time. Is it really a stretch to think that God does the same thing today? He gives some people the vision and often others the resources so that they need each other to accomplish the mission.

Seeing your life through the lens of God's purposes requires prayer. It requires that the Spirit of God opens the eyes of our heart to see our like circumstances Joseph- what you intended for evil, God intended for good. Without prayer, without saying, "God show me what you want to do with my circumstances" we will wallow in them, or we will waste them. But God wants us to witness with them.

4 Traits of a Missional Prayer Life:

Prioritizes Prayer

Prays for Gospel Opportunities

Prays for Gospel Clarity

Doesn't Waste Gospel Circumstances

Duncan Campbell, a minister in Scotland in the 1950s and 60s. On the Monday after Easter in 1952, Duncan was seated on the platform after speaking to the Faith Mission Convention in Bangor, Northern Ireland, when he sensed the inner voice say to him, "Berneray!" (That is a small island in Scotland.) Duncan bowed his head and prayed silently. Again came the name "Berneray." He prayed on, and the name came a third time. So Campbell turned to the chairman and whispered, "Brother, you will need to excuse me. The Holy Spirit has just told me that I am to go to Berneray." The chairman objected mildly, "You are the speaker tomorrow." But nothing could stop him. He knew the Spirit had spoken. He had never been to Berneray, had never known anyone from there, and had never received a letter from anyone there." He went to the hotel and packed his two suitcases and contacted the airport. Once arriving in Berneray through God's providence he found his way to the lone local church and an elder there said, we have been expecting you. While Campbell had been ministering in the convention at Bangor three days earlier, this elder had spent the day praying in his barn for God to send revival to the island. His wife in the house heard him praying in the barn, "Lord, I don't know where he is, but You know, and with You all things are possible. You send him to the island." He knew in his heart that God was going to send Duncan Campbell, who had been used in mighty revival in other parts of Scotland, to Berneray. He was so sure that he would be there in three days that he made all the arrangements to use the local church and had announced the services. That's exactly what happened, a great revival came to the island of Berneray and a great door for the Word was opened that no man could shut because God opened it. In his biography the author commented: "When God has people who prevail in prayer, and people who know how to recognize the voice of the Spirit and obey without question, there is no limit to what God can do."

Will you be a missional prayer? Will you be the fuel for missions in our community, in our country, across the globe?

Congregational Prayer

1) For Gospel Opportunities:

Open Doors of Location- Unreached People Groups and Your Circle of Influence

Open Doors of Impact- The gospel would have a great effect

2) For Gospel Clarity: That God would give our missionaries clarity, how to contextualize the message for the culture. For our clarity when we share our faith.

3) For Gospel Circumstances: Pray for the persecuted church to use their circumstances for God's purposes. For our own circumstances for God to show us how to use them for His purposes.