

You Were Raised Right

Studies in the Book of Colossians

Text

Colossians 4:2-18

Topic

Paul solicits prayer from the Colossians for the many brothers helping him spread the Gospel

Title

*“Cmon, people now, pray for your brother;
Everybody get together
and love one another right now”*

Many of you have participated in Team Building activities. An employer takes employees out of the workplace, often on a retreat, to help them break down personal barriers, eliminate distractions, and have some fun.

I'm most familiar with a trust-building activity called The Trust Fall.

1 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*“Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
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One member of the team is selected and stands on a raised platform, from which they fall backwards, relying on the support of their team to catch them.

Before you volunteer, you need to Google *Trust Fall Fails*:

- In some cases, the folks don't catch the faller.
- In others, the faller unexpectedly falls *forward*, instead of backwards.

I got to thinking about Team Building because here at the end of his letter to the church at Colossae, the apostle Paul introduces his 'team.' He identifies no less than ten individuals involved with him in spreading the Gospel and planting churches.

Do you think they participated in week-end retreats complete with Trust Falls?

No, they didn't. However, we do get insight into one activity that was essential for them. Paul encourages the Colossians to "continue earnestly in prayer" (v2) for themselves, and to "[pray] also for us" (v3).

2 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*"Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
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I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 Continue In Prayer For Yourselves At Home, and #2 Commit To Praying For Your Servants At Large.

#1 Continue In Prayer For Yourselves

(v2, 5-6)

Most of you are familiar with Charles Spurgeon. He was the pastor of the congregation of the New Park Street Chapel (later called the Metropolitan Tabernacle) in London for 38 years. Spurgeon frequently preached to audiences numbering more than 10,000. Thousands came to faith in Jesus.

Spurgeon never took credit for the success of his ministry. Instead, he always pointed to the hundreds of people who came before services and prayed. He said any success he had came from God in answer to their prayers. Spurgeon was fond of calling these prayer gatherings the church's "boiler room."

Steam was the power source of the day. Boiler rooms were the powerhouses.

3 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*"Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
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Spurgeon saw the corporate praying of his people as the true source of spiritual power.

When Paul encouraged the Colossians to “continue in prayer,” I think he meant something more than each individual believer’s personal prayer life. He was addressing the entire church - the gathering of believers. They should continue praying **together**.

We tend to think more individually than corporately. But we will see some reasons throughout these verses to believe that Paul had corporate prayer in mind.

Colossians 4:2 Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;

“Continue earnestly” is one word. It can mean to *devote yourselves*. It’s also (according to the *Strong’s Concordance*) a plural word. He was telling the church, in its gatherings, to devote time to prayer.

“Vigilante” has lots of possible meanings. One is to be mindful that you can slack-off if you’re not careful.

4 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*“Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
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Love One Another Right Now”*

That is certainly true of both corporate and individual praying.

“With thanksgiving” can certainly mean we should be thankful in all things. But might it not also mean we should be thankful that we can, in fact, approach God anytime in prayer - knowing He hears us? We ought to take full advantage of it - especially when gathered together.

Colossians 4:5 Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.

Paul was comparing those “inside” the church - those in Christ - with nonbelievers “outside” the church. So again it seems he had the corporate church in mind more than individual believers.

Having said that, we know that each of us **is** the church in the sense we are its members; we are its living stones. Individually, concerning “those who are outside,” you are to “walk in wisdom.” “Wisdom” is the practical application of the truth in God’s Word, the Bible. I “walk in wisdom” when I apply Christian principles out in the ‘real’ world.

5 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*“Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
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Concerning “those who are outside” I am to be “redeeming the time.” It’s from a word that means *to buy out*. Have you ever bought-out an item from a store? Bought every one they had? You do it when something is valuable to you and you just can’t pass it up.

That’s the idea - only Paul was applying it to opportunities to affect people’s lives for Jesus. We should see every opportunity as something valuable that we just cannot pass up.

Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

The wording suggests that you can create a ‘taste’ in the lives of the nonbelievers you encounter.

“Grace” is God’s undeserved and unmerited favor. It is the heart of God and thus the heart of the Gospel. It is captured perfectly in John 3:16,

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

If you are not yet a believer, you have a problem. It's probably not what you think it is - it is not your spouse or your boss or your addiction. It's sin. You are a sinner and need saving. Jesus came and took your place on the Cross to offer you the forgiveness of sin and a new spiritual life. Salvation is God's free gift to those who will simply receive it.

“Salt” both preserves food from corruption and makes it savory for consumption. It is a reminder to let nothing corrupt come from out of my mouth but only that which is wholesome and spiritually savory.

“That you may know how to answer each one.” First of all this tells you that when you walk in wisdom people will be curious. They will ask you questions.

Second of all notice that Paul didn't say “everyone” but “each one.” It reminds us that the people we encounter are unique individuals for whom Jesus died.

7 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*“Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
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Love One Another Right Now”*

If I'm right about Paul addressing the church as a whole, then it means part of our individual spiritual success to those "outside" in the 'real' world **is dependent upon our being a praying church.** They go hand-in-hand.

Is it biblical to think so highly of corporate prayer?

It is. In the sixth chapter of the Book of Acts, the early church faced a problem with the distribution of gifts to widows. When it was brought to the attention of the apostles, they uttered the well-known decree,

Act 6:3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;

Act 6:4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

We tend to interpret this as the pastors private prayer & study time. We think of the apostles as cloistered away, praying and studying for the greater part of the day. Many pastors follow this model.

The actual words themselves are about corporate ministry. The last part of Acts 6:4 should be translated, “we will give ourselves continually to **THE** prayer and to **the** ministry of the word.”

Why emphasize THE prayer? One commentator put it this way:

That little word "the" that appears before prayer indicates that this doesn't mean prayer in general. It highlights something specific and important. The syntax of the sentence creates the possibility that **the ministry of prayer and the word are twin ideas.**

Twin ideas, meaning these were both areas of public serving - *not* personal preparation.

Let me say that whatever we do to serve corporate prayer, it must be done with grace - not force. We do not want to force anyone to pray against their will.

We therefore encourage corporate prayer in non-threatening ways:

9 of 21
Colossians 4:2-18
*“Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
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- About once a month, we take the Prayer Offering. It gives folks in the corporate setting opportunity to participate in a ministry of prayer - if they so choose.
- We have a weekly prayer meeting, *First Watch*, on Saturday nights, where we pray for the cards and whatever else.
- We have pretty good response to corporate prayer at our Mid-Week service.
- Every Sunday, at service end, we set aside time for prayer. It may not be corporate in the sense of praying out loud, but it is in a group setting; and we have guys up front to pray with you.
- Annually, we've hosted a special prayer event.

I'll leave it up to you to measure your participation.

#2 Commit To Praying For Your Servants At Large (v3-4 & 7-18)

You're in jail for preaching the Gospel. What do you ask believers to pray for?

10 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*"Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
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Colossians 4:3 meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,

Paul didn't ask them to pray that his prison 'door' would be left 'open' so he could escape; or even that God would 'open' his prison 'door' through regular legal channels so he might be released. No, Paul was only interested in God opening spiritual doors of ministry while he was in prison.

Paul called what he was requesting "a door for the word" to be preached while he remained captive.

You might be in a place at home or at work or at school where you feel confined - almost as if it is a 'prison' to you. Well, first of all, *it isn't prison!* But even if it was, your priority ought to be that a "door" would "open for the **word**" rather than your prison door being opened.

Paul called his message "the mystery of Christ." He was revealing the previously concealed truth that the church on the earth was Jesus Christ's spiritual body and that it was entered by faith alone through grace

alone without any ethnic distinctions and without the necessity of first converting to Judaism.

Colossians 4:4 that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

Paul was a brilliant guy. He was a Jew with impeccable heritage but also enjoyed Roman citizenship. He was a Scripture scholar but also well-read in Greek wisdom and philosophy. He was called by Jesus personally to be an apostle. He performed miracles in the name of Jesus. He established churches. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he wrote Scripture.

Yet here he was, soliciting prayer, depending on God.

Dropping down to verse seven, Paul identifies a bunch of other guys the Colossians could pray for.

Colossians 4:7 Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.

He is named five times in the New Testament. He was given the responsibility of delivering or co-delivering three of Paul's letters - Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. After Paul was released from prison Tychicus went with him to Crete and probably replaced Titus as pastor there. He is with Paul again during his second imprisonment but is sent to Ephesus just before the apostle is martyred.

The three phrases that describe him **ought to describe each of us**. Do they?

Colossians 4:8 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts,

Here's a good definition of how to minister to others: "know [their] circumstances and comfort [their] hearts" in the Lord. Hear - really hear - what others are saying. Then offer real "comfort" - which can be sympathy but is most often an exhortation for them to be strong in the Lord and endure trouble by looking forward to Heaven.

13 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*"Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
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Colossians 4:9 with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here.

Onesimus was previously the unsaved slave of a Christian master, Philemon, in the city of Colossae. After he had wronged his master he ran away to Rome. There, by God's providence, he encountered Paul and was led to faith in Jesus Christ. Upon hearing his story, Paul told Onesimus that he knew his master, Philemon. He sent Onesimus back with Tychicus carrying another letter that we have in our Bibles - the letter to Philemon, in which Paul appealed to his friend to receive Onesimus as a brother.

Colossians 4:10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him),

Aristarchus was a Jew who had been converted to Jesus during Paul's brief ministry in the city of Thessalonica.

He began traveling with Paul and was one of two who were almost martyred by the angry mob of silversmiths in the city of Ephesus.

He is described here as a “fellow prisoner.” Whether he was currently a prisoner in Rome or had been one previously, Paul considered this high praise.

Too often the modern attitude concerning church is, “What can it do for me?” *Ask not what your church can do for you, but ask what you can do in your church.*

“Mark the cousin of Barnabas” is the famous Jon-Mark of the Book of Acts who deserted Paul and Barnabas on the mission field. Paul and Jon-Mark had reconciled and the apostle considered Jon-Mark a trusted faithful servant. There is an obvious lesson there about being ready to forgive and about seeking reconciliation.

Colossians 4:11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.

15 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*“Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
Everybody Get Together and
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“Jesus” was his Hebrew name; “Justus” was his Greek name. At this point Paul felt it important to identify Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus as being “of the circumcision.” It meant that they were Jews who had converted to Jesus. Two facts are then given:

1. They were the only such completed Jews who were working with Paul.
2. They were a great source of “comfort” to him in his work.

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Colossians 4:13 For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.

Epaphras had been led to Christ by Paul in Ephesus and had returned home to Colossae to share the Gospel. It seems he also founded the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

- “Laboring fervently” is an athletic metaphor. Epaphras approached prayer the way a professional athlete approaches their sport - with preparation, training, effort, etc.
- The subject of his praying was other believers, not so much himself.
- His objective for them was that they would submit to “the will of God” and thereby find themselves being perfected as God worked in them to “complete” the work He had begun at their conversion.
- Epaphras prayed with “zeal.” He would rather pray than anything else.

One commentator said that it might be better to pray for a person for half an hour than to counsel them for hours.

Colossians 4:14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.

Doctors may not have been as revered in first century Rome as they are today.

Luke likely was the slave of Theophyllus, for whom he was commissioned to write the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

Whether revered or not, Luke reminds us that no matter your career you are first-and-foremost committed to serving in the church. Your career belongs to Jesus.

Demas is mentioned three times in the Bible and there is a sad digression each time:

1. First, he is called “Demas... my fellow laborer” and is linked with three godly men - Mark, Aristarchus, and Luke (Philemon 24).
2. Next, he is simply called Demas here in our verse with no word of identification or commendation.
3. Finally, it is said of him, “for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (Second Timothy 4:10).

Colossians 4:15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house.

Colossians 4:16 Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

The church over in Laodicea met in the home of Nymphas. Some Bibles translate the name in a feminine form, Nympha; thus we cannot be certain if this was a man or a woman.

The church initially met daily in the Temple at Jerusalem and in private homes. As Christianity spread, the Gospel was preached in synagogue meetings and in private homes. If a building was available, it was rented or utilized - like the school of Tyrannus in Acts 19. About the third century, when Christianity ceased being officially persecuted by the government, the church started meeting more conveniently in buildings.

Today there is a home-church movement that is antagonistic to buildings and owning property. Hey, I'm OK with home churches, until they get legalistic and say it is the only way to meet.

19 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*“Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
Everybody Get Together and
Love One Another Right Now”*

The “epistle from Laodicea” is most likely the letter we call Ephesians. It was meant to be read in all the churches and just happened to be at Laodicea at the time.

What we learn is that *all* the letters to *any* of the churches were for **every** assembly of God’s people.

“Read” means *read aloud*. Another clue that we’re talking about the church, gathered together.

Colossians 4:17 And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

Archippus was most likely Philemon’s son and the current pastor of the church at Colossae.

Colossians 4:18 This salutation by my own hand - Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.

It’s believed by scholars that Paul dictated his letters to a secretary called an *amanensis*. He would always sign them to verify authenticity.

20 of 21

Colossians 4:2-18

*“Cmon People Now, Pray for Your Brother;
Everybody Get Together and
Love One Another Right Now”*

“Remember my chains.” How do you read that? I see Paul reminding them of the joy of sacrifice and suffering for the sake of Jesus.

“Grace be with you” is more than a quick end to the letter. It is a reminder that having begun in grace we must continue the Christian life by God’s grace.

“Amen.” So ended the sermon that day in Colossae.

I’ll end our time with a boiler room quote from Spurgeon:

Brethren, we shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians.