

Thank God for Prayer – Colossians 4:2-6

George Mueller was a man of prayer. Once, while crossing the Atlantic on the SS Sardinian in August 1877, his ship ran into thick fog. He explained to the captain that he needed to be in Quebec by the following afternoon, but the Captain said that he was slowing the ship down for safety and Müller's appointment would have to be missed. Müller asked to use the chart-room to pray for the lifting of the fog. The captain followed him down, claiming it would be a waste of time. After Müller prayed a very simple prayer, the captain started to pray, but Müller stopped him; partly because the captain did not believe, but mainly because he believed the prayer had already been answered. Müller said, "Captain, I have known my Lord for more than fifty years and there is not one instance that I have failed to have an audience with the King. Get up, Captain, for you will find that the fog has gone." When the two men went back to the bridge, they found the fog had lifted, and Müller was able to keep his appointment. The captain became a Christian shortly afterwards. (Wikipedia)

If you were to ask George Mueller what he was most grateful for, it would come as no surprise if he said, "I am thankful for the gift of prayer."

In the book of Colossians, we have found that the Apostle Paul is filled with thankfulness for many things. We have seen how he was thankful for the church family, for the cross, and for the new life in Christ.

Today we will see that he is thankful for prayer.

Looking back over the life of the Apostle I am sure he would say that of all the things he is thankful for, prayer would have to be near the top of his list.

The Apostle Paul's journey with Jesus began with an encounter with the living Lord on the road to Damascus. There Paul's life was forever changed. When Paul met Jesus he was left blind.

Prayer, however, prepared a man named Ananias to not only welcome Saul (as he was known then) into the fellowship, but through prayer Saul received his sight back. Through prayer Paul was chosen to be a missionary for the sake of the Gospel. Paul saw many miracles happen as a result of prayer, including his release from prison via an earthquake, which resulted in the salvation of the jailer. In Troas a young man fell three stories from a window to his death. Paul prayed over him and God raised the young man back to life. As Paul was coming to Rome, as a prisoner on a ship, a great storm destroyed the ship but not one passenger was lost. All made it safely to shore, just as Paul said they would, for this was revealed to him by God as he prayed.

And now Paul sat in Rome, writing to the Christians of Colossae, a prisoner awaiting a trial that could result in his execution. Flowing out of a heart of gratitude for the power of prayer evidenced in his life, Paul gives this instruction to the Christians:

"Devote yourselves to prayer."

There are so many things we can do as followers of Jesus, most of them really good things. We can pack shoeboxes for children who would not only not have a gift this Christmas otherwise, but they also would not receive the message of Jesus without these gifts.

We can collect coats and socks and gloves and scarfs for people who have had to flee their country and now live in a refugee camp.

We can collect tarps and tools and cloths for the victims of an earthquake in Haiti.

We can hand out gift bags to the women of our community who get forced onto our streets or into shelters.

These are all really good things, but the Apostle Paul would say it is even more important to pray. Do these things, yes, but make sure you are a praying people first and foremost. **Devote yourself to prayer...**

Do you remember what Jesus did the night before he chose the men who would be his disciples? According to Luke 6:12 he prayed – all night.

Paul would say to the Christians in Philippi, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Phil 4:6)

In 1904 – 1905 a revival swept through Wales, largely in part because of the ministry of a young man names Evan Roberts. A very spiritual young man, he prayed for eleven years for revival to come to his country. Often he would be awakened by God at 1 am and he would pray until 5. At the age of 26, Evan had a dramatic encounter with Jesus, so he simply shared this with the people at his church. The people gathered to pray and sing and hear the Word, and the nation was changed. It is estimated that over 150,000 came to faith in Jesus in 1904 alone, and the result was that families were restored, the liquor industry almost went completely broke, and the police had little more to do than escort people to the services.

It is hard to deny the power of even one person devoted to praying...

By the early 1990s, Cali, Columbia had become one of the most thoroughly corrupt cities in the world. Cartel interests controlled virtually every major institution – including banks, businesses, politicians and law enforcement.

Like everything else in Cali, the church was in disarray. Evangelicals were few and did not much care for each other. Every pastor was working on his own; no one wanted to join together.”

When pastor-evangelists Julio and Ruth Ruibal came to Cali in 1978, they were dismayed at the pervasive darkness in the city. Julio started to build relationships with the other pastors.

Randy and Marcy MacMillan were among the first to join the Ruibals in intercession. “We just asked the Lord to show us how to pray,” Marcy remembers. And He did. For the next several

months they focused on the meagre appetite within the church for prayer, unity and holiness. Realizing these are the very things that attract the presence of God, they petitioned the Lord to stimulate a renewed spiritual hunger, especially in the city's ministers.

As their prayers began to take effect, a small group of pastors proposed assembling their congregations for an evening of joint worship and prayer. The idea was to lease the city's civic auditorium, and spend the night in prayer and repentance. They would solicit God's active participation in their stand against the drug cartels and their unseen spiritual masters.

Roping off most of the seating area, the pastors planned for a few thousand people. And even this, in the minds of many, was overly optimistic. "We heard it all," said Rosevelt Muriel. "People told us, 'It can't be done,' 'No one will come,' 'Pastors won't give their support.' But we decided to move forward and trust God with the results."

When the event was finally held in May 1995, the nay-sayers and even some of the organizers were dumbfounded. Instead of the expected modest turnout, more than 25,000 people filed into the civic auditorium – nearly half of the city's evangelical population at the time! At one point the mayor mounted the platform and proclaimed, 'Cali belongs to Jesus Christ.' Well, when they heard those words, the crowd was energized. Giving themselves to intense prayer, the crowd remained until 6 o'clock the next morning. The city's famous all-night prayer vigil – the 'vigilia' – had been born.

Forty-eight hours after the event, the daily newspaper headlined, "No Homicides!" For the first time in as long as anybody in the city could remember, a 24-hour period had passed without a single person being killed. In a nation cursed with the highest homicide rate in the world, this was a newsworthy development. Corruption also took a major hit when, over the next four months, 900 cartel-linked officers were fired from the metropolitan police force. Within a few more months seven leaders of the cartel were rounded up and arrested.

What made the difference in that city?

People headed the words of God: **Devote yourselves to prayer.**

What do you think God could do in Nanaimo if people truly devoted themselves to prayer? Do you think it would affect the crime rates, rates that are only rising at this point? Would it affect the homelessness crisis on our streets? Would it affect the people who are caught up in drugs and alcohol? Would it make a difference in the rate of depression and suicide in our city? Would it make a difference in the cases of domestic violence?

My answer is a resounding YES! We keep waiting for the government to fix all these things. They can't. The root of all these issues is a spiritual issue, and that can only be addressed through spiritual means. As the Apostle Paul said,

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." 2 Corinthians 10:4

Paul goes on to say that we must be watchful. We must stay awake, be alert, be watching for the schemes of the devil as well as keep looking upwards for our redemption – the return of Jesus. We cannot afford to fall asleep spiritually, getting lazy in our praying. We should always be in an attitude of prayer, taking everything to the Lord for his direction and help.

And in our prayers there should be thanksgiving. God has already done so much for us, we must lift our voices in thanksgiving to him.

Of course the Apostle is thinking first and foremost about what God has done for us in Jesus. In verse 3, note that Paul does not pray for deliverance from prison, or even a quick trial, but for the opportunity to share the mystery of the Gospel.

The mystery is not that it is hard to figure out, or it is somehow hidden and only a few can find it. No, the mystery is that God cares for sinful people like you and me and was willing to sacrifice his own Son, Jesus, to set us free from sin and to open the door to the very presence of a holy God. The mystery includes this fact: we cannot earn or deserve this salvation. It is offered as a gift, and is only received as a gift through faith.

The mystery is that salvation is so easy to attain because God did all that was necessary to make it available to us. But we must repent and invite Jesus into our lives.

Paul asks that believers will pray that he can proclaim that mystery to people in Rome, in a wise and clear way.

This morning I want you to hear the heart of Paul beating for a world lost until it finds Jesus. And the only way to see that world reached for Jesus is to start with prayer.

And Paul is so thankful for prayer because it makes all the difference in the world. I am sure you are saved today because someone prayed for you.

What a gift prayer is. We bring to God our needs, yes, and how many times has God provided for us as we trusted him with our needs? I have heard the story from so many people that I confuse the details now. But the story line is simple: there was a bill that needed to be paid, a financial need of some kind, and after praying about it, a cheque arrived, an envelope was delivered, a handshake left money in your palm and it was exactly what was needed to pay the bill, or meet the financial need.

People have prayed, and there have been healings. People have prayed and God has arranged for the right doctors to do the right surgery at the right time. People have prayed, and God has gently assured them he was still in control as he lovingly took their loved one home to be with him. People prayed and anger and bitterness and confusion was wiped away in the presence of Jesus.

This morning we can talk much about prayer, but the power of prayer is not in talking about it, but doing it. I do not know what you need to pray about today, but we are taking time in this service to simply pray.

You may want to pray that God would purify your heart.

You may want to pray for those who have lost loved ones.

You may want to pray for the lost of our city.

You may want to pray for a personal need.

You may want to pray for your family.

You may want to pray for revival in your own heart.

You may want to pray for revival in our church.

We will sing "I Must Tell Jesus" and as we do, I invite anyone who wants to to come forward and pray at our altars, to do so. Or you may want to use the chairs on our front row. You certainly may pray where you are seated now.

I simply invite you to pray. You may even want to pray that God would help you devote more time to praying this week, and the next, and the next after that.

Let me close with an old poem by Alan Grant called, The Difference:

The Difference

I got up early one morning and rushed right into the day.

I had so much to accomplish that I didn't have time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me, and heavier came each task.

"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered. He answered, "You didn't ask,"

I wanted to see joy and beauty, but the day toiled on, gray and bleak.

I wondered why God didn't show me. He said, "But you didn't seek.:"

I tried to come into God's presence. I used all my keys at the lock.

God gently and lovingly chided, "My child, you didn't knock."

I woke up early this morning and paused before entering the day.

I had so much to accomplish that I had to take time to pray.

Author: Alan Grant

This morning we thank God for prayer...