

“A Man of Prayer”
Philemon 1:4
(Preached at Trinity, July 16, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we saw last time, this was a very personal letter. Paul's first few sentences of this letter bear the characteristics of typical first century letters.
 - We find the author: "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother"
 - This was followed by the recipient of the letter: "To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker"
 - Paul added some co-recipients - "Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church"
 - This was followed by an expression of thanksgiving - "I thank my God always"
2. In **Verse 3** Paul sends his blessing of grace and peace. This was a distinctly Christian greeting. Paul used it in all of his epistles except 1 & 2 Timothy. Luther said, "These two words, *grace* and *peace*, contain in them the whole sum of Christianity. Grace releases sin, and peace makes the conscience quiet."
3. Then we come to **Verse 4**, and again, it would be easy for us to pass by without considering the significance. Paul expresses thanksgiving to God for their faith and love. We'll consider this more carefully next time as we look at **Verse 5**.
4. But before we consider Philemon's faith and love I want to pause at the end of **Verse 4**. Paul makes a simple statement: "I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,"
5. This is really an incredible affirmation of Paul's prayer life. Paul's command to us was, **1 Thessalonians 5:17 NAU** - "pray without ceasing"
Paul demonstrated this in his own life. The remarkable thing was how he prayed continually for individuals and churches by name. His prayer list must have been extensive.
 - To the Ephesians - **Ephesians 1:16 NAU** - "I do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers"
 - To Timothy - "I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day"
 - To the Church of Rome - "I make mention of you, always in my prayers"
 - To the Philippians - "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,"
6. Now Paul is stating he remembers Philemon in his prayers.
"I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,"
7. Paul was a man of prayer. Paul was writing this epistle to Philemon while under Roman house arrest, Paul was chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day. What a testimony it must have been as this guard witnessed the countless hours Paul spent in prayer.
8. We need to ask an important question:
Was it because Paul was an Apostle that he was devoted to prayer, or was it because he was a Christian? It was both. Paul knew his duty as an apostle, but he also knew his duty as a Christian. Prayer is essential to the Christian life. It is essential for our church.

9. Prayer has been called a test of our spiritual life before God.
 Robert Murray M'Cheyne – "What a man is on his knees before God, that he is – and nothing more."
 Martyn Lloyd-Jones – "There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christians so much as our prayer life."
 J.C. Ryle - "What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray little, and those who are eminently holy pray much."
10. So the pressing question is, why don't Christians pray? It is a frequent question to a perennial problem. As I talk with my fellow pastors they all lament this issue. Why don't Christians pray?
 Let me rule out the first two reasons we don't pray:
1. Spiritual deadness. We'll rule this out because of how I phrased the question. Why don't Christians pray? But it is a serious point to consider. Lost people don't pray. Not regularly. Not consistently. They don't feel a compulsion to go before the Father because they have no relationship with Him. They don't pray because they don't desire to pray.
 I am presuming each of you desire to pray.
 2. We also can't say we don't know the importance of prayer. There are few subjects I've preached on more. A quick search of my sermon archive reveals I've preached over 100 sermons on the subject of prayer.
 3. Sin has a negative impact on our prayer life. It creates a breach of fellowship. We cease to feel His presence and leave off praying. It's true, nothing shall ever sever our *union* with Christ, but sin will have a negative impact upon our *communion* with Christ.
 4. Unbelief – Most people do not pray because they don't believe it will make any difference - if we expected results we would certainly pray.
Matthew 21:21-22 NAU - "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. ²² "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."
 But we don't believe this do we?
 When a person fails to see the greatness of God his prayer life will be small.
 5. Apathy - a sense of being satisfied - In times of great need men are driven to prayer.
 6. Pride and self-sufficiency – Most men would rather trust in their own wisdom.
 7. Preoccupation - We become so distracted by other things that we leave off praying.
 8. A lack of discipline - We don't plan to pray. We don't set aside times for prayer. It isn't a priority. We always make time for those things important to us.
 9. We convince ourselves we are too busy to pray
 A busy schedule is no excuse for not praying.
 It is easy to brush off our limited prayer to having such a busy life.
 - a. We have work and children and so many responsibilities.
 - b. The truth is some of the busiest people have been the greatest prayer warriors.
 - c. Luther: "I have so much business I cannot get along without spending three hours daily in prayer."

- I. Prayer is a duty pressed upon every believer
- A. It is sinful to be negligent in prayer. In the imperative Paul writes:
1 Thessalonians 5:17 NAU - "pray without ceasing"
1. Paul was praying because Christians have a duty to pray for one another.
 2. We should note, Paul had never met most of the Christians at Colossae. The church was founded by Epaphras. Yet, Paul loved this church because it belonged to Christ. He loved Philemon because he belonged to Christ.
John 13:34 NAU - "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."
1 John 3:11 NAU - "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another"
 3. How do you feel about your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you feel a burden for them? Do you pray for them?
- B. All of us have a duty to build our Lord's church.
1. Christians have the duty to pray for their pastors in their work.
Hebrews 13:17-18 NAU - "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. ¹⁸ Pray for us"
 - a. Paul continually sought the prayers of the brethren
Ephesians 6:19-20 NAU - "and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."
 - b. Preaching depends on prayer.
Churches must pray for the preaching of their church – for their preacher, for themselves, for each other.
E.M. Bounds: "Salvation never finds its way to a prayerless heart. The Holy Spirit never abides in a prayerless spirit. Preaching never edifies a prayerless soul. Christ knows nothing of prayerless Christians. The gospel cannot be projected by a prayerless preacher." 2. Prayer is Essential to the advancement of the Gospel.
The Gospel depends on prayer. When the people of God cease praying the Gospel is greatly hindered.
 - a. But you say, I thought salvation is a work of God. How can God be hindered from saving His elect people? Yes, salvation is a monergistic work of God's grace. But God has ordained all the means to bring about the salvation of the lost. God is sovereign but the Gospel must be preached. And God's people must pray.
 - b. The Gospel demands prayer for laborers
Matthew 9:38 NAU - "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."
 - c. The Gospel demands prayer for opportunities –
Colossians 4:2-3 NAU - "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*; ³ praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word"

- d. The Gospel demands prayer since there is a natural hatred of it by the men of this world.
2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 NAU - "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you; ² and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."
- e. The work of the Gospel is under continual assault by the wicked one.
- 4. You also have a duty to pray for one another.
 - a. We are affected greatly by the hyper-individualism of our day. We forget we are united as a part of a body. That which affects one of us affects the whole.
 - b. After admonishing the Ephesian Christians to put on the whole armor of God and the shield of faith with the sword of the Spirit they were commanded to pray.
Ephesians 6:18 NAU - "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,"

II. Few of us understand the importance of prayer and the power of prayer.

- A. Few of us understand all that God has ordained through prayer.
 - 1. What would happen if we truly committed our way to Him? What would happen if we truly trusted in His sovereign dominion and if we prayed knowing He hears us effectually.
 - 2. What would happen to our church if we all committed to prayer?
- B. Everything we do as Christians depends on prayer.
 - 1. God has appointed the end of all things, but He is also sovereign over the means to the end. One of those means is prayer.
 - 2. The Bible is filled with examples:
 - a. Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still
Joshua 10:12-13 NAU - "Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Aijalon." ¹³ So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped"
 - b. Hannah prayed and God opened her womb
 - c. Elijah prayed that it would not rain
James 5:17-18 NAU - "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit."
 - d. Elisha prayed for victory over the Arameans:
2 Kings 6:18 NAU - "Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha."
 - e. The Assyrians were defeated as the result of prayer
2 Chronicles 32:20-21 NAU - "But King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed about this and cried out to heaven. ²¹ And the LORD sent an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior, commander and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria. "

3. Listen to James:
James 5:14-16 NAU - "Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

- C. God's people must recognize the effectual nature of prayer
 1. We are in a great spiritual conflict. Prayer is one of our great weapons. Paul includes it in his description of our spiritual armor
 2. E.M. Bounds: "The holier a man is, the more does he esteem prayer; the clearer does he see that God gives himself to the praying ones, and that the measure of God's revelation to the soul is the measure of the soul's longing, importunate prayer for God."

Conclusion:

1. Why do people neglect prayer? Because they don't really believe that God answers prayer. They don't believe in the importance of prayer. They don't understand all that is lost by their prayerlessness.
2. Do you see the importance of prayer?
Do you understand God's power in prayer?
3. Do you come before God with great faith knowing that your prayers are not without effect? Do you understand the unique place of corporate prayer. When Peter was in prison the church could have prayed individually in their homes. But they did not. They gathered together.
Acts 12:12 NAU - "he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying."
4. They were joined together contending in prayer on behalf of Peter.
May each of us commit to joining together in contending prayer.
Never forget the importance of your prayers for the success of our church and the preaching of the Word.
Spurgeon spoke to his ministerial students: "A certain preacher, whose sermons converted men by scores, received a revelation from heaven that not one of the conversions was owing to his talents or eloquence, but all to the prayers of an illiterate lay brother, who sat on the pulpit steps, pleading all the time for the success of the sermon. We may discover, after having labored long and wearily in preaching, that all the honor belongs to another builder, whose prayers were gold, silver, and precious stones, while our sermonizing, being apart from prayer, were but hay and stubble."¹
5. Will you be that man, that lady whose prayers open the gates of heaven for God's blessings to come raining down.

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008) Page 48