

Agonizing in Prayer

Preacher: Treavor K.

Date: September 13, 2026

Church: 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel

References: **Colossians 1**, Colossians 1:9-14; Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:26; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 2:1; Colossians 2:10; Romans 4:4-5; Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 1:3

Roy said whenever I speak Chinese, nobody understands me.

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Colossians chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1. It's nice to be with you again. It's nice to be able to share with you.

Some of you were on with the Bible study last night and you heard the news. I've been praying for my mother since 1989. The Lord saved me. Lael's been praying for my mother since 1997 when we met. I think on Monday she made a profession of faith. And so we thank many of you who've been praying—some of you for that long, some of you for shorter. If you didn't pray, you can rejoice that she made a profession of faith.

A friend of mine, Clayton, who's been my friend since I was twelve years old, has been visiting her in the hospital, and he was sharing the gospel with her. And sometimes, I don't know, the Bible says a prophet is without honor, and maybe she took it a little better from Clayton. But there were an awful lot of people who sowed with tears. We were thinking about that hymn, that we're beneficiaries of what the Lord has sown in tears and come away reaping with joy.

We're going to read about a prayer of Paul:

[Colossians 1:9-14 NKJV] - ⁹ For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

And the Lord will bless the reading of His Word to us this morning.

The Unseen Spiritual Conflict

This is one of Paul's prison letters. That means this is a letter that Paul wrote while he was incarcerated in Rome. It goes along with the book of Ephesians, it goes along with the book of Philippians, and it goes with the letter to Philemon. Philemon was also a person who lived in this town of Colossae, we think. And the church in Colossae was a church that Paul had never physically been to. Very interesting that he's praying for people in a church where he's never physically been. It was probably started—and I'm going to pronounce his name Epaphras, some say Epaphras. But I wasn't there, so... and since my Greek is horrible, as bad as my Chinese—it's not as bad as my Spanish, and some of you think my English isn't very good—but despite that, we're going to call him Epaphras. And Epaphras was the man who was the connection between Paul and the church in Colossae.

And this is a prayer that Paul prayed. And as we look at this prayer this morning, we would like to ask ourselves: do we pray for others? Do we pray for even those who we don't know exactly who they are?

There was a situation recently where there was a mudslide and a flood in Tibet, maybe you remember it. And one of the brothers in the back at the prayer meeting was saying, "Remember Tibet, remember Tibet." And so we ended up praying for those in Tibet. Do we pray for those that we don't even know? Do we pray for others in the local assembly? Do we pray for the local assembly? Do we pray very much? And sometimes I wonder, do we pray for ourselves enough? Do we pray for ourselves enough?

It's a deep question, and it's a difficult question to answer. It's a personal question. But when all is said and done, it gives me comfort, because I don't remember to pray for everything. But the book of Hebrews tells us that we have a High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us. The book of Romans tells us that even when we don't know how to pray, the Holy Spirit is able to intercede and make our prayers in such a way that by the time they get to the throne of God, they're fixed. It's a marvelous thing.

And so as we look at this prayer, we'd like to maybe pick up some pointers. So verse 9 says, for this cause, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray. It was a constant prayer. Paul would write earlier to the Thessalonians that they should pray without ceasing in chapter 5. Isn't that what Paul prayed? Look at chapter 2, verse 1 of Colossians. It says:

[Colossians 2:1 NKJV] - For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,

This word conflict is the Greek word *agon*. It's the word we get the English word *agonize* from. And this is what Paul would do in prayer: he would *agon*. He would **agonize**. He would fight. He would have this great conflict. Conflicts, not within himself, but there is this battle going on in the unseen realms between God and those that are opposed to God. There's a spiritual battle, not against flesh and blood, that's going on in the unseen heavenly realms.

And this is where, beloved, the battles are won or lost in our lives. Do we understand that? Probably. Every time we lose a battle, if we lose a battle to temptation, if we lose a battle in not doing what exactly is the will of God, it's probably because we have not agonized in prayer. Right. This is the great conflict that we don't see. It's there and it exists. We see in the book of Daniel that there was this great conflict in chapter 9, and the angel couldn't get to answer the prayer of Daniel until Michael the archangel came to help. There's this spiritual battle going on. And the battle, beloved, is won or lost in prayer.

Now, we understand that everybody still has their own free will, and so we can't force others to believe. But we can pray for them. We can ask God to open doors. We can ask God to bring people into their lives. We can ask God to open their minds. We can ask God to open their eyes. We can ask God to do it. I like to say, some way, somehow, do what You need to do, because You're the only wise God, and there's no one like You, and You need to do what You need to do.

How many mothers and grandmothers have seen their sons or daughters get saved in prison? How many people have prayed for their mother for thirty-seven years, or more, or less? I've even heard stories of mothers who have died with prayers on their lips for their children, and at the reading of the will, a child gets saved. At the funeral, a child gets saved. At a funeral, a cousin gets saved. At a funeral, a brother gets saved.

Sometimes in Canada and in the United States, we like to clean up funerals. We like to hold it when it's more convenient for us. Have you ever gone to a memorial service like two months later? It happens in Los Angeles all the time. There's something happening this weekend, there's something happening that weekend, and two months down the road is the memorial service. And everybody is stripped of that emotion they felt of the loss. And when you strip yourself of that emotion of the loss, you strip yourself of what God is speaking into their lives. The brevity of life—you forgot about it; it was two months ago.

What happens in the Bible? Lazarus was already dead for four days, and he smelled, and Jesus wasn't there, and they were still mourning. It happens in almost all the world that a person dies and is buried right after that. And this is the opportunity we have to speak to those raw emotions that are experiencing loss. And people get saved at funerals, because the Lord is able to take that raw emotion of sadness and not understanding and ignorance, and teach it: this is the surety of salvation that's in Jesus Christ. And it's something that we're missing out on in Canada; it's something we're missing out on in the United States, because of our convenience, and we don't think working it out is a big deal.

But this is how people get saved: when we **agonize** for them in prayer. And oftentimes when the road gets tough, when the emotions get raw, is when I pray more earnestly. You might not be the same as me—you're probably not the same as me—but that's often when I find my prayers are the most honest. That's often when I find that my prayers are more heartfelt.

Sometimes we go through our prayer list like it's Santa; we're writing a letter to Santa Claus: "I've been a good boy this year. Please give me this, and please give me that, and please save this person, and please heal that person, and please, please, please." We don't say it exactly that way, but sometimes we say, "In Jesus' name, in Jesus' name, in Jesus' name." That's Christianese. That's how Christians say "pretty please with sugar on top." We don't want to have a prayer life like that.

We want to enter into a prayer life where we're right before the throne of God, and we see the eternal realities of what's going on. And because we see the eternal realities of what's going on, and we're speaking with the eternal God, and we rejoice that He's allowed us into the throne room of grace—and to that throne of grace where we can find mercy and grace to help in the time of need—we begin to agonize. We exert effort. It's not just going through the motions.

The Delusion of False Spirituality

You see, in Colossians, they were being flooded with false teachers. They were coming left, right, and center. These false teachers would become commonly known as—oh, boy, Gnostics? Gnostics, thank you. They thought that there was some other higher level of getting to. They had this philosophy that if you were able to do this or do that... they had this idea that material things were bad and spiritual things were good, and it didn't matter. Everything spiritual was good and everything material was bad.

Is that true? People I talk to in Canada, they like to say, "Well, I'm spiritual." Oh, is that good or is that bad? It depends on the context, doesn't it? Because usually "I'm spiritual" means that I like to do things the way I like to do things. Because usually, if you're a believer, you

say, "I'm a Christian," or something like that. But lots of people like to say, "I'm spiritual." Is everything spiritual good? Is everything spiritual going to get you to hell? It's not true. Is the devil a spirit, or is he physical? The devil's a spirit, isn't he? He's an angel, a principality, a power. He's spiritual. Is he good? And in your best Spanish you should all be able to say, "No way, Jose." Not everything spiritual is good.

If we drive down 49th Avenue by Langara College, you'll see all these places, if we're heading east on the left-hand side of the road. None of them are good for anything. Spiritual places—well, the only thing they're good for is, if you follow them, you end up in hell separated from Jesus for the rest of your life.

One of the reasons the book of Colossians is written is because they were teaching that there were some other things you could do. You could have Christ, you could believe in Jesus as your Savior, and you could do these other spiritual things. You could mix them all together, because they're spiritual things, and spiritual things are good. You cannot add Jesus to anything, and you cannot add anything to Jesus. This is why he's agonizing. This is a letter written 2,000 years ago, and it's written in the Bible in the Middle East, and it's applicable to us in Vancouver today, because there's an awful lot of people saying they're spiritual.

They needed to be filled with God's wisdom and spiritual understanding. And sometimes I run into people around here and, well, what are you doing? You own this business—what do you got that cat that waves his arm like this? You're a Christian, and you got a cat that waves your arm to give you good luck and keep the evil spirits away? No way! That's blasphemy against God, that Jesus isn't enough. No! You can't add that to Jesus. Jesus is all you need. Chapter 2 will go on and say we're complete in Him.

And God is being told by Paul, "Father, fill them with the knowledge of Your will." There are a lot of false teachers, but they need to know what Your will is. They need to have that knowledge and all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Because sometimes in our wisdom, we don't get it. Sometimes in human understanding, we don't get it.

I thought I was going to be a pharmacist my whole life, and my parents never got it: "Why would you leave a job that's like \$45 an hour?" This is like thirty-something years ago now. "Why would you leave that and live by faith with no guarantee of any funds at all? Why would you leave that? I don't get it. There's no wisdom in that. There's no understanding. I don't understand that." And for years, my mother, in the olden days—I used to have these things, for the younger people here, things called newspapers. And in the newspapers, they had these help-wanted ads. And my mother would bring the newspaper and say, "Look, starting wage, \$45 an hour. Look, starting wage, \$50 an hour, plus benefits! And you're living in a

three-room shack with an outhouse in the back? What are you doing? Are you stupid?" Well, they never said it that way, but they were awfully disappointed.

You see, sometimes the way God leads us doesn't make any sense at all. And we need all wisdom and spiritual understanding to be able to do God's will. So when He lets it known to us, if we don't get it, we need to know, and we need to understand it. Because if we don't understand what God's calling us to do, we will never do it well. If we don't know that it's God's voice speaking to us, we will never have the full assurance that we're walking in His perfect and holy will, as Romans 12 would tell us. This is what he's praying for them: they need this discernment spiritually. Absolutely. And we need this discernment spiritually.

Walking Worthy of the Lord

And sometimes when we talk about these things—and remember, these are written to the people being bombarded by the Gnostics, and they weren't the most reliable people. They'd sometimes use the same words and use a different dictionary. You know, the cults are very good at that, aren't they?

I talk with people in Mexico and they talk about grace. And what they mean by grace is that God gave me the ability and God gave me the strength to complete all of these tasks that I need to do to be saved. Maybe. Because they're never sure if they've done it or not. When grace means in the Bible the unmerited favor of God! It's nothing you can earn. Romans chapter 4 says it's the opposite of works: he who works gets a wage, some of us were reading last night, but he who receives Jesus by faith, then it's counted to him as righteousness. But if you want to work it, you just get your wage. It's a big difference. And they will use the same words, but they'll have different meanings.

What does faith mean? Is it something you exercise, or is it something that God gives you? Does God give you life before you make a profession of faith? That's what some people teach: if God doesn't give you the faith, you'll never be saved. It's a big teaching in most seminaries today. Is that how it is? When you don't have a free will to make your own choice, God forces you whether you like it or not?

Paul goes on in verse 10: that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work. Paul wants them, and the way you live, to be pleasing in the sight of God. That the words of your mouth would be pleasing in His ears. That the things you do are pleasing in His sight. That you might be like the Lord Jesus and hear, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." That you might hear at the end of your life, "This is My faithful servant, I'm pleased with you. Enter into the joy of the Lord."

And the way you know is that your life is full of fruit. Now, this is another word that some people use differently. There was this fellow in Mexico. He'd go on the bus, and I'd see him probably two or three or four times a week. And he'd always say, "Ten people believed while I was preaching on the bus today! Two people believed! Three people believed!" He was always saying that. He never saw one person enter into the assembly. But that was his boast: "I was doing this, and I saved these many people."

But the fruit is love and joy and peace—the fruit of the Spirit that Galatians 5 talks to us about. We keep these things. It makes us more godly. And the fruit of the Spirit is in our lives as we end up loving the brethren and agonizing for them. This is our doctrine: keeping our feet on the ground and not puffing up.

Delivered and Translated

Verse 11: strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy. So they would have strength according to His power. How much power does God have? An awful lot.

Verse 12 would go on to say: giving thanks. Because that's what a heart full of God does: it gives thanks. Just like in verse 3, verse 12 says it too.

Verse 13: why would you bother to pray for anybody like that? Because He delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us to the kingdom of His dear Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sin. Because He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. This is a prayer based on the knowledge of what Jesus has done.

In the last verse, you'll notice the change of pronouns: from you to we, to us. He translated us. And because He did that, we're going to pray for you.

May you be encouraged in your prayer life and not just have a list. Have a sort of certainty about it, a specificness about it, that when God answers, you'll know that it was God answering. That it wasn't just sort of a fluke—that's not a word that Phoebe's going to know, probably. It didn't happen by chance. It wasn't just something that just happened; it was an actual answer to prayer.

The Lord bless you.

Father, we would thank You for Paul. He's an example of the Lord Jesus to us. He was an imitator of Him. And Father, we thank You for the example of his prayer. Just like Jesus taught us to pray, whether it was in John chapter 17 or in Matthew chapter 6, whether it was

in Mark chapter 5 or anywhere else, we learn from Jesus about how to have fellowship with You and to pray for others. And Paul's doing the same thing. And he's saying to us, it's not an easy thing. It's something you agonize in. It's something that takes great effort. It's something that takes great discipline. It's something that we need to press on in to have the victory.

Because we live in a world where we see things all around us, but we don't battle against flesh and blood, but we battle against spiritual entities in heavenly places. And so we commit ourselves to You and pray that some way, that somehow You would make us a man and women who are warriors in the prayer room. For Your honor and for Your glory we pray. Amen.