

Great pray-ers * Colossians 4:2

June 26, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

This morning we're going to change gears a little. The last few weeks, we've been looking at the 'great prayers' of the Bible, but our goal is not just to read great prayers but to become great pray-ers. I don't want us to go away from here saying 'oh, that's some lovely literature.' I want for us to go away from here saying 'man, I want to pray like that.' So we're going to take this morning to think about what we've learned from these great prayers and then to think about how to apply that we might ourselves become great pray-ers.

To organize our thoughts this morning, I want to take you to one verse in Colossians 4 – Colossians 4:2 – because I think it summarizes quite nicely the lessons that we find in the Great Prayers of the Bible.

So here it is – Colossians 4:2 - 2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Col 4:2 NIV). Pretty straightforward, right? 2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Col 4:2 NIV).

Now in seminary, they say to put that into parallel preaching points, so how's this:

Pray consistently.

Pray expectantly.

Pray thankfully.

Great pray-ers pray consistently, expectantly and thankfully. Let's talk about those one by one.

So first, pray consistently.

In Colossians 4:2, Paul literally says 'devote' yourselves to prayer. That is, give yourself fully and faithfully to the practice of praying for yourself and for other people. Not just: pray when you're in trouble, or pray when you feel like it; be intentional about praying every day.

Clearly, this idea was important to Paul – he says it in Romans 12:12 - ESV Romans 12:12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. (Rom 12:12 ESV).

He says it again in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 - 16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1Th 5:16-18 NIV).

And what's more, he practised what he preached. Think back to Colossians 1:9 - 9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you... (Col 1:9 NIV). Paul was absolutely committed to bringing his friends and churches and worries and plans to the Lord in prayer.

And Paul wasn't alone in that. Remember Acts 4? Peter and James got thrown out of the assembly and threatened with violence if they ever preached the Gospel again. What was the first thing they did? '[They] went back to their own people and reported all that [had happened and] they raised their voices together in prayer to God (Act 4:23-24 NIV).

And just on hunch, I did a search on all the prayer language in the book of Acts and guess how often it mentions prayer?ⁱ

Twice in chapter 1, once in chapter 2, once in chapter 3, twice in chapter 4, twice in chapter 6, once in chapter 7, three times in chapter 8, twice in chapter 9... and so on...

Pray powered the early church. They grew because they relied upon the Lord and consistently went to Him in prayer. We need to too. If I asked you to hold up the number of fingers that you set aside time to pray this week, would you feel good about it?

I don't say that to shame you or make you feel guilty because your value in God's eyes and in my eyes does not come from a legalistic devotion to a practice of prayer. But imagine if you only talked to your spouse once or twice a week? Or someone else you cared deeply about? The hymn is right – 'what a privilege it is to carry everything to God in prayer.' So take advantage of that privilege. You have a direct hotline to the Lord of all things – go to Him in prayer consistently.

And as you do that, as you pray consistently, pray expectantly.

Paul literally says here 'pray watchfully' or 'pray alertly.'

Now there's two ways that we can take that. One is to say, pray alertly, like, take stock of the world around you and pray in light of that. We saw that in Acts 4 – the disciples were threatened on account of the Gospel and so they went straight to God who is more powerful by far than the people who threatened them. Psalm 51, David knew how far he had fallen; instead of ignoring it or hiding it or running away from it, he took it to the Lord in prayer. This is praying alertly, in the sense of praying in light of what's going on around you.

But the other sense is to pray watchfully, expectantly, anticipating that God will indeed answer your prayer. It may not be exactly the answer you want and it may not come in the timing that you expect, but you can be absolutely sure that the God who sets the stars in the sky and makes molecules fit together will answer your prayers.

Remember Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount? He says – if you who are evil know how to give your children good gifts, how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask?ⁱⁱ

God answers our prayers so we need to pray with the expectation that He will.

See the problem is, I think that sometimes we go through the motions of praying without really expecting an answer. I've been guilty of that in the past. We pray but somehow in the back of our hearts, we think 'God probably won't answer this.'

But I've learned how important it is to pray with expectation, picturing God with the answer in hand, ready to give it, if we would only ask trusting that He will give. Paul I think is quite convinced that we should pray expecting God to answer.

We didn't go deeply into this, but Ephesians 3, remember the prayer that our roots would go deep down into the soil of God's love, that we would know his love that is so high, so deep, so wide that we would never really see the end? Paul prays that, and then the very next verses, he says - 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen
(Eph 3:20-1 NIV).

Paul is convinced that God will absolutely answer that prayer to know the love of God and it moves him to thanksgiving. The essence of this prayer is – 'oh that you would do this' – and his very next words are 'praise God who does these sorts of things!' That's praying expectantly.

And that moves us to the next point – pray thankfully. We pray consistently, we pray expectantly, we also need to pray thankfully, with thanksgiving.

In my mind, Philippians 4:6-7 is really the clearest expression of that – my little Living Bible puts it like this -

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.

It's all too easy for us to be like a kid at Christmas who rips the wrapping paper off a really nice gift but forgets to say thank you because he's already moved on to see what's next. We need to stop and give thanks for the answers that God has already given.

And so we need to hear passages like Philippians 4, like Colossians 1:11-12 – remember from the Jesus-shaped life sermon? Paul prays that we would live a life worthy of the Lord, 'joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light' (Col 1:11-12 NIV).

I remember back in Woodstock; I was out for a run one day and I was feeling really good. I was speeding along, wind in my hair, I remember thinking 'this is great!' and then my foot slipped off the asphalt and snap! Down I went. I lay there for a while in intense pain; this was before I ran with a cell phone, so I had to wait for some teen girl to go by and lend me her phone to call a

cab. He came and helped me into the car; he was really concerned about my foot – I remember hobbling inside to get some money – I think the fare was probably \$12-13 but all I had was a \$20 and I just gave it to him because I was so thankful to him for getting me home. I think we're called to pray like that too – just so aware of what God has done to rescue us for all eternity, to help us in this life, that we can't help but overflow with thanksgiving, joyful thanksgiving for what He has done.

And not just for God's sake, but for our own sake too. Because when we stop and acknowledge God's help in one situation, it strengthens our hearts for the next. Recognizing how God has helped us now helps to prepare us for the next trial and dilemma that we face.

Great pray-ers pray consistently, expectantly and thankfully.

Now that's Colossians 4:2, but I'd like to add one more, given all that we've seen in this Great Prayers series and it's this: Great pray-ers pray comprehensively. Great pray-ers pray about everything.

Here's what I mean. Think about our pastoral prayer time here at the church. Think about your own prayer time that you have at home. What are the majority of prayers about? Health stuff, right? Heal so and so, heal so and so.

And that's fine, that's expected – 2 Chronicles 32:24 - King Hezekiah was sick and he prayed to the LORD who answered him with a miracle. James 5:14 –

14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. (Jam 5:14 NIV).

I keep getting emails from a church in New Hamburg that I helped out at before I came to Langford and one of their people is in the hospital with a serious COVID case and it's been really encouraging to see them rally together to pray for her – about a week ago they wrote: 'What a blessing it is to be able to go before our Heavenly Father, to bring the suffering of his children before his throne and ask for healing, peace, and comfort as only he can give.'

So it's good and right to pray about health stuff – absolutely. But there is so much more that God invites us to bring to Him in prayer. I mean, if you were going to sell your home and have someone stage it, you wouldn't say to them 'ok, you can do the kitchen and the living room but I'll take care of the rest myself.' No, you'd invite them to take care of the whole thing right?

And God invites US to trust Him with the whole thing, meaning that we can (*and should*) pray comprehensively about all aspects of our lives and His plans.

Think back to the prayers that we've seen in this series – Ephesians 3 – that we'd know the fullness of God's love for ourselves; Acts 4 – that we would speak His truth with boldness;

Colossians 1 – that we would live lives worthy of the Lord, growing to know Him, bearing good fruit, joyfully giving thanks; Psalm 51 – for forgiveness.

Even the Lord's prayer – Jesus' prayer priorities – God's glory, God's Kingdom, God's will; our daily needs, our forgiveness, our deliverance – there's so much more to pray for than just health. If that's all you pray for, I would invite you to expand your prayer priorities. Don't stop praying about health; that's one absolutely crucial aspect of our lives, but add to those prayers for health prayers for spiritual health, for the advancement of God's kingdom, for godly wisdom in every situation. I'm actually I think going to try to build some of those ideas into our prayer time here at church, so that *we will pray about the things that are on your hearts but also pray about the things that are on God's heart*, like the themes of the Lord's prayer.

Pray comprehensively, pray holistically. Bring it all to the Lord in prayer.

My prayer for this series is that it would inspire you to pray — to devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful and prayerful about all things (Col 4:2 NIV) because when we pray, God listens. He invites us to join Him in His mission to draw all people to Himself and give faith and everlasting life to all who believe, so let's partner with Him by praying consistently, expectantly, thankfully, comprehensively.

BENEDICTION

Ephesians 3:20-21 - Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 1:14	... constantly in prayer, along wi
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 1:24	Then they prayed, "Lord, you kn
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 2:42	... of bread and to prayer.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 3:1	... the time of prayer at three in :
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 4:24	... voices together in prayer to G
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 4:31	After they prayed, the place whe
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 6:4	... our attention to prayer and th
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 6:6	... the apostles, who prayed and
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 7:59	... him, Stephen prayed, "Lord J
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 8:15	... they arrived, they prayed for t
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 8:22	... this wickedness and pray to f
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 8:24	Then Simon answered, "Pray to
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 9:11	... Saul, for he is praying.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 9:40	... his knees and prayed. Turnin
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 10:2	... in need and prayed to God re
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 10:4	... answered, "Your prayers and
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 10:9	... went up on the roof to pray.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 10:30	... in my house praying at this h
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 10:31	... has heard your prayer and rei
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 11:5	... city of Joppa praying, and in :
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 12:5	... was earnestly praying to God
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 12:12	... gathered and were praying.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 13:3	... had fasted and prayed, they p
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 14:23	... church and, with prayer and f
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 16:13	... a place of prayer. We sat dov
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 16:16	... the place of prayer, we were i
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 16:25	... and Silas were praying and s
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 20:36	... with all of them and prayed.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 21:5	... the beach we knelt to pray.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 22:17	... Jerusalem and was praying a
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 26:29	... or long I pray God that not on
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 27:29	... the stern and prayed for dayli
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Act 28:8	... him and, after prayer, placed

ⁱⁱ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Mat 7:11 NIV).