

Becoming a Contagious Christian
CONTAGIOUS PRAYING

Prayer is a puzzling mystery, isn't it? Have you ever wondered why we pray, after all? I mean, if God is absolutely sovereign and perfectly able to carry out his purposes without your help or mine, then why pray? The One who spoke the worlds into existence and upholds them by the word of his power, does he really need you and me and our prayers in the carrying out of his purposes?

It's been said: "Without God, man cannot; without man, God will not." I believe that this little statement summarizes well the Bible's answer to the mystery of prayer. The all-powerful God of the universe wants to associate you and me with the fulfillment of his purposes. We can do nothing apart from God. That should motivate us to pray. And in God's economy, He does little apart from man. That should keep us in praying.

If this is true, then prayer plays a vital role in others coming to faith in Christ. We really can't talk about being a "contagious" Christian, without talking about contagious praying. But do we regularly pray for the salvation of our friends, neighbors, family members and co-workers? And just *how* should we be praying for the progress of the gospel in the lives of those around us?

You may not realize it, but the Bible has a lot to say about this topic. In fact, there are about seven or eight passages in the New Testament that specifically link prayer to topic of being a "contagious" Christian. Let's take a look at these.

1. Open doors for the gospel:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Colossians 4:2-3

As contagious Christians, we are first of all to be praying for "open doors." Paul begins by telling us to devote ourselves to prayer. But Paul does more in this book than talk about prayer, exhorting others to pray. He models prayer. Paul doesn't ask these believers to do something that he himself is not doing.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Colossians 1:9-10

Not only was Paul praying regularly, so also was his colleague in the ministry, Epaphras. Paul didn't plant the church in Colosse; Epaphras did. In the very chapter where Paul exhorts the Colossians and us to prayer, he speaks about the example that Epaphras was in prayer. Check out verses 12-13:

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. Col 4:12-13

Paul says that Epaphras is “wrestling” in prayer. The word is *agonizomai*. It sounds a lot like our word *agonize*, doesn’t it? This word is used elsewhere in the New Testament of competitive athletics (1 Cor. 9:25), of armed conflict (John 18:36) and of many types of intense struggles (Luke 13:24). What this tells me is that our prayer life, both for the church and for unbelievers, is like a wrestling match. It calls for devotion, persistence and the willingness to make sacrifices.

That’s *how* we are to pray. But what are we to pray for? We are to pray for open doors for the gospel. What is an “open door?” An open door is an opportunity. Remember, Paul is writing this letter while in prison. If I were Paul, I probably would have asked these believers to pray that I could get out of that stinkin cell! I would have asked to be delivered from the Roman authorities who opposed the gospel! After all, that makes good sense. I would have reasoned that if I weren’t in prison, then I could preach more freely. I would have viewed prison as a closed door, rather than an open door.

But did you notice? Paul doesn’t ask the believers to pray this way. He says simply, “Pray that God may open a door for our message!” Paul doesn’t pray that he would get *out of* prison, but that the gospel would *come into* the prison in all of its power.

Sometimes you and I find ourselves in difficult circumstances. We too feel “imprisoned” by the realities of life. We feel all chained up, just like the Apostle Paul. And at times like that we tend to focus more on RELIEF. How can I find relief from these unfortunate circumstances? But Paul didn’t do that. His focus was not on himself, but on the progress of the gospel, even in the lives of those holding him captive.

Take inventory of your situation. How can God use the present circumstances of your life as an “open door” for the gospel in the lives of others? Pray about it. Ask God to help you recognize the open doors all around you. And as you do this, remember that an open door doesn’t mean the lack of resistance or opposition. When Paul writes to the Corinthians he says: “A great door for effective work has opened for me, *but there are many adversaries*” (1 Corinthians 16:9). In fact, the door that God opens for you may be loaded with opposition and resistance!

The amazing thing about this prayer request is the evidence we have the God answered this prayer! But notice what he says in Philippians 1:12-14:

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.
Philippians 1:12-14

We don’t know the exact date of Philippians. And there is much debate about whether it was written from imprisonment in Ephesus or Rome. I personally prefer a later date while Paul was in Roman imprisonment. I also tend to think that it was written shortly after Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians. Isn’t that amazing? Believers pray for open doors, and God does exactly that! He takes the harsh circumstances that Paul encounters and turns this into an open door for the gospel. This is how you and I should be praying for ourselves and for one another – for open doors.

2. **Clarity in sharing the gospel:**

Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Colossians 4:4

Given the importance of the message of the gospel, it's understandable why Paul would ask for prayer that he and others might present it clearly. The principle is this: We must not speak confusingly where God has spoken with clarity.

It's amazing to me that Paul would give us this prayer request. The great Apostle, the one chose by God to take the gospel to the Gentile nations, the one to whom God entrusted what Paul earlier in this letter calls the "mystery" of the Gospel – this same one asks prayer that he might proclaim it clearly.

If Paul requested others to pray that for him, we should also. We must not speak confusingly where God has spoken clearly. This is how we should pray for ourselves and for others in the Church if we are to be contagious Christians.

3. **Wisdom in sharing the gospel:**

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Col 4:5-6

But notice, too, in verses 5-6. Paul moves here from stating what we are to pray for to how we are to live and speak. But since it is still in the context of prayer, what he says also tells us something important as to how we are to pray.

First, he talks about our *walk*. Literally in verse 4 he says, "Be wise in the way you *walk* in relation to outsiders." Your "walk" is your lifestyle. And the contagious Christian who is wise will "make the most of the opportunities." Paul uses a term that means "to redeem" or to "buy up" the opportunities. This takes us back to the idea of "open doors." Sometimes God presents you and me with opportunity to share our story, to demonstrate the reality of Christ, to speak the words of the gospel, but we fail to "buy up" that opportunity. So let us pray, both for ourselves and for one another, that we will redeem the opportunities that come along our way every day.

Second, Paul here talks about our *talk*. "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." *What* we say to others in sharing Jesus is very important. And there we need to speak with clarity. But here Paul emphasizes *how* we say it. How we say what we say is often just as important as what we say! And the wise contagious Christian will share the gospel with grace and according to the need of each person they speak with. No "canned" approaches here to sharing the greatest story ever told. Again, this is how we should be praying for ourselves and for one another.

4. **Workers for the spiritual harvest:**

At this point, turn with me from Colossians to the book of Luke, chapter 10, verses 2-3. And notice Jesus' words to his disciples:

He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Luke 10:2-3

We’ve already looked at this passage in our series on Luke, *Bringing Jesus to Your World*. But let me remind you that Jesus’ words to his disciples follow on the heels of Jesus’ interaction with several who simply aren’t willing to pay the price of following Jesus. That’s found in Luke 9:57-62. That’s why the workers are few! We can never be contagious, commissioned Christians unless we’re willing to be inconvenienced. And there are few who are. But on this occasion, Jesus finds seventy-two, whom he immediately sends out on a mission. But he tells them as they go to pray that God would raise up others like them.

If we’re lacking workers for the spiritual harvest, we need to pray. But be careful! Prayer changes the pray-er. It’s impossible to pray regularly for a family member, a neighbor, or a colleague at work and not be eventually moved to be the “someone” that God would use in reaching that person. It’s impossible to regularly pray for God to provide workers for his harvest and not make ourselves available to be used by God in answer to our prayer!

5. Boldness to share the gospel:

Let me take you now to a passage that I mentioned briefly last week. It’s found in Ephesians 6:19-20.

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:19-20

We can have complete knowledge of the enemy. We can have the best armor capable of resisting his vicious attacks. But all of this is worthless without direct and constant communication with the Commander and Chief. And so beyond each piece of armor, God has given each of us a “walkie-talkie” for our warfare. This “walkie-talkie” of prayer not only enables us to effectively put on each piece of the armor, but also to remain in intimate contact with our Commander and Chief, listening to his commands and following his directives. But for this to happen, we must keep our “walkie-talkie” of prayer attuned to the right frequencies. And one of those “frequencies” is this: we are to pray, as Paul did, for boldness in proclaiming the gospel.

Do you feel fearful in sharing Christ with others? Do you cower and hesitate? Do you pull back and clam up? Do you have a hard time getting the words out of your mouth? Do you prefer to leave that role to someone else? Pray for boldness! Pray for boldness for yourself and pray for boldness for other believers. Do you believe that if you pray for boldness God will give it? I do.

There are two other requests that Paul gives us in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. You have them on your outline. But this morning, I’m going to skip to the last one which is found in Romans 10:1.

6. The rapid spread of the gospel:

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 Thessalonians 3:1

7. Deliverance from those who oppose the gospel:

And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 2 Thessalonians 3:2

8. The salvation of the lost by name:

Brothers, my hearts desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. Rom 10:1

Now Paul, the “Apostle to the Gentiles,” had plenty of opportunity to *preach* to Jews in his travels. There were some four to five million Jews living abroad in the first century. Every major city had at least one synagogue, and Rome had at least eleven. The Jewish population of Rome alone was 40,000-50,000.¹ But here, out of a heart of great compassion and love, he doesn’t focus on *preaching to the Jews*, but rather on *praying for the Jews*, that they might be saved.

Paul’s prayer for Israel is an example for us to follow. We are to pray for the salvation of the lost by name. I believe that as Paul went about his missionary travels, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles by foot and horseback, he was praying for the salvation of the lost, and particularly for his fellow Jews. Why? Because their salvation was his “heart’s desire.” This is what motivated Paul. In fact, so much so that he can say in Romans 9:3 that he rather be cursed and cut off from Christ if it took that for the salvation of his fellow Jews.

Can we even begin to imagine that kind of compassion for the lost? A love that would lead us to forfeit our own eternal salvation for others! Do you feel that way for your neighbors? For your unsaved family members? For your classmates at school? As God places within our hearts a compassion for the lost, it will swell up in a spirit of prayer for the lost *by name*.

You’ll find in the pew pocket in front of you a book mark that looks like this. Take one and let this be a reminder of the points we’ve gone over today. Also, at the end you’ll notice the challenge to commit yourself to pray regularly for at least three individuals that you know who need the forgiveness and salvation that Jesus Christ offers. Let me encourage you to write down their names and to pray regularly for them. At the same time, pray that God will give you open doors, clarity, wisdom, and boldness in sharing your story with these individuals.

Contagious Praying

Pray for...

Open doors
Colossians 4:2-3

Clarity
Colossians 4:4

Wisdom
Colossians 4:5-6

Workers
Luke 10:2-3

Boldness
Ephesians 6:10-20

Spread of the gospel
2 Thessalonians 3:1

Deliverance from opposition
2 Thessalonians 3:2

Salvation of the lost by name
Romans 10:1

I commit myself to pray for the salvation
of the following individuals by name:

ⁱ "Paul and His Times," *Christian History*, no. 47.