

The Incredible Scope of Prayer

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon highlights the profound power and necessity of prayer in the life of believers, emphasizing struggle, commitment, and the importance of praying for others.

Duration: 25:00

Scripture: Colossians 1:29 - 2:4, Colossians 2:9-10

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the power and scope of prayer when it is done sincerely and with a belief in a personal audience with God. The speaker refers to the book of Colossians, where Paul writes to the church at Colossae, expressing gratitude for their faith in Christ and love for all the saints. Despite not having visited the church, Paul emphasizes the importance of praying for them, using a specific Greek word that implies a conscious awareness of being in the presence of God. The speaker encourages listeners to pray intentionally and with the understanding that they have the attention of the Almighty.

Transcript

I want to tell you a couple of things about the phenomenal scope of prayer, and what prayer can accomplish if we pray from our hearts, and we believe, and we understand that we have a face-to-face audience with God. Lord made something alive to me, I felt, from Colossians, but while I was reading it, I saw something else that I had never thought of before. Let's just look at a couple verses.

Paul is writing to the church at Colossae, and he's never been there. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love you have for all the saints. Because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love you have for all the saints.

Can I just say something about that passage? Notice, most people, if they heard of someone's faith, and the love that you have for all the saints, they would say, oh, that church is doing great, I don't have to pray for them. Paul says, no, now I really pray for you. So you don't pray for people that are just in trouble, you pray for all Christians.

And when he heard of their love for all the saints, and their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, remember, Paul had never been there. This is not one of his churches that he fathered. He says, no, I pray for you.

I constantly pray for you. And that word prayer there is a word in the Greek, which has a three-letter beginning, P-R-O-S, and that word means toward, and it implies, being conscious of a face-to-face audience with Almighty God. It's not just throwing up prayers, but it's focusing in and knowing, I am now talking to the God of the universe.

And I have his ear, and he's the one who told me to pray. Very intentional word for pray there. There's several words in the Bible for prayer.

Okay, now I wanna bring something else about that verse, but let's wait. Let's go to another verse in the second chapter. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally, I want you to know how much I am struggling for you.

Now, let me just say something about that verse. The verse before it, the last verse in chapter one, is one of those odd verses that says, Paul says, about his ministry and how he ministered. He said, and I just wanna remind you how God uses me as I struggle with all of my strength, as I struggle with everything in me, through the power that God works in me so mightily as I'm ministering.

I just want you to know as God uses me as I struggle with everything in me, as God's power works mightily through me in that struggle. Well, who's doing the working? Is it Paul or is it the Holy Spirit? It's both. When people are used by God, they're not sitting on a sofa.

They're killing themselves. They're struggling. Paul boasts in another place talking about the other apostles.

I worked harder than them all. Well, we would say, well, listen, don't say that because God has to do the work. Yeah, but God has to do the work, but he's never used lazy people yet once in the history of the church.

He only uses people who work hard. No, well, God has to do the work. Now, look, you can't put your confidence in your work.

It's like Moody said, work with all your heart as if there's no God and then trust him as if you never even worked. That's the combination. Work with all your heart.

So Paul now picks up that word struggle as I struggle with all of my strength as God's spirit works so mightily in me. I'm paraphrasing. Now he picks that same thought up in the next verse as we have verses and he says, I want you to know how much I'm struggling for all of you.

See, this language is so foreign to us, isn't it? We've watered down Christianity in America. So it's all about us and it's all about a life of ease because that's what people want to hear. They want to hear about struggle, sacrifice.

But how are we going to be followers of Christ who went to the cross unless we have our own battles to fight? Anybody with me here say amen. I mean, why are we here? Why are they going to Benin so they can take a tour? So they can see the sites? Are they going over there to fight? They're going there to fight. But when you fight, God fights for you and God fights with you.

But if you're not fighting, why would God fight for you? You're not even in the fight. What did Paul say at the end of his life? I have fought a good? Well, Paul just lay back and give it to God. There's this seeming

contradiction of resting in God and working at the same time.

And if you overemphasize one, you get weird. Just working, then you don't trust God. Then if you just trust God and sit back and say, look, what is ever going to be is going to be.

How can I help God? Why would he need my work? No, the both go together and only the Holy Spirit can teach us. But Paul says here, I'm struggling for you. Then at the end of the letter, he's sending greetings from people who are with him.

And this one says, hello, he's very polite. You know, it's the body of Christ. We love each other.

We talk. And then he mentions this man, Epaphras. Epaphras, who is one of you, that means he comes from Colossae and a servant of Christ.

Now, what's interesting about that? He uses the word for bond slave of Christ. And he never says that of anyone in the Bible. In the New Testament, Paul never calls anyone a servant of Christ except for himself, Timothy in one place, and Epaphras.

Never calls anybody a servant of Christ, a bond slave. This is a high, very high word. Epaphras, who's one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus or a bond slave, 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. Let's read it again.

Epaphras is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. So here's what I want to say about the scope of prayer. The first thing that I would like to point out to you that I am so encouraged by tonight is that Paul starts the letter by saying, I thank God for you always.

I'm always giving God thanks when I pray for you. Now, what's interesting about that is two things. If Paul never went to the city, how could he pray for them? And number two, if there's a church there that God is blessing, how can you pray for a church if you don't know any of the individual names but a few? Which tells me that God is so good that you don't have to know the names of all the people.

You can just flat out pray and God will apply the blessing. Oh, isn't that a good promise for us? Come on, let's put our hands together. He said, I'm always thanking God whenever I pray for you.

Well, how did you pray? He must've prayed, oh God, bless the church at Colossae. Well, what are their names? You know I don't know them, God, but you know who I'm talking about. You know who I'm talking about.

I've been held back sometimes because I think I have to know more specifics. But I'm so happy we have a God whose ear is open to our prayers tonight. You can pray for a congregation in Benin.

You can pray for somebody in Trinidad tonight. You can pray for someone in Detroit, Michigan and you don't know every name. What do you think, God doesn't know the names? He knows everything.

All you have to do is bring the body before him, the group of people or whatever. And Paul was doing it all the time for a church that he never visited. By the way, what a rebuke to pastors who don't pray for their churches.

If Paul was always praying for a church he never went to, think of what an indictment it is on me and other pastors around the country if we don't pray for the congregations that God put us over. I know, but Pastor Simba, you know all those people? No, I don't. I don't know everybody's name here, much less on Sunday.

But I can still lift you up to God. And Satan can't discourage me and say, yeah, but you don't know everyone. I'll never know everybody, but God knows everyone and I can lift you up in prayer.

And God's ear is open. So remember this, there's just a little side truth getting to where we want to go. You can pray for groups of people that you're not even aware of their name.

You can lift up a nation to God. You can pray for Benin. You can pray for any place.

God sorts that all out, I'm so happy. Now, Paul says, for I want you to know how much I'm struggling for you. Now, if he's never been there and we see no indication that he's gonna visit, how is he struggling for them? He was struggling for them in prayer.

What he goes on to say after that verse, the next sentence says this, that you might know how much I struggle for you, that you might be encouraged in heart and united in faith. You know, people get discouraged. Paul couldn't get there, couldn't teach, wasn't planning to go there, had never been there, didn't know their names.

But he still knew that God would hear and answer when he said, I'm always struggling for you, praying that you might be encouraged in your heart. You might fight off all the discouragements that the devil tries to throw on you. How many have ever had to fight off discouragements that the devil throws on you? Come on, lift your hand up so I know.

So Paul says, I can't teach you encouragement, but I can pray encouragement. Even though I'm not there to encourage you in word, I can pray encouragement into your life and that you might be united in faith. Maybe he's heard that there's some division.

Maybe there's some fracturing of the body of Christ. So he's praying for unity and more love that they might be knit together. But the key word in that second passage is the word struggle.

He's talking about prayer, which I'll prove in a moment, and he's talking that it's a struggle, that all the hosts of hell mount up against us when we pray and prayer can become a struggle. Your mind can be tempted to be diverted, you can be distracted. How many of us have experienced that? You set your mind to pray and 20 things you haven't even thought about suddenly invade your mind.

Lift your hand if you know what I'm talking about. Yeah, well, is that by accident? Is that by accident? No. Now that word struggle means that there's strong opposing forces against you.

So I'm just saying what Paul said. Paul said, I want you to know, I've never been there, don't know if I'll make it, but I love you and always pray for you even though I don't know your names. And I want you to also know that I struggle for you, that you might grow up and be mature, that you might be encouraged in your hearts.

And it's a struggle. I'm fighting against demons. People think saying prayers is easy.

Saying prayers is easy, but really praying face-to-face with God, knowing that there's opposition. We wrestle not against what? Flesh and blood. But who do we wrestle against? And we never wrestle against them more but in prayer because Satan doesn't like us praising God.

He doesn't like us hearing sermons. He doesn't like us reading the Bible. But when he sees Sylvia Glover get on her knees and say, I'm gonna pray for that burden that's on my heart and she goes like that, all the demons in hell start doing calisthenics or whatever they do.

They begin to tremble and shake because when you and I begin to pray, that links us up with God. Come on, somebody say amen by clapping your hands or by sitting, by walking, or by standing. The posture is secondary.

But when people go to pray, when a church goes to pray, oh my goodness, Satan doesn't like anything. Singing, preaching, teaching, music conference, ladies meeting, he doesn't like anything. But when the people set their hearts to pray, he knows his kingdom is gonna be shaken.

Well, of course, that's the way it's always been. Why do you think God said my house shall be called? House of prayer, because that's where the power and energy is released and it's a struggle. So the people who really learn to pray are the ones who fight through the struggle, who discern it and say, oh no.

No, you won't. And those are the people who, when they're shoved, they shove back. They're not feeling sorry for themselves.

They're not overwhelmed by their circumstances. They're saying, Satan, I'm coming against you. I'm struggling now in prayer.

Come on, let's say amen. You will release my daughter. You will release my son.

There will be a breakthrough. No, because I'm gonna pray the effectual fervent prayer. And effectual means, as Charles Finney said, you pray until you get the answer.

That's part of the struggle. It's not just say a prayer and hope that it'll work out. It's no, you pray until you know, God has heard me and this thing is taken care of.

A.W. Tozer said in a sermon that I have on tape, one of the few messages that I know of that, you can hear his voice, has an interesting sermon about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. And he makes this interesting suggestion. He said, who knows how the disciples would have reacted when Jesus was arrested if they had prayed like he asked them to? Remember what he said to them? Watch and pray, stay with me.

What do they do? And he says, who knows what Peter would have done? Who knows what any of them would have done? Watch and pray so that you don't get into temptation. You get in that vulnerable place. So there's a wrestling in prayer.

Now, this church was not started by Paul, but Paul says at Epaphras in the first chapter, he says Epaphras has maybe been a convert of Paul and then went back to his hometown and started that church by preaching the gospel. So he possibly is the father of that church, the spiritual father. So now Epaphras is no longer in Colossae, he's with Paul.

And he's now sending greetings. Remember that last passage we read? And he said, Epaphras sends greetings to you. He's a true servant of God.

He's a bond slave of Christ like I am and Timothy is. He never stops wrestling for you in prayer. You know, Pastor Delene and I were talking at lunch today.

There's that mystery that God is sovereign and God sits on a throne and yet prayer is effective. And if you don't pray, you miss out on what God has for you. You have not because you... So Epaphras could have said, well, praise God.

I started the church, I sowed the seed. God is on the throne. God is good all the time.

So I just let it be. Because God's gonna work it out. No.

The way spiritual dynamics work, he's wrestling for you in prayer that you might stand firm and not be pulled down. I wonder how many people you know tonight that need someone to wrestle for them. What teenager, what preteen that's opened their heart to the Lord a little bit or some relative of yours who's not serving God.

Who is gonna wrestle for them? Wrestle in prayer. Who's gonna fight through that they stand firm in all the will of God? That's what the verse goes on to say. And Epaphras not only started the church and was a preacher, oh, what a blessing Colossae had.

They had a spiritual father who wrestled for them in prayer. And he's not even with them. He's not watching over them.

He's with the Apostle Paul, but he can't forget those people. Oh, I'm wrestling for them in prayer. You get that, of course, for your children.

But God will put people on your heart. And if you yield to the Holy Spirit, he will help you to struggle in prayer, wrestle in prayer. And that word wrestle that he uses there is the word used in the Olympics of going against the enemy and trying to throw him down on the ground.

No, Satan, you will not have your way with that person. Oh, Pastor Simba, God's on the throne. He's gonna do whatever he's gonna do.

Look, according to your faith, so be it unto you. I'm just reading the Bible to you. And I'm telling you, the New Testament church did not look at prayer the way you and I have.

They didn't make it the last thing to do. They made it the first thing to do. Because you can struggle and wrestle for someone and make a difference in their life tonight.

Now, you can't work up that emotion. You don't always have to be loud. God's not deaf that he can't hear.

But many times you get very loud. People close to me who I've prayed for, I've had the spirit of prayer on me where I knew for the first time what it meant, pray without ceasing. Wrestled, wrestled against demonic forces.

Wrestled, wrestled, absolutely wrestled. And I remember a man of God standing by my refrigerator when my daughter was so far away from God and my wife was hormonally out of it after a hysterectomy and

was talking about ending her life. And I was hanging by a thread, by a thread, sir, ma'am, hanging by a thread.

And with my head just on the kitchen table and he said to me, you know, this is not about you or your daughter. And I went, what are you talking about? He just turned to me out of nowhere. He said, this has nothing to do with you and your daughter or Carol.

This has to do with the church. If he can pull you down and make you go crazy or break down, then he'll go, the shepherd goes down, he'll go after the sheep. And something rose up inside of me because I love you all so much.

And just the thought of that. You devil, never. I'm not only gonna get my daughter back, my wife's gonna be better, but you'll never touch the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Can somebody say amen? But you gotta get like that. You know, maybe how God helps me is how I was raised. But some of you were raised tough too.

Anybody raised tough here? Come on, how many were pushed and shoved around a little bit in life growing up? So in the playground, somebody say, hey, yo, Jim, let's play. I'm gonna whip you. I'm gonna beat you down.

I go, oh yeah? No, you won't. I'm not gonna back down to anybody. Well, if people do that over basketball, that's silly.

How should we be in spiritual things? I wrestle in prayer for you. I struggle. I want you to know that.

God's gonna help you pray for someone tonight. Every eye closed. Anybody here, while I was talking, the Holy Spirit just gave you a little bubble like he's done in my life.

Just a little pop inside where you felt like, yeah, that person, they need somebody to pray for them, someone to wrestle for them. That 12-year-old girl, that 16-year-old girl, that brother-in-law, that sister, whoever it might be, that mother, that father, they're gonna face eternity. And they're not standing firm in all the will of God.

Who's gonna wrestle for them? They're not gonna wrestle themselves. They're not in that position. But Paul says, Epaphras, he wrestles for you mightily in prayer.

And I have struggled for you myself. I might not know all your names, but I'm gonna pray for you, he says. Anybody got somebody you wanna just stand before God for, stand in the gap for them? Get out of your seat and come up here.

I'll pray with you. I got a bunch coming to me. I'm not leaving this altar here until I unload my heart to God about some people.

Anybody here with me? Anybody wanna do warfare, you wanna fight? Okay, every eye closed. Let's do it this way. Tonight, because there's strength in agreement.

When I tell you to turn, every woman will find a woman partner. Every man will find a man partner in the whole building, not just up here in the front. I want you to just briefly tell, do not go into detail.

Just say, it's my daughter. It's my son. It's my cousin.

It's a church in China. It's whatever it is that God, the Holy Spirit has put on you. If it's more than one thing, just say one or two things, but don't go into a long list.

Then you're gonna hear what this other person has. Then you just start praying together out loud. Not one for the other, the other one for the other.

No, you're gonna start praying out loud together in agreement. God's gonna hear every word that's uttered in this building. And the power of Satan will be broken when God's people pray.

Do I get an amen? God's power is greater, able to break the strongholds, the strong places. Remember, I want you to know how much I struggle for you. I want you to know how Epiphra labors, wrestles for you in prayer.

You pray for a while when you have to go. You go when you want to stay. You come up here to the front and kneel or sit or stand.

You stay as long as you want. Increase the faith of your people, Lord. Help us to pray with boldness.

Give us words. Holy Spirit, come. Give us fervency.

Give us endurance to pray. Everybody join hands with the person next to you. Lord, as we dismiss tonight, I'm asking that you would make us sensitive to that.

Spirit of intercession that you would put upon our hearts. It could be while we're in a car. It could be at the job.

It could be in our bed at night. It could be when we're alone with you. Help us to be men and women mighty in prayer with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Help us to wrestle, struggle for people in prayer. Not to complain about them, not to give up, not to quit, but to pray. Because you're a prayer answering God.

And God, all the mysteries of prayer will never be learned except by praying. There's many questions that we don't understand, but when we pray, you will teach us what we need to know. I also pray, Lord, in closing that this week you'll give a burden to each of us to minister to one person the love of Jesus, at least one.

Maybe to bring them to church, but to talk to them, to share with them, to ask them if we can pray about something. God, do that. Lead your people in the way that they should go in ministering to others.

For we pray this in the wonderful name that's above every other name, the name of Jesus. And all the people said, let's give them one last standing ovation. Come on, fuerte aplauso.

We praise you, Lord.

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