

# WHEN YOU ASK FOR PRAYER

## Colossians 4v2-4

This is all about prayer. But what is prayer? In case some people think of a heavenly shopping list here are a few quotes which will take us a bit deeper.

Jeanne Guyon, (1648-1717) spent 25 years in confinement (including many years in the Bastille) for her beliefs. Her devotional literature influenced many in later centuries including John Wesley and Hudson Taylor. She wrote a classic on praying the Scriptures; she wrote: *“Prayer is the application of the heart to God, and the internal exercise of love.”* In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy wrote: *“Prayer is an invisible tool which is wielded in a visible world.* James Montgomery, wrote a hymn which began: *“Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, The Christian’s native air.”* American evangelist Billy Graham: *“Prayer is simply a two way conversation between you and God”*. Finally, pastor and theologian John Piper writes: *“Prayer is the splicing of our limp wire to the lightning bolt of heaven”*.

You can sense in our text today that Paul is in tune with these quotes. He writes: **Devote yourselves to prayer, steadfastly continue**; this is not something occasional or spasmodic it is a lifestyle, **being watchful**, literally, *keep wide awake*, keep your eyes open; **and thankful** - not just a polite nod in God’s direction, but heartfelt gratitude; the word is *eucharistia*, the same as thanksgiving for Christ’s sacrifice.

But, why is Paul writing about prayer as he winds up his letter? Answer, because the believers in the church at Colosse are his prayer partners. They pray for him and his colleagues on their mission with the gospel. So he tells them how they can pray. **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. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.** Prayer backing has always been a huge factor in the advance of the Christian gospel.

There are many ways we could look at the subject of prayer but, today I will concentrate on the fact that this is a request for prayer. I want us to explore what is going on when you ask someone to pray for you. What does it indicate?

### 1. When you ask for prayer - God is in your thinking

When you ask someone to pray for you, you believe that there is more to life and this world than the natural. But the level of belief may vary considerably.

For some people it is one of the first indications that faith is being stirred. You might ask for prayer when you are just beginning to be open to the possibility of God. Many people find that the key moment on Alpha is when they either ask someone to pray for them or are willing to be prayed for when asked.

For others it is second nature. People, like Paul, are utterly convinced about God. They believe He created the whole universe that He is involved in the affairs of our world and has come among us in the person of Jesus Christ. That’s how it is for many of us here. We believe God loves us and wants to meet our deepest needs.

## **2. When you ask for prayer - you feel in need of God's help**

It may be in extreme circumstances. This is what often causes people to look up and ask for prayer – some difficulty or crisis. When my mother was widowed after just four years of marriage she turned to an elderly aunt, who prayed for her and then introduced her to Jesus. This week Tory leader David Cameron said that the death this year of his 6 years old son Ivan had strengthened him in faith. He said, *“For me, and I suspect for lots of other people too, bad things actually sometimes make you think more about faith and the fact that you’re not facing these things on your own.”*

But the truth is, whether there is a crisis or not, we are always in need of God's help. *“Prayer is the splicing of our limp wire to the lightning bolt of heaven”*. Paul was a mighty impressive man but he knew he was useless without God.

In this instance Paul *is* in an extreme situation. He is in Rome sitting in chains between two Roman soldiers, under house arrest. He isn't sure how long he has left before he is tried and executed. But there is no moaning; he is still thinking about how he can use his circumstances to share the good news of Jesus. He is asking them to pray that God will open doors for him. There is some evidence that this happened - that Paul was actually released after his first trial in Rome and that he travelled to Spain with the gospel before returning to Rome where he was re-arrested and executed.

We need God's help because He can do what we cannot do. He can bring about miraculous change. He can take our impossible circumstances and transform them.

## **3. When you ask for prayer – you admit you need other people.**

But why ask someone else to pray for you? Can't you pray yourself? Yes, of course you can and sometimes there may not *be* anyone you can ask anyway. God has wired you up to need other people. It is a healthy sign, not an indication that you are dysfunctional, when you realise you need other people. And there are situations where you just feel unable to pray.

Some people are very ready to pray for others but never ask others to pray for them. This is a common weakness in church leaders. People like me! We can easily get into a frame of mind where we only exist to serve others; in fact we even *enjoy* being thought of in this way. But it may indicate that we are getting our needs met by *being needed* by others, or that we do not want others to know about our needy areas. Perhaps we even feel it will undermine our leadership.

In my early years as a pastor I was aware of my need of more of God's power; I saw that the Bible taught that every believer could be baptised in the Holy Spirit, but I was not! But it wasn't until I asked one of my church members to come round and pray for me that I was filled with the Spirit. Some of us are good at serving others, but we need to learn to let others serve us. Asking others to pray for you is one way.

#### 4. When you ask for prayer – it is an expression of trust

When you ask someone to pray you are opening yourself up to some extent. It may be only slightly, and for the first time but it is still an important expression of trust. Or you may open up your very soul and tell someone your deepest fears and most intimate secrets. When you are as transparent as this you make yourself vulnerable. If someone shares with you in this way it is a privilege you must respect.

You are also trusting that they will pray for you. Jesus asked three of his closest disciples to stay awake and pray with Him in Gethsemane on the eve of His crucifixion, but they fell asleep.

William Carey was a pioneer, sailing off to India in 1793 to proclaim the gospel, having issued the call *“Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God”*. But before he went he made sure he had people praying. One of his closest friends was Andrew Fuller a Baptist minister in Kettering. Using the analogy of a miner he said to Fuller, *“I will go down if you will hold the rope.”* Fuller recalled this later and said, *“Before he went down we engaged (i.e. made a serious commitment) that while he lived we would never let go the rope.”* Carey’s early years were full of discouragements – seven years before his first convert; but by the time he died in 1743 he had seen churches planted, a training college established at Serampore and the Scriptures translated and printed in something like 40 languages.

If you are going to ask someone to pray you will approach people who have a prayer track record. In the Old Testament spiritual leaders like the prophet Samuel were approached by the people. For example, in 1 Samuel 12 we read that he prayed for rain as a sign from God and when it came the people *“were in awe of God and of Samuel.”* (v18) Then they all said to Samuel *“Pray to the LORD your God for your servants.”* He replied: *“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.”* (v23) He saw prayer as one of his chief functions.

So, here Paul is catching up the Colossian believers in his mission by asking them to pray. Other spiritual giants have seen the importance of prayer partners.

Charles Finney was an American evangelist who saw extraordinary breakthrough in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His right hand man was Daniel Nash; he travelled with Finney and prayed for him while Finney preached.

In the twentieth century Billy Graham was world famous for the vast numbers he preached to and led to Christ. Less well known is Pearl Goode who was one of his prayer partners throughout those years. Billy Graham attributes much of his success to her faithful prayers.

\*

\*

\*

There are two basic responses you can make today. One is – being willing to engage in prayer on behalf of someone else. Many of you do this already. But some here might be feeling uncomfortable because you have not prayed for others as you said you would – you have let go of the rope! Well, here is your chance to ask God to forgive you and make a fresh start.

The other is – being willing to ask for prayer. You may be just beginning to reach out for God; you may be facing some big problem; you might be feeling very alone or you might be realising that you have been eager to pray for other but rarely asking others to pray for you. You might need someone to pray for you to be baptised with the Holy Spirit, just as I did. This morning, then, ask someone to pray for you – someone you trust and who you know will go on praying for you.

**John Wilthew. November 2009.**

**Message Summary**  
**WHEN YOU ASK FOR PRAYER**  
**Colossians 4v2-4**

This is all about prayer. But what is prayer? Jeanne Guyon: *“Prayer is the application of the heart to God, and the internal exercise of love.”* Leo Tolstoy: *“Prayer is an invisible tool which is wielded in a visible world.”* James Montgomery: *“Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, The Christian’s native air.”* Billy Graham: *“Prayer is simply a two way conversation between you and God”.* John Piper: *“Prayer is the splicing of our limp wire to the lightning bolt of heaven”.* Paul writes: **Devote yourselves to prayer**, this is not something spasmodic it is a lifestyle, **being watchful**, literally, *keep wide awake*; **and thankful** - not just a polite nod in God’s direction, but heartfelt gratitude.

But, why is Paul writing about prayer? He is enlisting them as prayer partners & telling them how they can pray. **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. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.** Prayer backing has always been a huge factor in the advance of the Christian gospel. There are many ways we could look at the subject of prayer but, we will concentrate on what is going on when you ask someone to pray for you.

**1. When you ask for prayer - God is in your thinking:** When you ask someone to pray for you, you believe that there is more to life and this world than the natural. But the level of belief may vary considerably. For some people it is one of the first indications that faith is being stirred. For others it is second nature. People, like Paul, are utterly convinced about God. That’s how it is for us. We believe God loves us and wants to meet our deepest needs.

**2. When you ask for prayer - you feel in need of God’s help:** It may be some difficulty or crisis. But the truth is, whether there is a crisis or not, we are always in need of God’s help. Paul was a mighty impressive man but he knew he was useless without God. In this instance Paul *is* in an extreme situation. He is in Rome sitting in chains between two Roman soldiers, under house arrest. He isn’t sure how long he has left before he is tried and executed. But there is no moaning; he is still thinking about how he can use his circumstances to share the good news of Jesus. He is asking them to pray that God will open doors for him. We need God’s help because He can take our impossible circumstances and transform them.

**3. When you ask for prayer – you admit you need other people:** Why ask someone else to pray for you? Can’t you pray yourself? Yes, of course you can. But God has wired you up to need other people. It is a healthy sign, not an indication that you are dysfunctional, when you realise you need other people. Some people are very ready to pray for others but never ask others to pray for them. We can easily get into a frame of mind where we only exist to serve others; in fact we even *enjoy* being thought of in this way. But it may indicate that we are getting our needs met by *being needed* by others, or that we do not want others to know about our needy areas. Some of us are good at serving others, but we need to learn to let others serve us. Requesting prayer is one way.

**4. When you ask for prayer – it is an expression of trust:** When you ask someone to pray you are opening yourself up to some extent. You may open up your very soul and tell someone your deepest fears and most intimate secrets. When you are as transparent as this you make yourself vulnerable. You are also trusting that they will pray for you. Before he left for India in 1793 William Carey said to his friend Andrew Fuller, *“I will go down if you will hold the rope.”* So, here Paul is catching up the Colossian believers in his mission by asking them to pray. Other spiritual giants have also seen the importance of prayer partners.

There are two basic responses you can make today. One is being willing to engage in prayer on behalf of someone else. The other is being willing to ask for prayer.

## **Questions for Group Discussion**

1. If someone were to ask you what prayer is, what would you say?
2. Can you remember your first steps in prayer?
3. Recall some specific occasion when you needed to ask others to pray for you.
4. Why do you think we are sometime reluctant to ask others to pray for us?
5. Over the years who are the people you have relied on most to pray for you?
6. Did God speak to you through Sunday's message in some particular way?