

Engage

Thursday 4 February 2021

Together in prayer

Colossians 4:2-18

BEFORE MEETING TOGETHER

Watch the Bible Project video: Colossians, an Overview <https://youtu.be/pXTXIDxQsvc>

OPEN

Most people, from quite small children upward, are ready to rise to the occasion if asked to do something on their own account. As long as the request is made in the right way, people are glad to be valued sufficiently to be entrusted with responsibility. The Colossians are new Christians who are taking their early steps in the faith. Yet he asks them to pray for him.

Is it easy or difficult for you to ask people to pray for you, and why?

How do you determine who you should ask to pray for you?

STUDY

Read Colossians 4:2-6.

Having begun the letter by telling the Colossians that he is thanking God for them and praying for them, Paul now draws toward a close by asking them to do the same for him. No matter how senior or respected anyone is in the service of the gospel, they still need the prayers of other Christians.

Why does Paul feel a special need for the Colossians' prayers at this time?

What does it reveal about Paul that he asks these new Christians to pray?

Paul knows that he can talk all he likes, but unless God opens a door for the word to go through he will simply be making a useless noise. The door doesn't open automatically. What opens that door, again and again, is prayer.

When have you seen a door open for you in response to the prayers of other Christians (3)?

What are the situations in your life where you need to 'behave wisely towards outsiders,' that is, people who have not come under the reign of Jesus (5)?

The Colossians must learn to speak with "grace" and "salt" (6), presumably meaning that whatever else they do, they mustn't be boring! And they must use every opportunity to do so (5), becoming skilled in the art of real listening to the questions and comments made by puzzled onlookers and being sure they answer the person appropriately, rather than just parroting stock responses.

List some ways that we might put this into practice in our everyday living.

The Colossians have never seen Paul face to face, but once you have prayed for someone, and once you realize they are praying for you as well, a bond grows up which creates a relationship of love and trust ahead of any personal contact.

What keeps you praying for those people even though you don't know them?

Read Colossians 4:7-18.

As Paul concludes his letter he conveys greetings to or from almost a dozen people, not counting an indefinite number at Laodicea and the church in Nympha's house.

What is the common thread which stitches all these people together?

From this collection of greetings at the close of his letter, what do you sense about Paul's personality?

Paul's own vulnerability emerges in his remarks about Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus Justus. Paul was not, as people often make out, an arrogant man, smug in his own rightness. He was deeply human, and this mention of one comfort of this sort reminds us just how many conflicting emotions he must have had to cope with, living the life he did and facing new challenges and dangers every day.

At difficult times in your Christian life, how have fellow Christians been a particular comfort and support to you?

In this letter Paul shows himself to be a great thinker about who Christ is and what he has done. He also shows himself to be a pastor and friend in Christ. The question is whether we in our day can hold together the thinking and writing of great thoughts and the challenge of pastoral care, prayer and concern.

If a church emphasizes personal care but de-emphasizes teaching, what may be the result?

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How does the entire closing of Paul's letter (7-18) speak to individual Christians who feel they can go it alone and have nothing to gain or learn from other Christians and churches?

PRAY

The point Paul is making throughout his letter to the Colossians is the thousand ways in which Christians belong to one another in a fellowship of mutual love, prayer, instruction and service. Pray that the Lord will stitch your fellowship together in love and also that he will stitch you together with believers in Christ's church worldwide.¹

NEXT TIME

God and the pandemic: where do we start?

¹ Tom Wright, Dale Larsen, and Sandy Larsen, *Colossians & Philemon: 8 Studies for Individuals or Groups, For Everyone Bible Study Guides* (London: SPCK, 2009), 19–25.