

Prayer - to be continued...
Pastor Joe Oakley
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Have you ever gone through a time in your life when you were tempted to give up on something you were praying for because it seemed like it was taking too long to receive from God? The truth is, we've all experienced times when we prayed in faith, but the answer to our prayers seemed to come far too slowly.

What should we do in those times? Should we just give up the hope that our prayer will be answered? If not, how long should we continue believing for God to answer? Well – the apostle Paul answered those questions about prayer in his letter to the Colossians.

We are preaching through Colossians verse by verse in a sermon series entitled Christ Above All. Today I'm preaching on Colossians 4:2-4

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

The title of my sermon is Prayer – to be continued. There are a couple of meanings of that phrase – but the first is that we are to continue praying – don't stop praying.

There's a lot of fancy definitions of prayer. Basically, prayer is simply talking with God. There's really no secret to prayer. The truth is, you only learn to pray by praying.

Some people don't pray because they don't know how. But let me ask you - How did you learn to talk as a child? Did you wait until you had a total grasp on English grammar and sentence structure to start talking? No, you started making noises and imitating others. You kept at it until you could converse. Did your parents scold you for not talking perfectly at first? Of course not!

I remember when my granddaughters were in a phase where they would just jabber away and nobody had a clue what they were saying. Did we try to shush them because they weren't talking correctly? NO! We loved that they were trying to communicate.

It's the same with God – prayer is simply talking to God at whatever level you can. Don't wait until you think you're an expert before you start praying. If that's that case, none of us would ever pray.

It doesn't matter when or where you pray, just that you pray.

Ephesians 6:18 says *Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*

Pray always with all kinds of prayer. What are these different kinds of prayer? Well, Paul mentions three in Colossian 4 – prayer, thanksgiving and intercession. The kind of prayer he mentioned is petition – which means asking. Thanksgiving, praise and worship are also forms of prayer. Intercession is praying for someone else – which is what Paul was asking for from the Colossians.

Other types of prayer include:

Confession

Supplication – intense asking

Travail – intense intercession

Praying in the Spirit and Praying the Word

How do you know which type of prayer to pray?

It depends of the situation.

If you've sinned, you pray a prayer of confession to receive forgiveness.

If you have a need, you pray a prayer of petition to ask God to meet it.

If you know of others with a need, you pray a prayer of intercession.

The situation dictates the kind of prayer to pray.

By the way - there is no certain time to pray or a certain length to pray.

The issue is not the length of your prayers, but the strength of your prayers!

The issue is not where you pray, just pray!

The issue is not when you pray, just pray!

In Luke 18:1 *Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*

In this verse Jesus gives us two pieces of wisdom. He tells us what we should always do and what we should never do. What we should always do is pray. What we should never do is give up.

That's what Paul is addressing in Colossians when he says:

1- Continue

This word “continue” is translated from the Greek word *proskartereo*, which is a compound of the words *pros* and *kartereo*. The word *pros* is a preposition of direction - toward, forward, to draw near to. The second word *kartereo* means to be strong, to be steadfast, to endure.

When these two words are compounded, as they are in Colossians 4:2, the new word describes a strong, solid, “never-give-up type” of drawing near to God.

It pictures a person who wants something so fiercely that he is pressing forward toward that object — devoted to the goal of obtaining it, and busily engaged in activities that will bring the object of his desire to him.

So, Paul is emphatically urging us to do three things as we wait for God to answer our prayers:

- Stay forward-directed and focused in prayer.
- Keep pressing into the Spirit.
- Resolutely refuse to give up until we have obtained that for which we are praying.

There will undoubtedly be times in your life when the answers to your prayers won't come quickly. However, God requires you to stay spiritually strong — pushing forward and continuously praying until you see what you are believing Him for come to fruition. If you are tenaciously determined to continue in prayer, you will eventually receive the answers you seek.

There are some things we receive from God only if we continue.

For example-

1 Timothy 2:15 says *if you continue in faith, love and holiness.*

Romans 11:22 says *if you continue in His goodness.*

1 Corinthians 15:2 says *if you continue to believe.*

It's the same way with prayer. In years gone by, we had a saying: Pray through. That meant to pray and keep on praying until you know that you know that you know God heard you and God answered.

Our generation needs to rediscover the difference between praying *for* and praying *through*. Sometimes praying *for* something is enough. But there are certain circumstances that require us to take hold of the horns of the altar and refuse to let go until God answers.

- You intercede until God intervenes.
- You refuse to move until God moves.
- You pray through until God comes through!

I wonder how many of us give up too soon because we feel like we have failed if God doesn't answer our prayer right away. That isn't failure. The only way you can fail is if you stop praying. Praying without ceasing means don't give up on prayer! Too many of us give up way too easy and way too soon!

2- Prayer

The Greek word translated "prayer" in this verse is the word *proseuche* (pros-yoo-kay), a word used 127 times in the New Testament. As we saw earlier, the word *pros* is the preposition to or toward, and it carries the idea of closeness. The word *euche* is an old Greek term that describes a prayer, or a vow.

This word was originally used in Scripture to describe a person who is so desperate for an answer that he promises to give something of great value to God in exchange for a favorable answer to his prayer.

When these two words are compounded, the new word conveys a multifaceted and powerful meaning. The first part of the word *proseuche* — *pros* — tells us that prayer should bring us face to face with God. Prayer is more than a mechanical act or a formula to follow; it is a vehicle through which you can enjoy a close, intimate relationship with God.

Secondly, the word *euche* conveys that sacrifice is a vital component of prayer. When you come before the Lord, you must be willing to surrender yourself totally to God. As you draw near to God, the Holy Spirit will convict your heart of any areas that need to be surrendered to Him.

Prayer and praise is not always easy and God responds to the sacrifice of praise. God wants you to meet Him face to face and surrender every area of your life to Him. In return, He promises that you will receive the answers you seek.

3- Be vigilant

Paul continued in Colossians 4:2 by saying, *“Continue in prayer, being vigilant.”* The word “vigilant” means to be awake and watchful.

Rather than go to sleep on the job after spending time praying, pressing, and interceding, you need to keep your eyes wide open so you can watch for the answer you are requesting!

Remember, the word “continue” refers to someone who wants something so fiercely that he is pressing toward the object of his desire. He is forward-directed, focused in prayer, pressing into the Spirit, and resolute in his determination not to give up until he has received the answer to his prayers. It is the picture of a believer who has prayed long and hard and is now becoming weary from constant prayer.

Therefore, Paul exhorted us, “Stay awake! Stay on your guard! Keep your eyes open!”

Once you pray in faith and begin to make the changes God requires of you, you need to stay vigilant and watch for the answers to your prayers to show up!

4- Thanksgiving

The final point Paul made in this verse is that you must continue in prayer with vigilance and thanksgiving. Paul taught that you must persistently engage in aggressive prayer — wholeheartedly seeking a specific answer from God as you keep your attitude vigilant and your eyes watching for the soon-to-be-manifested answer.

As you take that stance of faith, lift your voice to thank God in advance for the answer you are seeking!

It's one thing to thank God for something after it happens. Anyone can do that! But what he's talking about here is the voice of faith that thanks God for the answer before it comes!

It is hard to be discouraged or defeated when you are continually thankful, so be sure to maintain a thankful, faith-filled heart as you watch for your answer to arrive!

So, what should you do if you are praying in faith and the answer still hasn't come? It's time for you to dig in and press in the Spirit toward the answer.

Be willing to make whatever changes God may require of you, and keep your eyes open for the answer. Finally, lift up your voice, and start thanking Him now for the answer even before it comes!

Are you going through one of those trying times right now? Have you been tempted to give up on something you've been praying for because the answer isn't coming as quickly as you wish? If so, don't throw up your hands in exasperation and walk away! Instead – throw up your hands in praise and press in to God.

Stay in faith and stay alert, because you may be on the very brink of receiving your long-awaited answer! Keep in mind - When we work, we work, but when we pray - God works. When we fight, we fight, but when we pray - God fights!

Think of the prayers God answered in the Bible:

- Moses prayed and God reversed His judgment against Israel.
- Isaiah prayed and the sun stood still.
- Hannah prayed and she had a son who was a mighty prophet of God.
- Jehoshaphat prayed and God gave him victory over his enemy.
- Solomon prayed and the glory of God filled the temple.
- The early Christians prayed and angels got Peter out of prison.
- Elijah prayed and it didn't rain for 3 and a half years. He prayed again and it rained.

Don't think God answered these people's prayers because they were super saints! James 5:16 says:

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us.

People just like us can pray prayers that are powerful and effective!

People just like us can pray prayers that move the hand of God!

People just like us can pray prayers that overcome the enemy!

Satan wants you to think you must be more holy to pray, but he's a liar!
 Satan wants you to think you must be more mature to pray, but he's a liar!
 Satan wants you to think you must be stronger to pray, but he's a liar!

You don't need anything to pray but faith in God! I believe God can take ordinary men and women who will pray and literally change the world. Our vision as a church is to touch heaven and change earth. We do that in worship but we also do that in prayer. There is supernatural power in prayer. How do we tap into that power? By praying. Stop talking about it and start talking to God!

Have you ever watched a movie with a very unsatisfactory ending, but they put up this phrase at the end: "to be continued"? What does that phrase "to be continued" say to you?

It says: This is not the end.

You thought this was the conclusion, but it's not.

You were dissatisfied with what you thought was the end but what you thought was the end is not the end at all!

There's more to come.

It's not finished.

It's incomplete.

You thought this was the finale, but wait! There's more!

Stay strong! Keep believing! Have hope because it's not over yet.

And in life sometimes we think we are at an unsatisfactory end – so we give up, stop praying and stop believing. But God is saying today:

This is not the end!

You thought this was the conclusion, but it's not!

You were dissatisfied with what you thought was the end but what you thought was the end is not the end at all!

There's more to come.

It's not finished.

It's incomplete.

You thought this was the finale, but wait! There's more!

Stay strong! Keep believing! Have hope because it's not over yet.

Think of people in the Bible who continued in prayer and thanksgiving despite difficult circumstances.

Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in prison. It looked like it was over for them – but God said, to be continued! So, they continued in prayer and faith and thanksgiving and God sent an earthquake to set them free. That led to revival in Philippi.

When you are in your darkest hour – if you continue in prayer and thanksgiving – God will send an earthquake to shake things up and set you free.

The children of Israel were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea.
It looked like this would be the end - but God said, to be continued!
They continued in prayer until God said get up and part the water.
The Sea parted and Israel walked over on dry ground.

When you feel like you are trapped in life – continue in prayer and thanksgiving
and God will part your sea and defeat your enemy.

Jonah disobeyed God and was swallowed by a huge fish.
He thought it was over, but God said, to be continued!
Jonah repented and offered thanksgiving to God while He was in the fish.
God heard his prayer and commanded the fish to spit Jonah out.

You may have disobeyed God and got yourself in a mess.
But, what if God is waiting to see if you will continue in prayer and thanksgiving
before your whale of a problem spits you out?

Lazarus had been dead and buried for days.
Everyone said it was over, but Jesus said, to be continued!
Jesus stood outside the tomb of a dead man, prayed and gave thanks to God.
God heard that prayer and raised Lazarus from the dead.

There may be situations in your life that look too dead to resuscitate.
Maybe you feel your marriage is dead and gone.
Or a relationship with a family member had been dead so long it stinks.
Or there's an area in your life where you are bound up.

What if God is waiting for you to continue in prayer and thanksgiving before He
releases His resurrection power into your life?

Can somebody give God some radical praise and worship today!