

The Closet Life of a Pastor

- I. It is assumed in the New Testament that pastors will be men of prayer. Acts 6:4, “But **we will give ourselves continually to prayer**, and to the ministry of the word.” Jesus taught that we would have a closet prayer life. Matthew 6:6, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”
- II. Jesus Christ, the first pastor of the church, set the example of closet prayer: Matthew 14:23, “And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when **the evening was come**, he was there alone.”** Mark 1:35, “And **in the morning**, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.”** Luke 6:12, “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and **continued all night** in prayer to God.”** Luke 9:28, “And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.”** Luke 11:1, “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”** Luke 5:16, “And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.” **See Matt. 26:36-44 for His intense prayer in Gethsemane. **See His high-priestly prayer in John 17. There is a song in the Old School Hymnal, #432, *He Prayed*, that beautifully depicts the prayer life of our dear Savior.
- III. The eminent apostle, Paul, was a man absolutely given to prayer: He prayed for churches and he prayed for individuals. He prayed for people he was acquainted with and he prayed for people and churches he had not yet met. Even in Acts he is seen as a man of prayer: Acts 16:16, 25. His epistles abound with his prayer life. See Rom. 1:9; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Cor. 13:7; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1: 3, 4; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1: 3; 2 Tim. 1:3; Philem. 4.

He also prayed some of the most wonderful prayers recorded in the Bible. In fact, one of the best ways to learn to pray better is to study the prayers of Paul. One of my favorite books on prayer is, *Gleanings From Paul: Studies in the Prayers of the Apostle*, by Arthur W. Pink. In this book he examines thirty-two passages in Paul’s writings which are prayers. I have **memorized** several of these prayers and prayed them myself to my great edification. I have memorized the prayers recorded in Phil. 1: 9-11; Eph. 1: 15-23; 3: 14-21. I would suggest a study of the prayers of Paul as a wonderful way to enhance your own prayer life and that of the people you are ministering to.

I am currently writing a book on prayer. I want to share with you a part of one of the chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

PRAYER WARRIORS

Epaphras and Others

There is not very much information about Epaphras in the New Testament but what is revealed about him is very exciting. He was a minister of the church at Colosse, and he assisted Paul while the Apostle was imprisoned at Rome the first time. [\[1\]](#) All that we know about the behavior of Epaphras is included in Colossians 4:12, 13, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.” All the men who surrounded Paul must have been men of prayer. For Paul to have singled out Epaphras and to have so commented on his praying must

mean that this man was unusually given to fervent prayer.

It is first said of Epaphras that he was a “servant” of Christ. The word “servant” is *doulos* and refers to one who is actually a bond slave to another. The recognition that he did not belong to himself, but to the One who had purchased his salvation with His own blood, had a great motivating influence on his prayer life. “A servant of Christ Jesus is one who has been bought with a price and is therefore owned by his Master, on whom he is completely dependent, to whom he owes undivided allegiance and to whom he ministers with gladness of heart, in newness of spirit, and in the enjoyment of perfect freedom...receiving from him a glorious reward.”^[2]

This servant of Christ is “always labouring fervently for you in prayers...” As we indicated in the introduction, these are very powerful words. They are the words that induce us to refer to Epaphras as a “prayer warrior.” Epaphras was **constant** in prayer. He prayed “always.” Night and day he had the Colossian saints on his heart before God. He was also **fervent** in prayer. He **agonized** in prayer. He **strove** in prayer. He **wrestled** in prayer. His mind, will and emotions were all involved in his prayers. There was nothing haphazard or indifferent about his prayers. He put all his heart and all his might into his prayers. As John Gill describes this intensity of prayer Epaphras “strove with God for them, even to an agony, as the word signifies; he wrestled with the Lord as Jacob did, nor, as he, would he let him go without a blessing for this church; he was incessant, importunate, and fervent in prayer for them...”^[3]

What did Epaphras want for these Colossian saints? That they might “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” He wanted them to “have a perfect knowledge of the revealed will of God, both as to doctrine and practice, and be enabled to act according to it.”^[4] It is remarkable that he did not pray that they might have riches or comfort or freedom from persecution. He prayed for something much more important than for these things, significant though they may be. He prayed that they might know the truth of God and that they might live it, propagate it, and defend it. **When Satan attacks the church he wins if he can get her to deviate from the truth in either doctrine or practice.** We who pray must strive in prayer that the churches of Jesus Christ with whom we are intimately acquainted be sound in faith and practice. It often happens that churches get entangled in traditions and place them before the word of God. Sadly, many times churches lose vital elements of truth for several generations. Incredibly, in Old Testament times, the chosen people of God once actually lost the word of God!^[5] Sometimes when the people of God encounter error they overreact and “go into the ditch on the other side of the road.” Sometimes churches emphasize certain truths and simultaneously de-emphasize others. This is truth out of balance. Truth out of balance becomes error. As has been said, “A text without its context becomes a pretext!”

The Colossians were not the only ones that this prayer warrior was praying for. He also had a great zeal for “them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.” These were churches that were located in nearby cities in the Lycus Valley region of Asia Minor. **It is commendable to see Epaphras not only praying fervently for his home church, but for sister churches as well.** This reminds us of the prayer life of the apostle Paul, who ceaselessly prayed for all the churches he had visited and even for those he had never seen face to face.

Concerning the value of a prayer warrior, particularly a pastor who prays incessantly for the flock over whom the Holy Spirit makes him overseer, John Daille beautifully says:

Think not, Christian, that he who prays for you contributes nothing to your welfare, and that his prayers are but words and voices cast into the air. It is the best part of your battles; you have no succor more active than the

repose of a man of God, who prays for you with faith and perseverance. It is he who, as Moses formerly, standing on the mountain and rapt up in spirit into the heavenly sanctuary, defeats Amalek, your spiritual enemies; and by the uplifting of his hands draws down the blessing of heaven upon your arms. He oftentimes even takes those rods out of the hand of God which he is about to lay upon you; and courageously wrestling with Him, after Jacob's example, quits him not until he has obtained his demand. Such is the combat that Epaphras fought in the behalf of his Colossians, being night and day in prayer for them.[6]

This reminds us of the exceedingly fervent prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture says of Him in Hebrews 5:7, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears..." Our dear Lord was the **Mighty Prayer Warrior** in Gethsemane. It is said of Him in Luke 22:44, "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly..."

It is certain that we will never be in the agony that He was in. He was carrying the weight of all the sins of all the elect on Him. He carried this stupendous burden all the way to the cross, where he got rid of it by satisfying the wrath of God against the sins of His people. However, we desperately need prayer warriors in our day who will agonize for the languid condition of many of the people and churches of God. There have been Christians who have known how to really labor in prayer. One of these was David Brainerd. This young man had an intense desire to preach the gospel to the indigenous Indian population of New England in the 1740's. This was very difficult work, and so impaired his health that he died at an early age. During the course of his work he engaged in an unusually intense prayer life.

David Brainerd

A. J. Gordon has written: "David Brainerd did his greatest work by prayer. He was in the depths of the forests alone, **unable to speak the language of the Indians, but he spent whole days in prayer.**"[7] No doubt this is the reason Brainerd prayed with such intensity. He knew that his task was hopeless without the enabling grace of God. Much of the time most of us may theoretically acknowledge our absolute dependence on God, but this truth does not really grip our souls. **Fervent and truly sincere prayers are born out of a desperate sense of need.** We really pray when we genuinely feel our utter weakness and helplessness without God.

Brainerd felt this need for absolute dependence on God. He wrote in his diary June 14, 1742, "I set aside this day for secret fasting and prayer, to entreat God to direct and bless me with regard to the great work I have in view, of preaching the gospel. Just at night, the Lord visited me marvelously in prayer; I think my soul never was in such agony as before...I was in such agony till near dark, that I was wet with sweat.[8]

His dedication and intensity are revealed in this entry in his diary for April 20, 1743:

Set apart this day for fasting and prayer for the bestowment of divine grace; especially that all my spiritual affliction and inward distresses might be sanctified to my soul. Endeavored to remember the goodness of God to me in the year past, this being my birthday. Am now arrived at the age of twenty-five years. My soul was pained to think that I had lived so little to the glory of God. I spent the day in the woods alone, and there poured out my complaint to God.[9]

One more reference to Brainerd's diary, this one from July 21, 1744, shows plainly what it means to agonize in prayer:

In prayer I was exceedingly enlarged, and my soul was drawn out as ever I remember it to have been in my life. I was in such anguish, and pleaded with such earnestness that when I rose from my knees I could scarcely walk straight. The sweat ran down my face and body. I was wholly free from selfish ends in my supplications for the poor Indians... Thus I spent the evening, praying incessantly for divine assistance and that I might not be self-dependent... I continued in this frame all evening and night. While I was asleep, I dreamed of these things, and when I waked, the first thing I thought of was this great work of pleading for God against Satan. [\[10\]](#)

IV. There are other great men of prayer whose lives bear scrutiny. I would suggest the following passages to study to enhance your own prayer lives:

The **prayer of Daniel** in Daniel 9

The **prayer of Nehemiah** in Nehemiah 1:4-11.

The **prayer of Abraham** in Genesis 18:23-33. Study the skill which Abraham used in his approach to God. I believe that Abraham knew when he had asked for all that he was supposed to ask. Even though Abraham may not have gotten exactly all that he asked for, his prayer was certainly effectual. This is plain from Genesis 19:29, "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that **God remembered Abraham**, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt."

V. We must **stimulate our prayer lives** by a constant Scriptural study of prayer. We must **stir ourselves up** to pray. This is what Israel should have done long ago as can be seen from Isaiah 64:7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee..."

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[\[1\]](#) Col. 1:7; Philem. 23. William Hendriksen gives reasons why the word "fellowprisoner" in Philemon should probably not be taken in a *strictly* literal sense, but should be taken in the sense that Epaphras

“may well have volunteered to share Paul’s imprisonment, assisting him in every possible way.”
William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), p.187.

[2] Ibid., p.191.

[3] John Gill, An Exposition of the New Testament , 2 vols. (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1853), 2: 539.

[4] Ibid.

[5] See 2 Kings 22: 8-20.

[6] John Daille, An Exposition of the Epistle to the Colossians, Reprint by The National Foundation for Christian Education, n. d., p. 674.

[7] Oswald J. Smith, The Lives of Brainerd and Fletcher, (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1965), p.5

[8] Ibid., p. 33.

[9] Ibid., p. 42.

[10] Ibid., p. 55