Responding to the World with Prayer

Second in the series: “Doing Our Part to Change the World”

# Scripture: Colossians 4:2-6

# Key Thought: God’s work of changing the world will advance through the prayers of God’s people.

# Intro:

Several years ago, our Wednesday night prayer service at Kirkville was praying regularly for my missionary friends Jerry and Jodi Manwaring. Jerry and Jodi were serving in Zambia, West Africa. In the course of time Jodi and Jerry visited us and told about experiencing God’s protection in an incident where thieves had climbed over the wall of their home to raid their dwelling. But through a series of circumstances, the thieves turned back without success and without injuring anyone. As we compared the time differences, we learned that the incident had happened at the same time as we were at prayer on a Wednesday evening in Kirkville.

Intercessory prayer gives us a powerful way to make a difference for God. It is not just a superficial way to ease our conscience so we won’t feel we have to do anything else. In fact, those who earnestly pray are more likely, I would say, to do something more because God, in prayer, will encourage them in their next steps. Praying for others, interceding before God for them, is what Paul is urging the Colossian church to do.

# Devote Yourselves to Prayer

Intercessory prayer is one of the means that God has ordained for his people to make a difference in this broken world. I'm sure we at Kirkville church were not the only ones praying for Jerry and Jody Manwaring, but we were so blessed to know that we had some small part in God answering prayer in this specific way.

I offer a quote from one of the great classic writers on prayer, E. M. Bounds.

*Praying saints are God’s agents for carrying on his saving and providential work on earth. If his agents fail him, neglecting to pray, then his work fails. (The Weapon of Prayer, E. M. Bounds, page 10)*

However, if we are to do our part for the transformation of the world, one of the things that will need to change is the way we usually pray. So much of our prayers are consumed with prayers for our daily wants and needs and those of people we know, our health, our travel, our crises, our finances, our relationships. Now all of these are proper things to pray about for sure. But where the change is needed is that we need to add some bigger picture things to our prayer lists. We need for God to enlarge our hearts, to expand our vision and to give us a glimpse of the true possibilities of intercessory prayer.

Here’s a word of encouragement from Pastor Jim Cymbala of Brooklyn Tabernacle, a church that has been built on prayer.

*When we seek God for answers, we must persevere in prayer, letting it build up day after day until the force of it becomes a mighty tide pushing over all obstacles. No wonder God says his house is supposed to be known as a house of prayer – not merely a house of preaching or of singing, but especially of prayer. How else will we receive great answers from God unless we persevere in prayer? (Fresh Faith, page 102)*

Two more key verses help us

Eph. 6:18 “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. NIV

1 Tim. 2:1 – “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.”

## Intercessory Prayer keeps spiritual watch

I was very interested to note how the word translated “to watch” or “to be alert” or “awake” in Col. 4:2 is used in other NT verses. Consider the following.

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matt 26:41 NIV

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. 1 Cor. 16:13-14 ESV

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 ESV

"Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." Rev 16:15 NKJV

So to be watchful in our prayers is to be aware of our vulnerability to the enemy of our souls. It is to pray for God’s protection. It is to pray against the devil’s schemes.

So, for example, after the earthquake hit in Haiti a couple years ago, Kirkville church began both by praying and by collecting offerings to send. In addition, since we had conversations with long-time missionaries, Dick and Donna Doan, and since we had visited the island on missions trips we knew that one of the big problems in Haiti is corruption. So we prayed especially that the aid being sent would reach those most in need. A group of men who are carpenters and workers from that district went once a year to assist in the rebuilding process. A friend of ours, Peter Moon, along with his son-in-law went a year or two ago with a team, and returned with a report about how God had answered prayer for their safety and for the productiveness of their work.

## We are to pray with thanksgiving

Thanksgiving in our hearts as we pray for others avoids two errors.

First, when we are thankful, we avoid the error of anger and cynicism, of blaming God’s alleged actions or lack of action for the troubles of the world. That course of thinking affects many. “How can God allow this to happen?” is a question we cannot answer. But we can give thanks to God for our blessings.

Then we avoid the second error as well, which is to pray for the needs of others and do nothing. God wants us to put hands and feet to our prayers whenever possible. The more thankful we are to God for his good works on our behalf, the more likely we are to feel the need to use the resources God has given us to help others along the way.

# Pray for God’s Workers

## A practical hint

As Paul urged the church to pray, he reminded them to pray especially for him and for others who were God’s key chosen workers.

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. Col. 4:3, 4 NIV

I think this becomes a practical tip for us as to how to pray for many of the difficult situations in our world. We can pray for those who are God’s workers there, This includes not only those who are preaching and teaching the good News of the Gospel, but also those doing works of healing and comforting and those supplying the needs of people who have suffered great losses in natural disasters. We can pray for God to facilitate their work, help their work go forward without obstacles.

## Specific prayer suggestions

For example, I know from my work with teams going to Haiti and conversations with missions leaders there that regarding the disasters in the Caribbean, we can pray especially that hindrances such as avoiding corruption; transportation difficulties, and getting aid through customs checkpoints will be quickly overcome. Those are three sticklers in the Caribbean. According to a post I saw form Harriet Olsen of United Methodist Women, this is a great prayer for the assistance of Puerto Rico currently. The post relatt5ed that some aid that has already arrived can’t be unloaded and delivered for lack of truck-drivers and diesel fuel. The harbor cannot currently handle the aid influx. We can pray for this practical matter.

A related prayer that we can make is that God will supply the needs of the workers. Pray that sufficient aid, both in funds and material will come in to meet the needs that they are trying to address. This is a dangerous prayer, because we will feel, and rightfully so, that we need to also be a part of the answer to our own prayer. But that is fine.

Lastly, we can pray that God will call workers into the harvest field. In such places the work of God is being done. But it takes volunteers into God’s army, both paid ones and unpaid ones in order for the work of God to be done. In order for UMCOR to be effective in meeting the huge needs in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and other places, it will take a new outpouring of volunteers. Training is being offered now for such volunteers. The closest one to us is at Simsbury UMC on Nov. 4 at 1PM.

# Make the most of every opportunity

## What the verse means

We could not talk about this passage in Colossians without the phrase which in the NIV is translated, “Make the most of every opportunity.” In the NRSV it is translated, “making the most of the time,” The literal expression from the Greek is “buying up the time” and the Greek word for time is “kairos” which refers to a divinely given moment as opposed to simply a clock tick. So the verse is urging us to use to the fullest every God-given moment of opportunity.

## Putting it into practice

This is what we are to do in our daily lives. Each day God has good works prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10). Our goal is to make the most of the opportunities that God sends our way.

It is also a very relevant admonition in times such as these when the church has a chance to respond to multiple disasters. Times of great need in the world are also moments of divine opportunity for God’s church to be God’s agents to bring help and wholeness and the Good News of God’s love in Jesus. So the tragedies of hurricanes Harvey and Irma and the earthquakes in Mexico all provide moments of opportunity when God’s church can make a difference in people’s lives in the name of Jesus and at the same time bring glory to Jesus.