

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Watching and Praying for Opportunity and Ability

by Dan Trygg

“Praying by means of all prayer and urgent-petition at all times in the Spirit, and unto this, being alert with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints,¹⁹ and on my behalf, in order that utterance (‘a word’) may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, in plainness/boldness to make known the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ on behalf of which I ambassadorize in chains; in order that in it I may speak freely, as it is necessary for me to speak.”

Ephesians 6:18-20

“Devote yourselves to prayer; being watchful in it with thanksgiving,³ praying at the same time also for us in order that God may open to us a door for the message (‘word’) to speak the mystery of the Messiah-- for which I am in prison--⁴ in order that I may make it known as it is necessary for me to speak.”

Colossians 4:2-4

As we are drawing near to the end of this letter, it is fitting for us to return our focus to the mission. We are ambassadors for Christ, disciples who are learning to live, walk and talk like Him. When Jesus called His first disciples, this was part of the invitation: **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of people”** (Matt. 4:19). As we think back through this letter, this *sense of call* and *purpose* permeates the entire message Paul portrayed about who we are.

Before the foundation of the world, God determined that those in Christ would be **“holy and without blemish”** before Him. ***This is the language of sacrifice.*** “Set apart and without blemish” were the qualifications required of any sacrifice offered to God. In our case, **we are to be “living sacrifices”, laying down our lives not to die, but to live, ...to live for Christ** (Rom. 12:1). We simultaneously bear in our bodies the “dying of Jesus” (embracing the cross, by putting off our old selfish way of living) and “the life of Jesus” (the embodiment and expression of Jesus’ life operating in and through us) (2 Cor. 4:10). The genuine gospel is not simply a “get out of hell free” ticket. **The gospel message is all about choosing to turn away from sinful, selfish living, and embracing the pursuit of God and His purpose for your life.** This is expressed in the word “repent”, ...change your perception, ...your perception of God, about who you are, and what *your purpose in life* is all about. **Those who died with Christ, and have become new in Him, are to no longer live for themselves, but for Him**, who died and rose on their behalf (2 Cor. 5:14-21). He has reconciled us to Himself, and entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. **He has made us ambassadors for Christ**, as He Himself chooses to come alongside people *through your life* to interact with them. God intends for us to be to the praise of His glory, by using us to draw others to Him. **Learning to live like Jesus is critical to this process, but we must also be conscious of this Divine purpose, and be seeking opportunities to demonstrate Jesus’ life, and to speak on His behalf.**

After describing God’s sovereign purpose for our lives, Paul prayed that **we would come to know the incredible hope and expectation of our calling, what provision God has made for our assignment, and the surpassing greatness of His power available to us to carry out our mission** (1:15-17). He reminded us of His amazing grace that made us alive, when we were spiritually dead, and has created us in Christ for good works which He will produce through our lives (2:1-10). He reminded us that we, who were once distant from God, have now been brought near, have been given access to Him, and have been made part of His household (2:11-22). Paul wants us to know of God’s great love, and incomprehensible power that enables us to do far more than we could ever ask or imagine (3:1-21). **He has given us spiritual gifts, and calls us to grow to become mature, Christ-led ministers to other believers** (4:1-15).

We are to quit living as unbelievers live, and **learn to put aside the old ways, be renewed in our perception, and put on the new self** that has been created in God’s image (4:16-24). In Christ, we *are* children of light, and are to **learn to walk in that fashion**, letting the transformation of our lives expose the darkness that is around us (5:1-17). We are to be being filled with the Spirit, expressing joy, praise and thanksgiving to God, and learning to yield to one another. **Our relationships are to look different, ...positive, healthy, respectful and affirming to others** (5:18-6:9).

We can expect opposition from evil spiritual forces that are at work in the world. **God has empowered and equipped us to not only stand firm against their pressure, but also to resist and advance against them.** Our strength is in the Lord, and His inworking power. The finished work of Christ provides the protection from the false messages that the enemy would use to discourage us, deceive us, and diminish us (6:10-17). We overcome these lies by a clear grasp of the complete salvation that Jesus accomplished for us through His shed blood, and the victory demonstrated by His resurrection. **Our personal faith, and the word of our testimony, will defeat the enemy and advance the kingdom of Jesus** (Rev. 12:11). **THAT is our calling, to expose and defeat the enemy’s lies, ...and to share Jesus with others.**

It is difficult to determine, from the grammar, if Paul meant for verses 18-20 to be a transition from spiritual warfare to this larger purpose of sharing Christ with other people. Much prayer would be strategic for *both* of these aspects of our spiritual effectiveness. **One thing is certain, Paul wanted to emphasize prayer.** He used two separate words for prayer *twice* in the same verse. Four times in one verse! **The first is the basic word for prayer or**

intercession. “Through all prayer... praying”. It literally means “ask towards”, as in *having a focus or specific request in mind*. The other word is “petition, supplication, or entreaty”. It is bringing a *need* before God. It tends to be *more intense, or desperate, ...involving a pleading or begging dynamic to the asking*. “By means of all specific-requests and intense-pleading, praying-with-focus in every occasion in the Spirit...” **We are to pray with specific-direction and intense-pleading in every situation, and we are to pray “in the Spirit”.** Romans 8:26,27 tells us that the Spirit helps us in our weakness, because we do not know how to pray as it may be necessary to pray. **The ministry of the Spirit, however, is to intercede on our behalf, praying with groans, sighs and utterances that are inexpressible in words. Praying in the Spirit is learning to open oneself to the leading and expression that comes from His inner working.** This can be done with words, or groans, or through song. In 1 Corinthians 14:14-19, Paul indicates that praying in a tongue which the Spirit enabled you to express would be “praying with the Spirit”, but “not with the mind”, ...because you may not know what you are saying, unless there is interpretation. In the context, Paul said that he did both, ...but he would rather pray with the mind when others are present, so that they could benefit from what he would say. So, **to sum up, we are to pray with specific focus, with intense intercession, and in conjunction with the Holy Spirit.** From Colossians 4:2, we would add that **we are to be “watchful with thanksgiving”** when we pray. When we see God answer our requests, we are to be quick to give Him thanks. We call on God, He answers, we praise and thank Him, ...this is the dance we engage in with God. We move toward Him, He moves toward us, ...we move toward Him, He will move toward us. This is a beautiful back and forth relationship that He desires (cf. 1 Sam. 2:30).

What are we to be praying for?

First, we are to be alert and watchful with perseverance (‘unremitting-continuance’) **and intense-supplication-for-needs that may come to our attention.** This is the second time this word for prayer is used in this verse. This *does* serve as an effective transition from the previous spiritual warfare context to where Paul wants to go next.

Second, “...and on behalf of me, in order that a word/message might be given to me in the opening of my mouth...” We are to pray that God would give us something to share with others. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He delights to glorify Jesus by taking what He has done, and who He is, and declaring them in some way (Jn.16:14). Jesus said that He will bear witness of Me, ...and you, too, will bear witness (Jn. 15:26,27). **He can give us a message to share at a time of need** (Lk. 12:11,12; 21:13-15). We are not to simply take this for granted, ...we are to be watchful and to intensely-ask Him to do this, both in our own lives as well as in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. **The word for “give” here is in a form that means “at a moment in time”.** In other words, we need this ministry of the Spirit to meet the need or opportunity of the moment. **It is given in that moment, and for that moment.** We are not to be expecting to suddenly become eloquent from that time on. **We need the partnership of the Spirit in this way each time we are put in a position where we are to share a word about Jesus with someone else.**

Third, we are to pray that we might be able to speak with openness, clarity and confidence. We are to pray that God would enable us to speak plainly to make known the previously-hidden-but-now-revealed-truth of the gospel. We are ambassadors of the gospel, as Paul himself was. We represent Jesus, and the message of the good news. **Most translations use the word “boldness”, but the main thrust of the word is “to express oneself freely, unhindered”.** It is important to recognize this, so we don’t think that we need to be all “pumped up”, or come across loudly, or with a certain kind of delivery. **We are to pray for freedom in speaking, not necessarily volume or a specific approach.** Unhindered and plain speaking can be done in a quiet conversation, ...or in outdoor street preaching.

Fourth, from Colossians 4:2, we are to be alert and watchful with thanksgiving. As mentioned above, this is an important part of our partnership and relationship with God. When we see Him move, we respond with thanksgiving. In 1 Kings 18:41-46, Elijah told Ahab that rain was coming. He got down on his haunches, with his head between his knees, and prayed fervently for rain. He sent his servant up to the top of the mount to look out over the sea, to see if there was any sign that God was answering. Six times, the servant reported, “Nothing”, but on the seventh time, there was a tiny cloud forming. Elijah knew that was the answer. He rejoiced, and ran in the power of the Spirit the fifteen miles to Jezreel, arriving there before the king and his chariots. **When we see God answer, rejoice and give thanks.**

Fifth, we are to pray that God would open up opportunities for us to share with others. Paul referred to God “opening a door for the word” (Col. 4:3). This language is used several times in the NT. In Acts 14:27, God “opened a door of faith to the nations”. In 1 Corinthians 16:9, Paul reported that “a door was opened to me, wide and effectual (lit., ‘inworking’, meaning that God was causing people to be open to the gospel), and many are opposing me”. In 2 Corinthians 2:12, Paul recounted how, when he had come to Troas for the gospel, “a door was opened to me by the Lord...” Jesus referred to Himself as “the One who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.” He said to the church of Philadelphia, “I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (Rev. 3:7,8).

We are to pray for needs, for a “word” to share, for freedom in speaking, and opportunities to interact with others. We are to ask, expect, and thankfully respond when we see God working in our lives and in the world around us.