

Coach House Church BEACONS

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

6TH AUGUST 2020

The recent change in the COVID restrictions around Greater Manchester have made it seem as though what we previously knew as normality is still a long way off. So much of what we considered normal was suddenly cut off and we had to change the very way we live. That said, we must recognise that we are not in quite as restricted a position as we were at the start. It's not all bad. As the restrictions have eased, one of the blessings that we have been able to enjoy in the last few weeks has been to be able to gather together for the prayer meeting.

Prayer is the heartbeat of any Christians life, and indeed, of the church as a whole. Personal prayer is essential but also corporate prayer is also very important. This raises an important question for any Christian which is "What, or whom, should I pray for". We normally answer this by talking to one another, exchanging things that we have heard about, people with needs, and giving thanks for answered prayer. During the lock-down this became more difficult. Until we got used to phoning round, messaging, or using the zoom meeting, you might have found yourself feeling that you were missing something. You might have worried that you didn't know what was happening in someone's life and therefore you felt unable to pray effectively.

Living in an age of instant information has made us forget that for most of history a lack of information was the norm. This was certainly the norm in bible times. As the Gospel spread, people would have heard about other Christians from other places and about their needs, but it could be months before messages got through to update peoples knowledge, or, mostly, you might never hear about a situation ever again. So how do we deal with this? Paul knew this was a problem so he wrote to the Colossian church with some advice on this matter. Here's what he wrote "Since the day we first heard about you, we have not stopped praying for

you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light. For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins"

Wow, what an amazing passage. There's quite a lot in here so you might want to think about some of this later, but for now let's just look at the main points.

Firstly we should pray continually. As Paul says "Since the day we first heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you."

Paul doesn't mean that he is constantly praying day and night, he is saying that he doesn't just pray for someone once and then forget about them. In practice you won't pray for everybody you know every day. A good way to keep track of people you want to pray for is to keep a list. Perhaps some people will be allocated to a certain date in the month, or, for more regular prayer, a day of the week. It sounds simple, and I know lots of you will already do this. Now as we are focussing here on people you don't see very often, if at all, you might ask "what should I pray?" Well Paul answers this in an earlier verse saying, "We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you" This is a good discipline for any prayer. Always start with thanks because in doing so you will recognise God's grace at work in peoples lives.

Second Paul says that we should pray that people may be "continually filled with the knowledge of his will" This might surprise you to hear this. Isn't it my responsibility to find out God's will for my life? Won't God guide me anyway? Well the answer to these questions is yes, but Paul wouldn't be telling us this if there wasn't at least some obligation on us to ask on behalf of others. Remember in the Lord's Prayer we pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done" This is in essence the same prayer. Asking that we, and others, might be brought by God, into His will. Basically, to follow His plan for our lives and not our own plan. You might not know what is happening at the mission station in that far off land, but you can do your bit by asking God to guide the missionary who is working there.

Third Paul asks that we pray that they live a life worthy of the Lord. This is a prayer of protection. Again you don't need to know the exact circumstances of someone's life to pray that they might live the right way before God.

After this there is gaining knowledge of God, strength for endurance, and bearing of fruit. You see, none of these things needs you to know anything about the person you are praying for. Yes there are times when you need to pray about a very specific situation that you have heard about, but when you are remembering that person you only met once, or someone you heard about on a prayer letter use these principles and you will start to really enjoy praying into the unknown. So in Summary, Pray regularly; give thanks; ask for God's will to be done; seek a life worthy of the Lord; and ask for knowledge, wisdom, endurance and fruit. Can you imagine the difference you could make in someone's life just by praying this way. Try it out, see what happens, and may the Lord bless you for your faithfulness.



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