Engage

Dear Lord, help us unlearn wrong spiritual habits and teach us to pray according to Your will — with persistence through silence and hearts surrendered for You to transform us amid every challenge. Ground us securely in the identity of our sonship as Your children and Your royal priesthood, that we may walk in faith, trust, and obedience. In Jesus' Name, Amen.



WELCOME

Welcome is the first "W" in a Cell Group (CG) session. Each person may be going through many daily situations leading up to a CG session. Hence, it is good to bring the CG with a practice of releasing the daily situations we each may be going through. CGs are encouraged to get creative about Icebreakers and/or activities that help its members to be present with one another. Here are some suggestions to shake things up a little and inject some fun and freshness into how we do this.

Suggested Icebreaker Activity/Questions

For CGs with new visitors

- What is one street food (locally or abroad) that you enjoy eating the most, and the least?

For CGs with existing members

- Besides snacks and coffee, there are various other kinds of vending machines. Name some of the interesting products that you have come across.



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SERMON SUMMARY

Note to Word Facilitator: *The sermon notes below is a summary of the sermon. You may choose to further summarize it according to the needs and context of your CG members. The goal is not just to go through it "verbatim" but to prepare well, allowing members to recall and engage the message in the best possible way.*

Colossians #1: We May Be Praying Wrong

Pr Ann Wan Kuan

Colossians 1:9-14

For this reason, since the day we 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.

Introduction

Apostle Paul begins the epistle to the church of Colossae with thanksgiving. According to its church planter, Epaphras, the church had a faithful and loving congregation. Things were seemingly going well for them. For Paul though, he was confined to a prison at that time. Things could have been very hard and challenging, but Paul did not ask God to make his life easier, to remove every difficulty or to fix all the problems. He asked God to fill the minds.

Typically when faced with trials and tribulations, we would pray for outcomes first, but Paul was different. He prayed for transformation first. Prayer is not about asking God to remove the difficulties but to allow God to transform us in the midst of them.

There are 3 ways in which we may be praying wrongly:

1. Persistence: How long do we pray? ***Colossians 1:9-11***

The church of Colossae was alive and thriving. The people were filled with hope, faith and love. It is for this reason that Paul pressed on in prayer for them. Unlike most of us, Paul prays the hardest when things go well. The state of comfort can be the most dangerous time as our current spiritual health is not self-sustaining. We have to learn to be continually dependent on God.

We grow in maturity when we think and pray for others as we do for ourselves. Persistence takes time. There could be a wave of silence with no immediate results. Trust nevertheless, that God is working. Don't stop praying too soon!

Sometimes, the hardest prayers are prayed not through suffering but through silence. Breakthroughs, open doors and miracles may happen not just on the day that we prayed for them to happen, but over unseen weeks and months, or even years of persistent prayer.

2. Transformation: What is God doing in me? ***Colossians 1:9b-11***

(a) God wants to change you more than your circumstance

In Colossians 1:9, Paul prays that the Colossians will be "filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding".

- Knowledge — epignōsis (ἐπίγνωσις): the full knowledge of information or truths. It responds to the "what?"
- Understanding — sunesis or synesis (σύνεσις): the understanding of the significance as a result of things being connected with one another. It responds to the "why?"
- Wisdom — sophia (σοφία): the skill and intelligence to live out the truth rightly. It is the application that changes the way we live. It responds to the "how?"

The ingredients of spiritual growth consist of knowledge, understanding and wisdom. With them, we would be able to discern and obey the will of God, one surrender at a time.

(b) God wants your life to match your faith

In Colossians 1:10, Paul exhorts us to walk in a worthy manner — axios (ἀξίως). The imagery of axios is that of a scale where the weight of one side matches the value placed on the other side. Here, it illustrates how there ought to be a coherence or consistency between our beliefs (what we claim) and our lives

(our daily reality).

Some examples would be when your private life matches your public worship, when your character reflects Christ even when nobody is watching, when your workplace integrity matches your Sunday songs, and when your family sees Jesus in the way you speak, forgive, and serve.

(c) God wants to strengthen you; not just rescue you

In Colossians 1:11, Paul tells us how God can transform His people. He strengthens them with endurance — hupomoné (ὑπομονὴ) — to deal with difficult situations and patience — makrothumia (μακροθυμία) — to handle difficult people.

God transforms the person inside the situation first. He prepares us in advance so that we would be able to endure all things and be patient with all kinds of people. How much would you say that the Gospel has changed you?

3. Identity: Who am I before God? ***Colossians 1:12-14; Matthew 6:10***

Between verses 12 to 14, Paul reminds the Colossians of their identity in Christ. The terms such as qualified, rescued and transferred apply to us when we accept Jesus as our personal Lord and Saviour.

By being qualified, we have been made worthy, not by any of our own effort but by the grace of God. When we were once trapped in darkness and held captive in our sins, God came for us and rescued us. From the kingdom of darkness, God transferred and relocated us into His glorious kingdom. We now belong to Christ.

We were once strangers, but the Gospel welcomes us in. We are already loved, already forgiven and already welcomed home. God knows us and our every need. When we pray, we should not expect to get God to align with our desires. Pray to align our lives with His.

Conclusion

Our prayer reflects our relationship with God. As we seek Him consistently, the way we pray changes. We may pray not just for ourselves (inwardly) but for others (outwardly) as well. We may pray when nothing seems to be moving or when everything seems too good to be true. Don't give up praying, and don't stop too soon. Who knows, God's answer to your prayer might just be around the corner.

APPLICATION

Note to Word facilitator:

As you prepare for this session, this is a great time to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you to use the questions efficiently. You can select, modify or entirely create your own questions, according to the needs of your CG, especially if you feel that there are too many questions than required for the allocated time. The questions below are crafted with a certain flow in mind. You could use these towards the end or insert them in between your own sermon reflection and summary.

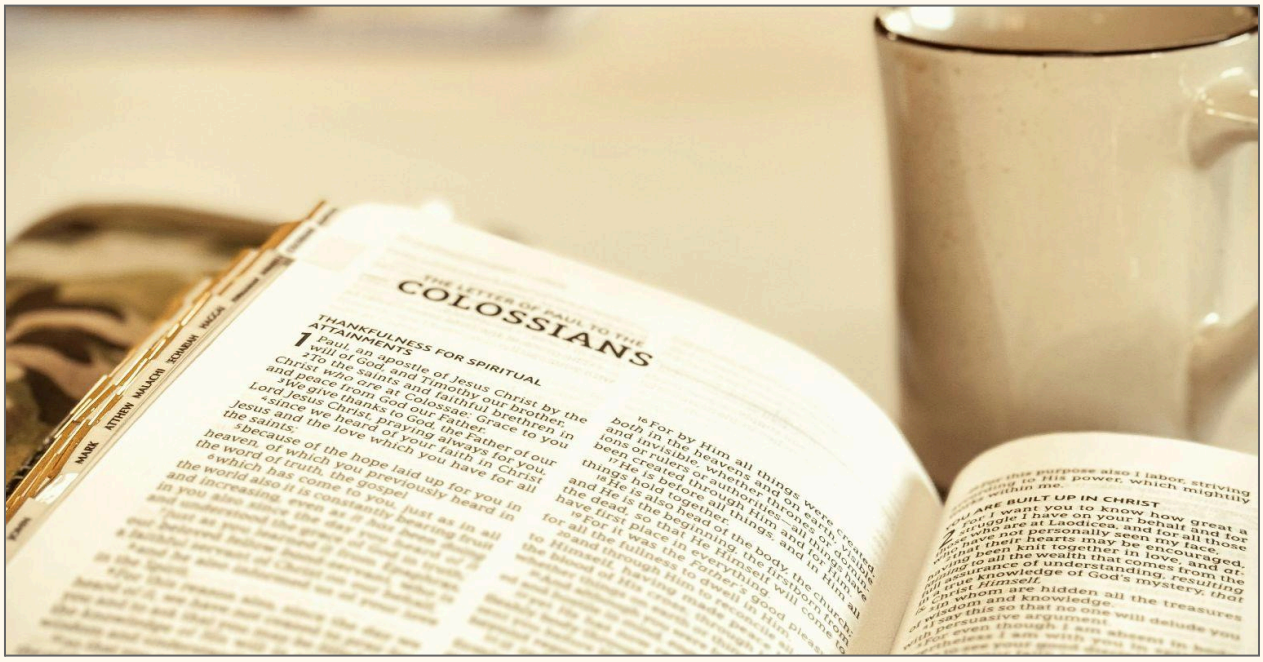


Photo by Guzel Sadykova on Pexels

Suggested Word Introductory Questions

- Do you think you may have been praying wrongly? If yes, in what ways would you improve on? If no, how are you sure that you are on the right track?
- How would you introduce yourself to a total stranger without mentioning your age, occupation / work title, marital status, number of siblings and children, race and education background.

Suggested Questions linked to the Sermon:

- What prayer item took God the longest time to answer you? What was God teaching you during that time of prayer?
- Why is prayer more important during the comfortable seasons of our lives? What do you pray about when everything is going well for you?
- Knowing you are rescued, loved and forgiven, how does that change the way you pray about the situations and people that you might have issues with?

EPL Emphasis:

*A question or activity to help anchor our focus back on [**E**]vangelism/[**P**]rayer/[**L**]ead*

- John Wesley said, “Storm through the throne of grace and persevere there, and mercy will come down.”

  Whether individually or as a CG, name the people in your life or a community group (or Unreached People’s Group) that you have a burden to reach out to. For a month (at least), set aside time weekly to pray in CG for these people.

SERMON REFLECTION



Photo by Airam Dato-on on Pexels

The phrase, “stop too soon” lingered on my mind as I drove home after Saturday’s Celebrations. Clearly, I know that I am a child of God (a sometimes cheeky, *manja* one), and I know that God will continue to transform me. It is not difficult to ask Him to mold me to be more Christlike, or to confess to Him when I have been a little impatient towards others. But to *persist* in prayer?

When I think about it, I do persist. Just not all the time. I persist the most when it concerns myself. When the rash and scars are taking months to heal. When the assignment due dates are nearing. When people are hurting me badly. When the sensitivities overwhelm me and I have no more energy to mask. When I feel like the world and its systems are being unfair towards me. When I miss my Pa, even after 14 years have gone by.

I persist too when major things take place, like the last General Elections, or the Covid-19 pandemic. Though to admit, I have no strong interest in following the political affairs or new strain of viruses that have made it to news headlines. I persisted when our church was undergoing a transition in the past two years

because church matters.

What about family and friends? Or my CG and the ministries I serve in? There have been seasons that I do persist in prayer for different ones, and then there are times when I don't at all. Sometimes, I don't know what to say about the situations or the people involved. Sometimes, I don't want to think about the problems that have cropped up. Sometimes really, I find myself unbothered to pray because nothing has changed since I last did.

For this reason, I found myself challenged by the phrase. I have stopped too soon in persisting in prayer for the salvation of my cousins and their parents. I stopped when I came back after a day trip to Penang. It felt futile after my aunt had passed away and I saw how staunch the family was in their beliefs. How can I break through the barriers? How do I tell them that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life when that would mean losing the idea of seeing their mother in their next life? How do I convey eternal hope when they don't feel like they need it?

I am reminded now that with God, all things are possible. I am encouraged every time I hear the conversion testimonies of individuals who took the step to be baptised. Often, God partners with someone to bring the Gospel into their lives. I am reminded too of friends who tell about the years they have prayed for their loved ones and how overjoyed they were when their parents or siblings believed in Jesus. I hope that someday, I too would experience that joy.

Father, thank you for opening my eyes to see what I have been missing out on. The possibilities of how you can work through my life, and my prayer for the people You've placed in my heart. Help me to see beyond my own setbacks and my tendency to let go when it feels too hard. I can't promise You that I will always be persistent in my prayer, but as you continue to work in my life and change me, may my posture be of one who is obedient and true to her faith in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Contributed by Wendy ML Tan

MISSIONAL

Note to CGL: Inspire and encourage the Cell Group members to participate in the activity suggested below (from our CrossFields, Missions department) together to cultivate a culture of being a missional church.



A shared time of worship, stories, and prayer for God's global work.

PRAYER

Note to CGL: You (or someone you assign this portion to), may lead by praying OR reading these prayers together as a CG during worship.





Malaysia Prayer Convention (25 to 27 May, DUMC)

Organised by the Methodist Church In Malaysia — gathering in unity to pray for the nation and to seek God's face together.

Pray:

- A spiritual awakening to seek God's heart and a renewed passion for His kingdom.
- Preparation of all participants' hearts to receive a fresh touch from God and a deeper hunger for Him.
- Unity among the diverse ethnic groups, denominations, and language groups within the Church.
- Smooth logistics and operations for the event and safe travels for all.