

**The Agony of Victory – Part III**  
**Importunity in Prayer**  
**Colossians 2:1- 4**  
**Reality Carpinteria - Pastor Britt Merrick**  
**February 19, 2006**

**Pastor's Note:** “ This week we're on Part III of the message called Agony of Victory. Try as I might to get beyond this concept, the Lord is not allowing it. The Lord is speaking to us individually and as a congregation in Reality Carpinteria, about the subject of struggling in prayer, wrestling in prayer, and doing spiritual warfare. Several weeks ago, when I first started to study verses one through four, I thought we'd breeze through it in a minute. The first Sunday I planned on going all the way through verse eight. But, the Holy Spirit said, 'Slow down. There's some stuff I want to show you.' We did a sermon on verses 1-4, but didn't get through it, so we added another sermon to cover it last week. And, now we're in it for Part III of the Agony of Victory. I have a sneaking suspicion that there might be a Part IV!”

**Colossians 2:1- 4**, Paul writes, “**For I want you to know how great a struggle I have had on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face.**”

**Pastor Britt's Opening Prayer:**

Spirit of the Living God, we ask You to speak to us this morning, in our individual hearts and corporately as a body, as a congregation, and as a church. I know, Lord, that You are calling us to a deeper place of prayer. Again, individually and corporately, I ask that You would tune our ears this morning that the church might hear what the Spirit is saying. Lord, that You might instruct us in the deep things; that You would call us to a brand new place of prayer, that our lives would be transformed and our community would be transformed. Lord, that we would have faith that even our nation would be transformed. God, You do those things in the Bible. And, Lord, we are going to hold You accountable to what we see in the Word of God. We believe that You are unchanging; that You are the same God yesterday, today and forever. And so Lord, we expect great things from You. But, make us a people that would attempt great things for you, Lord. Move radically in our hearts this morning. Teach us to be persistent in prayer. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Review:**

**Struggling and Agonizing in Prayer on Behalf of Others**

**Colossians 2:1- 4**, Paul writes to the churches in the Lychus Valley in modern day Turkey, , “**For I want you to know how great a struggle I have had on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face.**”

- Even though he has never seen them, Paul is struggling in the spiritual realm, battling on their behalf for their spiritual wellbeing.
  - The word struggle in the Greek is *agon*. It is the picture of an athlete who is striving, competing, and giving it his all, going for the prize, the goal, first place with all that he has.
    - Paul is doing this for them even though he is in a prison cell in Rome, thousands of miles away and he's never met these people.
  - The reason why he is doing this is:
    - Paul had a tremendous love for God, which stirred in him a tremendous love for people.
    - Paul had a tremendous love for the truth of God's Word.
    - Paul had an understanding of the power of prayer.

There is a clear teaching of scripture throughout history:

1. God has chosen to work **through** people, rather than independent of people.
2. We have been commanded, as well as given the privilege and joy to ask the Lord anything in prayer.
3. Prayer changes things.

## Prayer Changes Things

- This was the thrust of the message last week. Lives, situations, communities, and nations are transformed through prayer.
  - **2 Chronicles 7:14**, “**IF** my people, who are called by My name, humble themselves and pray and seek after My face and turn from their wicked ways, **then** I will hear from Heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”
    - If you don’t, then He won’t!
- The lack of prayer causes things to continue as the status quo.

**We know that God works through people;  
We have the command and privilege of asking for things in prayer; and  
We know that prayer changes things.  
Therefore, we each have a moral obligation to cultivate a lifestyle of prayer.**

- In **Mark 9**, a distraught father brought his son to the disciples and asked them to cast the demon out of his son. The disciples had seen the Lord do it, and they themselves had done it before (**Mark 6:7**), they had been given authority over it (**Mark 3:15**), but now they were unable to do it. Then Jesus comes on the scene and He casts out the demon. The disciples ask the Lord why weren’t they able to do it and the Lord answered in **verse 29**, “**This kind only comes out by prayer (and fasting).**”
  - It doesn’t mean that they had to start praying in an instant, they were certainly doing that, rather that they should have been cultivating a lifestyle and attitude of prayer which yields a spiritual alertness, readiness, power and ability to stand in the authority and in the gifts of the Lord in the moment of need.
    - But because they, like so many of us, were not cultivating that the time of need came and they were unable to affect change.
  - It says in **James 5:16**, “The fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much.”
    - Fervent, continual, heartfelt, passionate prayer accomplishes much. But because of their prayerlessness, they were unable to affect change when somebody was in desperate need.

### **Saints of God, we don’t want to be in this position of helplessness against the spiritual realm.**

There are young men and women in our community who may be demonized. Caught up in all sorts of immorality. Broken, hurt, lost and wounded. There are parents and children who are crying out for help.

The church needs to be in a spiritual place where, by the authority and power of the cross of Jesus Christ, we are able to help them. Because the Lord chooses to work through you, rather than independent of you, there is a tremendous moral obligation on the church to be in an attitude of prayer.

**“Pray without ceasing”<sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:17**

- Remember also that prayer is engaging in the spiritual battle that is constantly being waged for the souls of men, women and children and their wellbeing.

**Ephesians 6:10-18**, is a very famous passage on spiritual warfare.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

- This incredible passage reminds us that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. That we struggle, not against physical things in the physical realm but, against the spiritual realities behind them. The command to us is that we **stand firm**.
  - **James 4:7**, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you!”
    - Cave in to the devil and he will cling to you!

- Paul repeatedly tells us to “stand firm” and to be strong in the **Lord** and in the strength of **His** might.
  - The Christian does not stand in his own strength or in his own might.
  - When it comes to the Lord and the devil, it is **not** a power struggle. The Lord has **all** authority and **all** power! But we are living in a period in history in which the devil is allowed a certain measure and degree of sway in this world, by which Christians are defined and non-Christians are forced to choose between a holy God who loves them and a wicked enemy who wants to see their end and their demise.
- There are two very important points to keep in mind from this passage.
  - Verse 12, our struggle is against spiritual forces of wickedness.
    - This word holds the same idea that Paul uses in **Colossians 2:1**, “I want you to know how great a struggle I’ve had on your behalf.”
    - Some translations say, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of wickedness”. So there is the idea in the spiritual realm of wrestling and struggling.
    - Note, that it does not say that we wrestle with **God** in prayer. But, it does say that we wrestle against the **forces of wickedness** in prayer.
      - Understand that there is a distinction and that we should be aware of it.
  - Verse 18, we are commanded to pray at all times.

**How do we struggle/wrestle for the souls and wellbeing of men, women and children?  
By praying at all times!**

**2 Corinthians 10:4**, “for the weapons of our warfare are not of flesh, but divinely powerful (Literally “mighty before God”) for the destruction of fortresses (or strongholds).”

- We have been given a weapon of prayer. It is a tool and resource that is divinely powerful.
  - It is not a weapon of the flesh. It has no limits upon it. It is an unending resource.
 

**Prayer is powerful before God.  
God honors prayer and uses prayer.  
God moves and works through prayer.**
- Prayer is for the destruction of fortresses, that is, over satanic strongholds. Prayer is for the tearing down of things that would exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.
  - We’re not to try to make a **dent** in our community. Rather, we are to destroy what the enemy wants to do in our community.
    - We’re told in the **Book of Hebrews** that **Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil**.
  - When we pray, we partner with God. In **2 Corinthians 3:9** Paul tells us that, “For we are God’s fellow workers...”
    - We partner with God when we pray for our family, friends, our community and our nation.
  - Recall from last week that Daniel prayed on behalf of his nation. Three weeks later he received an answer to his prayers. An angel of the Lord came to Daniel and told him that “from the **first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.**”
    - From the first moment Daniel started praying, his words were heard. God sent an angel to visit Daniel in response to his prayer. It took the angel 3 weeks to get to Daniel because the angel was engaged in a war in the spiritual realm and Michael the Archangel came to his aid.
      - Thank God that Daniel persevered in prayer and didn’t give up after 10, 14 or 20 days! He persevered in prayer until the battle was won and then the answer came.
      - We are to persevere in prayer. There is a battle going on. Prayer changes things. We have the command and the privilege to pray. We have a moral responsibility, but it is a battle.
- Jesus addresses this issue in **Luke 18**, **1Now He was telling them (the disciples) a parable.**

- *Para* in the Greek means alongside. *Bole* means to cast. It literally means to cast alongside, or put something alongside of something in an effort to illustrate, make a point or a comparison or to make a contrast.
- Jesus wanted to reveal a spiritual truth, that His disciples might learn a spiritual principle.
- **Luke 18:1b** "to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart."
  - Jesus wants them to learn two things: (1) that they ought to pray at all times and (2) they should not lose heart. Those who are engaged in the battle sometimes can lose heart.
    - Paul said in **2 Corinthians 4:1**, "Therefore since we have this kind of ministry, therefore we do not lose heart." In the Greek, that translates to: we are not faint-hearted cowards. The Church has been given the incredible ministry of rescuing men, women and children from the gates of hell and delivering them into the Kingdom of Light of the beloved Son.
- **Luke 18:2** saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3 There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' (do me justice) 4 'For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she wear me out.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said; 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 8 "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"
  - This parable is not an illustration of the character of God the Father. Jesus is not using this parable to illustrate or compare God to the unjust judge. God is **NOT** the unjust judge, nor is He anything like him. God is not bothered by us coming to Him for anything.
  - Jesus is making a parable about **prayer**.
    - Prayer should be like the attitude of the widow.
    - It should be consistent and continual and relentless.
- In **Luke 11: 1, 5-8** Jesus teaches the same thing with a different illustration. "It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."
  - There is a powerful point here: The only thing that the disciples asked Jesus to teach them was how to pray. They'd seen Him walk on water and raise people from the dead, but they never asked him to teach them these things, although Peter got the chance to walk on water and he raised Tabitha from the dead.
  - The most potent thing the disciples had witness in Jesus' was His prayer life.
- **Luke 11:5** Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs."
  - Once again, **God** is not like the friend who was sleeping, but **prayer** is like the persistent friend.
  - Jesus uses this parable to teach them how to pray.
  - This is **not** a parable about the character of God.
  - This is a parable about the character and nature of prayer.
  - Jesus said that the man got up out of bed only because his friend's persistence, or as it could be translated, shamelessness. In the King James Version, this word is translated as importunity.

**im·por·tu·ni·ty** – adjective. To be urgent or persistent in asking or demanding. To insistent; refusing to be denied; annoyingly urgent or persistent. The quality of being importune.

- In **Luke 18:5**, the judge had said, "yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection."
    - This widow was persistent and insistent and thus her prayer was answered.
    - Again, God is **not** like this judge. **Revelation 5:8** says that our prayers are like "golden bowls full of incense."
      - God delights in us.
      - He commands us to pray.
      - He loves to hear our voice in the morning as His children.
- Prayer that prevails is persistent. It is importune!**
- There is a difference in prayers that come and go with our whims and prayer that prevails.

- It is consistent, persistent, and insistent. It is consistently requesting with insistence over and over again!

In the Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 6:7**, Jesus talks about prayer and says, “When you pray do not use meaningless or vain repetition.”

- Jesus did not say, “don’t use repetition”. He said, “Do not use *meaningless* repetition.”
  - In that time, in the Greek culture and among the pagan peoples, when they prayed they would use many words or the titles of their deities, to get the attention of their gods.
    - **1Kings 18**, the prophets of Baal danced, chanted, yelled and screamed, and cut themselves all day long trying to get the attention of their god. There was no attention because there was no god!
- The Word of God tells us that we do not need to do this.
  - In **Matthew 6:8**, Jesus tells us, “Your Father knows what you need...”
  - We’re told in the Old Testament that His eyes go to and fro across the earth looking to find someone on whose behalf He might show Himself mighty.
  - When Israel was in trouble, God looked for a man who would stand in the gap.
  - Jesus tells us that the Lord has numbered the hairs upon our head.
  - God is intimately and infinitely concerned with us. His thoughts are precious and so vast that if you were to number them they would outnumber the grains of sand (**Psalms 139**).

#### True prayer is predicated on relationship

- It doesn’t require vain words or manipulative addresses. Fathers and children do not need to make speeches to one another, because a relationship exists between them.
- Fathers and children communicate frequently.
- When you repent of your sins and are saved by the cross of Jesus Christ, you come into a true love relationship with the Living God.
- The Book of Hebrews says, we have access to the throne of grace (undeserved favor), where we can enter boldly when we need help, only because we have a relationship with God.

#### Jesus Explains Importunity in Prayer

In **Luke 11:9-13**, Jesus says, “So I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. 10 “For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. 11“Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 “Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 “If then, you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

- In this passage, Jesus brings the Holy Spirit into the picture and also contrasts the perturbed friend of the previous parable with the attitude of concern that God has for His children.
- Jesus gives us the idea of importunity telling us to ask, seek, and knock. In the Greek, the word Jesus uses for “ask, seek and knock” actually means “*keep on asking*”, “*keep on seeking*”, and “*keep on knocking*”.

**NOTE:** You need faith to believe the word of God. You’ve got to come to the word of God with some measure of belief. But, many people hear the word of God and it doesn’t make any sense to them. They come to a point where they just don’t believe it. They think that God wants to limit their joy, their life or experience and so they dismiss it. But Jesus says God wants to give us good things, but you’ve got to have faith.

If you lose heart, you’ll lose faith. You will lose faith when you stop receiving the word of God as *the word of God*.

**Is there someone or something in your life that needs prayer?**

**Then pray and keep praying.**

**Don’t give up.**

**Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking.**

#### Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking

- Notice that each step increases with intensity. First you ask with care, and then you find yourself actively seeking God’s favor. Then, you find yourself knocking frantically asking God to intervene.

**Jesus teaches us to pray with importunity and with the understanding that there is a battle going on.**

- In fact, there are two battles going on.
  - One, for the souls and wellbeing of men, women and children.
  - One, for your refining.
    - As we seek, ask, and knock in prayer, the Lord refines us.
    - Prayer builds a discipline, a faith, a holy boldness and a passion for other people.
      - Jesus said, **"Pray for your enemies."**
        - When you pray for your enemies, your heart softens for them.
- This battle is illustrated perfectly in the Garden of Gethsemane. We read here that Jesus persisted and agonized in prayer to the Father.
  - **Luke 22:39** "And He (Jesus) came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. 40 When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."
    - This is the eve before His crucifixion. He will be arrested soon.
  - **Luke 22:41** "And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if Thou are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done." 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground."
    - There are two points to focus on in this passage:
      1. We learn from the other gospels that Jesus prayed this prayer **three** times. Jesus, the Son of God, was very persistent!
      2. We are told in the Book of 1 John to pray in the will of God.

**If the Son of God Himself prayed to the Father with persistence in the midst of this battle,**

**How much more should you and I pray?**

**We can't grasp this truth!**

**PRAYER CHANGES THINGS!**

- The Garden of Gethsemane is also called the Garden of Decision. This is where the reality and depth of the meaning of the cross - - not the physical torment of it - - came into being. It was the revelation of the spiritual truth that each and every sin ever committed by every person who ever lived would be heaped upon the sinless shoulders of Jesus Christ, in that indescribable moment on the cross!!!
- Jesus actually sweat drops of blood. This is an actual physical condition called *hematidrosis*. It is only experienced under severe, agonizing conditions.
- **Verse 44** states that Jesus was **praying very fervently**. He was in the midst of a battle and so He prayed with persistence.
  - When we begin to pray, we step into the battle. Church, when we refuse to pray, we remove ourselves from the battle and we might as well assume a victim mentality and watch it happen.

**God calls us to press into the battle**

**Put off the victim mentality**

**Reject the status quo!**

**Have faith that prayer changes all things!**

**Don't lose heart**

**Don't be a faint-hearted coward!**

**Persist!**

**Insist!**

**Be importune in your prayer!**

- In His life, Jesus rose early to pray and spent whole evenings and whole nights in prayer.
- **Hebrews 5:7**, states that Jesus offered up prayers with loud crying and tears. "In the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety."

**If the Lord prayed with crying and tears, how much more should you and I pray?**

**Colossians 2:1- 4**, Paul writes, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have had on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face."

- Paul was struggling and agonizing in prayer with much importunity.
- In the **Book of Daniel, chapter 10**, Daniel was praying with importunity on behalf of Israel.
- The Church was praying with importunity in **Acts 12:5**, when Peter was imprisoned for sharing the gospel. The disciples refused to stop praying until Peter came and knocked on their door.
- In addition to our regular prayer meetings, Reality is praying for the purity of the youth of this community on Wednesday evenings.

**We need to persist, insist, press in and be importune.**

**If ever the Church is in spiritual battle it is for the sexual purity of our young people in America today.**

**Lord, teach us to pray!**

And when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to Pray in **Luke 11:1**, part of the response was that they had to do it with importunity. They had to persist with insistence. Prayer is like that.

**Charles G. Finney (1792- 1875)** Quote in his Autobiography pp. 142-143. The way that the Lord used him in this nation some years ago is undeniable.

"For several weeks before I left De Kalb to go to the synod, I was very strongly exercised in prayer, and had an experience that was somewhat new to me. I found myself so much exercised, and so borne down with the weight of immortal souls, that I was constrained to pray without ceasing. Some of my experiences, indeed, alarmed me. A spirit of importunity sometimes came upon me so that I would say to God that He had made a promise to answer prayer, and I could not, and would not, be denied. I felt so certain that He would hear me, and that faithfulness to His promises, and to Himself, rendered it impossible that He should not hear and answer, that frequently I found myself saying to Him, "I hope Thou dost not think that I can be denied. I come with Thy faithful promises in my hand, and I cannot be denied." I cannot tell how absurd unbelief looked to me, and how certain it was, in my mind, that God would answer prayer--those prayers that, from day to day, and from hour to hour, I found myself offering in such agony and faith. I had no idea of the shape the answer would take, the locality in which the prayers would be answered, or the exact time of the answer. My impression was that the answer was near, even at the door; and I felt myself strengthened in the divine life, put on the harness for a mighty conflict with the powers of darkness, and expected soon to see a far more powerful outpouring of the Spirit of God, in that new country where I had been laboring."

**Lord, that You would give men and women in our community a faith like that!**

**That You would burden our souls the way You burdened the soul of Charles Finney.**

**Lord, that You would do that to some people in this place.**

Note, that what caused such fervent prayer in him was that he was "borne down with the weight of souls."

- This is the exact situation that Paul experienced when he sat in prison in Rome, thinking about those churches in the Lychnus Valley. Burdened with their souls, he wrote his first letter to them and said, "it's very important that you know the struggle I have had on your behalf."

**William Carey (1761-1834)**, a shoemaker in England. One day having a realization of the immensity of the gospel and the size of the world, he fashioned out of some shoe leather a globe. He made this leather globe the inspiration for prayer. He would hold it and pray for people he had never seen, or visited, nor would ever think to know. But, he prayed for them, burdened for their soul. The Lord sent William Carey to India and he became the Father of Modern Missions. There are people in India today who owe their salvation in part to this shoemaker, who had the faith to make for himself a globe and pray for a people he had never seen. He is the man from whom we get this quote:

**"Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God."**

**Pastor's Note: "Church, the only thing I have to ask you is: are you passionate about anybody other than yourself? If not, that needs to change."**

**Pastor Britt's Closing Prayer:**

Lord, thank You for Your word this morning. I trust, Holy Spirit, that these things, which You spoke, have not fallen upon deaf ears. Indeed Your word says that as the rain and the snow come forth upon the earth and water it and causes seed to sprout and bear fruit, so Your word accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent forth.

Spirit of God, I ask that You would water the Word now in our hearts and that You would raise up in our midst Charles Finneys, William Careys, Pauls and Christ-like men and women, with a passion to intercede. I confess, Lord, that my heart is not in this place. We are asking corporately, Lord, that You would do a work in us of rattling our selfishness, of opening up to us the depth, the breadth, the width of the gospel. And, that You would burden us for souls and make us importune in prayer. Holy Spirit of God, do that in us.

Worship the Lord. Pray with others. Maybe the Spirit of God has put a certain nation upon your heart. Start to pray for that nation. Maybe it's something or someone in your community. Pray. Come forward before the Lord. Get on your face. Put your hearts before the Lord and let Him do something at this time.