

A Mosaic of Prayer
Pastor Larry Kroon
Wasilla Bible Church
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On December 31st we finished a thousand days of prayer in which for, day in and day out, week after week, for a thousand days we committed as a congregation to praying a very specific prayer of witness modeled after a prayer found in the book of Acts, Acts chapter 4. And we just said, "Lord, let's pray that." And for a thousand days we continued to pray "Give us confidence in every circumstance to speak Your word as Your Spirit leads." We finished that December 31st, those thousand days, and we're taking the first weeks of January to kinda look back over those thousand days and kinda think through and debrief what it was we went through. It's a process of telling some of the stories, answering some of the questions raised, and learning the lessons that are to be learned from going through a deliberate process like that, and today we'll be doing that. This will be the second in that set of sermons that will be looking back over those thousand days and reflecting a bit, and learning what it is that God would have us learn, having taken us through that process.

As we get ready today there will eventually be a short video clip, but before we get to that I wanna take time, a few minutes here, about fifteen minutes or so, to establish a biblical principle, a truth that is foundational to what we did over those thousand days. And I'll begin with this statement, that the calling of God to the Christian life...the calling of God to the Christian life is a high calling. It often comes in very dramatic terms because of that. But the Christian life is a high calling. I'll give you an example from the book of Colossians, chapter 3. The Apostle Paul is talking to Christians, and he's talking about living out the lordship of Jesus Christ, that calling upon their lives that God has for them as Christians. And he puts it in pretty dramatic terms. He says

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything [do everything] in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

In other words, in everything you do, represent Jesus. Live out the representation of Jesus in your life—the King of kings, the Lord of lords, represent Him. Now, that's a pretty dramatic and high calling. The intriguing thing is it is lived out in the ordinary. It is lived out in the ordinary...everyday places, everyday relationships, everyday work is where we answer that calling. In the verses that followed Colossians 3:17, that dramatic calling, the specific instructions will be to live out this calling in your marriage, your family, your work, and your conversation. In other words, in everyday places, everyday relationships, your everyday work. Ok?

I'll give you another example. This is from another writer in Scripture, this time the Apostle Peter rather than the Apostle Paul. 1 Peter chapter 2, the Apostle Peter is doing the same thing. He is discussing with Christians their high calling as believers, and he says this. He says

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His [for God's] own possession...

'You are set apart,' he's saying. And then he says why, what is the purpose for this, why you've been called, and he puts it this way,

...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

In other words, he says you've got a high calling, and it's to be a light and to make known the wonder, and the glory, and the excellence of our God. You're a chosen race, a royal priesthood. Now, like the passage in Colossians, it's intriguing here because immediately [he] goes from that dramatic calling, that high calling, to very ordinary applications. And what follows in 1 Peter 2, just like in Colossians 3, it's everyday places, everyday relationships, and everyday work that we live this out. It's lived out under the authorities that are over us in everyday life, in the family around us, the everyday relationships we have, and among those who are beside us in everyday life. And as Peter develops these on through this chapter and the next he will finally come to the point to where he says, you know, just be ready as you live this out to give answer for the hope you have. It's a high calling, but it's lived out in the ordinary.

One of the more dramatic, to me, one of those verses that just struck me years ago and has stayed with me ever since, is another example of this same thing and you'll find it all the way through the New Testament. But this one comes in Philippians chapter 2. The Apostle Paul is talking to the Christians that were living in Philippi, a very central and strategic city. And he's talking to them, and he's telling them...he's been telling them to live a certain way, and he says 'so that you will be...'

...children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,

...and then this line right here,

...among whom you shine as lights in the world...

That's a high calling. But it's intriguing, the instructions that lead into it...what it is he tells them to do in order to shine as lights. And the specific instructions given in this case, found in the previous verse, are simply

Do all things without grumbling or questioning...

The idea of the term here is disputing, arguing. In everyday places, in everyday relationships, in everyday work if you simply do all things without grumbling... Think about this—if you simply do all things without grumbling you will shine like a light in this world. It's a high calling, but it's lived out in the ordinary.

That's very different; it stands in stark contrast to the modern model of ministry. The modern approach to ministry, and mission, and living out our calling from God, is to call us out of the ordinary to do great things for our God. We market our ministries...and that is what is done...we market our ministries, we promote our programs, and we champion our causes with the promise that 'if you'll just really grip this ministry, pursue this program, and stand for this cause, you will change the world! You will make a difference! You will have impact!' And we bring in the most motivational speaker we can to tell you that.

One more verse from the New Testament...two more. Listen how the Apostle Paul talks to a church...in fact, it was one of the first churches he started. It was the first church he ever wrote a letter to, the church of Thessalonika. And he writes them, he checks in, he says, 'Hey, I found out...I was worried about you. I found out you're doing great. Now let me encourage you to keep going the direction we pointed you.' And as he gives 'em instructions in how to continue there in that city, a crucial, strategic city, he makes this statement to them. He says "Aspire...", and I wanna underscore that word, 'Make it your ambition...'

...aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you...

In other words, 'This is something we told you when we first started that little church. It's the basic teaching...'

...so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

It's not a call to change the world by doing something great for God.

There is a mindset, and the best illustration of it in the New Testament is found in 1 Corinthians 7. The Apostle Paul is dealing with some questions the Corinthian church had. And they are wrestling through issues, and one of 'em had to do with being single or married or status of life that way. And he's dealing with that question, and in the process of dealing with that question he states a principle. And I just pulled a verse out where that principle is stated. It's applied in all sorts of areas by Paul, and it's a general principle. It's being applied specifically in this case, and we're not going to look at how it's being applied in that particular situation. I just want you to hear the principle stated. Paul says to these Christians, he says

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

There's a mindset here, there's a perspective that looks at everyday relationships, everyday places, everyday work, and says 'That is God's calling in your life. Where He has put you is not accidental. It's His strategic placement. And though you may, if the opportunity arrives and arises,' Paul says, 'you may wanna leave. But that's ok. Understand that right now, where you're at is a calling and a placement by God.' You don't have to leave where

you are to answer God's high calling on your life. It takes place right where you are...everyday places, everyday relationships, everyday work.

An astounding thing happens when we do that, when we answer God's call by living it in the ordinary. What begins to happen is the Church has a scope of witness that is unequalled. The Church is able to give witness to the reality of Jesus in every conceivable situation, circumstance, and setting across the community. Jesus can be made known, His glory and His wonder and His mystery, wherever one of us is. That is a scope of witness that no other organization can match—ordinary people like you and I living out our high calling in the ordinary. That's one of the most important lessons to learn from the thousand days we went through.

And what we're going to do is we're going to show you a video clip here. It takes about twelve minutes. As we walk through this video clip it'll just start and go right through. As we go through that video clip what I want you to observe as we go through there is the range and the scope of witness that is given, the varied circumstances, situation, and places—all of them everyday where witness was given to the reality of Jesus. Let's show that video. I usually sit near the back of our services, and as I look out and around, and we sing that song, I think of all the different people that are having an effect, and they're everywhere from children to our adults to our teens, and all the different...just mosaic of our people...praying that prayer and seeing things happen.

Witness 1: Took my kayak out on the lake for a last paddle and I wanted to stay out longer, but I just felt like I needed to go in to the landing area. And landed, and got out of the boat without falling in the water. Pulled it up a little further and busied myself with taking the cart out of the rear compartment. And when I turned around there was this fella standing on the dock. And somehow we got to talking about ...I think it was the peace of the place, and somehow that led to the state of the world, and then very quickly to matters of faith. And he was clearly searching. The Lord had put him in different circumstances. I think he'd gone to a couple of churches and hadn't really struck home, but he knew he was looking. And we kinda got around to how to know that you have known the Lord, that you've received Him. We talked a long time, and he was more and more interested. It wasn't one of these 'holding him hostage' kind of things. And eventually he realized that I was probably getting cold and asked me, I said I was fine. Helped me get my boat out of the water and up into the rack. And he went off back up into the campground. And I hope it sunk in. I hope it took. And the next morning I went up to the visitors' center to take some stuff back up to one of the hosts that I promised. And he said, "You're the gal he talked to! He came in here and he was so excited!" So then I knew that what I had said took. And we talked, and it was evident from the conversation that the guy had really received what I had said.

Witness 2: I was called into the manager's office and they told us, "You know, it's not because of anything you did. It was just financial reasons." So they laid us off. And I went to my locker, packed up my locker, and went home. And then...it was funny...that night I had a friend from work who called me, and his name was Al. He called and he just expressed concern about me being...about my job being cut from the budget. And I was happily surprised that he called, and I really sensed his compassion and his respect for me when he called me. And he offered me a job if I didn't get hired back at the railroad, working with kids with his wife and stuff like that. We had just a good conversation, and it was really...I really appreciated that from him. So we talked a little bit and...but the way that God gave me the grace and the confidence to just speak for Him is after we were talking a while I told him, I said, "Al," and I was kinda pointed, because I was, you know, not happy that I lost my job, you know, I said, "I'm a Christian, Al. And I'm a born-again Christian and I have received Jesus Christ into my life, and He guides my life. And I don't know exactly what's gonna happen right now, but I do know that God will take care of me, and that He will watch over me." After about exactly a month I got re-hired back at the railroad in a different job...not the same one I left, but a different job, and then I had a dollar an hour pay raise that God allowed me to have.

Witness 3 (a couple): So this last spring Peter and I got a phone call about three in the morning one day that my grandpa had passed away. We had an opportunity to fly down the next week to be there with the family for the funeral. And there was a mixture of grief for the loss of my grandpa, but also a sadness we were feeling because we weren't sure he was a believer. By any indication that we could tell, he didn't know Jesus. And more than that, many of the people who were there at the funeral that week maybe claimed to know Jesus, or went to church, but there were unsaved souls there. Our job at the funeral was to create the programs. There were a lot of ideas that people had about what should happen at the funeral, but we got to kinda do our own thing and include the Gospel.

We got to edit a lot of the ideas for what would go into the service, and so instead of some poems that had nothing to do with Jesus we got to put in...include psalms, and we also made sure we would be singing hymns and not just "O Susanna". But probably the most important moment came when Cora called her grandpa's nephew, Hayden, who is a Southern Baptist minister, who was gonna deliver the homily. And we didn't know what a homily was, and I don't think Hayden knew what a homily was either. And so he asked what he would be allowed to...or what he

would be sharing, what he was expected to share. And I remember hearing Cora talk to him on the phone. I could hear him asking her, you know, really what was expected of him, and I whispered to Cora, "Hey, tell him to share the Gospel!" And Cora said, "Well, we were thinking you could share the Gospel." And Hayden said, "Well, I can do that!" And Hayden did. He shared the Gospel. And so, in an atmosphere of spiritual confusion and grief he was able to clearly talk about what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to know Jesus as your Lord. And he did so in a way that was merciful and was really sensitive to people who were in mourning. But he also did so with clarity that was refreshing and really encouraging for me.

Witness 4 (a child): My name is Charlotte, and I'd like to tell you a story about when a family came to dinner. They...we had just finished dinner, and the two girls in the family...they came to my room and they saw my baptism picture and they asked me, "What's that about? What's that?" And then I explained to them that that was when I was baptized, and I believe that...me and my family believe that when you get baptized it's pretty much expressing to other people I believe in Jesus, I wanna become a Christian. Yeah.

Witness 5: I had written down on our prayer cards a friend's name. He was a military man, he's been to Afghanistan several times, and to Iraq, and we talk, play golf, that kind of thing. But I didn't really know him a whole lot, but he was on my heart. So we started praying for him. And about three weeks after the prayer started we were at their house. It was the middle of winter, it was freezing cold. And he just got up...we'd been talking about kids, and he got up and went into the kitchen, pulled out this humidifier and says, "Let's go have a cigar." And I was like, "Ok, it's twenty below outside." And he said, "Yeah, I need to talk to you." Standing on the back deck, and he just turned around and looked at me and he was like, "You are different. Your wife is different, your kids are different. I know that you guys are Christians. We're not. And I've been struggling with some things, and I wanted to ask you." And I was like, "Ok. Shoot." So he started asking me about, you know, the situations that he had been in, war, how someone like him could possibly, you know, ask for forgiveness or receive grace given the things he's had to do. And I just stood there for a minute, just shocked, and the prayer came into my head. In every circumstance give us confidence. And so I just started talking. And we ended up talking about Jesus' death on the cross and how His perfect life paid the penalty for our sin. We talked about the fall of man and how sin affects our lives, and how we're born into sin. And I was able to explain to him that he's right...he doesn't deserve grace, and he is a sinner, and he's no different than I am, that it doesn't matter what you've done, or where you've been, or what you've seen—that God's grace covers a multitude of sins, and that His love for us is unconditional. And all He asks in return is that we put our faith in Him, and that we believe that Jesus died because...He died to save us from our sins. And it was really amazing, and it's a prayer that I continue to this day for him.

Witness 6: It happened on August 28th. I had volunteered to preach a sermon on Psalm 90, and it was because that was a prayer that has been meaningful to me through the years. There was a crux point in Psalm 90, though, that I hadn't dealt with in my life, I hadn't really thought about until it became time to develop a teaching on that. That was what do we do with the fact that we are living under the curse? How do we handle the fact that God is very angry with our sin, and the just, right thing to do with our sin is to punish it forever? And to deal with that and to wrestle through it...how do we make that transition in Psalm 90 from the fact that we live under the curse to being able to pray with confidence for God's blessing in our life, for His satisfaction, for His favor to rest on us? How can we make that transition? And that transition is Jesus. And I had the opportunity on that Sunday to preach that sermon in front of 500-600 people over the two services? I don't know. In one of those services were two relatives of mine—one who is very outspoken that he does not believe in God. And I would not have had that direct of a conversation with him face-to-face in a one-on-one conversation, but I was able to speak it in that setting in a very careful and thought-out way, in a way that made the reality of our Jesus clear.

Pastor Larry: Six situations, none of which are dramatically out of the ordinary—teaching in front of a room full of people may be a bit intimidating, but Mark's a professional teacher and it's not that dramatically out of the ordinary for him. Standing in chilly water in a conversation may be a little uncomfortable, but it happens a lot when you're pulling kayaks out of the lake. Ok, twenty below getting sick on a cigar, answering questions about why your family's different—ok. I will say this, it's an everyday place in an everyday relationship...your neighbor on his porch.

One of the most consistent things I found as we've gone through these thousand days is how ordinary those place and opportunities of witness were...so much so that consistently when I've talked to people they hardly noticed what happened. I made a little habit early on is when somebody would talk about an incident like this I would make a note, and I'd date it, and I kept a little kind of journal-like thing. And I found later, when I went back and asked 'em about it, they wouldn't even remember it. And I'd go, "Wait...on this day you told me this." And then it would start coming back. One of these interviews up here was exactly like that.

The high calling is lived out in very ordinary places. But as you see it, it's astounding the scope of places. Six simple examples. Think of the differences—little kids in a bedroom, a family gathered in grief, a teacher in a large group setting, a guy going through a lay-off, lady standing by the shore with her kayak. We could not have planned and orchestrated that broad a scope of witness if we had tried. It's simply you living out your high calling in everyday places, everyday relationships, and everyday work, and God blessing it. That may be one of the most important lessons for you to take from this project.

I'm gonna conclude by highlighting another person's testimony to that same lesson learned, a person not of our congregation but his story makes the same point. Back in 1990 a man by the name of Phil Vischer, working in the spare bedroom of his apartment in Chicago, created the VeggieTales. And as he created this and it began to catch on he began to develop a vision and a goal. His desire was to have an impact, to do something great for God. And he figured if his goal was great and his heart was pure God would bless him and give him that goal. And he set out to be the Christian Disney. By 1999 his company, with it's flagship VeggieTales, was the number two producer of children's videos on this planet. In 2003 the company was bankrupt, mired in lawsuits. He had to sell his dream, and he began an extended searching of his soul. I wanna read for you a statement he makes. He says,

I'm growing increasingly convinced that if every one of these kids [like he was], burning with a passion to write a hit Christian song or make that hit Christian movie or start that hit Christian ministry to change the world, would instead focus their passion on walking with God on a daily basis the world would change...because the world learns about God not by watching Christian movies but by watching Christians.

And I would add, "...by watching Christians in everyday places, everyday relationships, doing everyday work and answer to their high calling." I am so thankful you answered your calling and God blessed you, and we had a scope of witness we could have never reached if we set out to do something great beyond the ordinary.