

Our Circle of Love

1 of 1 | Our 2024 Labor of Love

SLIDE 1 Introduction

This coming Wednesday is the day many celebrate Valentine's Day by remembering those they love and expressing it through a card, a dinner or some other means of showing how much they care.

Well last Sunday we gathered names of our closest loved ones to express our love for them this year. And what greater love can you have than to pray for them on a daily basis. Some need salvation, others healing, and still others need encouragement through the trials of life.

Throughout this year we are going to find ways to emphasize prayer for others and work to equip ourselves with a devoted private personal prayer life.

Let's just call it "a labor of love."

SLIDE 2 Our Labor of Love

There are two places in the Bible where is actually uses the phrase "labor of love."

SLIDE 3 1st Thessalonians 1:2-4 (KJV) *"² We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; ³ Remembering without ceasing your **work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; ⁴ Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."*

I can't take time to unpack all that this passage conveys, but there are three areas the Apostle Paul thanked God for in the Thessalonians, their faith, their love, and their hope. As it says, these were demonstrated in their works, their labor, and their patience.

In a similar way the other verse says this:

SLIDE 4 Hebrews 6:10 (KJV) *"For God is not unrighteous to forget **your work and labour of love**, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."*

For those that the writer was addressing, he saw in them a passion that prompted their work and labor. It wasn't just a command to be followed. They weren't trying to set an example. They weren't even operating out of a sense of duty. It was because of their love for each other and others that they gave themselves to the work of the Lord.

So what is this "labor of love" that so compels us? We find the answer in a man that Paul commended for his prayer life. His name was Epaphras, and I mentioned him and his labor in my *Fervent Prayer* series.

Paul said this of him:

SLIDE 5 Colossians 4:12 (KJV) *"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, **always labouring fervently for you in prayers**, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."*

This man was constantly in prayer for those he was one with. Paul said "he is one of you." that's why your greatest fervency revolves around those you care for the most. If you are like many people, then that is your family and friends. Also for many it is their church family who they have become one with.

SLIDE 6 Prayer is Love's Highest Call

Prayer is a great form of love and a powerful expression of caring for others. You don't have to be pressed to pray for those you love.

The word "fervent" means to be filled with passion. It means you have intense feelings for someone or something. It literally means to be set afire and constantly burning hot. It's the Latin word for "boil." There is a point where heated water takes on a fervency and begins to boil.

When we looked at the Theme verse from James 5:16 in our last series, we noted that it was the "fervent and effective prayer of a righteous man that availed much." (my paraphrase) We too can achieve that same fervency by focusing our prayer lives around those people who we are the most passionate about.

Sometimes you don't need more education or information, you just need to care!

Paul noted this about Epaphras; he was devoted to praying for his own because he loved them. We need that same passion to drive us to prayer. We need to pray out of a heart of love. We need to pray first for those within our "circle of love."

SLIDE 7 Our Circle of Love

In our personal prayerbooks we have today, our circle of love on the cover is heart-shaped. This is to remind us of our love for those we are praying for daily.

Can you imagine the transformation in your family if your prayers for their salvation hit home? Can you imagine the impact their healings would have? We need to persist in prayer until these things become a reality in our everyday prayer lives.

Over the next two weeks we are going to talk about persistent and prevailing prayer. When you deeply desire something, you don't just mention it once, you talk about it all the time.

The greatest, most effective, and purest motivation for prayer is love.

Look what the Apostle Peter said about how we ought to love each other:

SLIDE 8 1st Peter 4:7, 8 (NIV) *"⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸ Above all, **love each other deeply**, because love covers over a multitude of sins."*

Sometimes you can get people to do things by constantly reminding them, or making them feel guilty if they neglect something. But love is a deep internal motivator which no one has to tell you about. It churns deeply inside you for those you care about.

Again, back to the Thessalonian church. Paul went on to say this about their love for one another:

SLIDE 9 1st Thessalonians 4:9, 10 (NIV) *"⁹ Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, **for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other**. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more..."*

That's the idea of our prayerbooks. We want to express our love for those we care about by praying more and more for them until we see the evidence we are looking for.

What are we looking for? For God to do a work in their hearts and draw them to Jesus. Yes, we know they need Jesus. They don't need our advice, our criticism, or even our guidance. They need our prayers most of all. Especially prayers borne out of a heart of love.

SLIDE 10 Write it Down

Now in being consistent with what we know about prayer and our own shortcomings, before you go to your place of prayer, write down what you are going to pray over each of these loved ones in your book. Even to a greater extent, find a verse that compliments what you are praying and write it down also.

God will openly reward your efforts with answers to prayer that you can actually put a checkmark beside.

Dedicate yourself to filling this prayerbook this year with wonderful, powerful prayers on behalf of those you love. Make this a year of fervent, effective prayer that will get results.

SLIDE 11 More Prayer, More Power. More Power, More Progress.

Let us not find ourselves in the coming year still praying about the things we have passionately lifted up before God this year. Let's begin to see answers. Simply from the names I typed into these prayerbooks, if half of your prayers were answered, we would not have a place to put all your loved ones coming to church.

Think about it. God wants this to be our year of increase. We would love to see others getting saved, but our hearts would explode over the ones in these books.

SLIDE 12 Altar Time

Let's take a moment and anoint these books as our heart-felt guides to prayer this year, and may our circle of love continue to expand.