

A DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

Wrestling in Prayer

Part One: The Nature of the Struggle

Colossians 4:12 • Colossians 1:29 • Luke 22:44

*A devotional reflection on the awakening at the intersection of
The Arena of Prayer • The Cost of Intercession • The Power Behind the Struggle*

***“For this I toil, struggling with all his energy
that he powerfully works within me.”***

— Colossians 1:29

The Awakening

Most of us have never been taught to think of prayer as labor. We have been taught that prayer is quiet. Reverent. Composed. We bow our heads, fold our hands, and speak in measured tones. And there is a place for that—Scripture records the still, small voice and the quiet meditative walk in the evening field (Genesis 24:63).

But Scripture also records something far more strenuous. It records a man who wrestled with God all night and walked with a limp for the rest of his life (Genesis 32:24–31). It records a Savior whose sweat fell like drops of blood as He prayed so intensely that the physician Luke could only describe it with one word: agony (Luke 22:44). It records an obscure man named Epaphras, commended by Paul for one distinguishing mark—he was “always wrestling” in prayer for people he loved (Colossians 4:12).

This awakening is about the kind of prayer that costs something. Not because God demands performance, but because the things worth praying for—the salvation of souls, the maturity of believers, the breaking of spiritual bondage, the revival of a nation—are contested ground. And contested ground requires more than polite requests. It requires the focused, sustained, Spirit-empowered exertion that Scripture calls wrestling.

The Foundational Text: Colossians 4:12

“Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” — Colossians 4:12

Paul does not commend Epaphras for his eloquence, his theological knowledge, or his ministerial accomplishments. He commends him for one thing: the intensity and consistency of his intercession. The word Paul uses—*agōnizomai*—is drawn from the athletic arena. It pictures the wrestler grappling with his opponent in total, focused exertion. It is the word from which English derives “agony.”

This same word appears across the New Testament in contexts of maximal effort:

Luke 13:24 — “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” The verb is *agōnizomai*. Entering God’s kingdom is not a stroll; it requires focused exertion against everything that would keep you out.

1 Corinthians 9:25 — “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.” The athlete’s discipline is the analogy for the believer’s prayer life.

1 Timothy 6:12 — “Fight the good fight of faith.” The Christian life itself is framed as an agōn—a contest requiring everything you have.

2 Timothy 4:7 — “I have fought the good fight.” Paul’s summary of his entire ministry is cast in the language of the arena. He wrestled to the end.

When Paul applies this word to Epaphras’ prayer life, he is saying something radical: prayer, at its highest intensity, is spiritual combat. It is the arena where the real battles of the Christian life are fought and won—not against God, but alongside God against everything that opposes His purposes.

What the Text Reveals: The Anatomy of Wrestling Prayer

It Is Intense Spiritual Labor

The first thing the text establishes is that genuine intercessory prayer is work. Not casual. Not passive. Not the recitation of a list while the mind wanders. Paul describes prayer as toil—he uses the word *kopiō* in Colossians 1:29, meaning exhausting labor—and then qualifies it: “struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”

This is the critical qualifier. The labor is real, but the energy is not self-generated. The intercessor is not manufacturing spiritual intensity through willpower. He is cooperating with divine power already at work within him. The struggle is genuine; the source of strength is supernatural. This prevents wrestling prayer from becoming a form of spiritual self-effort—as though God responds to the volume of our exertion rather than the sincerity of our dependence.

“For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”
— Colossians 1:29

It Is Other-Centered

Notice what Epaphras was wrestling for: not his own comfort, not his own spiritual experience, not his own circumstances. He was fighting for the spiritual maturity of others. “That you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”

This is intercessory ministry at its deepest level—a man bearing the spiritual weight of an entire church on his knees. He was doing for the Colossians in the invisible realm what a parent does for a child in the visible one: pouring out energy, losing sleep, bearing burden, refusing to quit—all for someone else’s benefit. The most exhausting prayers in Scripture are almost always intercessory: Abraham for Sodom, Moses for Israel, Paul for his kinsmen, Jesus for the world.

It Is Persistent and Habitual

Paul says Epaphras was “always wrestling.” Not occasionally. Not when inspiration struck. Not in seasons of crisis alone. Always. This was the man’s defining rhythm—habitual, disciplined, consistent intercession.

This distinction matters enormously. A single night of intense prayer can be driven by emotion. A lifestyle of wrestling prayer requires something deeper—a settled conviction that the unseen realm is more real than the seen, that intercessory labor produces results even when the results are invisible, and that the God who hears is worth the cost of sustained, daily, relentless approach.

It Is Goal-Oriented

Epaphras did not pray vaguely. He prayed with a specific objective: that the Colossians “may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” Three targets: firmness, maturity, full assurance. Every session of wrestling prayer had a destination.

This is not formula—it is focus. The wrestler does not flail randomly. He grapples with specific holds, specific leverage points, specific strategic intentions. Wrestling prayer brings specific people, specific situations, and specific spiritual objectives before God and refuses to let go until the matter is settled. Jacob’s declaration captures it: “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (Genesis 32:26).

The Core Truth of Part One

Here is the theological foundation this awakening establishes:

Wrestling in prayer is intense spiritual labor—but it is not self-generated labor. It is the costly, sustained cooperation of the human intercessor with the divine energy that God Himself powerfully works within. The struggle is real. The power source is supernatural. The focus is others. The rhythm is always.

This redefines what most believers think prayer is. Prayer at its deepest is not a brief devotional exercise appended to the beginning or end of the day. It is the arena where the real work of the kingdom is done—where souls are fought for, where churches are built up, where bondage is broken, where revival is born.

And the astounding news is this: you are not left to fight alone. The same energy that raised Christ from the dead is the energy that powers the intercessor's prayer. The question is not whether you have enough strength. The question is whether you are willing to enter the arena.

The Question That Closes Part One

Epaphras was commended by an apostle for a single distinguishing mark. Not his preaching. Not his leadership. Not his theological brilliance. His prayer life.

If Paul were writing about you, what would he commend?

Is prayer your arena—or merely your appendix?

Part Two will examine what the wrestler contends against, walk through five biblical examples of costly intercession, and connect wrestling prayer to the revival journey. But before you turn to the practice, settle the theology: prayer is labor. The energy is God's. The focus is others. And the rhythm must be always.

If that conviction takes root, everything in Part Two will land on prepared soil.

A Prayer from the Awakening

Father,

We confess that our prayer lives have been too comfortable. We have treated intercession as a brief formality rather than the costly, sustained, Spirit-empowered labor You have called us to. We have prayed casually for things that deserve agony. We have given minutes to matters that require hours.

Forgive us. And awaken in us the conviction that prayer is not the prelude to the work—it is the work.

Pour Your energy into us—the energy that Paul described, that You powerfully work within those who are willing to toil. Make us wrestlers, not spectators. Make our prayer lives arenas of real labor, empowered not by our resolve but by Your Spirit.

And give us someone to fight for. A name. A church. A generation. A nation. Let us not wrestle in the abstract, but on our knees for specific people You have placed in our lives.

In the name of Christ, who toiled and struggled and poured out everything for us,

Amen.

Scripture Treasury — Part One

Foundational texts on the nature of wrestling prayer

The Arena: Agōnizomai in the New Testament

Colossians 4:12 — “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”

Colossians 1:29 — “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”

Luke 13:24 — “Strive to enter through the narrow door.”

1 Corinthians 9:25 — “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.”

1 Timothy 6:12 — “Fight the good fight of faith.”

2 Timothy 4:7 — “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

The Power Source: Divine Energy, Not Human Effort

Romans 8:26 — “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

Zechariah 4:6 — “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD Almighty.”

Ephesians 3:20 — “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

Philippians 4:13 — “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

The Persistence: Prayer That Does Not Quit

1 Thessalonians 5:17 — “Pray continually.”

Luke 18:1 — “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

Ephesians 6:18 — “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”

Romans 12:12 — “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

The Effectiveness: Wrestling Prayer Produces Results

James 5:16 — “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

Hebrews 4:16 — “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

1 John 5:14–15 — “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

Continued in Part Two: The Arena and the Athletes