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Livia's Legacy

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, I just thank you for the lamb, I thank you for his blood. I thank you for the incredible gift that we have been given that we are able to have our souls washed in that blood. Thank you for the gift of your Son, thank you for the gift of your word, thank you for the gift of your comfort. And Lord, we just want to pray this morning again as we open up your word that your Holy Spirit would be here. We can't make sense of it without it. And so we pray that you would accompany us and guide us and make this of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, one of my favorite statements about God and about life itself is one that my daughter-in-law frequently says. She says, "Life is hard, but God is good." And as most of you know, this has been a hard week for Bethany and for Eric and for our family, and I spent a good deal of time just asking God what am I supposed to do today? And I was just kind of casting about and I just happened to stumble on a sermon that I had preached nine years ago on what turned out to be one day before Livia was born. The sermon was from a series

that I was doing on the book of Colossians and it was about the power of prayer. This was the scripture that I preached from. It was *Colossians 4:2-4: Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.*

Now Paul is speaking to a particular time and a particular place. The church is advancing but it's advancing in the face of stiff opposition. Paul himself is sitting in a jail cell and he's seeking for himself and for those who are advancing the gospel three particular things. He's seeking first for an open door for the gospel. He says, *"And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message."* Secondly, he's praying for the ability to declare the gospel: *"That we may proclaim the mystery of Christ."* And third, for the ability to make that declaration clear. He says, *"Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should."* Now we're not in the same dire circumstance that Paul is. I mean we still live in a country that allows us to express ourselves. We live in the most powerful and wealthy country in the world and so we face a different set of challenges than those that Paul faced. It doesn't mean that we don't have the same opportunities that Paul has. They just come in different packages. So with those goals in

mind, Paul is telling us to pray devotedly, to pray watchfully and to pray thankfully.

Paul says first of all to pray devotedly. Well, the NIV translates it *"Devote yourselves to prayer."* The ESV translates it *"Continue steadfastly in prayer."* Well, the idea in the original language is one of obstinate steadfast devotion to a task, and the task here is one that I've said repeatedly is one of the most difficult tasks for a believer to undertake. The task is prayer. It is priority number one for God's people. *1 Thessalonians* says: *Pray without ceasing.* *1 Timothy* says: *I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.* *Matthew 5* says: *"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* *Matthew 9* says: *"Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."* *Matthew 26* says: *"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* I think it's self-evident that God really, really wants us to pray.

Our scripture this morning says *"devote yourselves to prayer"* because prayer requires the same kind of devotion that you would apply to any difficult task that requires discipline. And what is unique about prayer is that it requires mental and spiritual and

physical discipline. You can't really pray successfully without involving your mind, your body and your spirit. Paul says in *1 Corinthians 14*: *What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also.* So we pray with our minds, we pray with our spirits. And the disciples, they gave proof that we pray with our bodies when their bodies failed Jesus in the worst possible way in the garden of Gethsemane. Remember Jesus asked them to pray, and they promptly fell asleep. Remember what Jesus said to them as he woke them up? He said: *"The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."* I mean we all know what it's like to try to establish a discipline of prayer. Something always comes up, something always distracts, something always seems to make it impossible to devote any real time to prayer. And with the best of intentions, we start out wanting to pray and then we get distracted. Our minds wander, we grow disinterested, even bored, and we wonder to ourselves what is the point of this? I mean if God is really in charge, why does he care if I mumble some words inside my head about what he's going to do anyway?

When it comes to prayer, we, all of us have weak minds, weak bodies and weak spirits. But that doesn't stop God from involving us in prayer. It is a testimony to how incredibly important our prayer is to God that God's Holy Spirit comes alongside us to help us as we struggle through the process of prayer. *Romans 8:26* says:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Why does the Holy Spirit come alongside us and intercede in our weakness? Why doesn't God simply do what he wants to do without having us pray for it? I mean if God is sovereignly guiding every molecule in this universe, what difference does it make if we raise our voices in prayer or if we remain absolutely silent? Isn't God going to do what he's always going to do? Well, the answer is absolutely yes. God's will is never going to be thwarted by our lack of prayer. But there's still a reason why God insists that we pray, and the reason is captured in one word and that word is "warfare." We are at war. I've said it many, many times, it is a proxy war between two great kingdoms, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. And we know that there's a war going on because God told us what happened in ancient history.

In Revelation 12 he says: Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world -- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Well we know that that serpent crash

landed on earth and then he set up shop and then he began his relentless attack on the kingdom of light. This was the serpent that showed up first in the Garden of Eden and introduced Adam and Eve to the idea of sin and rebellion. And ever since that day that he got them to fall, there's been an ongoing war, this proxy war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the serpent. Right there in the garden of Eden after Satan had gotten Adam to fall, God laid out the terms of this war. In *Genesis 3:14* it says: *So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, 'Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* We know at the cross Jesus was struck and he was struck mightily. God in the flesh had come to earth to live out his perfect life and was there offering that life up as a substitute for yours and mine so that by faith in his sacrifice, we could exchange his righteousness for our sin. And when he died on that cross, the serpent had successfully struck his heel, as God said that he would. Three days later when Christ rose from the dead, he had completed the perfect sacrifice. He had rescued us by paying our ransom. He had rendered the serpent's claim on us null and void. He had won the ultimate victory. He had crushed the serpent's head. Well, the serpent now knows that it's just a

matter of time and that he and his minions' days are numbered.

When Jesus confronted the demons that were inside two demon-possessed men of the Gadarenes, they revealed that even they know that their days were numbered. *Matthew 26* says: *When he arrived -- that's Jesus -- at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"* You see, the serpent's days are indeed numbered and they know it. But before their appointed time there is right now a full blown spiritual war that is going on. And this proxy war is fought through creatures of flesh and blood and soul and spirit and they're known as human beings. That's not my opinion, that's a fact of scripture. *Ephesians 6* says: *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* And the reason why God insists over and over and over again that we pray without ceasing is because God in his sovereign good pleasure has decided that it is not he who will directly battle the enemy, it's us. The reason why God commands us to pray without ceasing is because he's ordained the end of all things as well as the means. And the end is that Satan will

absolutely be defeated. The means to that end, though, is the prayers of the saints. I mean to put it another way, if God wants to move a mountain, he doesn't just move a mountain. The very first thing that he does is he moves his people to pray for the mountain to move and then he responds to that request by moving the mountain. When God moves against the powers of darkness, he doesn't just unilaterally move against them, instead he moves the people to pray and then he responds to their prayers. He is the end, we are part of his ordained means to the end. God is in effect telling Satan that he is in for the ultimate of humiliating defeat. That is that it is we humans who will be the source of his undoing. And Paul tells us as much in *1 Corinthians 6*. He says: *Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, in matters pertaining to this life!*

So through prayer we are to engage the power of God to destroy his enemies. *2 Corinthians 10* says: *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.* You see, God delights in using the weakness of man to destroy the strength of the enemy. Paul once said this to his young charge Timothy, he said: *This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare.* God

delights in showing us that his strength is made perfect in our weakness. *Isaiah 40* says: *Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.* See, the reason why Paul says devote yourselves to prayer is because not only is it difficult physically, mentally and spiritually, it's also an activity that the serpent fears and loathes, and he will do anything he can to stop you from praying. God's response to this is to tell us that we have to approach prayer as a matter of warfare. John Piper says this, he says, "I have often said that one of the reasons we feel so weak in our prayer lives is that we have tried to make a domestic intercom out of a wartime walkie talkie. Prayer is not designed as an intercom between us and God to serve the domestic comforts of the saints. It's designed as a walkie talkie for spiritual battlefields. It's the link between active soldiers and their command headquarters, with its unlimited fire-power and air cover and strategic wisdom."

Secondly, because we are at war, we are to approach prayer watchfully. Again he says: *"Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful."* The watchful alertness that Paul is speaking of is demonstrated in the prayer that he's asking for in

our passage this morning. He says: *And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.* So we look at Paul's prayer, we see that Paul's prayer is the product of an alert and vigilant spirit. We see his prayers, they're targeted, they're precise and that's what he wants for our prayers. You know, the old axiom that says "If you aim at nothing, you're bound to hit it" applies just as well to the importance of watchfulness in prayer because without watchfulness, prayer easily descends into platitude. Oh, God bless everyone everywhere, and Jesus, make everything turn out good in the end. That's a wonderful prayer if you're a child. But Paul says when I became a man I put away childish things. And Paul's not asking for childish things here. He's very specific about what he wants from God, he wants an open door for his message. He also wants the ability to proclaim the message with clarity.

So how do we pray strategically? Well, you have to know three things. First you have to know that there's a war on. Secondly, you have to know who it is that we're fighting. And third, you have to know what the objective is. As believers in Jesus Christ we've been given the ultimate privilege of being brought into the war room as it were. We've been given the declaration of war and the battle plan for the war and the ability to see how the war is

going to turn out. Guess what, folks, in the end we win. It's all there in the Bible. The declaration of war is what happened in the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There we learned that our federal corporate head Adam, the one who had perfectly served as a representative, had sold us all out by trading in his sinless perfection for the lie that he would be like God. He gave up his perfection and he embraced sin not just for himself but for every subsequent son or daughter of Adam. And because of Adam we are born at war with our creator. But praise God he didn't leave us in that state. And by grace he has saved us, as *Ephesians 2:8* says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* You know what that text is doing, that text gives us our battle plan for the war. We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. You see, our task, our battle plan is to live out the life that God has given to us for his glory. And as I pointed out so many times before, Paul's prayer at the beginning of the book of Colossians is that we would have God's wisdom so that we might walk the walk that God has given to us, so that we might demonstrate God's character and his attributes which is his way. God's wisdom, God's walk, God's way is our battle plan. And again, we know how the battle's going to

end because we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. So our confidence is in God's ability, it's not in ours, and that frees us up to be watchful, to be vigilant, seeking the most strategic way for God to be glorified in whatever it is that we're doing. And so it calls for highly specific prayer. I mean there's a huge difference in praying, "God, help me spread the gospel in the world," than saying, "God, help me with my next-door neighbor who seems angry all the time and thinks God is unloving and who thinks that she can be justified by living a green life." We look at real life situations. We say, oh, that's too hard. I don't have a seminary degree so I can't cut through all the different layers there. Paul is giving us an example of how he does it. We simply devote ourselves to prayer. We identify an area where we can pray strategically and then we apply the third principle of prayer, we pray steadfastly and devotedly, we pray watchfully and finally we pray thankfully.

Again: *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.* Being devoted and watchful is also exactly the way we are to be thankful. What do you mean by that? Well, one way is by steadfastly examining our lives for the telltale sign of God's grace. Do you know how many times and in how many ways God has blessed your life? Do you know how easy it is to overlook or to

forget what God is doing in your life? Awhile back a friend of mine was struggling with what he thought was God's indifference to his struggles. He said he couldn't feel God's love or God's care for him, and I challenged him to think on God's answers to his prayers. He said I can't think of a single one. Well, I took about three minutes and I was able to walk him through three or four answered prayers that I knew that he had received that he had simply forgotten about. And the more he thought, the more he remembered. I think that's true for most of us. But the blessedness is only the tip of the iceberg. There's another scripture that is two chapters back in the book of Colossians that I quote over and over again, it's *Colossians 2:9-10*, it says this: *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily -- speaking of Christ -- and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.* Just think about that for a second. This is a piece of information that God gives us that can so easily sail right past our heads. God is telling us that his Son Jesus Christ is the fullness of God dwelling in a human body and that now he has given as a gift himself to every one of his children. I mean God is telling us that the creator and the sustainer and the center of the universe has come first in the world as savior and now unto us as the giver of wisdom and grace and comfort and power. We know that it's good that we've been filled with the Spirit of Christ but beyond that we barely know how to scratch the surface of the depth

of that blessing. We think, okay, good deal. We got the Spirit of Christ in us. Okay. Now what? Well, you know, it's almost like you found out that you have a distant cousin who left you a piece of property. And you start examining the piece of property and only as you begin to examine it, you realize it's not just a piece of property. It's a 100,000-acre estate and it's overlooking the ocean and it's got a golf course and a horse farm and a pool and a gym and a basketball court and it sits on an oil field, so it's going to be paid for forever. The more you open it up, the more you look at it, the grander it grows. Well, the more you understand what you've been given in Christ, the more unbelievable it becomes. You might have been thankful when you found out that your cousin left you a piece of property but you've been ignorant of its real value. And when you really begin to find out what it is you've been given, you are absolutely flattened. But that property is nothing. It's not even a tenement compared to the legacy that you've inherited in Christ. *John 14* says: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* And *Revelation 5* says: *"You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve*

our God, and they will reign on the earth." We're going to reign on the earth. Those words alone should be capable of producing in us an unlimited amount of thankfulness, but they don't. We have to work at our thankfulness. We have to work at it because, frankly, much of it we won't see until the kingdom actually comes.

If I told you that your cousin has a great piece of property just waiting to hand over to you but you're going to have to wait to take ownership of it for 60 years, you may have a hard time getting excited about it. But Jesus isn't just talking about something 60 years hence. He's not asking us to wait years to gather up our inheritance. He says in *John 10:10*: "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*" Jesus took great pains to tell us that the kingdom of God was right here and right now and that it was so huge it couldn't be simply explained. He spoke parable after parable to give us hints and inklings of what it might be. He told us it was like a coin that was hidden in a house or a net cast into the sea or a pearl of great price or a treasure that's buried in a field. He's trying to explain something that's beyond mere words and understanding to puny little minds like ours who could never really grasp the enormity of the gift that we've been given. That doesn't mean that we don't experience the kingdom right here and right now. We can and we do. But it's not a mansion on a hill or health or wealth or prosperity or any of those

things but what is infinitely more precious is what Paul said it was in *Colossians 2:9*: *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

Let me just back up a little bit. Let me just go back to our text this morning to try to give you a context rooted in something concrete that we can grasp. Let me just repeat the text. Paul says: *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.* Paul is asking the Colossian Christians to devote themselves continually to prayer, to be ever vigilant, ever watching, ever thankful, being constantly on the lookout for opportunities for an open door for the message of the gospel, looking steadfastly for an opportunity to display the mystery of Christ for which Paul was in chains. Paul prays furthermore for the grace to be able to proclaim that truth with clarity. Now you may think that's well and good for Paul 2,000 years ago writing from prison, but what about 21st century America? How do we do that today? Well, I submit to you that this past week we've had the privilege of witnessing this very thing unfold before our eyes. I think it's safe to say everybody in this body knows who Livia Harget is. Livia is my granddaughter,

who nine years ago this very month was overdue, who had Trisomy 18 and was not expected to live long after she was born. Now there's a website out there called Trisomy18.org. It has a legacy page in which you can pour out your story about your child. Nine years ago Eric and Bethany did just that. They poured out their hearts about everything that had taken place over the nine months that they spent bearing Livia in the womb, and I read their account and I cried. Not so much out of sadness but more out of sadness and joy and amazement at the strength and the power and the mercy and the wisdom of God that I saw pouring out of Eric and Bethany. Eric described all of the feelings of being a brand new dad, then he took us through all of the fears and the struggles and the sadness of learning that his daughter had a deadly condition. He also took us through the journey that Christ had been leading him in throughout this trial.

When they first learned that Livia had serious complications, Eric wrote this, he said, "I felt God's grace given to us in abundance. I also felt God give us the wisdom to make a difficult decision so quickly. God was with us all the way." Eric took us through the process of more tests, more decisions, more diagnoses until they finally learned that it was Trisomy 18, and this is what he wrote: "Bethany and I decided that night that this was going to be the hardest thing we ever went through, but God picked us for a reason

to bear this baby girl even though 97 percent of infants diagnosed with this disorder are aborted. Abortion never crossed our mind. She was our little girl. We saw her. She had her hands, feet, spine, brain, heart, lungs, kidneys, et cetera. We saw our baby girl who was a life. She was going to be given the chance she deserved. We decided that we were chosen for this girl and this girl was chosen for us and we would glorify God in the end somehow. I told Bethany that when we look back 5, 10, 15 years down the road, all I wanted to be able to say is 'That was the toughest trial we could imagine that changed our lives forever, but we glorified God in the midst of that trial.'

Well, it's nine years later, and the trial has ended. As I read the words that Eric had written, I started thinking about the passage that I was studying for the message that day and then it hit me that Eric's words are the living embodiment of what Paul was trying to say. Let me repeat them. He says: *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.* Eric and Beth knew how incredibly powerful praying was. They had been steadfast not just in praying themselves but in seeking others to pray for them and with them. Paul in our text this morning asked for that level of

steadfastness in prayer, but then he asked for God to open a door for his message. He asked that God would open a door so that they could proclaim the mystery of Christ, and that's exactly what God gave to Beth and Eric, an open door through which they could proclaim the mystery of Christ.

Eric wrote this nine years ago just about Livia's life in the womb. He said: "In February, our church family made a scrapbook of letters they wrote to us and Livia. Livia had weight on this earth. My mom was coming to church with us every Sunday. Livia has weight. I was closer to members in my church and started a friendship with a correction officer that I knew in high school who was now saved by Jesus Christ. Livia has weight. We made a connection with a couple from the police department that was also facing a tough birth of their child. Livia has weight. Bethany was able to connect with her cousin who was also facing a tough pregnancy. Livia has weight. God was connecting so many dots through Livia. My little girl was changing our lives. We are proud parents."

I know for a fact that Eric is a great cop but I also know for a fact that he's not a wordsmith. One of the last things that Eric would claim to be is a skilled writer but I don't know of a writer who could put that better than Eric did that day. There was a

section after Eric's letter for folks to make a comment and the Samsons made this comment: "While studying the third commandment, 'thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain', I learned that the literal meaning of 'vain' is 'light' or worthless; and the literal meaning of its opposite, 'glory' is 'weighty' or having great worth and value. Hence, the command to take God and the things of God as glorious (of great worth) and weight because they are and not as vain or worthless. With this in view, the meaning of Eric's own wording can be seen in its fullest sense -- 'Livia has weight.' Livia has great worth and value. And whatever God is doing with, thru, by, and for Livia has something of glory in it -- though we may not understand it. Consequently your hope that God be glorified in this is certain to be fulfilled. Love, Carla and Don."

Well, that weight, that weight that Livia has is the reason for all of us to be here. It's to glorify God. The sad fact is that children like Livia are throw-aways in today's culture. The pressure to abort an in-utero diagnosis of Trisomy 18 is intense and very few babies even make it to birth. Livia was a grand exception to the rule because Beth and Eric don't play by this culture's rules. And Livia, it turned out, didn't play by biology's rules. She shouldn't have made it through the first two months, let alone nine years. But it was mom and dad who made the

difference. Loving Livia was extremely costly for Beth and Eric. They essentially dedicated their lives toward caring for her, advocating for her and demanding that others pay attention to the value inherent in her life. Sweet Livia was always sweet Livia, but the physical demands of her care were enormous. It essentially redirected their lives for the last nine years and they were happy to have it do so. There were times though when both Beth and Eric admitted that the stress and strain of loving Livia sometimes approached the breaking point. God always gave them the grace to keep loving even when it was extremely hard.

I was talking to my daughter Sarah about this just yesterday and she observed that Beth and Eric are a picture of how God loves us. Sarah suggested that we are far more difficult to love than Livia could ever be, and yet God never reaches his breaking point with us. Livia's struggle was always physical. Our struggle is moral and intellectual and emotional and physical and yet the love of God remains a constant in our lives. Sarah pointed out that just like Beth and Eric demonstrated a love that didn't waiver depending on circumstance, so, too, does God demonstrate the same kind of love with us. And once again, I thought of our text this morning. *And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.* And I realized that for the last nine years that's exactly what

Beth and Eric have been doing. They've been proclaiming the mystery of Christ. The Christ that is in them. The mystery of Christ that Livia's life proclaimed was that God works all things together for good, even Trisomy 18. And again, it brought me back nine years to the statement that Eric wrote, not knowing at all what the future would hold, I'll just repeat it. He said, "We decided that we were chosen for this girl and this girl was chosen for us and we would glorify God in the end somehow. I told Bethany that when we look back, 5, 10, 15 years down the road, all I wanted to be able to say is 'that was the toughest trial we could imagine that changed our lives forever, but we glorified God in the midst of that trial.'"

See, only eternity is going to be able to tell the power of the life of Livia in the hands of parents who chose to use their lives to glorify God. That's one of the things that they didn't want when we sat and we met and he said, please don't make it about us. We don't want to hear what great parents you are, blah, blah, blah. I get it. I mean Eric and Beth would be the very first ones to tell you that they're just ordinary folks, but I'd be the first one to tell you that God wants to do extraordinary things through ordinary folks. And he wants us praying steadfastly, watchfully and thankfully because he's got great and mighty tasks for every one of us to undertake. We've just been privileged to see one of

those mighty tasks take place in our midst, to see the power and grace of God in action.

Beth and Eric spent the last nine years demonstrating that Livia indeed had weight, but Livia's life was all about the weight of glory that God wove through a little girl and her parents who trusted him enough to let his strength be perfected in their weakness. For Livia that physical weakness included an intestinal re-section, a prolonged battle with respiratory illnesses and finally another battle this past summer with a lengthy and painful insertion of a pacemaker. That battle ended last Thursday morning. And Livia has now been given everything that the curse took away. Everything sad in her life has come undone.

The one thing that came through in all of the trials was that Livia was a fighter. And when the pain was able to be eased, there was always this smile that would come over her face. I saw it move doctors and nurses, believers and unbelievers alike, virtually everyone that she came in contact with, they demonstrated the weight that Livia actually had, and the glory this little girl has been able to bring to her savior in her nine short years is greater than some people, heck, most people will have in a lifetime. Some of those folks have shared how they've been strengthened, seeing the grace of God working through Eric and Beth. Some of them have

been inspired, some have been encouraged, some have been convicted but all have given testimony to the grace and glory of God. And over and over again, just like Paul prayed through Livia, God opened the door to proclaim the mystery of Christ. Again, Paul says: *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.*

Be steadfast, be watchful, be thankful in prayer, said Paul, the goal is to have a door opened so that the mystery of Christ could be proclaimed. Paul goes on to say: *Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.* That's exactly what God has done through the willing spirits of Eric and Bethany and Livia. They have proven that life is indeed hard but God is indeed good. And we are witnesses of that this morning. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for the journey that you took Beth and Eric and Livia on some nine years ago. I thank you, Lord, for the grace that enabled them to glorify you in it. Lord, I just, I think of Eric's words. He just wanted to look back and know that they glorified you in it. Lord, you have supplied abundantly the grace necessary for that. You have enabled them to proclaim the mystery of Christ, that all things do work together for good, including

Trisomy 18. Thank you, Lord, for the privilege you've given them. Thank you for the privilege you've given to us. And, Lord, I pray in these next few days that you would continue to give us and Eric especially and Beth the grace that they need to proclaim that mystery once again. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.