

**Text:** Colossians 4:2-4

**Title:** Devoted to Prayer

**Truth:** Christians are supposed to be a praying people.

**Date/Location:** Sunday January 10, 2016 at FBC

## **Introduction**

Christians have responsibilities in several areas of their lives: to know true doctrine and not be deceived by false teachers (Colossians 1:1-2:19), to be involved in personal sanctification (2:20-3:12), inter-personal relationships (3:13-15), corporate worship (3:16-17), marriage (3:18-19), family life (3:20-21), and employment (3:22-4:1). All these responsibilities must be combined in a wise and God-honoring way so as to be operational in our lives. But there is another area that, in a way, is foundational to these, and that is prayer. It is impossible to faithfully carry out our Christian responsibilities without praying.

## **I. Be a Prayerful Person**

A. Continue Earnestly in Prayer. This means to persist or be busily engaged in prayer, to be devoted to it. There is no suggestion that the Colossians were necessarily AWOL on this, but they were to make sure they didn't go that way. Prayer was to be a devotion of their lives. Consider passages that have the same idea: Acts 1:14, 6:4; Romans 12:12. All of these have to do with prayer. Romans 13:6 uses the same word in a different context, about civil servants whose job is to attend to the protection of the populace. That is to say, being devoted to prayer is taking prayer to be your job. It is!

B. Be Vigilant in Prayer. The simplest way to say it is this: stay awake! Be alert, like for an imminent event. 1 Peter 5:8 talks about the devil looking for people to devour; therefore we are to "watch out" = be vigilant. In prayer it means to "pay attention," to be observant of things going on around you (and report anything suspicious!)

It's sad that I can illustrate the idea this way, but I think we all can relate. Have you been forgetful to pray about a certain thing at times? Have you ever said, "I should have prayed about that!" or "I can't believe I haven't been asking God on that" or "Why didn't I start this endeavor with prayer?" or "I said I would pray about that, but then I forgot!"

C. Be Thankful in Prayer. We need to go back and visit Colossians 3:17 and re-consider this: if God wants us to do everything with thanks to Him,

and He tells us to devote ourselves to prayer with thanksgiving, do you think he means it? Do you think he is sick and tired of our grumbling?

## **II. Pray for Your Pastor and Missionaries**

- A. I decided to focus this section on modern application because we cannot now pray for Paul and his missionary team and effort. But we can pray for those we know who are similarly situated.
- B. Pastors need prayer. Sometimes I don't know what to do next, or have too much to do, or I face a perplexing problem, or don't know how to address this or that person, or how to lead this, or to whom to delegate that, or should I just do something myself? In addition, how to lead the church to maximize its potential for gospel ministry? Shall I prod at this point or plead at that point or just keep quiet? So many decisions...
- C. Pray for God to open opportunities for the Word
  - 1. For Paul, he needed some extra-ordinary help because he was in chains. How to get out the message and continue his apostolic ministry when under arrest?
  - 2. I'm not convinced that we should pray for tons of open doors when there are so many available all around us and we're not walking through them—or even willing to do so. Of any place on earth right now, we are in the land of opportunity for the gospel. We have freedom, and the need is tremendous because the United States is one of the largest mission fields with some very un-evangelized areas. But it is not wrong to ask for opportunities and for help to make use of them. On this front, we need to remind ourselves that there are doors that are closed. The liberal, humanistic government is closing doors all around us in the public square, in schools, and the like. So in that sense we need to pray for open doors to people, perhaps through other means than what were available before.
  - 3. Just be sure to know that when you pray this way, you should expect an answer from God, and you will have to put your hands to the work to help pastors and missionaries get the job done.
- D. Pray for God's ministers to speak the Word of Christ
  - 1. Notice that Paul is entirely comfortable speaking about God doing something *and* the missionary doing something. He prays for God to open the door, and for God's ministers to speak. In other words, two parties must be active. God has decided to arrange things so that He must act to open doors and we must act for the gospel to go through

those doors. This means that Christians are co-laborers with God (1 Cor. 3:9). The idea of being a co-worker with and for God is powerful, comforting, and encouraging.

2. Dear Pastor—God doesn't open doors for you to speak your own ideas or pop psychology or to address "felt needs" or politics or manmade books. He opens doors for you to speak the **Word of Christ**.

E. Pray for God's ministers to speak the Word clearly and boldly

1. Mystery of Christ. The content of the message was hidden for ages in the past (Col. 1:26) but has now been made known by God. It consists of the message of Jesus Christ – the good news about Him, and that He will take Gentiles to Himself—not only Jews—and will form them into a body, the church, and actually dwell in them by His Spirit! This life-changing message is what the Christian pastor and missionary has to offer.
2. Manifest. In general, the word "manifest" means to make something known by word of mouth or deed. Here it is obviously speaking about word of mouth. We must make God's message known clearly. It has already been revealed, but many people don't know it yet. Our way of speaking it may be simple, not eloquent, direct, not flowery, not delivered in "words of man's wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:13). But it needs to be clear!
3. It is easy to obfuscate the message by not knowing it or not communicating clearly. Do not equivocate or be ambiguous or ambivalent! It is easy to be timid when facing prison or persecution or "political correctness" pressure. It is easy to shade away from an unpopular message or to focus on a more popular one. Pray God's ministers don't do those things!
4. Boldness. I am actually borrowing this from Ephesians 6:19, a parallel passage. Paul asks that he would preach outspokenly, frankly, fearlessly, plainly. And that he would do this despite chains or the threat of chains. Actually Paul was already in chains, so this was a reality for him. We're not at that point in the USA—yet. But we can pray that we won't come to that point any time soon. Also, there are many countries where the gospel is illegal to one extent or another, and imprisonment or even death is a possibility for Christian people. Look at Iran, and many other places. Pray!

### III. Applications

- A. Pray for yourself that you would make use of abundant opportunities to speak of the Lord to people you know and meet. Pray that you will be bold, not timid. Pray that you will make the true gospel clear as you ought. Admittedly you do not have a commission like an apostle; nor are most called to be a pastor or missionary. But even though a pastor is supposed to do work of ministry and evangelism, part of his job is to prepare the saints to do their own ministry work to build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). The prayer modeled here is not prayer for self and our own things, but prayer for the work of God in us.
- B. Pray together. There is a corporate element to this prayer because the Bible is commanding prayer of the “plural” group of God’s people. Praying together has benefits:
1. You learn how to pray by hearing examples.
  2. You learn and can model the spirit of earnestness in prayer.
  3. You are reminded of things to pray about by hearing others.
  4. You are helped to be watchful by others reminding you of how God answered their prayers.
  5. You are helped to pray on better things when you hear the prayers of others that hopefully elevate your prayer life to more than “health and wealth and myself.”

### Conclusion

Make one or two concrete decisions right now as to what you are going to do to put into practice what we have studied. How are you going to continue earnestly in prayer? How are you going to maintain better vigilance in prayer? How are you going to be more active in praying for our missionaries and your pastor and other pastors? How are you going to be active in praying together with the church? How are you going to speak of Christ? To whom? What “doors” need to be opened? How are you going to express thanksgiving in prayer? How can you pray for those who are in prison for their faith?

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