

Sermon: 'Be devoted to prayer...' Colossians 4:2-6 (Part 14)

IN *Opportunities to connect and pray as a group*

1. What is the biggest challenge you have in your prayer life?

UP *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

1. Take time to review the focus of Colossians 1-3. Recall that the purpose for Paul's writing this letter to the people at Colossae was because of the danger of false teachers (Col 2:2-4).
What are some key words and phrases you find in Colossians 1:15-2:5 which describe who Jesus is?
2. Pastor Henry identified the three main focal points of Col 4:2 as:
Devote yourselves to prayer; Be watchful; Be thankful.
What significance is it that these words follow Colossians 3 with its focus on living out the Christian life?
3. In the following verses, what different aspects of prayer are pointed out?
2 Chron 16:9; Prov 15:8; Is 62:6-7; Mt 6:6; 28:20; Eph 6:18;
1 Thess 5:17, 18; Rev 5:8.
4. Consider the many warnings that Pastor Henry gives to be 'alert to' (watchful). Why did Paul need to include this reminder for the reader?
Are there other warnings you could add to the list?
5. Paul says 'be thankful' (Col 4:2). Also note, Col 3:15-17 and 1 Thess 5:17, 18.
Why did Paul include this reminder for the reader?
6. Paul models his instructions to pray by starting his letter describing his prayer for the Colossians (Col 1:3-14) For what was he most thankful?

OUT *Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community*

1. Which of the 'warnings' is the most applicable to your prayer life?
2. What is one thing you will do to address the challenge you identified about your prayer life?
3. How can our group support you in your prayer life?

UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

THE WORD (NIV)

2 Chronicles 16:9

⁹For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war."

Proverbs 15:8

The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

Isaiah 62:6-7

I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, ⁷and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

Matthew 6:6

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 28:20

... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

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.

Colossians 4:2

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

1 Thessalonians 5:17,18

Pray continually, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Revelation 5:8

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

Sermon Study Summary

The Apostle Paul starts out this chapter by challenging us to be devoted in prayer. God wants His kingdom to come, His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, and He has chosen to do it primarily through our obedience and prayers. Prayer changes things - it is powerful and effective. Prayer changes hearts, circumstances, attitudes and relationships; helps us face daily hardships by healing physical, emotional and spiritual problems; restores broken marriages and relationships; meets financial needs. Prayer can do anything God can do. But here is an important distinction to note. It is not prayer that is powerful, it is God that is powerful, and He has chosen to do His work and release His power through us. Neither is the person whose prayers are powerful and effective a perfect person, but one who has surrendered TO Jesus, has been forgiven BY Jesus, is seeking to live FOR Jesus; and is a friend OF Jesus and devoted to praying to Jesus.

Many of us think prayer as something to be done in emergency situations such as critical illness, job loss, or clear and imminent danger. Of course, it is right and good to pray in such situations, because God does want us to bring our needs and burdens to Him. Paul, however, challenges us to **devote** ourselves to prayer. To be "devoted" to something means that it is important to our daily life, to care deeply about, to give time to, and to be committed to it. Paul describes this commitment in Eph 6:18. Prayer is not an add-on to our lives. It is the centre, and also part of the rhythm and routine of life, just as eating and sleeping are. It is not a ritual for a time or an occasion. Prayer is being consciously aware of God with us at all times, and interacting with Him all through the day. Prayer is relationship, friendship, and communication with God that grows as we talk and listen to Him. A natural inclination for us is to interact with someone we are close to, are friendly with. If we believe Jesus' promise in Matt 28:20 that He is with us always, would we not want to talk with Him? Would He not want to hear from us? Instead we often have the mindset that we are doing God a favour by not bothering Him with our daily problems and needs – or only coming to him as a last resort. God did not create us to ignore us, nor to have us ignore Him. He created us to be in relationship with us. He does not tire of us or of our problems, does not tune us out, does not need a break. NO; God loves it when we come to Him, He delights in our prayers, and He is pleased when we pray (Prov 15:8). He invites us to keep coming to Him and asking for what we need (Is 62:6-7). He is constantly looking to strengthen us (2 Chron 16:9), looking for hearts totally devoted to Him so that He can strengthen, empower, bless and guide. When we make prayer our priority and give God our best time, we are declaring that it is not our gifts or efforts, but our PRAYERS that release God's wisdom, direction, and power in our lives.

A. "Being devoted to prayer" looks like this in practical terms: **1)** Spending time alone with God each day (Matt 6:6); asking God to speak to you through the Scriptures, to reveal truth, remind us of promises, to encourage, to give wisdom; to point out attitudes or idols to confess or release; to pour out and share your heart with Him, to celebrate and thank Him for the joy and goodness in your life, to ask for help in your struggles, fears and worries, your longings and desires – keeping no secrets, holding nothing back. **2)** Communicating with God during the day (1 Thess 5:17); taking everything to God in prayer: perhaps an accident while driving, even if you don't know those involved; a knotty problem at work; a health concern mentioned in passing; a person's name coming to mind; stress over meeting with someone; a sudden overwhelming feeling of joy at the goodness of God: pray right then and there, sing a song of praise and thanksgiving. These are just a few examples of what it looks like to be devoted to prayer; to have a living, growing relationship in moments alone and then all day long.

B. Next, Paul says that we are to **"be watchful"** in prayer, to be alert. **1)** Alert to other people's needs, writing down their prayer requests to pray about them daily or weekly. **2)** Alert to things that hinder you from praying (James 4:2). **3)** Alert to the natural tendency within us to NOT pray. **4)** Alert to our pride when we are too proud to say to a friend or spouse – let's pray right now. **5)** Alert to things that distract us from spending time in prayer. **6)** Alert to the tendency to give up praying, feeling that their prayers are not making a difference. Note that in Matt 7:7, the verbs are all in the present tense and in the command mood: persist in prayer. **7)** Alert to doubt and unbelief in the reality of warfare in the spiritual realm. As Christians, we know that the Bible teaches that we live in two realms – the natural earthly realm and the spiritual heavenly realm. But sometimes we don't pray for God's protection because we don't really believe that there are demonic forces at work; we tend to pray more earnestly for protection and healing from physical damage, illness and hurt. **8)** Alert to a tendency to not pray about small things – God often has a larger purpose in mind; our calling is to be obedient, to pray, to trust him.

C. Finally, Paul tells us to **"be thankful"** in prayer (Col 3:15 – be thankful; v.16 – with gratitude; v.17 – giving thanks.) Part of praying continually (1 Thess 5:17) is when, all through the day, we give thanks for who He is, what He has done, and what He is doing in our lives. Being thankful is reminding ourselves of the greatness and power of God in what He is able to accomplish; of His goodness; and that His answer to our requests will be for our ultimate good and His ultimate glory. But most importantly, being thankful in prayer means that we never forget what Jesus did for us (Col 1:12). Many people in our culture would say that if they got to heaven, it was because they were good people who tried to do good things. We, as Christians, know we cannot earn our way to heaven, but that we will be there because someone put us there: by rescuing us, by paying the price for our redemption and qualifying us not only to enter heaven, but to be a friend of God. As an illustration of this in today's world, a group of Christians intervening in the brutal civil war in Sudan raised enough money to buy 200 women and children at a cost of \$33 per person in order to be able to purchase their freedom from enslavement and torture by their captors. Jesus paid a costly price to redeem and save us; He paid with His life and His blood on the cross. Let us remember and give thanks, always.