

We will be looking at verses 2 to 4 today. We started our new series last week called “Essentials”. What we are going to continue to look at today and the next few weeks are “Essentials of the Christian Life!” Today, what we are going to talk about and what we are going to learn about is the Essential of Prayer! I would say to you, alongside of the reading and studying of God’s Word, prayer is an absolute essential to have a strong and close relationship with God.

Prayer is one of the greatest privileges that God has given us and probably the least used by the majority of Christians. It is through prayer, by which God moves and acts on our behalf. It is through prayer that God speaks to us, directs us, comforts us and yes, at times chastises us. Think about it! How can we have access to the sovereign, holy God that spoke all things into existence? Yet, that is precisely what prayer does for us. It brings us into an intimate conversation with our loving and gracious Heavenly Father. And it all starts with the prayer of repentance and asking God to forgive us of our sins and surrender our lives in obedience to our savior Jesus Christ. May we get a fervor to pray and ask God to move upon his behalf to glorify his righteous name.

Let’s look at some characteristics of prayer that we will see in our Scripture for today. Colossians Chapter 4 verses 2 through 4. Let’s read!

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

***<sup>2</sup> Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I am in prison <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.***

Now the Apostle Paul reminds us of something in these verses about when he wrote this letter. Paul is in prison. He is under house arrest in Rome, chained to a Roman soldier 24 hours a day. Colossians is one of the four letters Paul wrote under arrest in Rome. The other three were, Ephesians, Philipians and Philemon.

The Apostle Paul is ending this letter as he started, with the mention of prayer. Turn over to Colossians 1 and look at verses 3 to 5. The Apostle Paul wrote in verse 3, ***“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.”*** Then he commends them for:

1. Their faith in Jesus Christ
2. Their Love for the saints, or their brothers and sisters in Christ
3. Their obedience to the Truth of God’s Word, the Gospel

Ladies and Gentlemen, right there is a recipe for a strong, thriving and mature church. Actively showing their faith in Jesus, loving each other and being obedient to God’s Word. And because of their obedience we see the following in verses 9 and 10.

***Colossians 1:9-10***

***And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.***

I believe Paul knew something here. A church or even an individual for that matter. If they are going to be that obedient to the Lord, they are going to need to be prayed for and they are going to need to pray. Because Satan is not going to like a sold-out follower of Jesus Christ seeking him in prayer. Satan will try to sow discord, confusion and a compromise of the truth. That is what Paul brought in the ensuing verses in Chapter 1, 2 and 3.

Remember the image from our True/False series from this letter?



If we are to be a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and to be obedient to the truth of his word we need to pray and to pray for each other. If we are to be a husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, friend and disciple of the Lord Jesus according to the truth of God's Word we need prayer. That is why we see Paul's exhortation to prayer in verse 2 of Chapter 4.

***Colossians 4:2***

***<sup>2</sup> Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.***

Now, if you are like me you have heard many messages about prayer, primarily using what is called, "The Lord's Prayer" in the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 6 and the Gospel of Luke Chapter 11, as the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. And what Jesus gave them would be better described as, "The Model Prayer!"

Out of that model prayer you have probably heard those verses broken down in this way, ACTS.

**A – Adoration**

**C – Confession**

**T – Thanksgiving**

**S – Supplication or Requests**

That is good advice and good way to come before God. But I want to focus on what Paul is alluding to at the beginning of verse 2. ***Continue steadfastly!!***

As we have taught many times the New Testament was written in the Greek language. And in most cases what is two words in the English it is one word in the Greek. The Greek word for Continue Steadfastly is:

***Proskartereo – To be earnest towards, to be diligent, to devote oneself.***

A word I would use here is to persevere, as well as to be strong and to be locked in. Continue steadfastly! You are committed and you are going to endure. But where have we seen this before? Are there examples for us? You better believe it. It is all over the place in Scripture.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians Chapter 5 verses 16 to 18.

***1 Thessalonians 5:16-18***

***<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.***

Again, we see this exhortation from the Apostle Paul to continuously pray. What this brings is a realization in our lives that this is a way of life. There is a God-consciousness in our lives that as we come into different situations in our lives we know where to go to our source for an answer, direction, power and patience as we wait on the Lord.

But we don't want to wait. We want to throw our requests out and have God answer them right away. Come on God! Let's hurry up here! Ladies and Gentlemen what I am seeing here once again is that we need to be reminded it is not all about us. It is not about our wants, our likes, our preferences but it is about seeing the power of God move as his glory is manifested in our lives and in our midst each time we meet on Sunday or Wednesday and in all our outreaches in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the world.

Here is the question? Are we willing to grab hold of God and not let go until he moves on his behalf? Are we willing to grab hold of God until we experience God's power in our lives and people's lives around us so that Jesus is praised above all things? Is there a willingness to wait on God to move?

We see this in Acts Chapter 1 verses 12-14.

***Acts 1:12-14***

***<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup> All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.***

Jesus had risen from the grave and walked this earth for another 40 days and now has ascended to heaven. Jesus told his disciples to go back to Jerusalem and wait as the Holy Spirit was going to come soon. They devoted themselves to pray. Guess what? Same word that is used in Colossians. They were persevering, they were diligent and persistent in prayer as they were expecting Jesus to do what he said he would do.

Staying in Acts look at Chapter 2 verse 42.

***Acts 2:42***

***<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.***

Who is the they at the beginning of that verse? Look at verse 41 if you have your Bible. If you don't have your Bible, I will describe it to you. Peter had just preached at the day of Pentecost and 3000 were saved described in verse 41. The, "THEY" in that verse, are those that were saved. They devoted themselves to Prayer! What we see here is a faithfulness in prayer.

Faithful, diligent prayers bring results where God is honored, and his faithfulness is on display.

Daniel was faithful to pray three times a day! Nehemiah was faithful to pray as they were rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem!

Also, what we can learn from these portions of Scripture is to pray with an expectation.

What were they expecting as they were praying in the upper room? The Holy Spirit to come! Did he? Yes. What was the expectation of the believers that were saved after Peter preached? More people to be saved.

Turn back to Colossians and let's look at the other part of verse 2.

### **Colossians 4:2**

***<sup>2</sup> Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.***

We are to continue steadfastly but we are also to be watchful. We are to be alert to what is around us. There is an understanding that prayer is also a weapon we fight with against Satan. Ephesians 6 describes the warfare we are in. ***For we wrestle not 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.***

Listen to what it says in verse 18 of Chapter 6:

### **Ephesians 6:18**

***Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.***

Being watchful means, we are looking for things to be truly praying for. We are sensitive to the happenings around us. This doesn't mean we are walking around constantly muttering words under our breath. It again is that we are in communion with God throughout our day. As people ask us to pray, we actually pray. We just don't give it lip service we come before God and pray on their behalf.

Jesus makes us very aware to be watchful of the times we live in.

In Matthew 26:41, Jesus said - ***Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.***"

Isn't that usually the case? We know to pray, we want to pray but our flesh is so weak, and we are so tired, and we are so busy, doing, doing, doing that we forget to be still and know that he is God! I'm not talking just about our house. I'm talking about God's house too. We get so caught up in what we think we are supposed to do that we forget to ask God what he wants!

In Matthew 24:42 - ***Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.***

Did you see the reasons to be watchful? Not to enter into temptation so we will not sin! Also, to be ready for Jesus' return. Do we really want Jesus to come back and find us unfaithful to his word? But if we are being watchful, we are looking outward and not inward. If we are looking outward, then we are not looking at ourselves and we just might not be so selfish in our prayers.

As we look at verse 2 again, we see another characteristic of prayer and that is to be thankful.

### **Colossians 4:2**

***<sup>2</sup> Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.***

A prayerful believer is a thankful believer. If we have truly repented of our sins and surrendered our life to Jesus Christ, we have a lot to be thankful for, don't we?

Our salvation! That we are saved from hell! Thankful that he has given us prayer so that we can know him, and we can have access to him through our prayers.

Just as being watchful can do, in taking our focus off of ourselves, so can being thankful in our prayers. Being thankful can dispel worry, it can dispel fear, once we start naming all those things, we are thankful for, we start seeing how God blesses us each and every day. Remember that wonderful hymn.

### ***Count Your Blessings!***

**Count your blessings, Name them one by one  
Count your blessings, See, what God has done  
Count you blessing, Name them one by one  
Count your many blessings, See, What God has DONE!**

But what issues arise due to the lack of prayer? I'll mention 3 things.

1. We already touched on it. It makes us susceptible to sin and not walking in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It keeps us away from the intimate relationship with God that he desires for us.
3. It shows a lack of faith and trust in the character of God.

Let's reverse that and see what praying continuously and being watchful and being thankful does?

1. We will walk in the power of the Holy Spirit that we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is our spiritual worship. Not being conformed to this world but being transformed by the renewal of our minds, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2
2. We will have an intimate relationship with God because we are continuously talking with him.
3. We will show great faith and trust in his character because we take him at his word, and we are obedient to the call of prayer.

In Matthew Chapter 6 Jesus said twice, "And when you pray", "And when you pray"! So, it is a command. I am not talking about saying prayers over our meals. Which is good! What we may call night-time prayers with our children! Which is good! But what we read throughout the Old Testament where God said many times, just like in Deuteronomy Chapter 4:29, Moses is speaking to the nation of Israel as they were getting ready to go into the promised land:

#### ***Deuteronomy 4:29***

***But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.***

How do we seek after him? His word and in prayer! With all our heart! It always goes back to the heart doesn't it? I love what it says in Philippians Chapter 4 verses 4 to 7. This is the effect of prayer on our life.

#### ***Philippians 4:4-7***

***<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with***

*thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

If we are praying in everything, then we are praying continuously. The important part of the heart comes into play again as prayer helps protect our hearts and minds as this speaks to that spiritual battle, we are in.

I want to come back to this terminology that prayer gives us access to God that I mentioned earlier. As I said at the beginning. Prayer is one the greatest “Essentials” God has given us for our Christian life.

And he has given us a guide for our prayers in this Word. Prayer gives us a direct line of communication to the sovereign, holy righteous creator of the universe. As I was preparing and praying over the sermon, I was reminded of this book that I read. So, I went to my bookcase at home and pulled the book back out. I don’t use many quotes when I speak but I could not get away from this one from John MacArthur from his book, **Lord, Teach Me To Pray.**

*“How can anyone have intimate access to the holy God of the universe? Yet, that is precisely what we have when we go to God in prayer. And not just access, but unlimited divine resources – more than enough for our needs – freely available from a loving heavenly Father. Through prayer we encounter what it means to enter the presence of the infinitely awesome and majestic God and yet feel welcome there because He longs to have us with Him, telling Him all the issues of our hearts, casting all our cares on Him because He cares for us.”*  
*John MacArthur*

Prayer is fellowship with God. It creates an intimacy with God so that we can know God and his character. But it is not us telling God what to do. It is us learning of God so we can be obedient to the call in our lives as true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in a battle and we fight through prayer and there is a purpose behind our prayers as we ask God to show his will and his strength.

I believe we are reminded of this in verses 3 and 4.

*Colossians 4:3-4*

*<sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

We read the verse in Philippians about making our requests made known to God. Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

In James Chapter 4 on Wednesday’s we have learned, “We have not because we ask not.” But, pertaining to that verse, it also says, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.”

Remember the first part of the model prayer.

*Our Father, Who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name  
Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done  
On Earth as it is in Heaven*

What we see in verses 3 and 4 is to be purposeful, yes, but also to be specific. Look at the verses again.

*Colossians 4:3-4*

*<sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

Look at Paul's request. What more specific can we be than to pray for each other. I love the way this ends up. There is verse after verse that talks about praying for each other. But, what more important request can we make for anyone. That God would open doors, opportunities, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is the "Mystery of Christ" that Paul is talking about here. The Gospel, of who Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith in him. To proclaim and teach the Word of God. The grass withers, the flower fades. But the Word of God lasts forever!!

I mentioned this at the beginning. Paul is under house arrest in Rome. He isn't asking to be freed, He isn't asking for people to pray that he doesn't die. He is praying that he and those with him will have an opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The reason he is there in the first place. And that they can be clear of speech when sharing the Gospel.

I pray that today God has spoken to you about how Essential prayer is to our life as a true believer. So, I am going to leave you with a challenge today. I am going to challenge you to pray. I am going to challenge you to pray continuously. I am going to challenge you to be watchful and seek out things, people to pray for. I am going to challenge you to pray with thanksgiving.

I am going to challenge you to be purposeful and specific in your prayers. I am going to give you some specifics.

- 1. Pray that God would give you a passion to pray.*
- 2. Pray that God would break the stronghold of sin in our lives. Pride, Arrogance, Selfishness, Slander, Sexual sins.*
- 3. Pray for God's presence to move upon the lost in our services.*
- 4. Pray that each and everyone of us would have open doors to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*
- 5. Pray for each other! Pray for God's spiritual and physical protection.*

Remember!!! In prayer we are going before the sovereign, holy God of the universe and he has given us access to him through his Son Jesus Christ! What a privilege!