

Persistence and Watchfulness in Prayer

- Watchfulness is a dynamic, proactive stance of spiritual alertness, like a sentinel guarding a fortress.

Effective Prayer is Persistent

- Continue steadfastly in **prayer**, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Col. 4:2
- Rejoice always, **pray** without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thess. 5:16-18

Watchfulness

- Not passive waiting, but an active awareness
- Disciplined effort to protect one's soul from sin and to pursue holiness.
- View all of life as a spiritual battlefield.
- **Mark 13:33: “Be on guard, keep awake, for you do not know when the time will come.”** This underscores eschatological urgency—Christ's return could be imminent.
- We must be alert to our enemy at all times.

Theological Context

- While holding to predestination, we see watchfulness as evidence of election and a necessary part of living a fruitful, God-honoring life.
- It is a demonstration of God's transformative grace and distinguishes the "elect" from the unregenerate.
- Watchfulness is both **defensive** (resisting sin, Satan, and worldly distractions) and **offensive** (actively seeking God's glory through obedience and worship).
- It is a lifelong duty, sanctification as a gradual process requiring constant effort.

Watchfulness in Daily Life

- Our desire is to integrate watchfulness into every facet of existence, making it a practical outworking of our devotional life:
- Morning and Evening Routines: Many began and end their days with prayer and Scripture meditation to “set a watch” over their hearts. For example, they’d pray **Psalm 141:3: “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.”**
- We should do a rigorous self-examination, often journaling to identify sins or spiritual growth.

Sabbath and Church Focus

- We are blessed with an amplified watchfulness as our Pastor urges constant vigilance from the pulpit.
- We are to watch over each other, correcting sins in personal conversations, family settings and even church discipline when necessary.
- This is rooted in **a love for souls**, aiming to keep the church pure.

Puritan Teaching on Watchfulness

- John Owen (*The Mortification of Sin*, 1656): Owen saw watchfulness as critical to “mortifying” (killing) sin. He advised believers to “be always watching” for sin’s first stirrings, like lustful thoughts or pride, before they grew. He wrote, “He that stands fast in his watch will have the first alarm of his enemy.”

- **Thomas Brooks (*Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, 1652): Brooks emphasized watchfulness to counter Satan's tailored temptations. He urged believers to “keep at the greatest distance from sin” and watch for Satan's “occasions” (e.g., idleness or bad company). His vivid imagery—Satan as a serpent or lion—made watchfulness urgent.**

- **Richard Baxter (*The Christian Directory*, 1673):** *Baxter, a practical theologian, outlined watchfulness as a daily discipline, advising Christians to “watch your hearts, your tongues, your senses, your company, and your actions.” His work, which you might appreciate for its practicality, offered detailed guidance on avoiding spiritual complacency.*

- **John Bunyan (*The Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678):**
Bunyan's allegory portrays watchfulness through Christian's vigilance on his journey, dodging pitfalls like the Slough of Despond or Vanity Fair. His character "Watchful" (a pastor) embodies this virtue.
- **Cotton Mather (*A Christian at His Calling*, 1701):**
Mather tied watchfulness to vocational diligence, urging Puritans to work as if Christ were watching, aligning with their view of all life as worship.

Prayer is ...

- A Sincere pouring out of our heart to God
- Sensible –
- Affectionate –
- Pouring out of the heart and soul to God through Christ, by the strength and assistance of the Spirit –
- For such things as God has promised –
- For the good of the Church –
- In submission to the will of God -

- **“We must keep a constant watch over our souls, as a city under siege... Let us stir up ourselves to take hold of God’s promises, and watch that our hearts wander not from His presence.”** Richard Sibbes, *The Soul’s conflict with Itself* (1635)
- **“Watchfulness is the sentinel of the soul, keeping it from the surprisals of sin. A Christian must watch his thoughts, for from the heart proceedeth all evil; and watch his ways, for the feet soon stumble.”** John Flavel, *The Method of Grace* (1681)

The Benefits of Watchfulness

- Watchfulness guards against drifting into spiritual dullness. (Colossians 4:2; **Matthew 26:41**; Revelation 3:2-3)
- Persistence in prayer reflects trust in God's character. (Luke 18:1-8; **Psalm 27:14**; Isaiah 40:31)
- Prayer involves persevering even when God seems silent. (Psalm 77; **Job 23:8-10**; Habakkuk 3:17-19)

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- Persistent prayer requires humility and faith. (**Hebrews 11:6**; Matthew 7:7–11; Psalm 34:15–18)
 - God uses seasons of waiting to deepen dependence. (Romans 5:3–5; **James 1:2–4**; Psalm 40:1–3)
 - Jesus models persistence in prayer. (**Luke 5:16**; Hebrews 5:7; Mark 14:35–36)

Keeping the Heart

- **Keep your heart with all vigilance. For from it flow the springs of life. (Prov. 4:23)**
- **Persevering prayer strengthens spiritual endurance. (Ephesians 6:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18)**

Keeping The Heart Defined

- Flavel defines keeping the heart as the diligent and constant use and improvement of all holy means to preserve the soul from sin and maintain sweet and free communion with God.
- It is our duty, but we must depend upon the life giving and assisting strength of Christ. We must abide in Him. (John 15:5)
- It requires frequent observation of our heart, turning in and examining how it is responding and interacting with outward circumstances.

Persistent Prayer

- And he told a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1)
- Jesus said, In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. (Luke 18:2)
- And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, give me justice against my adversary. (Luke 18:3)
- For a while he refused, but afterward said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.” (Luke 18:3-5)

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- “Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Mark 14:38)
 - “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matt. 7:7)
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 - Without the keeping of the heart we are nothing more than formalist, hypocrites, white-washed tombs.