

DEVOTE YOURSELVES TO PRAYER

Colossians 4:2-4, 12-13

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. **Colossians 4:2** “Devote yourselves to prayer.”
2. The polls say 9 of 10 Americans pray regularly. 75% of Americans pray daily. More people will pray next week than exercise or have sex.
3. But are most Americans truly devoted to prayer? Are they praying effectively?
4. Colossians 4 is full of content about the subject of prayer. So, we’re going to take verses 2-4, and 12-13, and deal with them together since they are on the same topic.

II. TEXT

1. **Colossians 4:2-4, 12-13** “2 Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, 4 so that I may make it known as I should. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is always wrestling for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills. 13 For I testify about him that he works hard for you, for those in Laodicea, and for those in Hierapolis.”
2. Let me provide some structure to these verses:
 - i. A command to pray. Colossians 4:2 “Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.”
 - ii. A request for prayer. Colossians 4:3-4 “At the same time, pray also for us...”
 - iii. An example of prayer. Colossians 4:12-13 “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is always wrestling for you in his prayers.”
3. In these verses we can find eleven lessons about prayer.

III. ELEVEN PRAYER PRINCIPLES

1. **Always maintain the habit of prayer.**
 - i. The word “devote” is rich and full of meaning. It means “be earnest towards, persevere. A steadfast, single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action. It means to persist obstinately in a task, to keep on with devotion, to continue to do something with intense effort, to be steadfastly attentive unto, to give unremitting care to a thing, to continue all the time in a place, to persevere and not to faint, to be constantly diligent, to attend assiduously all the exercises, to adhere closely, to attend continually or wait on continually, to tarry or remain somewhere. (PreceptAustin.org)
 - ii. In this verse the verb “devote” is used in the present tense, which means continuous action, habitual action, and often reflects a lifestyle.
 - iii. **Colossians 4:2 (Phillips)** “Always maintain the habit of prayer.”
 - iv. Two things:

1. Get in the habit of prayer.
 - a. I recommend that you schedule a daily prayer time with God. Usually the best time for this is first thing in the morning, because it is the easiest time of the day to be consistent. For me it is 3:30 am.
 - b. Get in the habit of praying before meals.
 - c. **J. C. Ryle** “This only I say, that it is essential to your soul's health to make praying a part of the business of every twenty-four hours in your life. Just as you allot time to eating, sleeping, and business, so also allot time to prayer. Choose your own hours and seasons. At the very least, speak with God in the morning, before you speak with the world; and speak with God at night, after you have done with the world. But settle it down in your minds that prayer is one of the great things of every day. Do not drive it into a corner. Do not give it the scraps, and leavings, and parings of your day. Whatever else you make a business of, make a business of prayer.”
 - d. Get the habit of praying the moment that someone asks you for prayer.
2. Don't get out of the habit of prayer. If you have, get back in it. Don't give up on prayer. Don't get so busy that you don't have time to pray.
 - a. Daniel is the perfect example. Daniel served as one of the top government officials over the kingdom of Persia, under King Darius. The other advisors were jealous of Daniel, so they convinced the king to sign a law, making it illegal for anyone to pray to any god but King Darius for thirty days; the punishment would be the lion's den. Notice Daniel's response. **Daniel 6:10** “When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upstairs room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”
 - b. Daniel teaches us four lessons:
 - i. Prayer should be a habit. He prayed three times a day. He had set times with God; daily appointment with God.
 - ii. You are never too busy to pray. Daniel was one of the top government officials in the entire empire, yet he made time to pray three times a day.
 - iii. You are never too important to pray. Daniel had as much earthly power and money as anyone on earth

could desire, but he still saw his deep need for prayer. I don't care how much money you have, or how much power you have, or how healthy you are, you need prayer. You need God, and prayer is how you access the Lord.

- iv. You must never allow anything to interfere with prayer. Even at the threat of losing his life, Daniel did not stop praying. He did not even pray less. He went on as normal. You know the rest of the story. Daniel was caught praying and arrested. He was thrown into the lion's den overnight, but the Lord sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths. Daniel was promoted, and his enemies were thrown to the lions.

2. Give a lot of time and effort to prayer.

- i. **Colossians 4:2 (NIRV)** "Give a lot of time and effort to prayer"
- ii. To be devoted to something means to give it a lot of your time and effort. We must be devoted that way to prayer.
- iii. To have a healthy walk with God, strive for more than just quick prayers. Work on spending extended periods of time in prayer.
- iv. My quiet time every morning is 55 minutes long. That may sound like a lot to some of you, but it's not.
- v. **Robert Murray McCheyne**, the famous Scottish Pastor "I ought to spend the best hours in communion with God. It is my noblest and most fruitful employment and is not to be thrust into a corner. The morning hours from six to eight are the most uninterrupted and should be thus employed. After tea is my best hour, and that should be solemnly dedicated to God. I should not give up the good old habit of prayer before going to bed; I also need to guard against sleep. When I awake in the night, I should rise and pray. A little time after breakfast might be given to intercession."
- vi. **E. M. Bounds** wrote in his book *Power Through Prayer*:
 1. Charles Simeon, the English revivalist, devoted the hours from four to eight in the morning to God.
 2. John Wesley spent two hours a day in prayer, beginning at 4 am.
 3. **Martin Luther** "If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the Devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business, I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer."
 4. **Francis Asbury**, famous Methodist "I propose to rise at four o'clock as often as I can and spend two hours in prayer and meditation."
 5. Samuel Rutherford, famous Scottish pastor, arose at four o'clock for his business of praying until eight. If he heard other tradesmen going

about their business before he was up, he would exclaim, “Oh, how this shames me! Does my Master not deserve more than theirs?”

- vii. How can you increase the time you spend in prayer? Balanced prayer. Do more than just petition. Spend time on adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. If you just spend five minutes on each, that’s twenty minutes.

3. Guard your prayers.

- i. **Colossians 4:2 (CEB)** “Keep on praying and guard your prayers.”
- ii. Now we move on to the next command, “Stay alert in it.” This word can mean to guard your prayers. If we aren’t careful, we can pray in an ineffective way; a way that yields no results.
- iii. How do we need to guard our prayers?
 1. Guard your prayers from hypocrisy. There are those who love to pray in the company of others because it makes them look good, but who rarely pray in private.
 2. Guard your prayers from sin. God will not answer the prayers of an unrepentant sinner. **1 John 3:21-22** “21 Dear friends, if our hearts don’t condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight.”
 3. Guard your prayers from selfishness. God will only answer your prayers if you pray according to His will. **1 John 5:14-15** “14 This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him.”
 4. Guard your prayers from arrogance. Don’t assume that you know what’s best; don’t assume that God has to do what you ask; don’t assume that you deserve God’s blessings.
 5. Guard your prayers from vain repetition. Chanting the same words over and over does not give them more power. **Matthew 6:7-8** “7 When you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. 8 Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.”

4. Watch for God’s answers.

- i. **Colossians 4:2 (TLB)** “Don’t be weary in prayer; keep at it; watch for God’s answers”
- ii. I like how the TLB translates the command to “stay alert in it.” “Watch for God’s blessings.”
- iii. How often do we forget what we’ve prayed for? If we would pay attention to answered prayers, it would encourage us to pray more, and it would cause us to praise more.

- iv. One thing you can do is to keep a list of your prayer requests in a prayer journal, and every week or so review it and cross the requests off the list once they've been answered.
- v. One of the reasons it seems like God is not listening is that you are not keeping track of the answers. You are not watching for God's blessings.

5. Put your mind into what you are saying.

- i. **Colossians 4:2 (WE)** "Always take time to talk to God. Put your mind on what you are saying."
- ii. Notice how the WE version translates "stay alert in it." "Put your mind on what you are saying." The idea is to focus.
- iii. If you aren't careful, your prayers can be mindless.
 - 1. Beware of your mind wandering. Has your mind ever wandered during the praise time in church? Even though you are singing the words to a song, you aren't thinking about thing; your mind is elsewhere. Sometimes in prayer your mind will wander, and you'll end up thinking about something else when you're supposed to be praying. Stay focused.
 - 2. Beware of generalities. When you pray, be specific. Don't just ask God to forgive you; name the sins you need forgiven. Don't just ask for blessings; specify how you want to be blessed. Don't just ask for help; specify how you need help. In the Bible you find very specific prayers.
 - a. Jacob prayed for protection from his brother Esau (Gen 32:11).
 - b. Eliezer prayed for success in finding a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:12).
 - c. Paul prayed for God to remove the thorn in his flesh (2 Cor 12:8).
 - d. **J.C. Ryle** "I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of particularity in prayer. We ought not to be content with great general petitions. We ought to specify our wants before the throne of grace.... What should we think of the patient who told his doctor he was ill, but never went into particulars? What should we think of the wife who told her husband she was unhappy, but did not specify the cause? What should we think of the child who told his father he was in trouble, but nothing more?"
 - e. **Philippians 4:6 (AMP)** "Do not be anxious or worried about anything, but in everything [every circumstance and situation] by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, continue to make your [specific] requests known to God."

3. Beware of memorized prayers. There is nothing wrong with memorized prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer. But if you aren't careful, you can end up saying them without meaning them; without thinking about what you are saying.

6. Always include thanksgiving in your prayers.

- i. **Colossians 4:2 (ICB)** "And when you pray, always thank God."
- ii. Our prayers must be balanced. Not just asking for future blessings, but thanking God for past blessings.
- iii. **Thomas Watson** "In this, Christians are defective, though they are much in supplication—yet little in thanksgiving."
- iv. **Philippians 4:6** "Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

7. Pray for others.

- i. **Colossians 4:3** "At the same time, pray also for us"
- ii. Now we're moving on to verse 3, where Paul asks for prayer for himself.
- iii. When you pray, don't just pray for yourself; pray for others. This is called intercession. Intercession is praying on behalf of others.
- iv. I learned a cool way to do this in college.
 1. Write down the days of the week that you are going to have a quiet time.
 2. On each day, write down a different subject for your prayer time.
 - a. Monday = Family
 - b. Tuesday = Lost friends
 - c. Wednesday = Political leaders
 - d. Thursday = Church family

8. Pray for the spread of the gospel.

- i. **Colossians 4:3-4** "3 At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, 4 so that I may make it known as I should."
- ii. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for the same thing.
- iii. **Ephesians 6:19-20** "19 Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. 20 For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should."
- iv. One of the things we should be praying for specifically is for the spread of the gospel. Ask God to help you and our church reach the lost for Christ.
- v. How should we pray for the spread of the gospel?
 1. Pray for vocational ministers. Col 4:3 "At the same time, pray also for us"
 2. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel. Col 4:3 "that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ"

3. Pray for the right words. Eph 6:19 “Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.”
4. Pray for boldness. Eph 6:20 “Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should.”
- vi. Talk to God about the lost before you talk to the lost about God.

9. Pray persistently.

- i. **Colossians 4:12-13** “12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is always wrestling for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills. 13 For I testify about him that he works hard for you, for those in Laodicea, and for those in Hierapolis.”
- ii. “Always.” Epaphras prayed persistently for the same thing. Every time Paul heard Epaphras pray, he was praying for their spiritual growth.
- iii. In Luke 11 and Luke 18 just told two parables with the same lesson about persistent prayer. Persistence. The point is that if selfish, unwilling humans will given in to persistent requests, how much more will our loving, holy, generous heavenly Father?
- iv. How long should you pray for something? Keep on praying until God answers your prayer, or until He says “No.”
- v. One of the ways that God says “No” is by changing your desires. You no longer desire the thing you were praying for.

10. Pray earnestly.

- i. **Colossians 4:12** “12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is always wrestling for you in his prayers”
- ii. Do you remember old Epaphras? It’s been a while since we saw his name in chapter 1. Epaphras was the pastor of the church in Colossae who had traveled to Paul to give him a report of the church. Epaphras was a prayer warrior. He was always wrestling for them in his prayers.
- iii. “Wrestling.”
 1. KJV “Always laboring fervently for you in prayers”
 2. ASV “Always striving for you in his prayers”
 3. AMP “pleading”
 4. AMPC “He is always striving for you earnestly in his prayer”
 5. CJB “who always agonizes in his prayer on your behalf”
 6. CEV “He always prays hard”
- iv. The idea is pleading and begging with strong desire; earnestness; fervency.
- v. To pray earnestly is to pray with strong desire. You must truly want what you pray for.
- vi. **J. C. Ryle** “I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of earnestness in prayer. It is not necessary that a man should shout, or scream,

or be very loud, in order to prove that he is in earnest. But it is desirable that we should be hearty, and fervent, and warm, and ask as if we were really interested in what we were doing.”

- vii. Sometimes we pray for things, but we don't really want them. We pray for them because we know we're supposed to. But if your heart is not in it; if you are not earnest; then the answer won't come.

11. Pray for spiritual growth.

- i. **Colossians 4:12-13** “12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is always wrestling for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills.”
- ii. Notice what Epaphras was praying so fervently for the Colossians. Not for their health, or wealth, or prosperity, or happiness. His prayer was for their spiritual growth: “So that you can stand mature and full assured in everything God wills.”
- iii. When you pray, be sure that your primary request is for your spiritual growth, and the spiritual growth of others. Remember, God is more interested in your holiness than your happiness; in your character than your comfort. If you want to see answers to your prayers, start praying for what God truly wants.
- iv. Epaphras prayed for two things:
 - 1. Maturity in the practice of all God's will. Pray that you can be obedient to all of God's will in all of your life.
 - 2. Conviction in the knowledge of all God's will. Pray that you will have a clear understanding and an unshakeable faith in all of God's will.

IV. CONCLUSION

- 1. Awhile back my family joined a gym – Cajun Fitness. The first thing I started doing was running on the treadmill. But very quickly my knees started hurting. I was running so much that my knees were hurting. Here's a question: When's the last time my knees were hurting because I was praying so much? How are your knees? How is your prayer life? Are you devoted to prayer?
- 2. Thomas Watson “Prayer is a key which unlocks the treasury of God's mercy.”
- 3. The only way God blesses us is through prayer. How is your prayer life?
 - i. Do you need spiritual growth? Pray.
 - ii. Freedom from addiction? Pray.
 - iii. Friends? Pray.
 - iv. Financial increase? Pray.
 - v. Physical healing? Pray.
 - vi. Protection from harm? Pray.
 - vii. Marriage healing? Pray.
 - viii. Parenting wisdom? Pray.
 - ix. National revival? Pray.