

Colossians 4:2-4

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[0:00] This week, our program, as we've been saying, will begin full bloom, but we're glad to have the children among us on today as we get into the Word of God.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians, New Testament book, chapter 4. And we're going to read verses 2 through 4.

If you didn't bring a Bible, you'll find a pew Bible before you. They are read in the back of the holders, and you will find that on page 958.

That's our passage for this afternoon. Again, we're trying to simplify life a little. The Bibles are there, and the essence is the same.

It may read a little differently. But listen to God's Word from Colossians, chapter 4, verses 2 through 4.

[0:59] Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

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, that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.

Pray with me, would you please? Father, thank you for this opportunity on this afternoon. Thank you for your Word before us and your people before us.

I pray, O God, that we would be postured before you in a way that we would hear and that there would be both a will and action to do what thus saith the Word of God on this afternoon.

Pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Shirley and I are transitioning. For the last couple of years, we've been downtown, assisting there.

[2:18] Now that the pastor is in place, we are shifting our attention to the west side. And we were there for the first time this morning. Listen to the words of one of the songs that we sang today.

And it's entitled, God of this city. Perhaps like for Shirley and me, it's new to you. But the words were quite meaningful.

And I thought that I would begin my sermon with them on this afternoon. Listen. You're the God of this city. You are the king of these people.

You're the Lord of this nation. You're the light in this darkness. You're the hope to the hopeless. You're the peace to the restless. There is no God like our God. There is no God like our God. For greater things have yet to come.

[3:24] And greater things, listen to this, are still to be done in this city. For greater things have yet to come.

Greater things are still to be done here. Do you believe that? We feel that we are God's partners in gospel pursuit in this city.

And on this afternoon, this message is the last of 15 messages that we've done beginning in back in May. Concerning celebrating our life in the gospel.

What we've sought to do is to reacquaint you with the content of the message of the gospel concerning God's son. We're reminded that good news is that rebels.

Rebels. Rebels. God rejecting human beings. Children. Youth.

[4:34] Adults. People of all stripes and from all kinds of backgrounds. Rebels. All.

But the good news of the gospel is that rebels like you and me can be made right with God. Through his son.

Who has paid the penalty that God's justice demanded. And all who embrace God's son. Though sinful we may be. Have the right standing. A right standing. With the God of heaven. We are counted. As righteous.

For all time. And eternity. Boy if there's ever any good news. That is it. Such is the gospel.

[5:33] Friends in a nutshell. Good news. For all people. Of all. History. We've looked at the content of the gospel.

But we've also looked at the nature of the gospel. Of gospel living. Gospel living is. Worshipful. Living. Gospel living.

Is godly. Living. Gospel living. Is joyful. Living. It's expectant. Living. Huh. We looked at that. Jim and Kevin.

Helped to share. That aspect of the good news. On this summer. But most recently. We've examined. Some of our gospel commitments.

And on last week. Pastor David. Pastor Helm. Helps us to see. That you and I. Must have. Above all things. A commitment to.

[6:31] God's word. God's word. God's word. God's word. It has to be that. Which guides. Both our belief. And our behavior. What we embrace.

And what we practice. Huh. But this week. We turn our attention. And what a fitting close. To this particular series.

As we talk about. Gospel ministry. ministry and prayer. Communion with God is the focus of what we see in chapter 4 verses 2 through 4.

Communion with God, friends, to characterize those of us who have embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. And what we have before us is what could be called a prayer profile or perhaps a better term a prayer profile.

It's not exclusive but it does include for you and me to hear and you and me to embrace and to practice characteristics of our prayer communion with God.

[7:46] What is it that should characterize our prayer as those who have embraced this gospel and as you look at Colossians, Paul has upheld the supremacy of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ. He has pointed out how we have been relocated as it were from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Did you know that's what's happened when you came to Christ?

There was a spiritual location. You may live in the same house but really you're on different territory. Once you've come to Christ, you've come to a kingdom. An invisible kingdom as it were but does have physical invisible manifestations.

That's what happened when Jesus came. He said, behold, the kingdom of God is at hand. And even as Jesus lived, he brought out what the kingdom of God included and what the kingdom of God looked like.

It was among them and even so where the church abides. There are manifestations of the very rule of God in a society, in our own hearts, in our own homes.

Look at the first thing that you see there. Continue steadfastly in prayer. What's the characteristic? Habitual prayer is to characterize the people of God.

[9:12] Christians are to be steadfastly in prayer. That's the instruction that we see in verse 2 and it is quite clear. It concerns the prayer life of the Christian.

The new life that we have in Christ requires communion with the Lord if it is to be vibrant and effective.

Our union in Christ requires communion with Christ. And prayer, friends, is the means by which that happens. Thus, in verse 2, Paul instructs believers of his day but also believers of all ages.

He tells us to continue steadfastly. And some of your versions read, to devote yourselves to prayer. Huh? That's familiar to us. We know what it means to devote ourselves to different things, don't we? Recently, our daughter Naomi was home for a month. And she's a runner. And when she arrived home, she mourned the fact that she was not able to run.

[10:19] Her doctor, after having run a marathon in Rio de Janeiro, she came home and her doctor had recommended that she would rest for a month before she got back into her regiment.

Well, after the period of rest, she would arise. 4 a.m. in the morning.

I know that's redundant, but 4 a.m. if you please. So, I mean, some of us are maybe just turning over for the second or the third time at 4 a.m.

But I could hear her getting up between 4 and 5 before the sun rolls, turning off the security system, exiting, and going out to run for a couple of hours.

And when she came home, she had a sweat and sometimes a smile. That's devotion. That's dedication.

[11:19] And like her, some of you know something about devotion akin to that. Perhaps it's exercise or your diet. The level of health and appearance that you want demands certain things of you.

And you've said, I'll do that. Check that off. I'm in. Count me in. That's what I want. And you give yourself to things that you really count to be of some value to yourself.

And so here, Paul urges believers to what I would call to engage in a holy habit. Now, we'd have to admit that most, if not all of us, we have habits.

The question is, is it a holy habit? Is it producing good results?

Is it producing spiritual health? Is that the end, perhaps, of the habit that you're engaged in? He urges believers to be devoted to prayer.

[12:26] The word translated here is a great New Testament word. And again, it's actually a compound word. It means to be strong towards, to persist in, to give a constant attention to something.

That's what the word implies. And prayer was one of the holy habits of the leaders and the people of the New Testament in the infant church in the book of Acts.

As a matter of fact, turn back over to Acts chapter 1. And we'll see at the beginning what the church of Jesus Christ gave herself to.

Chapter 1 and verse 14. All these, those who were gathered in the upper room, with one accord, and here's the word, were devoting themselves to prayer.

There it is, same word. And what they're giving themselves to is prayer. The devotion is there, but then the word that is modifying, it's prayer. Together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her brothers.

[13:38] Same word. Acts chapter 2, verse 42. And you see four holy habits of the early church that she gave herself to.

Prayer was one of those. Listen to this. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship and to the breaking of breads and to the prayers. It's there.

Look, I'll turn over a few pages to Acts chapter 6. And you will see that the word is used for the dual devotion of Christian leadership to both prayer and to the ministry of God's word.

And we will devote ourselves, there's the word, to prayer and to the ministry of the word. How grateful and humbling it is, pastorally, to be able to give ourselves to these kinds of things.

Prayer and to the ministry of the word. One other reference you needn't turn to, but Romans 12, 12 uses the same word. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer.

[14:56] Brothers and sisters, prayer is the glorious default position, default posture of the Christian life.

And such dependence is to be natural to us through prayer. It is through that means by which you and I commune and converse with the God of heaven.

Directed to the Father. Directed to the Father. In the name of the Son. Consistent with his will and his character. It's empowered or assisted by the Holy Spirit.

Christians are to persist in prayer. Check this out. Our presence on earth. Christ's presence in heaven. Requires, demands, and means by which we can commune with, communicate with our captain.

Prayer is that means. It is as if the Lord has given a cell phone-like device to each member of his family.

[16:01] You know the family plan? Where the kids have a cell phone and mom and dad have a cell phone? Well, it is likened unto that. And guess what he gives?

Unlimited minutes, huh? But too many of us have minutes. Too many unused minutes, huh? Oh, don't even count the rollover minutes.

We haven't gotten it. We've got unused minutes, as it were, in prayer. And then when the family gets together, it's sort of like a conference call.

Everybody can check in and talk with the Father and agree together. That's what they did in Acts chapter 4. When the church was persecuted, the Bible says that they got together.

And with one voice they called on God. They called as the sovereign God. Behold the threatenings of these people. Corporate prayer. Everybody was pushing and pulling in the same direction.

[17:05] Continue in prayer. The call, brothers and sisters, is for consistent, persistent, habitual prayer. It's stated positively in the text.

But we can also state it negatively. Negatively stated is simply this. Don't stop praying. That would be the rendering. Whether stated positively or negatively, it takes brothers and sisters' intentionality on our part.

And here's the deal. Pick up the phone and use it. Pick it up. Use it.

For God's glory and our good Paul not only urged prayer, but he practiced prayer himself. Well, chapter 1 of Colossians, verse 3.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. Chapter 1, verse 9. And so from the day we heard it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

[18:15] He urged it. He urged it. And he practiced it. Let me ask you a question on this afternoon. What habits might you need to stop in order to develop a habit of prayer?

What habit might you need to stop in order to develop a habit of prayer?

Prayer is not one of your habits as a Christian. It should be. Not only is there habitual prayer. Look at the second part of the verse. There's watchful prayer.

You and I are to be alert. Here is the call for spiritual alertness. Christians are not to be casual in prayer, nor are we to be casual about prayer.

We must be careful. Careful enough to be alert. And here's the thing. One of our spiritual instincts should include prayer.

[19:21] Like an athlete with good hands or a musician with a good ear. We need good instincts as Christians. And one of those instincts should be prayer.

You and I are to always be prayer-ready. Prayer-readiness is a part of our description as believers in Christ.

You may be called Jesus' words to his disciples on the eve of this crucifixion. Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

In the garden of Gethsemane, the disciples were not in touch with the seriousness of what was going on that really demanded their attention and demanded their prayers.

They seemingly didn't have a clue to the critical hour that they were in. And sometimes we were in the same kind of condition. Neither are we.

[20:23] The Christian is to be alert, to be watchful in prayer. This, again, speaks about your prayer-readiness and mine. It speaks of our constant-readiness. You and I must not be in a spiritual daze or spiritually dull or dumb.

We must be constantly on call. We must not be casual in the presence of the king or the cause of the king.

If prayer is not one of your spiritual instincts, friends, it should be. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it.

And notice the next thing, habitual prayer. Watchful prayer, but simply thankful prayer. Christians ought to be grateful in prayer.

Along with steadfastness and alertness, the last part urges thankfulness in prayer. Christian prayer has a way of wedding, requesting and rejoicing praise in prayer.

[21:28] Oh, doesn't the psalmist teach us those very kinds of things? Oh, sometimes the psalmist, plural, their prayers can be our prayers, but also their praises can be our praises.

Huh? Paul spoke similarly in Philippians chapter 4, verse 6. Do not be anxious for anything but in everything by prayer and supplication.

What? With thanksgiving? Let your requests be made known to God. Why is it then? Why is it that you and I should be thankful in prayer?

Have you ever tried to get in to see somebody? Perhaps a doctor's appointment. I was speaking to someone recently about trying to get in an audience with a doctor.

And the waiting list was about five months long for this specialist. And they're willing to be on that list. Can you imagine five months down the road if something comes up and they're, which would throw a roadblock and they're getting to see that physician?

[22:34] Oh, they would probably put everything else aside because they had waited that long to see that specialist. You and I should be thankful that we have an audience. And God is not saying, well, see me about five months down the road and then we can talk.

Let me put you on hold. I've got some, I've got a little backup here. As a matter of fact, they were in line before you and I need to attend to them. No, no, no. You have an audience.

Not just with a great physician. You have an audience with the one who occupies the very throne room, the control room of the universe.

Don't we see that in Revelation chapters 4 and 5? We can go into the presence of the king because Jesus has made a way for us to have an audience with God.

We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. And let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.

[23:39] That's the audience that, that's the person that you have an audience with in prayer. Furthermore, we should be thankful not just because we have an audience with him but because of all the abundant mercies new every morning that he has poured out in your life.

And you get to come up before him and what do you say to someone who has exhibited such kindness and mercy in your life? Oh, there should not need to be a priming of thank you.

That should just automatically come out. As a matter of fact, it should be the first thing that comes out of our mouth. Lord, we praise you that we can come into your presence, presence of the God of the universe, without guilt because of what you've done for us.

Hallelujah. If thanksgiving is not a regular part of your prayer life, it should be. And Colossians 2, 4 and 2 helps us to see that.

We sing a song around Holy Trinity that encourages us, encourages prayer, continual prayer, thanksgiving and prayer.

[24:52] Pray in the morning. That's simple, isn't it? Yeah, profound. Pray in the noontime. Pray when the day is through. Pray when you're happy. Pray when you're worried.

Pray when you don't know what to do. Pray without ceasing. Pray without ceasing. And then, here it is. Praise him. Adore him. Bow down before him.

Pray. Pray. Just pray. Simple exhortation, but it's biblical, isn't it? Pray without ceasing. 1 Corinthians chapter 5, I believe it is verse 17.

Habitual prayer. Watchful prayer. Thankful prayer. Thankful prayer. And what I'm calling tactical prayer, basically deliberate, calculated, strategic, purposeful.

Christians are to be focused in prayer. Paul prayed for others, but he also, check this out. Here he got the great apostle. Not only did he pray and urge prayer, he requested prayer.

[25:56] Seasoned apostle. Pastor, church planter all over Asia Minor. Here you got this brother that is caught all the way up to the third heaven hearing words that are not sort of lawful for human beings to speak.

Here you are, this man that had this dynamic experience on the Damascus Road. Met Jesus in such a powerful way that it turned his life around. Here he was, this man that in Antioch prayed along with Barnabas and got sent out on the work that the Holy Spirit had called him to do.

This man that said, I didn't come to you with words of excellence to your speech declaring the testimony of God, but I came to you in the demonstration of the Spirit and the power. Here was this

dynamic apostle and he said, hey, pray for me.

Pray for me. Need God's help. Haven't arrived. I'm still in process. Walking with the Lord for perhaps decades, but I'm still in process.

We never get beyond dependence. We never reach a point that we go to automatic pilot as Christians.

[27:10] The Christian life, friends, is a dependent life. And so Paul says, pray for us. That's inclusive, isn't it? And notice here in the text that his request is kingdom focused.

Look at it in verse 3. At the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door. Listen to that. For the word. A door for the word. To what? To declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I am in prison.

That I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak. Pray for us, he says. He wanted to share. He wanted the Lord to open the door of opportunity for him to speak a word about Christ.

In essence, the gospel. Huh? He wanted to share this revelation about Christ. The one that was previously hidden in times before that. But now made known.

And Paul wanted to share it. What dependence? I wonder at this point. And he's in jail here. I wonder how many times. Paul may have shared the gospel up until that point.

[28:19] Ah, he had gone through the cities of Asia Minor. He had reasoned with them as they preached again. Acts chapter 17. In the various venues. I wonder how many times he had preached.

But here he said, pray for me. I wonder how many messages he had. But still he's saying, pray for me. Perhaps he could have gone to his files. And may have been filed there.

But he says, pray for me. There's that dependence there. God provided a way that humankind could be made right with himself.

Probably it shared a score of time. But we see here a prayerful dependence. And his prayer was that he would. Check it out. I want to make it clear.

And here's the big deal. The ministry of the gospel needs the ministry of prayer.

[29:20] The ministry of the gospel needs the ministry of prayer. The ministers of the gospel need the ministry of prayer.

Gospel ministry needs prayer ministry. The communication of the gospel needs communion with God. Isn't that what 312 is about?

You remember the 312 initiative? Praying for three people over two years. In hopes that the Lord would bring one to himself.

Praying that that would happen. And God would use you to be his agent. In those people's lives.

That's what it's about. The ministers of the gospel need the ministry of prayer.

And they're quite complimentary. Prayer needs the gospel. Gospel needs prayer. Effective ministry happens not because of what we do. But because of what the Lord does.

[30:19] Effectiveness in the Lord's work, friends, demands the Lord's work. We can do a lot of things. But listen to how Paul put it. What then is Apollos?

What is Paul? Servants through whom you believe. As the Lord assigned to each. I planted. Apollos watered. But God gave the growth.

So then is neither he who plants nor he who waters anything. But only God who gives the growth ultimately. Seed may be in the ground.

But if it doesn't rain. If the sun doesn't shine. It's not going to come up. If God doesn't work. God doesn't quick it. If God doesn't do what only he can do.

Yes, we have a responsibility. But God does what only he can do. Pray for opportunity.

[31:19] A doorway of entry. And notice Paul here. He wasn't in an ideal condition. Such that sharing the word of Christ could have been the father saying from his mind.

But it wasn't. He was in prison. But here's the deal. Rather than viewing his situation negatively. He saw it as an opportunity for the gospel.

The question on this afternoon. How do you view your dilemmas? Your burdens? Do you view them as opportunities? Could unemployment? Or sickness? Or other life challenges be a platform for gospel sharing?

Our prayerfulness can help determine if that is in fact the case. And thus let us not be quick to write off our difficulties. Let's be good gospel stewards of every difficulty.

Every challenge that may come our way. He prayed for clarity. Oh, this is a preacher's prayer. That he would make it clear. And he prayed for ministry.

[32:21] Huh? And all of us are ministers. All of us are involved. What, friends, a glorious gospel it is that has been trusted to us.

As I mentioned in the first sermon in this series, it's like a jewel that reflects light wherever you turn it. It is stunningly brilliant, the gospel.

The mercy of God shines through it. The justice of God comes through clearly like the many colors of a rainbow. God's grace streams through its many colored kindness and compassion.

These are revealed in the gospel. Everywhere the jewel of the gospel is turned, the glories of the living God come through. So, having then been entrusted with this glorious gospel, there has to be a stewardship.

What a responsibility. Nothing less, friends, having given, been entrusted with this glorious gospel. Nothing less than wholehearted dependence and trust is needed from us in the ministry of the gospel.

[33:35] The ministry of the gospel needs the ministry of prayer. The ministry of prayer. Gospel ministry that is before us, south side, citywide, corporately.

It causes us to ask certain questions. Are we really committed to personal, to regional, to corporate commitments to prayer? Do we simply give lip service to our dependence on God?

Are major decisions processed in prayer? Do we simply give lip service to our neediness and live otherwise? Because one of the things that gets in the way is our self-sufficiency, which leads to an attitude of no need for God.

How, how dangerous. John Piper, in his classic book, *Desiring God*, includes a passage on, a chapter on prayer. And this is what he writes, one or two sentences.

Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God and the confidence that he will provide all we need.

[34:42] Listen. He writes, prayer humbles us as needy and exalts God as wealthy. Is that the way you feel? We're needy. He's wealthy.

We come to him. Thus, we find ourselves humbling ourselves before him and communing with him. How? Habitually. Watchfully. Thankfully. And purposefully. The gospel life is a life of communion with God.

Did not Jesus himself teach us this? Was not his life a life of prayerful communion with the Father? And so should ours be.

Jesus, who was one with the Father, maintained communion with the Father through prayer. And should not the life of Jesus' body on earth include the same?

[35:42] Communion of God, with God, is right for those who are in union with God through his Son. And the pattern of the Son should be the pattern of the saints on earth.

What a fitting end to this series on the gospel. What am I saying today? Simply this. The ministry and the ministers of the gospel need the ministry of prayer.

Gospel ministry needs prayer ministry. And may we never forget it. May we recommit ourselves to this reality.

I'm challenged to do that. And I trust that you are the same. Let me pray. Then we're going to move into our time of communion. Father, we give thanks for your word that challenges us.

Lord, that reorders us. May we ponder that.

[37:05] And may we act in that way for your glory and for our good. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

We're coming to the Lord's table. That's another means by which you and I can commune with our Lord.

Lord, through these elements that represent his gospel work. The bread represents his broken body.

Broken for you and me. The juice, the fruit of the vine represents the blood that he shed for you. The death that he died for you and for me.

If you are a believer in Christ, you are welcome to the table. We ask that if you have not trusted in Christ, that you reflect on what it means to be a believer.

[38:09] That's trusting in all that God is to us and for us in Christ through his son who has shed his blood. But all who have embraced him, we invite you to come to the table.

And to be strengthened. And to be renewed in your faith. Paul writes these words in 1 Corinthians 11, verse 23.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you. That the Lord Jesus Christ on the night when he was betrayed took bread. Huh? And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, also he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. May these elements today, these symbols, may they be a prompt for your faith.

[39:23] May you come on this afternoon to be nourished and strengthened in your faith, strengthened in your resolve. You have embraced what these elements stand for.

Now may God give us to go out and to live it. And to minister. And to include communion with God as a part of our lives and our ministry.

The musicians or the Dave is coming now. And as soon as you're ready, this is a good time for reflection, meditation, and even repentance.

As soon as you're ready, come and gladly we will serve you on this afternoon.