

People of Prayer

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[0 : 00] Well, if you have been perceptive, you probably, and you were here last week, you probably noticed that both the sermon title and text is different from what was foreshadowed last week.

But I'll tell you what is not different. What is not different is the burden for the sermon. The burden for the sermon is the same, and the burden for myself and for you is that we would be people of prayer.

Not people who understand prayer, not people who talk about prayer, but people who pray.

And so if you have not yet done so, please turn in your Bible to Colossians chapter 4, and our attention this morning will be confined to verses 2 to 4.

Colossians chapter 4, verses 2 through 4. Please follow along as I read, and this is God's word.

[1 : 22] 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. Let's pray together. Father, how precious is your word.

And Lord, you have demonstrated your kindness to us by preserving your word over the ages. Lord, how precious is your word. That we might have it in our own language.

That we might understand it. That we might do what the psalmist says. That we might hide it in our hearts. That we might not sin against you.

That we might seek to please you in all things. Lord, would you speak to us from your word this morning about what it means to be a people of prayer.

[2 : 41] And Lord, that is a call to us individually and corporately. And I pray that you would help us to hear on both levels.

We ask for your grace now to meet us as we hear your word. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Although these verses that we just read are brief, they're actually quite profound in what they say to us about prayer. These verses tell us that God's people are called to a life of steadfast prayer that keeps in view the proclamation of the gospel.

We are called as God's people to a life of steadfast prayer that keeps in view the proclamation of the gospel.

In other words, it is a call to consistently pray and to be aware of the important matter of the good news of the gospel that is to be proclaimed to all people far and wide.

[4 : 01] As we consider these three verses this morning, there are two obvious ways that the Apostle Paul appeals to us and indeed to all God's people to be a people of prayer.

And the first way is by praying steadfastly. That's what we who are God's people are called to do. We are called to continue steadfastly in prayer.

And steadfast praying begins with the habit of praying. In his little book titled, A Call to Prayer, deceased Anglican Bishop, Bishop J.C. Ryle, begins by asking his readers this simple question, Do you pray?

And then he goes on to write the following. To be prayerless is to be without God, without Christ, without grace, without hope, and without heaven.

It is to be on the road to hell. Now, can you wonder that I ask the question, Do you pray?

[5 : 13] I ask again, rather you pray, because a habit of prayer is one of the surest marks of a true Christian. Those are piercing words, but those are true words.

Prayer is one of the surest marks of a true Christian. Not the only mark, but one of the surest marks. And here's how Bishop Ryle goes on to explain it.

All of the children of God on earth are alike in this respect. From the moment there is any life and reality about their religion, they pray.

Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again is praying.

This is one of the common marks of all the elect of God. They cry day and night unto him. The Holy Spirit, who makes them new creatures, works in them the feeling of adoption and makes them cry, Abba, Father.

[6 : 29] The Lord Jesus, when he quickens them, gives them a voice and a tongue and says to them, Be dumb no more. God has no dumb children. It is as much a part of their new nature to pray as it is for a child to cry.

They see the need of mercy and grace. They feel the emptiness and weakness. They cannot do otherwise than they do. They must pray.

And in these three verses before us, the Apostle Paul clearly assumes the same thing, that believers pray.

And so he calls the Colossians and he calls indeed all of God's people to continue steadfastly in prayer. The NIV translates it, Be devoted to prayer.

In other words, God's people are called to pray in an ongoing way. Paul could have simply said, Continue in prayer, but by adding steadfastly, he indicates that we need to persist in the commitment to pray continually.

[7 : 58] And I think we all know enough about prayer to know that prayer is not easy. And that's why Paul calls us to be steadfast in our prayers.

And one of the reasons that prayer is not easy is that we face opposition when we pray. And we face this opposition really on three particular fronts. The first is our own flesh.

And by flesh, I mean indwelling sin. Though we have come to Christ and though we have been born again, we still struggle with our flesh.

We still struggle with sin. The Apostle Paul describes indwelling sin very well in Romans 7, verses 14 through 19, where he says that as believers, we sometimes find ourselves not doing the good that we want to do or doing the sin we don't want to do.

And sometimes our flesh fights us in our desire to pray. And I think a lot of us could identify with this weather. Our flesh fights us, especially in this kind of weather, if it is our practice to get up to pray.

[9 : 20] The second front, though, on which we face opposition is the world. And I'm not talking about the physical world, but the moral world. The moral world that is fallen humanity organized in rebellion against God.

That's the world of our everyday existence. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2, verse 2, calls it the course of this world that is living in a fallen world that presents us with many temptations, many distractions, and they come against us.

And one of the areas in which they come against us is in the area of prayer. It amazes me sometimes when I am going to pray how many things I all of a sudden remember that I didn't remember before.

How many things that just need my immediate attention that didn't seem to need my immediate attention before? And the third front of opposition that we face in prayer and that we can easily overlook is the devil.

And when I say the devil, I don't necessarily mean Satan himself. but what I mean is that the spiritual forces of darkness over which Satan and his demonic agents are in control, that darkness, those spiritual forces, they come against us.

[10 : 58] And in particular, they come against us in prayer. And it's because of this spiritual opposition that Paul calls us not only to pray steadfastly, but he calls us to be watchful in prayer.

This word watchful that Paul uses where he tells us that we are to be watchful in prayer is very intentional and it means to be alert.

That's what biblical watchfulness is. It means to be alert. It means to be spiritually alert or spiritually awake. And I think this watchfulness that we are called to in prayer alerts us to this reality of spiritual warfare and spiritual opposition that comes against us generally but certainly specifically when we are praying.

And what we'll see in scripture if we study this call to watchfulness throughout the pages of scripture is that we generally are called to be watchful when danger lurks or the stakes are high.

When there's spiritual danger or the stakes are high we are called to be watchful. Let me give you a few examples disciples that point this out. The first is in Matthew 26 verse 41.

[12:33] This was the occasion of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and he asked his disciples to pray with him. And when he came back he found them asleep. And he said to them watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

The spirit is indeed willing for the flesh is weak. spiritual forces of darkness are associated with all of our temptations and watchfulness and prayer will help us not to fall into temptation.

Another example is Acts 20 29-31. This is the Apostle Paul speaking to the Ephesian elders and warning them of dangers that were ahead after his departure.

And he says to them I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock. And from your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore be alert. Remembering that for three years I did not cease day or night to admonish everyone with tears.

[13:54] it's insightful to note that in verse 31 in Acts 20 verse 31 the exact same word that is translated alert is the same word that's translated watch in Colossians 4 verse 2.

Dangerous lurking for these Ephesian elders and so Paul called them to be alert. And then the last one I want to draw your attention to is in 1 Peter 5 verse 8 where Peter says be sober minded be watchful your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Here's a call to be watchful and Peter employs the same word to call us to be on our guard against the devil he says be watchful.

Now I can go on with examples but I think the point is clear enough and the point is that the call to watchfulness or alertness is connected to situations where danger lurks where the stakes are high and we are called to be watchful in prayer because of the reality of the spiritual warfare that we face.

notice also in verse 2 that in addition to calling us to be watchful we are called to be steadfast sorry we are called to be in addition to being steadfast and watchful as we pray we are also called to do so with thanksgiving and sadly prayer can be reduced to just asking God for things and sometimes reduced to complaining and I think we all know how easy it is for us to be more aware of what God has not granted us than we are aware of his many gifts that he has bestowed upon us or sometimes we forget to thank God just for who he is and we see this in the

[16:17] Psalms we see this dual approach of thanking God for what he has done but also thanking God for who he is and we likewise should be cultivating that same example of thankfulness before the Lord and so these two verses we're called to be a people who pray steadfastly in an ongoing way and we are to do so while being alert and we are to do so with thanksgiving in our hearts that's the first way that Paul appeals to us to be people of prayer to be steadfast in our prayer and I think Paul is getting at more than maybe being steadfast and consistent in praying maybe at a particular time of the day in your devotions yes that's included but I think the steadfastness in prayer is for us to be cultivating this way of going through our days and breathing prayer just praying to God praying to him about the small things praying to him about the big things communing with

God walking close with the Lord one of the examples that come to my mind that is such a wonderful example of being steadfast in prayer is Nehemiah when he came before the king and the king began to ask him why are you troubled and what is wrong and the Bible says in that moment Nehemiah prayed he prayed in his heart he didn't openly get on his knees and start to pray before the king may we be a steadfast praying prayerful people and maybe one of the prayers we need to pray and ask the Lord to grant to us is that awareness of our need to pray to say God remind me as I go through my day how much I need to be praying how much I need to be looking to you and leaning on you and calling out to you last week we closed and we sang

I need the every hour and there's a line in I need the every hour that grips me every time I pray because I easily forget it and that is that we need the Lord in joy and in pain but how often we are only communing with the Lord and praying to the Lord when we are in pain when we are in trouble when we are in difficulty instead of in our joys and I think the very practical insight that Brother Shambi gave us a short while ago about how we can use the rhythm of receiving income as a moment to pause and to pray and to thank God for his faithfulness to us providing for us giving us work or a business especially in the economy that our nation has and indeed many countries

around the world has may we be people who are steadfast in prayer and breathing prayer on a daily basis not because we want to be on performance with the

Lord but because we need the Lord we need his wisdom we need his help the second way that the apostle Paul calls us to be a people of prayer is by praying evangelistically we see this in verses 3 and 4 Paul writes 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 so what does it mean to pray evangelistically well praying evangelistically is simply praying for the spread of the gospel and the salvation of sinners brothers and sisters when we think about this what greater endeavor can we commit ourselves to than praying that men and women and boys and girls will hear the gospel that the gospel will be proclaimed to all people what greater endeavor what more important news do people need to hear than the good news that they can be reconciled to a holy

God who is wrathful against sin it is the most and only essential news there is no more important news there is no more important endeavor that we can give ourselves to and so praying evangelistically is praying with this awareness praying with this awareness for the gospel to be spread and for people to be saved and in verses 3 and 4 the apostle Paul gives us three particular ways that we can pray evangelistically first he says in verse 3 at the same time pray for us the first way we can pray evangelistically is to pray for gospel ministers as we pray in an ongoing way we can specifically pray for gospel ministers especially those to whom we are connected the apostle [22 : 43] Paul needed support in his gospel ministry he asked them this is the mighty apostle Paul who's written most of our New Testament he says pray for me you can imagine that I and other gospel ministers need those prayers so much more than the apostle Paul and one of the ways that we can pray for gospel ministers is just based on our general awareness of their circumstances Paul was in prison and not only was he in prison he was in a Roman prison and the Colossians were able to pray for him they had an opportunity as he asked them to pray that he would persevere pray that he would be strengthened pray that he would not be disheartened by his chains and by all the suffering that he endured and so one of the ways that we can pray for gospel ministers is the very obvious things that we can see and other things that God might reveal and we pray for them accordingly second

Paul also says to the Colossians and by extension to us that we should pray for gospel opportunities look at what he says in verse three he says pray that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ and here mystery is not something that is hidden but mystery is something that was formerly hidden that God has now revealed something that was hidden under the Old Testament economy that now God has revealed in the New Testament and so this term mystery of Christ is shorthand for the gospel and Paul was saying asking them to pray for him and his gospel companions but he says beyond that I want you to pray that God would open a door for the gospel a door of gospel opportunity and the same is true for us today as I read these words

I thought of the apostle Paul in prison in chains and he's saying pray for doors to be open what is clear is that Paul was not even so much praying that his chains would be broken off of him that he would be set free he is praying for gospel opportunities because God could decide to let the opportunity be in the prison or God could decide to let the opportunities be given to others even as Paul remained in prison but Paul even in prison his heart was for the mission for the gospel to go forth notice in verse 3 that we have a prime example of divine sovereignty and human responsibility functioning together God is the one who opens doors that's divine sovereignty but we are the ones who are called to pray that he would do so and that's human responsibility

God is sovereign but he ordains means he uses means to bring about his sovereign purposes and so the ordinary means that God uses to open doors for the gospel to be spread is the prayers of the saints can he and does he sometimes sovereignly open doors for the gospel even though Christians have not prayed yes he does but the ordinary way that he does it is by us praying and this is why we need to pray that God will open doors for the gospel we can bring this in a very personal way that God will open doors in our families that God will open and I say this it is easy to think that because family is family the doors are always open but I think many of us know that even though people can be very close to you it seems like the door is closed in so many ways or there's some hurdle to jump over to be able to talk to them there's so many things to weed through to be able to talk to them and some of us would find it far easier talking to a stranger than to our own

loved ones where we can be praying

God open a door God open a conversation open their heart that I may share the gospel the same in our workplaces in our neighborhoods and in so many other kinds of settings that just don't seem to be obvious we can be praying God open a door of opportunity and third Paul called the Colossians and by extension he calls us to pray for gospel faithfulness notice how he says it in verse 4 he says I want you to pray that I may make the gospel clear which is how I ought to speak

[28 : 55] Paul called the Colossians to do this for him and we're called to do the same for gospel ministers today Paul's call was for clarity of the gospel and in the context in which Paul was in Paul recognized that if he was clear about the gospel there was a price to be paid if Paul were to be pre if he had been preaching Christ alongside Judaism and keeping the law he would have been fine but he wasn't doing that Paul was declaring that by the works of the Lord no flesh will be justified in God's sight and that upset the Pharisees and they did things to him like stoning him there's one account of it in Acts 14 in Leicester where they stoned

Paul if you preach the gospel vaguely alongside idolatry and paganism it would have been fine but Paul was calling people to turn away from idols and when he did so whole cities attacked him as happened in Ephesus recorded in Acts 19 it would have been so easy for Paul to just coexist to give in to the temptation of not wanting to be stoned and not wanting to be attacked like many other so-called gospel ministers of his day but Paul recognized that there was a price to be paid and that price was evident in the chains that he bore even as he wrote this letter and Paul was reminding them and he's reminding us that there is a price attached to proclaiming the gospel faithfully brothers and sisters it's always been that way it will continue to be that way and increasingly so in our context today to proclaim the gospel faithfully and to proclaim the gospel clearly has a great price attached to it one of the challenges that one of the challenges that gospel ministers face today is in the area of the gospel and human sexuality and the gospel and marriage today to be faithful to the word of

God and to call homosexual conduct sin is an invitation to be persecuted and to be derided even though you call those who practice homosexuality like every other sin you call them to repentance even though there is no distinction in focusing on one and not the other there is a price to be paid for simply touching on the issue of homosexuality in some cases today there are pastors who are being imprisoned for doing so just very recently Canada passed a law where they considered hate speech to say that homosexual conduct is sin and to say that transgenderism is not real just two weeks ago

Pastor John MacArthur preached a sermon on biblically based human sexuality and YouTube in a very short while took down the recording of that sermon and here's what YouTube said they took it down because it violated their hate speech policy and here's the part that was offensive John MacArthur said in his sermon there's no such thing as transgender you are either XX or XY that's it God made man male and female that is determined genetically it is physiology that is science that is reality and they took it down and the reality is that this will increase and it will not be confined to human sexuality it will soon spread to almost anything that is contained in the pages of scripture and we shouldn't be surprised and we shouldn't be alarmed eventually every single faithful church will be removed from social media and we shouldn't be surprised we shouldn't be alarmed it's free it's theirs it's owned by the people who own it and we shouldn't complain if they take us off and we should not compromise to stay on and we should not think it's strange if there is a price to be paid with our liberty to preach the gospel as it was for the apostle

Paul in our own country I will fight for liberties because it's the right thing to do but by the grace of God I will not fight for liberties to spare!

[35 : 03] myself from going to prison if that is the price to be paid to faithfully proclaim the gospel the price to be paid to say to a woman who pretends to be a man you are a woman or to say to two individuals of the same sex God did not ordain it that marriage would look like that if the price to be paid for saying that is to go to prison faithful ministers must go to prison and must not shy away from preaching these particular things and this is why prayer is needed that they would be faithful to do that that God would give them the courage despite the cost despite the hardship to be willing to say I will faithfully proclaim the gospel to my dying breath and here's what I know none of us is sufficient in and of ourselves to do so because we are fallen and because we are selfish and because left to ourselves we will not be faithful and so we need

God's grace and one of the ways that God has ordained that grace should come to his ministers is through the prayers of his people and so how can we apply these three verses on prayer that call us to be a people of prayer I want to suggest two simple ways as we close first take time to ponder them beyond this gathering I encourage us to carve out some time and ponder these three verses in light of this morning's sermon these are great verses to commit to memory to help us to be steadfast in prayer to be watchful in prayer to be thankful in prayer to pray evangelistically that the most important news that men and women need to hear will go forth isn't it a blessing to know that even though we may not be able to get on a plane or to go to foreign lands but we can pray there are a lot of things that we might not be able to do in our own right in the furtherance of the gospel that

God gives others opportunities to do but we can pray and in praying we are involved in the endeavor of the gospel going forth and lives being changed and that is the means that God has chosen to use and so let's ponder them and then second let's take time to pray about them and see how the Lord might speak to us in our own lives in a personal way asking that he would help us to make these verses more real in our lives so let's take time to ponder them let's take time to pray about them as I close this morning I especially encourage you to think about and pray about the extent to which any current paralysis in your prayer life might be due to spiritual warfare might be due to the forces of darkness that are working against you to keep you spiritually drowsy spiritually dumb so that you're not praying and I pray that if and when we see that we'll cry out to God for grace we'll cry out to God for change we'll cry out to God to help us to be faithful in prayer and again brothers and sisters what more precious gift can we ask for having been reconciled to God and being able to commune with him and to pray with him and to pray to him day by day I pray that God will quicken us and open our eyes to this wonderful privilege that we have to commune with the God of the universe and to pray in an ongoing way in the smallest things breathing prayer to God expressing our dependency upon the Lord if you're here this morning and you don't know the Lord or maybe you are viewing online I say to you come to Jesus turn from sin trust in Christ and this same privilege of communion with God will be yours and what you will find is God's word is true whoever comes to him he will never turn away he will receive all who come to him in faith let's pray together Father we pray this morning that you would make us a people of prayer Lord I pray you would loosen our tongues to pray I pray oh Lord that you would give freedom in our souls to pray I pray that you would convict us of how much we need to pray and oh

[41 : 26] Lord make us a people of prayer that in the smallest things and indeed in the bigger things we will pray and be people of prayer would you do this by your spirit we pray in Christ's name amen let's stand for our closing song