

Devotion to Prayer

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[0 : 00] an atheist was taking a walk, hiking in fact, out in the Canadian wilderness, standing in awe as he walked, and of just the natural beauty that was there, that was there by a freak of nature, an accident, when all of a sudden in his delight of daydreaming as he wandered, this huge grizzly bear was belting down towards him, down the trail, and he realised he had no chance, and before he knew it, he was flat on his back, pinned to the ground by this huge bear, and this bear, one paw on his chest, the other one up, ready to strike him, and without a thought, he blurted out at the top of his voice, Oh God, help me!

And the bear was momentarily startled by such a scream. Everything went into slow motion at that point, and the atheist all of a sudden realised the inconsistency of living his life confident that God doesn't exist, and then calling out to him when he had his time of need, and so he calls out a second time, I don't believe you exist, God, and I don't care if you do, but if you do, prove that you are good, and that you are powerful, as people say you are, and make this bear a Christian. He thought that was a pretty good move, because if the bear was a Christian, then he'd have to obey the command to turn the other cheek and not kill him. And to his great surprise, in that instant, the bear's demeanour just changed, and he pulled back his paw, and he knelt down beside him, he clapped his paws together, and he started to pray.

For what? I'm about to receive. May the Lord make me truly thankful. Now I'm pretty sure that story's not true.

Bears don't speak English. And I'm not convinced bears pray, but most humans on this planet, at least some time in their lives, pray.

[2 : 13] While it's true that prayer is practically a worldwide activity, what we actually mean by prayer is vastly different from group to group, individual to individual.

The difference in what prayer is or means or how we go about it is in what we think God is like, and what we think our relationship with him is like.

You see, when a Buddhist spins his prayer wheel or a Hindu sits in mystic silence or the Muslim with his prayer mat facing Mecca five times a day, they are all reflecting the character of the God or the gods they're praying to and what they think their relationship with that God is like.

It's no different for the Christian. Our prayer is shaped and defined by the God to whom we are praying.

And so there are many Bible references and multitude of Bible references that shape the Christian prayer life. And I'll just give you a couple. Jeremiah 32, 17. That shapes your prayer life, as does the whole chapter of Romans 8.

[3 : 37] It's the stunning picture of the Christian life that is laid out before us, where it says that we were once slaves to sin and death and fear. We were hostile to God.

We were unable to please Him. There was a gap that we could not communicate with Him. But we are now free, sons of the Father, co-heirs in His kingdom with Christ through being united with Jesus who died to free us.

We are now new. We have a new life which God Himself dwells in us by His Spirit. It's because of the saving work of the Lord Jesus that we are raised up from our low position of being cut off from any access to God.

And have been granted free access to the God who rules all things. Or Psalm 145. God, my translation of Psalm 145, God bends His ear and delights to hear your prayers.

You see, prayer is not an addition or an appendix to the Christian life. It is the heart of who we are as Christians and how we relate to the God who is in charge of all things.

[4 : 57] It's crucial for us because we sit in a room here and I imagine most people say that they pray in this room. But so does a Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, as I've already said.

Multitude of people, many people, most people in this world pray. But how does the Christian pray? Today is the first Sunday in February and it traditionally signals the start of ministry programs as we've just seen a moment ago in the new year.

And as we kick off this new year of ministry, we are doing what we've done in the previous two years. And we're beginning the ministry year with a week of prayer. And we do this to make a statement as a church.

It's a statement to God, to the world, and to our own consciences that we exist as a church to do things that we cannot do without the supernatural grace of God. Everything good and worthwhile and eternal and God glorifying that we want to do as a church, we cannot do without the supernatural grace of God.

And so Prayer Week proclaims St. Paul's exists mainly to do the humanly impossible. And that's written on the back wall of our church as you exit.

[6 : 06] We have a stated objective to grow, to be a healthy church with 150 call members and 500 attending by the end of this year. That is humanly impossible.

Our corporate objective was set at the end of 2011 for the three years up to the end of this year. And the intention and vision behind our objective is to see people know and treasure the Lord Jesus for the very first time through the people in the ministry of St. Paul's Chatsworth.

And here we are now. Two thirds of that time is gone. It's 2014 and January is over already. And we have a fair way to go.

But our Lord has not called us to an impossible mission. He's called us to a demanding one. And I chose Colossians 4.2.4 for the beginning of Prayer Week for that very reason.

Because if I understand this text correctly, the human key that might unlock the blessing of God's power and grace in our mission to Chatswood is devoted, watchful and thankful prayer.

[7 : 21] This text gives me strong hope that God will open a door for the word in Chatswood and faith will come to many people if we pray for him to do it.

In Colossians 4.2.4, Paul is urging the Colossians to pray just like I'm urging us to pray today. In fact, to pray for something quite specific.

I see two things that he wants them to pray for. And we'll look at those first before we turn our attention to how to pray for them. The two things are an open door for the word of God and for a powerful word to go through that open door.

Paul wants God to work both in the recipients of the message and in him, the proclaimer of the message. So in verse 3 he says, And pray for us too that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ.

And there are at least three other times in the New Testament that Paul uses the exact same image of an open door. In Acts 14.27, in 1 Corinthians 16, verses 8 and 9, in 2 Corinthians 2.12.

[8 : 35] Each time the open door seems to be a remarkable set of circumstances that would have been very effective for the gospel.

And so when Paul says in verse 3, Pray for us too that God may open a door for our message that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ. I take into mean that God changes things when his people pray.

Circumstances and attitudes and receptivity of the gospel change so that instead of hitting a brick wall, the gospel finds an open door and becomes unusually effective.

Such as in the case of Duncan Campbell, a minister of the United Free Church of Scotland. On the Monday after Easter in 1952, Campbell was seated on the platform of Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church in Bangor, a Northern Ireland.

I apologise if I've murdered that. Particularly to you, Katrina. It's a church that Nat and I have visited twice and a dear close friend of mine was on staff there for a number of years.

[9 : 51] He had just finished speaking to the Faith Mission Convention where he sensed the inner voice say to him, Bernare. And I apologise again if I've murdered that.

He bowed his head while he sat on the platform and he prayed. Again, the name came to him, Bernare. He prayed again and the name came to him a third time, Bernare.

And so Campbell turned while he was sitting on the platform to the chairman of the convention and said to him, Brother, you're going to need to excuse me. The Holy Spirit has just told me that I'm to

go to Bernare.

And the chairman objected. You're the tomorrow speaker. But he couldn't convince him and off he got from the platform and away he went. Went to his hotel, packed his two suitcases, contacted the airport and he'd have a flight to Bernare.

They said, no thing exists. They said, well get me, how do I get there? Here's one island which is close. He caught a flight to that island, walked down to the, the fishing port, asked the fisherman, how do I get there?

[10:59] He said, there is no commercial way to get there but you can get on my boat and I'll take you there. It'll cost this amount of money and it's almost exactly what he had in his pocket.

Fisherman took him, dropped him on the beach and he was there with his two suitcases, climbed over a little bit of a hill and thought, what do I do next?

He came to the edge of a cultivated paddock, saw a farmer work in the paddock. He called the farmer over and he says, go to your pastor and tell them that Uncle Campbell has arrived.

We don't actually have a minister right now was the reply. He said, do you have elders? Yes we do, we'll go and tell your nearest elder that Uncle Campbell has arrived.

Farmer looked at him quite quizzically then amazingly started off across the field, left his work, came back after some time, Duncan Campbell sitting there on the hillside, sitting on his suitcases. Farmer says, the elder's expecting you. He has a place ready for you and he has announced that the meetings will begin at nine o'clock tonight. While Campbell was speaking in Bangor, Northern Ireland, this elder had spent the day praying in his shed for God to send revival to the island.

[12:21] His wife in the house overheard him pray, Lord, I don't know where he is, but you know where he is and all things are possible to you, so send Uncle Campbell to Burneray.

And he was so sure that God would do that and that he would do it in three days, that he made all the arrangements for the local church and announced all the services across the island and great revival broke out across Burneray.

A great door for the word was opened, a door that no person could shut because God had opened it. And so my friends, the first thing we should be praying for this year is that God would work in all the circumstances surrounding our people and our ministry, including the hearts of everyone who hears the gospel to open a wide and effective door for that gospel.

Let this sink not just into your minds, but into your hearts. The key to opening the door of God's blessing on our vision to see people come to Christ will be prayer if God so chooses.

That's the first thing that Paul mentions for prayer. The second thing to pray for is the clarity of the message and boldness of the messenger. Verses 3 and 4, pray for us too that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains.

[14:01] Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. And so Paul exhorts the Colossians here to persevere in prayer and follows it immediately with a request to pray for him and for his co-workers.

The content of the prayer is not for the personal benefit of Paul or his companions, but for the preaching of the gospel. He mentions he's in chains for his preaching, but he doesn't ask for prayer to be released from those chains in order to keep preaching.

He doesn't pray for personal benefit, he prays for the effectiveness of the message going out. And we see here at a number of points in the New Testament that Paul places a significant importance on his converts and other Christians partnering with him in prayer as he seeks to win the Gentile world for Christ.

He sees them as partners with him in that task. He earnestly desired their help and their support as he laboured to see the gospel spread to the ends of the earth.

And there is no better way to express this partnership than in accessory prayer. When he calls these Christians to pray for him and his colleagues, he is calling them to an ongoing activity.

[15:28] This is a prayer for the preacher, for the evangelist, for the community group leader, for the music director and for every Christian who has the word of God on their lips. Friends, let me say how consistently aware I am that I need your prayers.

if Paul needed their prayers because he could imagine himself speaking the gospel in such a way that was not clear or bold or powerful, how much more can I imagine that for myself?

The greatest preacher and missionary who ever lived said that the effectiveness of his preaching depended on the prayers of the church. And if that's true for Paul, that's true for me.

100, 200, 300 times over. What happens right now? Right now is the Bible's open in front of you. even as this word of Colossians 4 is right in front of us depends in great measure on how you have prayed up to this point.

And so there are two prayer requests, one for an open door in the lives of unbelievers and for a clear and powerful gospel message to go through that door. And it is with a real sense of urgency that I called you to devote yourself to pray like that in 2014.

[17 : 14] And this is, brings me to how we are to pray. Paul mentions three things in verse 2. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Pray with the devotion, with watchfulness and with thanksgiving. The call of God's word here is to devote yourself to prayer and it shouldn't come as a surprise to us given what he requests prayer for in verses 3 and 4.

If prayer is so great and central to us unlocking God's purpose for the universe and your life, it is not surprising that God would command us to devote ourselves to prayer.

The word be devoted to or persevere in or continue in occurs six times in the New Testament connected to prayer. Acts 1.14, they all joined together constantly in prayer.

Acts 2.42, they, that is the early church, devoted themselves to prayer. Acts 6.4, the apostles said that they would devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

[18 : 17] Romans 12.12, be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Ephesians 6.18, pray in the spirit on all occasions.

It means to pray regularly and to pray often. Prayer is not infrequent and prayer is not meant to be hit and miss for the Christian. Being devoted to prayer means that we are not to be haphazard, we are not to be forgetful.

It means that we take steps to see that it is part of our regular life the same way that eating and sleeping is. I think it's also implied in the word watchfulness to describe the sort of prayer life that we are called to have.

Watchfulness is often used as a reference in the Bible to particularly in the New Testament the second coming of Christ and the final judgment, the end of all things.

The vision of the future, God's plan and purposes coming to their final end in Christ, is to govern not just the content of our prayer life but our devotion to it.

[19 : 26] God is working out his purposes and he will bring it all to completion and so don't go to sleep at the wheel. Direct your mind to Christ and his coming and the fulfillment of all our hope and our joy.

Labor against distractions and hindrances and the temptation towards prayerless praying. Be vigilant, my friends, like a sentry on duty outside the camp at night knowing that if you go to sleep the enemy can overthrow your mission.

This is the tempo of prayer I think that is often missing when the church has settled into the world and is just using prayer as a domestic intercom rather than a battlefield walkie-talkie.

Paul urges the church to be devoted to prayer because of how tremendously serious the battle is that we're involved in. Heaven and hell hang in the balance for many people this year and so be watchful, awake, vigilant and pray.

Pray the way you would if you knew that two of your unbelieving friends would hear the gospel for the last time next Sunday. And finally Paul calls us here to pray with thanksgiving.

[20 : 56] It doesn't seem right to pray for God to open a door of faith for others without remembering that he did that very thing for you. Does it?

When we pray for the salvation of others isn't the fervency of our prayer a mirror of how thankful we are for our own salvation? If we don't feel thankful for our own salvation for the time when God opened the door of our hearts and unlocked it so that we saw Christ in all his glory and beauty then how can we pray with devotion and watchfulness and urgency for the salvation of others?

I suspect that we grow in thankfulness for our own rescue as we do that we will pray with a new zeal for the rescue of others. So friends go to your word and remind yourself of the gospel every day.

Amen. On the back wall of our church just as you leave in our welcome centre downstairs a bunch of stuff that I've written around the place we have a core value called devotion to prayer and I wrote it and it's based on this passage Colossians 4 2 4 but I the one who penned those words need this word from Colossians 4 to penetrate my heart and to shape my life more in 2014.

Prayerlessness or haphazard prayer life makes me feel like a hypocrite more than anything else. More than anything else.

[22 : 51] I've always found prayer to be hard work. I'm an activist which means I don't often stop and for me I've had to learn to pray and walk and I have to take steps to ensure that prayer deliberate steps to ensure that prayer is incorporated in my daily life.

our core value says that as a church we are committed to consistently bringing all things to God in prayer intentionally building prayer into the centre of our life together developing a culture of natural and instructed prayerfulness when interacting sorry unstructured prayerfulness when interacting with each other encouraging and equipping for prayer for personal and family level and incorporating prayer into every church activity.

So friends can I encourage you to join together in seeing this core value written on our hearts in such a way that it shapes our actions and our attitudes into 2014.

in the immediate can I call you to join with me in this prayer week in being devoted to praying that a door would be open for the gospel among many precious unbelievers and that we would proclaim the gospel with clarity and with power and can I call you to be committed to that devoted to that throughout the course of this year here's a really simple way of going on this in terms of the gospel going out pray one plus one plus one one plus one plus one equals one it's bad mathematics but it's a good point commit to praying for one person for one minute once a day and pray that God would bring that one person into his kingdom one plus one plus one equals one

I've got one plus one plus one in my diary in my electronic diary it pops up every day of the year as a reminder and my one plus one plus one equals and I've got the initials of the person that I'm praying for brothers and sisters pray for a door to be open to the gospel as we labor to make it known with clarity and with boldness and with power in our mission field here at St Paul's let's pray Father you're you're a God who controls all things in this world you have all the power where we have none and it is your plan and purposes to call people from every tribe and language and nation under the lordship of the Christ and we pray

[26 : 07] Father that you would do that in our midst and we pray Father that we would not sit back in comfortable mediocrity but that we would see the mission that you put before us as a demanding mission but you are an even greater God and we pray Lord that you would help us to pray in the same way that the Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray men who had prayed all their life I pray that you would teach us to pray in a new way to pray for your kingdom to come to pray for your kingdom to come in the hearts of many and so Lord as we move into 2014 we pray for every instance where your word will be proclaimed and I pray Lord it will be done with boldness and with clarity and with power and we pray Father that you would send your spirit and you would unlock the doors of people's hearts so that they not just understand the gospel but they see the beauty of it and they would receive the

Lord Jesus with joy and we ask it for your sake Amen for Lord O43 o43 p outfits o43 o100 o100 ou oor