

Pray-Watch-Thank

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[0 : 00] And reading in verse 2, Colossians 4, verse 2, Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. I don't think it would be possible for Paul to write a letter without encouraging people to pray.

In fact, in all his letters, you will find that the subject of prayer comes up. Paul himself was a man of prayer. And you will find that it's true of all the great people of the Bible that they were people of prayer.

And Paul knew, just as Jesus knew, just as the early church knew, that the growth of the kingdom is tied in with our prayer.

And you know, it's an awesome privilege that the Lord has given to us, the privilege of prayer. Sometimes we take it for granted because it's something we've been taught from our youngest days.

[1 : 12] If you are brought up in a Christian home or a home that has a sympathy with the Christian faith, all young people are taught a wee bit about prayer.

And it's one of the great things within a child's life that they're taught to pray. Because it is the great privilege.

And sometimes we forget just what it is that we're doing, that we're having an audience with the creator God of heaven and earth, that we're able to come right into his presence. Can you imagine the opportunity that if we were given the freedom to go into the place, the residence, 10 Downing Street or Buckingham Palace, whenever we chose, and that we could petition the prime minister or petition the queen any time we wanted and bring anything we had, any burden that was upon us, that we could go with it and they would listen to us.

We would say, whoa, that's actually quite extraordinary. Well, here we have the greatest king, the king above every king, the eternal king, the all-powerful king.

And any day, any time, anywhere, we can go into his presence. And so it is this inestimable privilege that has been given to us. Now, the thing is, you will never find a praying Christian who is not a growing Christian.

[2 : 41] And you won't find a prayerless Christian, which is almost a contradiction, but it's possible. You won't find a prayerless Christian growing.

A growing Christian is always a praying Christian. The two things are inseparably bound. A prayerless Christian will not be growing.

And so we find here that God has given us this great privilege of prayer. Prayer and the word is what brings us into the kingdom.

Prayer and the word is what enables us to grow in the kingdom. And prayer and the word is what prepares us for leaving the kingdom here in this world to entering into the eternal kingdom.

Because, as we know, as people say, we are in the departure lounge. We are waiting until we are called into the eternal kingdom.

[3 : 45] So it's a word and prayer. There aren't other things. It's a word and prayer that God has given us in order to enter his kingdom. Because it is through the word that we come to faith and through our asking the Lord that he would come into our heart.

And it is through this word that we are sanctified, that we are being changed more and more. And as we seek the Lord's face and his favor, he works within us.

But he is also preparing us for glory. Often said Martin Luther used to say that there were three things that regulated Christian growth.

Prayer, the word, and temptation. These three things God uses in order to develop us and in order for that we might grow in this world. So Paul here highlights the great importance of prayer. And he says to continue steadfastly in it. Now that can mean two things. It can mean, first of all, that we are in the habit of prayer. That prayer is something that is part and partial of our everyday life. [4 : 57] That we have different types of prayer. We have spontaneous prayer. We have urgent prayer. We have prayer that just happens all of a sudden.

For instance, if something happens and you say to the Lord, Lord, help me here. How often we have done that in our day to day. Lord, I do not know what to do. Help me. There are these little prayers.

But they are real prayers and they are prayers of faith. They come from a heart that believes in God. Believes that God will help you. That God will answer.

That God will direct you. Sometimes we, even just as we go about our daily work or whatever it is that we are doing. We become so aware of the wrongdoing of our life.

And we can even, when we are working, say, oh Lord, forgive me. Lord, have mercy upon me. Lord, show me what to do. Lord, help me here.

[5 : 57] This is too much for me. You know how often within the course of a day you find and you say, I don't know what to do. And sometimes you can feel overwhelmed. And things can just like a wave coming in over us all of a sudden.

We say, Lord, I need your help here. So it can mean that. So that continues steadfastly. But it can also mean persevering in prayer.

In other words, going on and on and on before the Lord, praying about something. Or praying about a few things. But just, it's like not stopping.

And you keep praying and you keep praying and you keep praying. It's this persevering in prayer. And God wants us to do that. Because sometimes people will say, oh, you know, I don't know if I can bring this to the Lord.

Have you ever thought that? I don't know if I can actually go to the Lord with this. Well, you can. Because the Lord says in everything by prayer.

[7 : 03] And when the Lord says that, he means it. He wouldn't just put that in and say, oh, when I say everything, I don't mean everything. He does. He means everything.

The good things, the bad things, the difficult things, the things that lift you up, the things that put you down. The huge things in your life, the little insignificant things in your life. Everything.

He means exactly what he says. And we won't tire the Lord out. You know, sometimes at home maybe you're talking about something and you raise it over and over.

And people get tired of, oh, not that again. Well, the Lord is never like that. The Lord will never say, oh, here he comes again. Or here she comes again with that. There have been the, there's been the odd occasion in the Bible when the Lord has said.

Remember when, and these are exceptions. But the Lord, the Lord actually said, don't speak to me about it again. He said it to Moses. Moses, Moses remember how he was forbidden to go into the land of promise after he had sinned.

[8 : 11] And he pleaded. He had must have, it's one of the things I often think about, the heartbreak for Moses, who had led Israel out of Egypt and for 40 years taken them through the wilderness.

And yet he was denied actual access. He saw the land. He went up to the mountain. He saw the land. But he didn't get in. And when the Lord told him he wasn't going to go in, that was a heartbreak to Moses.

And he pleaded to the Lord. And he went back to the Lord. And the Lord, the Lord said, don't speak to me anymore about it. You're not going in. And, of course, we with hindsight are able to understand why Moses wasn't getting in.

Yes, he had sinned. But Moses, as we often said, he was the representative of the law. He stood for the law. And as such, as the representative of the law, he takes you to the very borders of the promised land.

But he can't take you in. It's Joshua, who is Jesus, who is salvation, who led them in. And that's how it is. The law is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, takes us to the borders of the kingdom.

[9 : 22] But the law can't take us into the kingdom. It's Jesus who takes us into the kingdom. And so, in God's sovereign way of teaching us and teaching his people, although it was hard for Moses,

this is what he had to do.

He could take them to the borders, but not actually take them in. However, as we say, the Lord doesn't say to us, don't speak to me about this again.

He tells us to keep on and to keep on praying. And as we said, we will never tire the Lord. So we have to ask ourselves, what is prayer? Well, the short of Catechism puts it very simply where it says prayer is an offering up of our desires to God.

Of course, there's a lot more in it, but that is it encapsulated in that moment. It is the offering up of our desires unto God. And as we said, the great encouragement is that God wants us to pray. We love to hear the voice of our children. If our children are away, they might text or they might send an email, but you prefer to hear their voice.

[10:34] That's what you want to hear. And it's the same with ourselves. God wants to hear our voice. If you today, you're a child of God, God wants to hear your voice.

And it must be a great disappointment to the Lord when he doesn't hear your voice. Sometimes you might be listening and you say, I'm not hearing his voice, I'm not hearing her voice.

But he wants to hear your voice. Because we're told in Proverbs that the prayer of the upright is a delight to him. So don't worry, you won't tire him.

Your prayers aren't stupid. They're a delight to him. That's what he actually loves, hearing your voice as you come to him in prayer. And so God wants his people to continually pray.

And one of the things that God wants us to pray for is the establishment of his kingdom in this world. Now that's a great encouragement to us.

[11:38] Because that means that we have the right to pray against all the stranglehold of secularism and atheism and humanism.

And all the opposition that is coming and strangling us today. And sometimes we feel we can almost have a defeatist attitude and say, oh well, we've kind of had it.

When we look back and you think how it was 10 years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, we used to say, oh, it's getting harder and harder. But every year it's getting harder and harder.

But the Lord encourages us to pray. This is what he says, listen. Give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.

Give the Lord no rest. Keep knocking, knocking, knocking, pleading that he will establish his kingdom on this earth.

[12:44] That's what it's saying. And so we have our right to go. Is it possible that things are getting so bad because God's people aren't praying that we've kind of given up?

That we've lost heart? That we're saying, oh, what's the point? Or is it just a handful of people? Or are the Lord's people taking it?

Are all God's people taking on board and saying, hey, this is what he's actually saying? He's saying to us, give him no rest. I have here the authority. I have here the backing of God.

And he's saying to me, keep on, keep on, keep on, keep on praying. Because if you do so, I will develop and I will make my kingdom greater and greater.

And I will establish it on the earth. It could be that we're not nearly urgent enough or that we're not continuing as we should.

[13:47] Because that's what the Lord is saying to us. So he wants, as we say, his people to be praying. Now this word carries the idea of somebody who is devoted to prayer.

Continuing steadfast in prayer is somebody who is devoted to prayer. Now if you're devoted to something, you're given over to that thing. It's what you do.

It's natural to you. If you're devoted to something, it's not something that you say, now, will I do this or will I not? It's what you do. It's part and partial of your life.

And so that's how prayer ought to be in our lives. It ought to be automatic. Yes, there are times that we have our devotion, our times of devotion.

And, you know, I would always say this, that we won't have the spontaneous, the constant praying, as Paul says, praying without ceasing. That prayer is that daily part of your life.

[14:48] If we don't have our quiet times as well. It's not enough just to have these kind of moments of prayer. You're praying here, praying just a wee word here and a wee word there.

We need to stop and come aside with the Lord. That's an important integral part of every day as well. The Lord says to set yourself aside.

And the aviator says go into your closet or go, in other words, just go somewhere private and get a wee bit of time alone with the Lord. Do business with the Lord. And once you, if you establish the day in that way, then it becomes natural that you continue, that you continue to pray.

And I think probably one of the saddest things you can find is that when you climb into bed at night and you say to yourself, do you know this? I don't know, I don't know how much I've spoken to the Lord.

Have I spoken to the Lord today? And sometimes you have to think back and say, was there much communication between my heart and heaven? Well, as you know, all the great people in the Bible, you look at the lives of your Abraham, your Jacob, your Moses, your David, your Daniel, your Paul. [16:03] They did huge things, great things for the Lord. But at the very heart of it all was their prayer life. All these people, just to mention, there's loads more here, Elijah. They were all people of prayer.

And they all did great things for the Lord. And so we too must be in the habit of praying, of bringing before the Lord. And of course, prayer involves praise.

It involves not just a petition or confession. It involves all these things as we come to our Heavenly Father. And so we are to intercede, intercede on behalf of others.

And when we come in prayer, we pray about ourselves. We pray about our family. We pray about our community. We pray about our church. We pray about our land.

We pray. You know, the more you actually pray, the more you set aside a time to pray, the more time you need. You know, that's a funny thing with prayer.

[17:00] If you're, supposing you're a Christian and you say to yourself, you know, I haven't really put much time in prayer. In the course of the day, I only spend a couple of minutes where I have my wee quiet time.

But if you say, right, I'm going to put aside, there's five minutes, and I'm going to set that five minutes aside to pray. And if you really get into the heart of prayer, you will find that the five minutes will become ten minutes.

And you will find that the more you pray, the more you find to pray about. The more that you will need to pray. And, you know, the wonderful thing is that as you get into the heart of prayer and you feel, because sometimes when we pray, we feel that heaven doors are locked against you.

You're just getting nowhere. But, you know, sometimes it takes a wee while to get the door of heaven open. Not, it is open, but that's the way we feel.

But, you know, once you feel that you're getting somewhere in prayer, then everything changes. And you've got this sense of that there's not just that you're praying about things, but that you're getting to know the one you're praying to.

[18:17] That you're conscious of his presence, of him being here with you. And it's a wonderful, it's an absolutely wonderful thing. The early churches, we know, they devoted themselves to the prayer and the word.

Remember in the early days of the early church, that's what they did. They were caught up at the beginning with so many things and they said there's too much. They got the deacons, they got other people involved and they said, look, the apostles, this is what they said.

There's, in order for the kingdom to spread two things, we are going to devote ourselves to the word and prayer. That's it. Other people can do other things.

That's what we're going to do. So they saw the absolute priority of it. So, it's, as we say, it's absolutely vital that we pray personally, we pray urgently, and there is just so much that we can bet the time is going.

But then the second thing that we see, so much that you could see here, we have to be watchful in it. In order to pray right, we need to watch. And you and I know how easy it is to become drowsy when you pray.

[19:27] In fact, this word watchful could also mean wakeful, awake, vigilant. And we've got to always remember that we have an enemy of our souls.

And you will all know what I'm talking about. You can be alert. Everything can be fine. You can be chatting away. You can be working. You can be doing this and that. Feel bright as a button and you say, right, I'm going to have a quiet time.

I'm going to spend a little time in prayer. And you hardly start when your eyelids begin to get heavy. And you begin to get drowsy. You can be reading.

You can be reading the paper and you're, oh, this is a really interesting article. And you say, well, you know what? I'm going to read the Bible. Start reading the Bible, your mind goes away. What we've got to remember is that we have an enemy of our souls who does not want us to read God's word.

And he does not want us to pray. And we've got to always remember that there is this influence going on behind. Where he is trying to make us drowsy.

[20 : 31] Trying to take us away. This heaviness coming in. It has been often highlighted. Remember the battle in the wilderness when Joshua led against the Amalekites.

And the battle was going all day. And Moses went up the mountain to pray. And he held up his hands to pray for Joshua and the Israelites fighting below.

And Moses had Aaron and her with him. And it tells us that Moses' hands were becoming heavy. And when Moses held his hands up, which was signaling him praying, when his hands came down, Israel were losing the battle.

So his hands had to go back up. And as long as Moses was praying, Israel were winning. And in the end, Aaron and her were having to support Moses' hands.

We don't read of Joshua fought all day. We don't read of Joshua, his hands becoming tired in battle. But in the fighting, we don't read of him becoming tired.

[21 : 44] I'm sure he was. But we don't read of it. But we read of Moses becoming tired in prayer. And that's just the very thing that we're highlighting here. And once you go into prayer, a weariness is likely to take over.

Even when you're alert for other things. So we're up against an enemy. And he will do everything to prevent us from being watchful, from being, as we say, wakeful.

And probably as Paul is writing this about being watchful and being awake, coming to his mind, he's thinking about, remember on the Mount of Transfiguration when the disciples were with Jesus?

What happened to them? In that beautiful moment when the glory shone through Jesus, it tells us that they fell asleep. A heaviness came over them. Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane when they were with Jesus and Jesus was in agony.

And he says to the disciples, can you, will you stay here and pray? Because I'm going to go a wee bit further to pray. When he came back, how did he find them praying? No, asleep.

[22 : 54] And he said to them, rise and pray. And then he said to them, watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. And he went away. And when he came back, they were asleep again.

What happened to them? They fell into temptation. Because they weren't not just praying but watching. Peter most of all fell into terrible temptation. And so watching is vital.

In any military campaign, there are always people on watch. Looking out for the enemy. Being aware of all their surrounds, what's happening.

And so it is for us as well. As we journey on in the Christian life, we've got to be aware. Aware of the enemy. Aware of who's around, what's around, and what's happening.

So as we say, watching is absolutely vital. And not just watching for the enemy, but watching for the return of prayers. You know, as you pray, are you looking for the answer?

[23 : 56] Is it possible that the answer has come and you don't know? You know, sometimes that can happen. You're praying and praying. And it might be a good while down the road.

You think, well, God actually answered my prayer. I just didn't recognize that. I didn't understand. That was the answer to my prayer. Well, we should have the attitude of Elijah.

When he prayed, he kept watching. Remember how he was praying and praying for rain? And he would send the servant and say when he would get up from his prayer, he was down on the ground praying.

He would get up and say to the servant, go and look at the sky on the horizon. See if there's any sign even of any sign of a cloud coming with rain. The servant would go off.

He'd come back. No, nothing. Elijah would get back down praying, praying, praying. Here's an example of constant, steadfast praying.

[24 : 55] And then eventually the servant came back and he says, you know what? There's a wee cloud just about the size of a man's hand, way in the distance. Elijah said, that's it. That's the answer to prayer.

He knew that that cloud was the signal, the sign that there were going to be more clouds and eventually there was going to be rain. He was watching. He was waiting.

He was alert. He was looking for the sign of God answering prayer. That's how we were to pray as well, with an expectancy, with a faith, with a looking so that we'll be able to discern the answer, to be able to make it out.

And then it says, again, there's so much that we could do on this, it says that we're to pray with thanksgiving. And the more we pray, the greater our dependence upon the Lord becomes. It's inevitable. You feel, and this is where people who aren't Christians cannot understand the way the Christian lives.

[26 : 01] And I remember when I was converted, somebody who was no friend of the gospel, he said to me when I was converted, he says, I thought you were strong enough to go through life on your own without having to lean on that crutch.

So that becoming a Christian is a crutch. And although it was said in a derogatory manner, actually what he said was absolutely true.

Because that's what happens. You come to this place where you realize that you can't go through life on your own. And that you do need a crutch. And that crutch is the Lord.

And you, he is the one who is there. And the more you lean on him, the more you want to lean on him. The more dependent you become on him. And that's a great thing.

That's what God wants us to do. It's, yes, it's a growing sense of our own weakness. But tied into that is a growing awareness of his strength, which is sufficient for us in our weakness.

[27 : 05] So as we come to the Lord with thankfulness, the first thing, thank the Lord. We've said it already, but for the privilege of prayer.

Imagine if the only way that we could speak to the Lord was through a priest. Imagine if we had to go to a particular building and there was a particular individual there and we had to say to this individual, right, I want you to pray for me.

And here, I've written out the things I want you to pray. I want you to pray for that. And imagine if that's what prayer was. That the only way that we could bring anything to the Lord was through another individual, another person.

But we don't. We have freedom. Just any time. As we said earlier on, any time in the world, anywhere, any time, we can bring whatever we need before the Lord.

Do we sufficiently thank the Lord for that? Maybe sometimes you might be saying to yourself, well, it's all very well saying, have thanksgiving attached to the prayer.

[28 : 23] I can understand praying steadfastly. I can understand praying watching. But I find it difficult to be thanking the Lord because of my circumstances.

My circumstances are difficult. Well, remember who wrote this letter. It's the Apostle Paul. And he asks the church at the very end, remember my chains.

The man who was writing this letter to thank the Lord, and this is what he did in his life, was chained in prison. His circumstances weren't too smart.

In fact, who would want to swap places with somebody who was bound in prison and was going to be eventually executed? And yet, that's the person who's telling us, in everything, thank the Lord.

May thanksgiving be part of not just your prayer life, but your life. Now, I know for some of you, this might be so difficult, but there's always something to thank the Lord for.

[29 : 27] It's not saying that you're thanking the Lord for the difficult providence that you've gone through, but you thank the Lord for the grace that has enabled you to bear, the grace that has taken you thus far.

Some of you might be in a place, have reached a point where you thought, there might have been a time in your life you thought, I'll never reach that far on. My life is over.

That may be the way you felt. Maybe the way you still feel. And yet, you have to say, you know, the Lord is taking me on. It's difficult, but he's taking me on.

And so we have to, we have to thank him wherever we are and whatever we're going through.

Thank him for all the promises that we have. Bible, Bible is just from Genesis through to Revelation, is rich with the most beautiful promises.

And the Lord is saying, I'll do this, I'll do that, I'll do the next thing. And we're to go and we're saying, Lord, this is what you say. Do as you have said.

[30 : 30] I hope and pray that steadfast, continual prayer with alertness, watchfulness, being awake, and with thanksgiving is part and partial of your life.

Let us pray. Lord our God, we give thanks for the great opportunity and privilege of prayer. We pray that we may discover our lives becoming enriched and that we might be growing in grace as we continue before you.

We pray that you will bless us. Bless us as we make our way home, take us home in safety. We pray, Lord, for your blessing upon the cup of tea, coffee in the hall after. Do us good, we pray, and cleanse us from our every sin in Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen. We conclude singing in the fifth psalm, psalm number five. This is from Sing Psalms. And we're going to sing the first, it's on page four, the tune is Arlington.

We're going to sing the first two stanzas and the last two. So we're going to sing verses one, one to three, and then eleven and twelve.

[31 : 46] O Lord, give ear to what I say, think on me as I sigh, and listen, O my King and God, as I plead earnestly for help, because to you I cry.

And then the last, the very end, so those who truly love your name will give a joyful shout. Surely you bless the righteous Lord. Your favor keeps them safe from harm and shields them round about. So verses one to three, and eleven to twelve, and the tune is Arlington. O Lord, give ear to what I say, think on me as I sigh, and listen, O my King and God, as I plead earnestly for help, because to you I cry.

At dawning of the day, O Lord, you listen to my plea, As morning light returns again, I lay before you my request, and wait expectantly.

But let all those who feed to you Rejoice with confidence Let them at all times sing for joy And read your protection over them And read their strong defense So those who truly love you Rejoice with confidence And hear your protection over them And hear your protection over them And hear your protection over them And hear your protection over them When hear a joyful shout Surely you rest the righteous Lord.

[34 : 41] Your favor keeps them safe from harm. And shields them round the door.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.