

Religious Duties To Faithfully Carry Out

Colossians 4:2-6

We are in the final chapter in Colossians. And as usual – it's packed full of encouragement and information that we need. Paul would never write a letter without urging the duty and the privilege of prayer. He tells us to persevere in prayer. But even for the best of and most faithful of us – there comes times when prayer seems to go no farther than the walls and ceiling of the room. From a calendar: The only place God never answers prayer is on the golf course.

And it's not a surprise that Paul links prayer to living rightly and seeking out opportunities to evangelize. This is an important lesson for us because the lack of evangelism opportunities is directly tied to the lack of proper prayer, and proper prayer is directly related to living in a manner in keeping with being someone who has been raised up with Christ.

Let's allow the Holy Spirit to blow freshness on us through this passage. We have all heard about the need to pray and the need to witness and yet most of us struggle because we know we're not doing enough. We know that prayer makes a difference, that we have access to the God of the universe, that we can have peace as we pray, and that without prayer, we are powerless. And yet, we all could probably have a better prayer life.

Even though I love to pray, I find there is nothing that my flesh resists quite as much as being still and seeking the Lord. Though communion with the Lord is life's greatest pleasure, I often neglect it as if it were not even a priority. Prayer is both a privilege and one of the most difficult struggles we endure. It's one reason I do prayer walking. The habit of walking is a good health measure, but it's more importantly an activity that also reminds me to work on my spiritual health by praying. And it is good to sit, contemplate, reflect, and pray.

Prayer is simple but it is also a most difficult part of the Christian life. Ask any believer about their battles, and nine out of ten will tell you that maintaining a warm and deepening prayer life is

one of their greatest challenges. Because so many have struggled for so long, it's tempting to not pray at all. But then we feel guilty for not trying harder to cultivate a life of prayer.

So here are some **obstacles to prayer** we should reflect on. *First*, we may not yet have a true relationship with our Creator. To experience the joy of answered prayer, it's essential we can call God our Father. We can do that only if we have fully received Jesus Christ into our lives.

Second, we may be more focused on asking for things, than on knowing God more deeply and closely, intimately. James 4:3 tells us sometimes we don't receive because we are asking with wrong motives. "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives so you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

The *Third* obstacle to prayer is, we are too proud. If the truth were known, some of us don't really feel like we need any help, except in emergencies. James 4:6: teaches, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Fourth, we view prayer as a chore. It takes time and energy we want to use for other things. When we see something as a "have to" we often fight against it. Most of us know through experience that guilt trips are usually dead ends because guilt is a lousy motivator. Only grace can truly bring us to our knees. And you probably can list your own obstacles to prayer.

So, let's dive into these verses, on **how to pray**. Verse 2. "Pray & keep praying. Be alert & thankful when you pray." Not being devoted to prayer, aware & thankful, hinders our prayer lives. Not doing this leads to a failure in witnessing. Salvation is a matter for the Holy Spirit and not our ability to argue someone into the kingdom. But, we need to be well prepared in knowing the gospel message, revering Christ as Lord, and be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks us to give an account for the hope that is within us, as it says in 1 Peter 3:15.

The verb translated here is *devote, meaning giving constant attention*. It is the idea that we

keep coming back to prayer. We will give our attention to other things, but we always return to diligent prayer. We can always pray, multi-task, while doing our daily tasks. George Mueller, who had a great reputation as a man of prayer, petitioned God concerning the salvation of three of his friends for well over 20 years. All did eventually become Christians, with one of them repenting after Mueller's death.

Being devoted in prayer is similar to cheering on your sports team, regardless of whether they are winning or losing. That means that when the Rough Riders lose their next game, we will still root for them. Paul is saying something quite simple: Keep praying. Don't forget. Don't give up. Be faithful. We may have dry times and days when we don't know what to pray, but keep praying anyway. Even tell God, we don't know what or how to pray for this situation. But let's "pray continually" as 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says.

A *second* how to of prayer is to be *watchful, vigilant, alert and in constant readiness*. In Greek the word here literally means *wakeful*. This reminds us of when Jesus asked the disciples to stay awake and pray with him in the Garden of Gethsemane after the last Supper and before he was arrested. It's true it is often hard to keep alert, focused and to not doze off – but we must find ways to stay vigilant. Paul assumes we will pray. But we are to give steady attention; be in constant readiness; & persistent in prayer. Devoted to prayer refers to a God consciousness that comes from walking with Him & relating each experience in life to Him.

Prayer is an important expression of our New Life in Christ. It is the means of obtaining for ourselves and others the satisfaction of physical and spiritual needs. It is a divinely appointed weapon against the sinister attacks of the devil and his demons. It is the vehicle for confession of sin. And it's the tool by which a grateful soul pours out spontaneous adoration before the Throne of God on high. So, we need to use prayer regularly as we stay fully alert, watchful. Watchful prayer provides the spiritual fortitude to face down temptation. Because Peter could not stay awake when he was supposed to pray,

he gave in to temptation and denied Christ a few hours later. Wakeful prayer helps us listen to the Holy Spirit as well as notice ourselves and what & how we are praying. Vigilant prayer keeps us from being bored & going through the motions.

Consider the difference between military sentries. One is guarding an Armory here in Canada. Another is guarding the border. And a third is guarding a platoon in a war zone. Which one is probably going to be more attentive? Which one will be more watchful, wakeful, alert, vigilant, being constantly ready? The answer is the sentry in greater danger, & who understands they are in a battle. Because you and I are in a regular spiritual battle, we need to always stay on high alert. 1 Peter 5:8 paints a real picture of the war we are in: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

And the *third* how to of prayer is, always *be thankful*. As we read Paul's writings, we should not be surprised, he is always thankful, whatever the circumstances. We should never pray without thinking of at least one thing to thank God for. Gratitude is a great stimulus to prayer. This attitude keeps us watchful. When we see answers to prayer, we will pray more. And when we don't, we just get more persistent as well as remember how wonderful our Creator has been toward us in so many ways.

Colossians 4:2 tells us how we are to pray by being devoted, alert and thankful. Next, Colossians 4: 3 & 4 instructs us on **what to pray for**. "And while you are praying, add us to your prayers. Pray that God would *open doors and windows and minds and eyes and hearts for the word so we can go on telling the mystery of the Anointed, for this is exactly why I am currently imprisoned. Pray that I, Paul, will *proclaim this message clearly and fearlessly* as I should.*"

Knowing a little about Paul, this is not a casual request. It's amazing that while Paul is under house arrest, he does not ask for prayers for his release, or for better food, or anything else like that. He simply wants prayers for an *open door for the gospel message*. Even though he was

locked up, he was able to minister effectively. But he felt he needed the prayers of God's people for the doors to open.

You think with Paul in prison, he would retire. But no! Instead, he asks for prayer to open doors for ministry, prayer to proclaim Jesus Christ, prayer for opportunities to evangelize. This is a good thing to be obsessively compulsive about. Paul in other writings also craved the prayers of people. He knew it would lead to increased opportunities to proclaim the gospel message.

This is what we are to pray for. Opportunities to appear so we can faithfully carry out the duties of not just prayer but also evangelism. Prayer helps us see those opportunities. This is the connection between prayer and evangelism. Paul's desire was to be able to share the gospel wherever he might be. He wrote in Ephesians 6:19, "Please pray for me. Pray that truth will be with me before I even open my mouth. *Ask the Spirit to guide me* while I boldly defend the mystery that is the good news."

We are told to pray for an open door to share the Good News. And *second* we are to pray for *clarity when we share about Jesus*. Once God opens a door, it is essential we have the ability to proclaim the mystery of Christ with clarity. The goal of evangelism is to make the cloudy clear. As we've learned in Colossians, the mystery is that Christ has died for the sins of the whole world, and that when we receive Him by faith, He comes to take up residence in our life as Colossians 1:27 states: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." This is what we share.

Paul was concerned that he would be clear in what he said and bold in its proclamation. If Paul understood his need for prayer for clarity, opportunity, and boldness, then how much more do we need others praying for us! If we want to tell others about Jesus, then begin by praying for yourself and then get others to join you in praying for such opportunities. Prayer gives us eyes to see and ears to hear those occasions, and opportunities to speak up.

I can open a door for you, and you can open a door for me if we pray for one another. First Samuel 12:23 is very challenging. Samuel is speaking and he says, "As for me, the last thing I would ever do is to stop praying for you. That would be a sin against the Eternal One on my part. I will always try to teach you *to live and act* in a way that is good & proper *in His eyes*."

That means that if I don't pray for you, and you do not pray for me, we can end up sinning against the Lord. So maybe we should start up several prayer meetings at different times and places to suit our schedules. Maybe we should pick one to five people to pray for, who need Jesus. We can follow Paul's example of prayer here, by asking for open doors, opportunities to share, as well as help to be clear when it occurs.

When we speak to God about others, Paul urges us to be devoted, to be watchful, and to be thankful. When we wonder what we should say when we pray, we're given two practical requests - pray for open doors and pray for clarity when those opportunities come. Then, in verses 5 and 6, we are given guidance on **speaking to others about Jesus**. This is where prayer dovetails with evangelism as we discover that our ability to impact people is directly related to the intensity of our intercession.

Paul gives us more ideas about successful duties of Christian living. Colossians 4:5 focuses on *how we walk*. Verse 5 tells us, *behave wisely with nonbelievers*. We must balance our life and our lips. Verse 5 in the Voice translation goes: "Be wise when you engage with those outside the faith community; make the most of every effort and encounter."

To be wise in the way we walk means that we are careful not to say or do anything that would make it difficult to share the gospel. This is about how we conduct ourselves as we have already studied. This simply means that we need to be aware that those who don't yet know Christ are watching us. Our way of living speaks.

When Dr. Will Houghton became pastor of the Baptist Tabernacle in Atlanta, a man in that city

hired a private detective to follow him around and report on his conduct. After a few weeks, the detective reported that Dr. Houghton's life matched his preaching. As a result, the man became a Christ follower.

In contrast, when a pastor was getting to know his new community, one person he met, boldly asked, "Do you want to know what is wrong with your church?" This perked my brother in laws interest. So the man told him all about one of the elders of his church and how he was widely hated and known for some specific business & political practices. The elder was not wise with his reputation as well as Christ's.

When Jesus sent his disciples out to spread the good news, he told them to be "as shrewd as snakes & innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16) Romans 16:19 challenges us to be "wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil."

Simply put, how we walk, our conduct, means we need to be careful about the way we act because people are making decisions about the validity of Christianity based upon how we are living. When we pray, God will give us open doors. Let's not shut them by our behavior.

And Paul reminds us that another way our lives speak is, do we ***make the most of every effort and encounter to share about Jesus***. Grab and even create opportunities. This phrase is a commercial term in Greek and means to "buy up." It's the picture of finding something on sale and buying all we can because the price is so good. Likewise, we're to buy up every opportunity to speak for Christ and serve Jesus. Prayer opens our eyes to see those opportunities. So often we miss them. So often we fear making people uncomfortable and mad. But that leads us to never speaking up, turning the conversation to Jesus' values and our own faith in Jesus.

A man took a short train trip through an area known for its scenic beauty. Once on board, it took quite a while to get his packages put away the way he wanted them in the overhead rack. Then he had trouble getting the window shade adjusted. Next, he decided he would rather be

farther back in the coach, so he moved seats. After searching through his bags to make sure he had his return ticket, he decided to relax and enjoy the passing scenery. Then the conductor announced the train's arrival at the man's destination. "Oh my!" he exclaimed. "If I had only known that we would be here so soon, I would not have wasted all my time in fussing." He was so concerned about his personal comfort and satisfaction that he missed the beautiful sights along the way. How often are we like this when we talk with people?

Paul had committed Himself to constantly speak to God, and he had determined to speak to others for God also. He knew he would need the prayer support of others not only to share his faith, but to open doors of opportunity to share his faith. We too can pray that God would give us opportunities to share the gospel. And we need to take advantage of our opportunities especially if we want to have more of them. Let us be thankful for the opportunities God gives us & He will continue giving them to us. Are we making the most of the opportunities we have every day? Let's try to accomplish as much spiritual good as we can in all our relationships, by how we live and by making the most of every opportunity to talk about Jesus.

Then Paul, continues to give practical advice in walking with nonbelievers. Verse 6. "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." ***Be gracious***. It's important that we communicate with words of grace when we speak with those who don't know Christ. Unfortunately, many times believers go off on people who are living in sin. Or, we let loose about a moral issue in our culture, forgetting that there may be someone listening who is caught in that particular sin. When we are filled with anger and rage people feel judgment, not hope.

We need to be more like Jesus, who was the perfect embodiment of both truth and grace. Even when He dealt with sin, He spoke words of grace. In Luke 4:22 and following, after listening to Jesus teach, the people "spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came

from his lips.” But he also called the Jewish religious leaders, whitewashed tombs. As we read the Gospels, we find Jesus did offend people. So, we can be so cautious to not offend, we avoid talking about Jesus. This isn’t helpful either. We must work at directing our conversations with unbelievers toward spiritual matters, instead of sticking in the safe zone.

Then we are told, *be appetizing*. Our conversations need to be seasoned with salt. Salt enhances flavor and makes food appetizing “Salty speech” in Paul’s day referred to witty and clever discussion. It was the opposite of being boring or monotone. When we talk about our faith how can we not be interesting? Salty speech makes people thirsty for more. We should be talking about Christ in a way that makes someone’s mouth water!

Salt was added to the Old Testament sacrifices in Leviticus 2:13. Maybe Paul is implying that we should view our words as oral offerings to God, just as our words of praise are spiritual offerings in Hebrews 13:15. Recognizing that what comes out of our mouths is a sacrifice to God should help us be gracious and appetizing and to speak up. Plus, Jesus said we are to be salt & if we aren’t, we are not useful. (Mt 5:13)

And the last point of being wise in the way we act toward outsiders is, always *be ready*. When we choose to mix it up with people who don’t yet know Christ we need to be ready to give them an answer when they ask us some questions. Another way to say it is that when we are gracious and appetizing, people will want an explanation, especially if we pray for opportunities and the right words. This is a natural process that will happen when people see Christ in us. So we need to make sure we have some non Christian friends and relationships.

Peter put it this way in 1 Peter 3:15: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” We must be on the outlook for opportunity to talk

about Jesus. We represent him anyway, so why not work to be ready to answer everyone?

We can do that any number of ways. Be devoted, watchful and thankful in prayer. Pray for opportunities, open doors and clarity. Be aware that we speak to others with our lives – our witness, by how much we look for and act on openings, by being gracious, salt and ready.

There are as many ways as people in carrying out these important religious duties. It can be as simple as bending a conversation toward what would Jesus think. It can be simply sharing your story about how you became a Christian. And tell Jesus’ story, explaining why He had to die on the cross and the need for us to respond to what He has done. We can always invite people to more conversation, as well as a church activity. And of course, pray, and keep praying.

Praying properly to be a good witness for the Lord Jesus Christ is dependent on having the motivations and following the instructions Paul has given us. Every true Christian has been raised up with Christ and therefore there should be certain changes in that person’s life. This includes having a mind set on the things above, to seek there, instead of the things of this earth. The importance of the eternal replaces the temporal. Paul gave us rules about things to give up and about things to put on. At the heart of this change in how we live is our purpose of life. Life is now about our Creator, His glory, and His Kingdom. Paul tells us in Colossians 3:17, that “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to the Father.” Doing these teachings, helps us to faithfully carry out our religious duties.