

“Devote Yourselves to Prayer”
Colossians 4:2
(Preached at Trinity, January 6, 2019)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Since the beginning of **Chapter 3** Paul has had his focus upon the marvelous transforming grace of the Gospel.
Beginning with **Verse 18** Paul began applying the effect of God’s grace upon the family—wives, husbands, children, slaves and masters, each in their particular role and function, but all seeking to honor Christ.
2. Now, with **Verse 2** Paul is moving towards the close of his letter. He is still writing about the Christian life, but now he’s giving some final words of instruction. He encourages them to persevere in prayer and then asks them to pray for the success of the Gospel. He then encourages them to give careful attention to their witness to unbelievers.
4. There are two elements essential to the Christian life—the Word of God and prayer. With one God speaks to us, with the other we speak to Him. These two are the chief means of grace. Both are essential to our spiritual growth and prosperity. They are the chief duties of those in ministry, but are also essential for every Christian.
 - A. Paul has already stressed the element of the Word.
Colossians 3:16 NAU - "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God."
 - B. The Word of God is the means by which we are instructed in righteousness. It is the means whereby God gives us discernment and understanding. It is the means of the increasing of our faith and assurance.
Romans 10:17 NAU - "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."
5. Now, in **Verse 2** Paul stresses the importance of prayer.
Prayer is one of the true tests of our spiritual life. Our flesh hates prayer, but it is God’s great gift to His people.
 - A. It is through our supplications that we request of God our needs, both physical and spiritual.
 - B. It is through prayer that we express our wonder of God’s greatness.
 - C. It is through prayer that we confess our sins.
 - D. It is through prayer that we express our gratitude for God’s mercies.
 - E. Prayer is essential in our warfare against the attacks of Satan.
6. Paul has admonished us with Christian characteristics that challenge and convict all of us. In **Verses 12-13** of the previous chapter he commanded us to put on compassion, humility, and patience. And in addition, he adds forgiveness. What Christian isn’t convicted by these things. How lacking we are in compassion and forgiveness. And how seldom do we truly display humility?
Now Paul commands us to devote ourselves to prayer. Again, who among us is not convicted by the weakness of our prayer life.

7. But we must understand this in the context of the Gospel. Yes, Paul is commanding prayer, but he is also recognizing that we do pray. Prayer is the natural response of our union with Christ. Paul is encouraging us to persevere in prayer, to strengthen what's already present.
 8. While our weakness convicts us, the Gospel recognizes we do not reach perfection in this life. And so we press on in the joy of God's grace, enjoying the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit.
Ephesians 3:16 NAU - "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,"
 9. Paul's admonition on prayer contains three important elements.
 - I. Prayer demands perseverance
 - II. Prayer demands vigilance
 - III. Prayer demands an attitude of thanksgiving
- I. Prayer demands perseverance - "Devote yourselves to prayer"
προσκαρτερέω – attend constantly, continue steadfastly. It carries the idea of persistence
- A. This has characterized Christians from the beginning
 1. The early church was devoted to prayer
Acts 1:13-14 NAU - "When they had entered *the city*, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son* of James. ¹⁴ These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the women*, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."
Acts 2:42 NAU - "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."
 2. Paul often stressed the importance of prayer in his epistles
Romans 12:10-12 NAU - "*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer"
ESV – "Constant in prayer"
CSV – "persistent in prayer"
Ephesians 6:18-19 NAU - "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, ¹⁹ and *pray on my behalf*"*
 3. Again, Paul presumed that these Christians prayed. Every Christian prays. Paul is encouraging them to continue in prayer.
 - B. Christians are devoted to prayer because of our intimate relationship with Christ—our beloved Bridegroom
 1. Through Christ we have been reconciled with the Father. We are at peace. We have the relationship of adoption. We call out to our Father and have the assurance that He receives us.
Prayer is simply a child of God speaking with his Father.

2. We are devoted to prayer because we understand our weakness but His strength.
Psalm 28:6-7 NAU - "Blessed be the LORD, Because He has heard the voice of my supplication. ⁷ The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart exults, And with my song I shall thank Him."
- II. Prayer demands vigilance - "keeping alert in it"
 γρηγορέω – It means “to stay awake”
- A. The Christian life demands vigilance. We must stay alert
 1. This word is used often in the New Testament
Matthew 24:42 NAU - "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming."
Matthew 26:41 NAU - "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."
Mark 13:34-37 NAU - "*It is* like a man away on a journey, *who* upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, *assigning* to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. ³⁵ "Therefore, be on the alert-- for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning-- ³⁶ in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ "What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!"
1 Corinthians 16:13 NAU - "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong."
1 Thessalonians 5:5-6 NAU - "We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober."
1 Peter 5:8 NAU - "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."
 2. The Christian life is a serious journey full of many dangers and snares. It demands vigilance.
 - B. This is greatly important in prayer
 1. Our prayers are sometimes filled with drowsiness.
 2. We should guard our hearts carefully against sleepiness in prayer and approach God's throne spiritually alert.
 John Davenant wrote: "The heart inflamed with this spiritual heat, immediately grows soft and becomes more apt and capable for receiving the Divine gifts. It is a most sure sign of a pious and devoted mind. On the other hand, a cold and sleepy prayer is a mark of a carnal mind, and one riveted to earthly things. Sleepy prayers, which are uttered with a mind either wandering or benumbed, neither reach heaven, nor can move God to hear."¹

¹ Davenant, John, *Colossians*, Geneva Series Commentary, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), Chapter 4, Page 225.

- C. How is it we are we to remain alert in prayer?
1. We must maintain awareness of our great spiritual war. If we could see beyond this physical world we would see the terrifying reality—unimaginable warfare. What soldier slumbers in the midst of the battle? We must approach prayer as mighty warriors.
 2. We must understand our weakness. Prayer is the natural response to our weakness. Knowing the spiritual dangers all around us we pray. Knowing the almighty power of God, we pray. Knowing God's great love for us we pray. Such prayer is focused prayer.
 3. We are most likely to maintain watchfulness when we keep our minds focused on heavenly matters. Our minds are most prone to slumber in prayer when they are distracted by earthly things that cause us to daydream and slumber.
Colossians 3:1-2 NAU - "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."
 4. Christian watchfulness in prayer brings peace and expels fear and anxiety. It is the perfect peace of resting in the presence of Christ who has promised us He will abide with us.
Colossians 3:15 NAU - "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful."
Philippians 4:6-7 NAU - "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

III. Prayer demands an attitude of thanksgiving

- A. The Christian is naturally thankful. You might say it's in our DNA
1. Those who have tasted of God's favor are forever thankful
Psalm 9:1-2 NAU - "I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders. ² I will be glad and exult in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High."
Psalm 69:30 NAU - " I will praise the name of God with song And magnify Him with thanksgiving."
Psalm 95:2-3 NAU - "Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. ³ For the LORD is a great God And a great King above all gods,"
Psalm 100:4-101:1 NAU - " Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. ⁵ For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting And His faithfulness to all generations."
 2. David's heart must be the heart of us all
1 Chronicles 29:12-13 KJV – "Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all. ¹³ Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name."

3. Thanksgiving has been an important part of this epistle
Colossians 1:3 NAU - "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,"
Colossians 1:11-12 NAU - "joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light."
Colossians 3:15-17 NAU - "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."
 4. Thanksgiving is at the heart Christianity. We are admonished over and over in the NT to be thankful. Ingratitude robs us of the blessings of God. John Davenant writes: "Without gratitude there can be no spiritual blessings within us. For since every spiritual blessing depends upon a certain perpetual influx of Divine grace, ingratitude is that infernal bar which interrupts the flow and course of the Divine goodness. Therefore we should be thankful, lest we should be deprived of all our gifts."²
 5. In closing this letter Paul is reminding us that thanksgiving is an inseparable aspect of prayer. With a thankful heart we approach God with praise regardless of our outward condition.
 When we praise God for everything we complain about nothing
- B. Fervent prayer is watchful prayer filled with thanksgiving.
1. When Mary sat weeping at the feet of Jesus she forgot herself as she poured the perfume on His feet wiping it with her hair
 Jesus was pleased with her act of love and gratitude
 2. As God's people we are constantly aware of His tender mercies which cause us to lift up our hearts in thanksgiving. We praise Him for things both known and unknown. The great crime of fallen humanity is a failure to give God the glory and praise and gratitude He deserves.
Romans 1:21 NAU - "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks"

Conclusion:

1. The great danger for every Christian is to become so caught up in our daily earthly lives that we fail to spend much time in prayer. And then when we find a few minutes to pray our minds are quickly filled with the affairs of our life.
2. Even when we are faced with a calamity or trial, we sometimes go to carnal solutions before we flee to God in prayer.
3. Paul is reminding us to be constant in prayer and alert in prayer. He is reminding us to remember that we serve a gracious God and we must remember to maintain grateful hearts. Remember Paul's admonition:
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NAU - "Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing; ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

² Davenant, John, *Colossians, Geneva Series of Commentaries*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009) page 128.