

# RTM

reaching/teaching/ministering curriculum



November 30, 2008  
Devoted to Pray  
Colossians 4:2-6; 12-13

## MINISTERING HELPS

### Group Prayer

Instead of praying over a master list of prayer requests, why not divide up in groups of 2-3 and assign each group to pray specifically for the names mentioned today. Assign parts of all the list to each group of three so that specific heartfelt prayer might happen.

### Stay Connected

Is it time for a "random act of kindness" for someone in your group who has been missing for a long time? Why not pick out one or more folks who have been AWOL and let the class do a random act of kindness on them this week. Maybe someone from the class could take them some cookies and let them know the class is thinking of them. Maybe the class could sign a "thinking of you" card and put a STARBUCKS gift card in it to be delivered this week. You know what will say I LOVE YOU the best, so be creative and see if your action will activate someone who is inactive!

## REACHING HELPS

One of our biggest ways to reach adults with the message of Jesus is coming up in just a few weeks.

Christmas Celebration is FBC Allen's Musical Christmas Card to our community. This two-hour musical extravaganza begins with an hour of seasonal upbeat Christmas music. The second hour is a costumed presentation of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, helping folks to understand His ultimate mission... making possible the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

The presentations will be at 7 p.m. on December 12, 13, and 14; and this year, we will have a matinee presentation at 3 p.m. on December 14<sup>th</sup>.

This is a GREAT outreach event, if we will make the effort to invite the unchurched and unbelievers. You must have a ticket, but tickets are FREE and can be picked up in the foyer or at the church office.

## TEACHING HELPS

Pastor Chad finishes our prayer series today with a sermon titled... *LORD, CAN YOU HELP?* It will help us think about the things we need to pray for folks when they are in need of special times of prayer.

We can fire off a "single prayer" to God about folks, or we can be devoted in prayer for them. Today's lesson will help us see what being devoted to praying for someone looks like, and challenge us to do more of that kind of praying for others.



# Devoted to Pray

Colossians 4:2-6; 12-13



During the mid-1800's, one of the most impacting preachers in all the world was a man named Charles Spurgeon. He pastored one of the first "mega-churches," and his church made a "mega-impact" on folks during this time in history.

Five young college students were spending a Sunday in London, so they went to hear the famed Spurgeon preach. While waiting for the doors to open, the students were greeted by a man who asked, "Gentlemen, let me show you around. Would you like to see the heating plant of this church?" They were not particularly interested, for it was a hot day in July. But they didn't want to offend the stranger, so they consented. The young men were taken down a stairway, a door was quietly opened, and their guide whispered, "This is our heating plant." Surprised, the students saw 700 people bowed in prayer, seeking a blessing on the service that was soon to begin in the auditorium above. Softly closing the door, the gentleman then introduced himself. It was none other than Charles Spurgeon.<sup>1</sup>

Charles Spurgeon understood that prayer was the source that powered (or heated up) a ministry and a man. His own devotion to prayer is seen by the way he conveyed the importance to those with whom he ministered. Spurgeon found this empowering tool in Paul's Epistles. The Christian life-style is best communicated by those consistently devoted to prayer.

## 1. *Devoted to Prayer... defined! (v2-6)*

*Context:* Colossians reveals some of the most relational Christological writings in the whole of scripture. Countless times throughout four short chapters believers are empowered "in Christ," as Christ's supremacy is exalted as the "fullness of deity dwells in him." Col. 2:9 Paul repeatedly pin-points Christ's preeminence and the Churches appropriate response to His position. Ultimately, Paul leads his readers to understand that a perfect relationship with Christ exemplifies a life-style devoted to prayer.

In chapter 4, Paul moves to make Christ's supremacy practical after speaking doctrinally in chapter 1, polemically in chapter 2, and spiritually in chapter 3. This progression is often seen in many of Paul's writings, allowing the studious reader to understand the reason for much of Paul's contemporary thought. Chapter 4 of

### Teaching Points

#### Introduction...

Ask your group if any of them plays golf. Ask them why the sport appeals to them, how long they have been a golfer, how much they practice and ask them to give their best score for a round of 18 holes.

Now mention the name, Tiger Woods. Ask your group to tell what they know about him in relation to golf. How long has he been a golfer? (Since a preschooler) How much did he practice before he got hurt? (several hours each day he is not competing) His best score for 18 holes? (59 in a practice round, 61 in competition)

Is there a difference between having an interest in golf and being devoted to golf? Which do you think our class members are? Which do you think Tiger Woods is?

Let's take these thoughts about interested in and devotion into the area of prayer. If someone was just interested in praying to God, how would you describe them? If someone was really devoted to prayer, what might you expect to be different?

Today's lesson is going to challenge us to be not just interested in prayer, but DEVOTED to prayer.

<sup>1</sup> Our Daily Bread, April 24.

Colossians is no different. Based on chapters 1-3, Paul now focuses on an external element of a life-style “in Christ,” devotion to prayer.

<sup>2</sup>*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.* <sup>3</sup>*And 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.* <sup>4</sup>*Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.* <sup>5</sup>*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.* <sup>6</sup>*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

### **Colossians 4:2-6**

Paul gets specific about the external elements of the Christian life in verse two when he says **devote yourselves to prayer**. Devotion to prayer is one of many themes Paul frequents, not by accident. Prayer is the lifeline through which a relationship with Christ exists. Prayer, at its source, is power, patience, comfort and hope. The word **devote** here means to busy oneself with or be busily engaged in.<sup>2</sup> This is similar encouragement that Paul gave the Ephesians in 6:18, “Pray at all times;” the Thessalonians in his first epistle, 5:17, “Pray without ceasing;” and the Romans in chapter 12 verse 12, “devoted to prayer.” Paul knew that those who continued in prayer and persisted in prayer would experience a life-style in Christ anew. (See Chapter 3)

An individual devoted to prayer will be watchful. Paul adds two more adjectives to help us understand how to pray, **being watchful and thankful**. There was much to be watchful for in Colosse. Paul spent chapters one and two explaining the supremacy of Christ over creation, angels, philosophy, and man’s religious and non-religious traditions. Any of these could become a stumbling block, and Paul did not want these believers to be entrapped by false teaching. Paul may also be implying that believers are to be watchful in the manner in which they pray. Christ warns against praying with vain repetitions, public applause, as well as without a purpose. Paul may be implying that as we pray, we should understand its significance and with whom we are speaking.

How does **watchful prayer** enhance one’s devotion to prayer? Prayer is that mode whereby we know Christ. Scripture reveals Christ’s identity in detail. Prayer reveals that identity through relationship. An individual

## **1. Devoted to Prayer... defined! (v2-6)**

- Have someone read the passage.
- Why do you think Paul would make such a big deal about prayer? Isn’t it just enough that we talk to God whenever... whatever? How do you think that the idea of being devoted to prayer connects to Jesus’ words in John 15:5, where He said...

<sup>5</sup> *“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.*

**John 15:5 (NLT)**

From the commentary, help people understand the word devotion by using the meaning given in the commentary...

“to busy oneself or be busily engaged in.”

Ask the class how they would define the word devotion, or go back to some of the things that were mentioned in the introductory activity.

Paul calls us to be devoted to prayer, and then spends the next few lines defining what devotion looks like...

### 1) Devotion includes WATCHFULNESS.

- use the commentary to talk about stumbling blocks to prayer that we need to be watching out for.
- ask the class if someone has ever asked them to do something or give them something that seemed REALLY important when they were asking for it, but after you gave it to them, they quickly forgot about it (like a “gotta have this toy” at Christmas, or a “gotta have this report” at work). How did it make you feel when your effort was cast aside? Do we do the same with God in prayer? Do we ask Him to do things and then quickly forget to notice what He is doing, not watching for how He is working?

<sup>2</sup> A Readers Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Kubo.

devoted to prayer will be watchful of his prayer habits, beliefs, and sayings, as Christ makes evident His purpose and will through prayer.

Watchfulness could also be related to the idea of when we take things to God, don't forget about them. If we are really asking God to do something about a situation, then we should keep our eyes open to the activity of God related to that situation.

An individual devoted to prayer will take time to ***thank God*** in prayer. The second adjective Paul gives is thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is always a re-occurring theme in prayer. The reason, prayer is a God thing. When an individual realizes who they are in comparison to God, he can only be thankful for everything. God's spiritual (salvation), physical (health), emotional (love), relational (family), and unforeseen (unexpected gift or opportunity) blessings are innumerable; therefore, the believer has much to be thankful for. Thankfulness is not equivalent to happiness. It is an attitude toward God about His provision/sovereignty. It is something we are commanded to practice although we may not understand our situation or circumstance. (1 Cor. 15:57; Ps. 75:1; 2 Cor. 1:20; Rom. 8:28)

An individual devoted to prayer will pray for ***spiritual opportunities***. Paul focused on his own spiritual need to share Christ with those around him, **and pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message**. The "us" most likely refers to those ministering to Paul as he is in prison, Aristarchis, Mark, Justis, Luke, Demas, and Epaphras. The "open door" Paul is looking for is any person who would listen to the gospel message. This is a common request Paul makes in several other epistles. The reason for this request is that Paul understood one way the Colosse believers could take part in his ministry was prayer. Every believer has the opportunity to minister limitlessly through prayer. Prayer is the empowering factor of any ministry opportunity, including Paul's.

Paul moves beyond the need of an open door, to the desire for effective communication. Not only is Paul looking for the next opportunity, but he is also looking for success in that opportunity, **pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should**. Paul understood that God gives us opportunities to be included in His glorious will and plan. Paul wanted to make sure he was included in God's plan, and he gave the message God desired.

An individual devoted to prayer will reveal an external life-style of prayer. **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity**. Paul now turns his attention to exterior action, specifically, actions in the presence of unbelievers. Paul is pretty clear that he believes every time a believer is in the presence of an unbeliever, there is an opportunity for Christ to be uplifted through action. My dad frequently says, "*Your walk talks and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks.*" It's more than what you say, it's what you do. Paul knew that God gives daily opportunities to proclaim or hinder Christ through

## 2) Devotion includes THANKFULNESS.

- use the commentary to talk about the topic of thankfulness.
- ask the class if they have ever done something for someone and didn't get a thank you for it. How does it make you feel? Though God is not as fragile as we are when we don't get a thank you, what does the story of the 10 lepers (Luke 17:17) let us see about how God feels about thankfulness or thanklessness?
- ask the class if they can give an example of someone who said "thank you," but you weren't sure if they were really thankful on the inside. How does that relate to a devotion that includes thankfulness?

## 3) Devotion includes praying for SPIRITUAL OPPORTUNITIES.

- What are spiritual opportunities we can pray for "open doors" to share the good news of Jesus? When a situation shows a "closed door," what can we pray? When a situation shows a "door that is cracked open," what can we pray?
- Besides yourself, who are people you know who we need to be praying for so that they will have success in seeing doors opened for sharing about Jesus? When is the last time you asked your bfg to pray for you because you needed some doors to open so you could share Jesus with someone?

one's life-style. Believers should be praying for every opportunity to influence the unbelieving community towards Christ.

An individual devoted to prayer will speak his life-style of prayer. **“Let your conversation be always full of grace.** The way to follow-up a consistent life-style is through consistent speech. Love, compassion, patience, long-suffering, gentle, truthful, kind, and spiritual can sum up the meaning of speech that is full of grace. Paul communicates this again in Ephesians 4:29. **Seasoned with salt,** John MacArthur explains, “It is not only to be gracious, but also to have an effect. Salt can sting when rubbed into a wound. It also prevents corruption. Believers’ speech should act as a purifying influence, rescuing conversation from the filth that so often engulfs it. Salt also adds flavor, and the speech of the new man should add charm and wit to conversation.”<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, the speech of a believer should be as his life-style, opportunistic towards God.

The reason why life-style and speech are so important is so **that you may know how to answer everyone.** The Christian life is not simply a calling to a heavenly reward. It is a calling to a relationship for the purpose of impacting the world for Christ. A life devoted to prayer will not only see doors opened, but will also be ready to respond in a Godly manner that accurately reflects truth in the right timing. (1 Peter 3:15)

## 2. The Example of Epaphras: Devoted to Prayer (v12-13)

*12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. 13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Colossians 4:12-13*

Epaphras was a [Christian](#) preacher who spread the [Gospel](#) to his fellow Colosse citizens (Col. 1:7; 4:12). He came to Paul while in prison with a favorable account of the Church at [Colosse](#) inspiring Paul to write the Epistle. He then remained in Rome with Paul and is described as his "fellow prisoner" ([Philemon 1:23](#)). Epaphras is our example of one who is totally devoted to prayer in life-style.

Epaphras was well known by the Colosse community, **who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus.** Most likely, he was the founding minister who went on to travel as an evangelist. Ultimately, he would be one of Paul's encouragers and prayer partners. The people of Colosse would have identified with Epaphras as a spiritual leader. This made Epaphras the perfect example for the Colossians to follow.

### 2. The Example of Epaphras (v12-13)

- Have group members read verses 12-13, and ask them to point out all the ways we can tell Epaphras was devoted to prayer.
- Has anyone ever been devoted to praying for you? Who was it and how did it pay off for you?
- Who are you devoted to praying for? Each of us should be doing this for family members, but here's a question... Is there someone you could be devoted to praying for and by doing so you just might be the only person on the planet praying for this person?
- While we shouldn't brag to others that we are praying for them, what can be the payoffs that come from letting someone know you are devoted to praying for them?

Epaphras was devoted to prayer, **he is always wrestling in prayer for you.** Paul revealed that Epaphras' ministry connection to the church was through prayer. He gives the grammatical construction of continuum, i.e. Epaphras did not simply pray for the ministry at Colosse, he was constantly and consistently praying for that ministry. Paul describes his prayers as a wrestling match. The picture need not be clearer. Epaphras fought for the spiritual health of the church through his prayers. From Epaphras' standpoint, that is all he could do, yet he

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<sup>3</sup> MacArthur's New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon, Electronic Edition 1997, Parsons Technology, Inc.

was vocal enough about his prayers that Paul knew. I'm guessing that Epaphras and Paul spent much time in prayer together. Epaphras knew that real prayer is hard work. It is a spiritual engagement that involves more than self. In its purest form, prayer is communing or uniting with God.

Epaphras prayed specifically for the spiritual health and growth of the Colosse ministry. Epaphras was not simply praying, "God, bless ...," moving down the list. He spent time specifically praying for aspects of growth, strength, perseverance, and hope. He prayed they would **stand firm in the will of God**. Being one of them, Epaphras could identify with the cultural and social struggles they were facing on a daily basis. He could pray specifically for the areas they needed victory over. (see chapters 1-3) His prayer, ultimately, was for obedience.

#### Points for Application

- Challenge members to evaluate their prayer life. Are they casually praying, or are they devoted to praying?
- Challenge members to be **THANKFUL** in prayer all year long, not just on that special day we call Thanksgiving Day.
- Challenge members that if they are going to pray about a situation, they need to be observant about God's activity in that situation.
- Challenge members to pray and to ask for prayer about God opening doors so the message of Jesus can be shared.
- Challenge members to be an "Epaphras."

Epaphras also prayed for spiritual maturity within the congregation. His prayers were consumed with the spiritual progress of the congregation, so they might be **mature and fully assured**. Spiritual maturity ought to be the goal of every believer. This is not based on age, social status, sex, occupation, or income. It's based on dependence within a relationship. In this world, the more independent I become, the more mature I am perceived as being. In the spiritual realm, the more dependent on Christ I am, the more mature I am becoming. Epaphras' prayer was for the Colosse believers to be fully developing followers of Christ.

Epaphras' life-style was one that the Colossians could be proud of. God was working in Epaphras, and it was evident by the way he interacted with Paul and those around him. Paul honors Epaphras by saying, **I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis**. Epaphras' ministry was obviously an extension of the ministry he began in Colosse. His devotion to prayer empowered the spiritual well-being of his home ministry and made him a continuous proponent of the gospel. Epaphras is a great example of a person whose life-style was devoted to prayer.

May our lives be devoted to prayer, watchful, thankful, and empowering those around us in the mysteries of Christ.

Other References Used:  
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