

The Church's Prayer Life

Colossians 4:2-4

2Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3And 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. 4Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Introduction:

Every one of us has, at one time or another has heard a message that exhorted us to pray.

I'm sure we all pray in one way or another, but the kind of prayer that I'm going to preach on this morning is prayer that moves God and moves mountains.

I would contend that even if you only had heard one message on prayer you probably felt guilty about not praying correctly or frequently enough.

If that is the case with you then you stand with a majority of believers.

Now I must also admit to you that it seems to me that this is one of the most difficult subjects that I have to preach on because of my lack of prayer. So this message this morning is for your pastor too.

It is my belief and my experience that the enemy of God and the enemy of His Church, the Devil will let us do most anything, but when it comes to really praying and getting serious about what God would have us to do for His Kingdom, Satan will come in strategically to stop us.

There's also a great need, perhaps one of the greatest needs in our world - in all the churches of our nation and **that is a great need of a genuine Holy Ghost Revival.**

The only thing that will bring that Revival to our hearts and change our churches and our nation I believe will be the Churches collective and personal intercessory prayer.

We have all heard the story of great saints of old who boldly took hold of the throne of grace through their praying. It was through their prayers mighty things happened – miracles happened.

Illustration:

In the 19th century the Protestant church again veered from the course set by the early Reformers and sank into what was called **“Higher criticism.”**

The result was that people started leaving the traditional churches, not for other groups, but they simply stayed home. And that’s what they’re still doing today (It’s true that less than 20% of the people of our nation today is attending church. They are simply staying home.)

But toward the end of the 19th century, God raised up evangelists and pastors like Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody, R.A. Torrey, Phineas Bresee, Father of the Nazarene movement.

And these men preached under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, motivated by continual prayer and fasting. Oh, God, if you could just help us to get there.

The spiritual climate was rising again as the 20th century began.

It was in 1905-06 in Los Angeles, California, that the Holy Spirit of God fell again.

Methodist and Holiness Christian believers, which one of these groups gave birth to the Church of the Nazarene, had been fasting and praying for revival when the Holy Spirit of God fell on them as He did on the Day of Pentecost.

Now in the early 21st century, **secularism and human reason** has crept into the church and what we need to combat it is a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Could you get serious with me this morning and let me ask you what will bring about this revival that will lead our nation and our world away from

the brink of total destruction and annihilation? It can only be brought by God's Holy Spirit and the Church's Prayer life.

You see – God is using His Holy Spirit as the **Restrainer of evil that is happening in our world today.**

Paul Yonggi Cho says, “**At no time in the history of the modern world has there been such an outpouring of Satanic influence as there is today. The bottom of the pit of hell is belching out its filth in murder, rape, pornography, lawlessness and radical Islamic Muslims who want to destroy all Christians. Just as the preaching of the Wesley's kept Britain from following France in the revolution in the 18th century, so too a new outbreak of revival can bring about the social and political changes necessary to keep us from international destruction and calamity.**”

We know the story/we've heard the stories of people who got up early every day and spent hours before the Lord in prayer. And we don't doubt that these people were powerfully used by God. We may even wish that this was OUR regular experience. But we sadly know it's not.

William Barclay writes, "Even for the best of us, there come times when prayer seems to be unavailing and to penetrate no farther than the walls of the room in which we pray."

Now we know several things about prayer

Prayer makes a difference . . . we don't know how . . . we just know it does.

Prayer brings wisdom

Prayer provides strength for difficult time

Prayer convicts us of areas in our life that need changing

Prayer convicts the sinner of their sinful life.

Prayer brings us assurance of our position in the Father

We know these things, so why don't we pray?

Jesus has command us to “*pray without ceasing.*”

Paul said, “*Men ought always to pray and not faint.*”

To those people who just don't get it and are not interested in prayer and revival, **they won't pray and they won't be able to pray. There are some people who won't ever change except a miracle of God happen in their life.**

But, my friend, I believe this morning I'm preaching to a group of people who care about the sinner, about our community, about our nation, about our world.

If your heart is sensitive to wanting to your loved ones and unsaved people find Christ as their Savior – if you see the direction our world is going – if we see where our nation is and how it needs to turn to God, then the life of intercessory Prayer is a must for PCN.

I wish I could challenge some of you to come to church early to spend some time in prayer. Just on purpose making up your mind that you will come early and join a group in prayer for our church, our services, the lost, our nation - We have a wonderful prayer room upstairs.

So much more could be accomplished if every believer would come to church in an attitude of prayer, going to a quiet place where they could get on their knees and seek for God's presence in our services.

That is why the holy and mighty presence of God needs to be in our services. So that sinners are convicted by the Holy Spirit and led to this church so they can hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Saving Power.

You see when this happens hearts are opened to receiving the truth of God's Word by the spirit of prayer that has preceded our services.

I. What Prayer Accomplishes

A. Prayer Produces Power

Now God has created us in such a way that we need to know the purpose and the benefit of something if we are going to be motivated to change.

We don't like to admit it, but it is difficult for most of us to change.

If we actually realized the benefits and power of prayer we would have been praying before now as a church. Now, folks, I'm not trying to club anyone – I'm preaching to me.

So How can we develop a great desire to pray?

I believe the answer to that question is: **We must see the eternal and temporal benefits of prayer. I.E.**

1) Look at the ministry of Moses.

Here is a man of power through prayer.

He could speak with authority not only to the enemies of God, but also to God's people.

When he prayed, plagues came on the people of Egypt.

When he prayed, the Red Sea opened and the people of Israel walked across on dry land.

Yet, how did Moses develop his prayer power?

He developed a life of communion with God.

2) Look at his successor: Joshua

Joshua saw the mighty hand of God work through his life and ministry.

It was while Moses was praying on top of the mountain that Joshua spent the night in prayer at the foot of the mountain.

3) David was a man given to prayer

All you have to do is read the Psalms and see the many prayers that are recorded there by David.

When we look at the power in the kingdom and the life of David, we can see the source of his power, **a life of prayer.**

4) Elijah was the prophet of God during one of the worst times in the history of Israel and He was a man of prayer.

Most of you would know the story of Elijah and how he challenged the prophets of Baal to a showdown on Mount Carmel.

Elijah prayed **a 63 word prayer** and God showed up in His majestic power and fire from heaven and the old prophet of God was the Victor.

Elijah was a man of prayer.

5) But I want us to look at Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He's our greatest example.

No one manifested the power of God like Him.

He spent time with the Father in prayer.

Jesus was known to spend seasons of prayer with the Father all alone, sometimes all night.

And this was the source of His power.

Spiritual Application:

Could I ask all of us a very serious and personal question?

**Are you tired of powerless prayers that you pray?
Are you tired of praying and not seeing any results?**

Could you long for a prayer life that breaks into heaven to the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Father give you what you ask in His name?

Remember the Word of God says, *"Ask and You will receive."*

Could you desire for your church to enter into a powerful ministry of prayer so that your neighborhood, the city of Pataskala and surrounding communities, even the state would know of the power that resides in this church?

If you and I could desire this and we were willing to pay the price, then God will dramatically change our life and your ministry by bringing a new dimension of power that only comes through prayer.

There is no reason miracles couldn't take place in this church on a regular basis.

There is no reason why sinners should not be drawn by the Holy Spirit in this church building.

Story:

I have read about Charles Finney, for example, passing through a small community in Houghton, New York.

Listen - **When his train passed through Houghton**, the Holy Spirit fell on the sinners in the community.

Men in bars fell of their knees under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and asked Jesus Christ to save them.

I read where Charles Finney would walk down the aisle of a church and the sinners would fall out of their seats under the powerful conviction of the Holy Spirit.

And folks, ***God is no respecter of persons***. If the Holy Spirit gave Charles Finney such power and other men and women such as him, why shouldn't we see the same kind of power?

Finney rarely shared the key to his power; however, a reporter decided to spy on him. And the newspaperman finally realized that **the source of Finney's power was the hours that he spent in prayer.**

B. Prayer Brings Brokenness

Over my years of ministry I have learned that God cannot use a person until that person has gone through a process of brokenness in their life.

Remember Peter.

- Having denied Christ three times, he was broken by the grace and forgiveness of Christ in giving him an opportunity to preach the first sermon in the church's history.
- As a result of Peter's ministry, 3,000 people came to Christ on the Day of Pentecost.
- Peter was also used to open the door to the Gentile world. That means that you and I got the chance to have a relationship with Jesus because of Peter.

Remember David?

- David was capable of the most ugly and heinous sins.
- He was guilty of adultery with another man's wife.
- He was guilty of murder
- **And because of his sin he was broken.**
- Now folks that doesn't mean that anyone should commit sin in order to be broken.
- But as we walk with the Holy Spirit, as we walk gently before Him, **he will keep an up-to-date account of our behavior.**
- If we are to continue to walk in the Presence of the Holy Spirit, **we are to remain broken and humble.**
- David confessed his sin to God and went to God for help and seeing His deliverance, He said, *"I am like a broken vessel."* **Psalm 31:12**

Job is another example: Job was a man who learned this lesson well, he said, *"All was well with me, but He shattered me; He seized me by the neck and crushed me."* **Job 16:12 KJV** *"I was at ease, but He has broken me asunder."*

Friends, when we are broken, we'll turn to God in true and genuine prayer.

Possibly our greatest problem in the church today is we are ease in Zion.

Jesus taught this lesson of brokenness when He gave the illustration in Matthew 21:42-44:

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

***" 'The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"***

43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

What is this saying to us? What is the Lesson?

In verse 42 Jesus became the cornerstone of the spiritual temple, the church.

He was rejected by the builders. The Jewish
But He became the cornerstone.

The church in this context is more than the body of believers that was brought into being on the Day of Pentecost.

In this context the church is representative of God's people from the very beginning.

When Jesus was speaking in Matthew chapter 21, God's people were being represented by the Jewish nation.

Jesus Christ, the very Son of God is listed as the most important part of the building in which every member is depicted as a stone.

Jesus is the Cornerstone, or the stone that holds the entire building together.

Spiritual Application:

God's desire was to have a spiritual building that could properly contain His glory.

This is where the Church's Prayer Life comes into our understanding.

When Israel rejected Christ as the Messiah, she rejected the right to be that spiritual building.

Therefore, God created a new spiritual temple.

We Gentiles became that new spiritual temple.

See when you came to Christ with your sins and repented of your sins, Jesus Christ, the Son of God became your Savior and Cornerstone, you became a Christian believer.

You became a living stone in the new Spiritual Temple of God.

Now – let me take this a little bit farther:

When we are taken from the life of sin into the new life of salvation **we become stones which need to be shaped so that we can function according to the will of God.**

When building a stone building, the stone mason has to shape each stone so that they will fit into their rightful place.

If the stone is too hard to be fitted and refuses to be properly shaped, then that stone is of little value and is simply crushed to powder.

Therefore Jesus commanded, ***“Fall on the rock and be broken!”***

Here’s the Lesson:

It’s not God’s will for us to be annihilated, but it’s God’s will to shape us into a form that can be properly used for the purposes for which He chooses to use us.

If we resist the purpose of God, the result is crushing, or being good for nothing in God’s eternal purposes.

Therefore, it is important for each of us to walk in brokenness and humility before God.

Now, I’m not talking about walking around looking sad and downcast all the time.

I'm talking about learning to walk with the Holy Spirit's presence in prayer and complete surrender, in a spiritual attitude that will permit Christ as the Master builder to complete His work in us.

How Do we do this? By complete surrender!

When you and I are walking with God in a close communion in prayer, we get to know Him the way we should – We become righteous in His eyes.

He already knows us. He knows everything about us. There's nothing we can hide from Him.

But when **we have allowed Him** to shape us – break us – then comes surrender.

Now – I sense this morning there are some of you who are struggling with this – let me give you a good example of what I'm talking about:

Do you remember when you were little and growing up at home?
Or possibly you have young children at home now and you are parent.

Do you recall when you were disobedient what would happen when your Mom or Dad caught you?

If they were good parents who loved you – they would correct you and get you back in the right direction.

What were they doing? They were reshaping you.

And sometimes when you were stubborn, they would take stronger measures – do you know what I mean?

You felt like you were being crushed – but you weren't – but it sure hurt.
Amen!

God is like that with His children. What does the Bible say?

Look at Proverbs 3:11-12

11 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline

*and do not resent his rebuke,
12 because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father [a] the son he delights in.*

Friends, I deserved every correction and punishment I got from my Mom and Dad.

And listen, the same is true from God the Father. Every time I've been disobedient, God, through His Divine love and mercy has been there to correct me and sometimes it hurt, but He's done it to shape me for His Divine purpose.

I've been there to talk with Him and confess my sins to Him and I've felt so very guilty every time I've failed Him, but He's always been there to gently put me back where He had me before.

Friends, listen to me, wherever you are in your walk with God – if you are walking in sin right now – you need to get on your knees before God and confess and repent of those sins.

You need to be willing to allow God to reshape you and to put you back in your rightful place in the Body of Christ.

If you aren't willing to forsake your sins then you become a worthless stone that can't be used by God and is thrown on the stone pile of rejection.

II. OBSTACLES TO PRAYER

You see - I find that if I can identify a problem I am halfway towards solving the problem.

So to that end I want to suggest some reasons why we may have trouble praying.

A. We may not have a true relationship with God.

We may be trying to have a conversation with someone who we don't know. Lots of people pray much like they whistle. It's just a basic mindless activity that makes them feel better.

People who have no relationship with God will tell you that they pray.

The Word of God tells me that God won't hear them until they are changed spiritually.

Their prayers feel like they are going no where because they aren't going anywhere!

B. We may have a faulty view of prayer.

It's possible that we have this picture of prayer that involves us always having our eyes closed and our hands folded and being on our knees.

This is the only prayer we know.

Quaker Thomas Kelly in his Testament of Devotion writes:

"There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we can be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathing."

You see – now understand this - It may be that we are pushing ourselves to spend more time in some dark room someplace when what God wants is a more free exchange that comes from a constant "God consciousness".

I don't mean to suggest that quiet prayer is not necessary . . . it certainly is.

I only mean to point out that we may be missing out on some of the elements of true praying by our stereotypes.

C. We may be under spiritual attack.

In Daniel 10, the prophet is told by an angel . . .

"Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the King of Persia."

This is an usual passage that reports that **this angel faced demonic opposition in his attempt to answer Daniel's prayer.**

Christian Friend, listen to me - Satan wants nothing more than to sever the lines of our communication with the Father God.

We are in a spiritual battle and prayer is one of our chief weapons. Paul told the Ephesians in chapter 6 that **Prayer was the key to defeating the devil.**

So, if you are finding it difficult to pray it may be because there is a fierce battle going on around you.

D. We may be focusing on "getting stuff" rather than finding God's will for our lives.

In other words, we may be too worldly.

James tells us that we *"do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* (James 4:2,3).

How often are we guilty of seeking to persuade God that He should give us what we want instead of begging Him to teach us what He wants?

A Pastor went to visit a parishioner in the hospital. The man said, "Oh Brother Jones, pray for my healing. If God will only heal me I'll straighten up my life. I'll quit drinking and smoking and I'll get back to church every Sunday. I'll start tithing and quit running around on my wife... etc. etc. etc..." At the conclusion of this patient's promises, Rev. Jones said nothing, took the man's hand, kneeled at his bedside as was his custom and prayed: Lord you've heard Brother Brown's promises of what he'll do if you heal him. If he means it, cure him. If he doesn't, kill him. Amen."

And Brother Jones got up and walked out of the room without saying another word! I wonder if God said, "Amen."

III. PAUL COMMANDS US TO BE DEVOTED TO PRAYER

In our text: Paul writes, "*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful*".

What does it mean to "*be devoted*" to something?

The Greek words means to "*adhere firmly to,*" "*to persist in*", to remain devoted to.

We don't give up on the relationship no matter how difficult it becomes.

What about when a person is a devoted fan of a certain sports team? What about those Reds? Buckeyes?

It means they continue to root for that team when they are winning and when they are losing.

The "*fair weather*" fans are the ones that root for the team when they are doing well.

If you take this understanding and apply it to prayer, Paul is really saying something quite simple:

- **Keep praying!**
- **Don't give up on prayer!**
- **There may be dry times,**
- **There may be times you don't know what to say,**
- **You may feel you aren't doing a very good job . . . but keep praying.**
- **You know how valuable and important prayer is.**
- **Stick with it!**

Paul doesn't leave us with just this simple exhortation.

He also gives us some tips on how to remain devoted in our praying.

First, Paul says we should be "*watchful*".

The word for "*watchful*" means to "*be awake*."

Do you know what keeps us awake in our praying?

Prayer is intensified by Need.

Sometimes I think we don't pray because we are not aware of any need to pray.

Let me give you another illustration.

Consider the difference between two military sentries.

One is guarding the barracks of a stateside unit.

The other is guarding a platoon on the front in battle.

Which one is more diligent?

Which one is more attentive?

The one who realizes that they are in a battle.

Do we realize we are in an Eternal Battle – souls are at stake.

You will see this if you look around.

Have you watched the news lately?

Do you know what is happening in our world?

Do you know that Jesus Christ could come again at any time?

Does it bother you or concern you that your loved ones and friends and neighbors and people you work with might miss heaven and go to hell?

If you pay attention you will be motivated to pray.

Notice:

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The moral decay of our society

Have you ever seen our world in such a terrible plight?

The lostness of people who need Jesus

Think about it this morning – less than 20% of people in our society are attending church any where.

The needs of your family for protection,

The need for wisdom,

The need for shelter from worldly influences that are evil and damaging not only to you, but to your children.

You're aware of this just like I am, but anyone can watch Television – get on the computer – see graphic pornography that destroys people's lives. We can see all kinds of evil that creeps into your front living room. SIN - SIN everywhere!

Look at the lives of your friends and see the burdens they are carrying
Have you noticed lately someone you care about that is going through something that is tearing them to pieces? Will you spend time in prayer for them?

Notice the spiritual battle going on around you

Notice how often your old self sneaks out into your new life.

We need to realize that Satan is going to attack us at every point he can to defeat us and take us back into his world of sin.

You see the temper flare.

You are in a conversation and you realize that you are gossiping.

You are sharing a story and realize that you are embellishing the truth to enhance yourself.

Notice how hard it is to really change.

Notice the various signs that may suggest that the end of this earth is drawing near.

The church has been preaching this fact for years and people scoff at it and yet we know and we have that feeling that this could actually happen soon.

II Peter 3:3-4

3 “First of all you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ He promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’”

If you do these things, you will realize that you are in the midst of a battle field and you will want to keep in touch with God, the Father, our Commander-in-Chief.

You see the watchful believer is the one that is ready to pray at any prompting.

He does not wait until some future time . . . He prays when he is aware of the need.

When we look at the present state of our world, our nation, our churches, we need to Pray that God will intervene and bring a genuine Holy Ghost sent Revival.

How to Pray For Others

Paul does not stop with these words. He continues by asking the Colossians to pray for him. He writes, "*And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim it clearly, as I should*". (V. 3,4)

It's interesting isn't it, that Paul does not ask that they pray for his release from prison.

He doesn't ask them to pray that his provisions hold out.

He doesn't ask for prayer that he be able to deal with loneliness.

Paul sees a bigger picture.

To Paul there is only one pressing issue: that he be a faithful witness to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Friends, are you convicted by how much you and I miss the main issue?

Do you see that we pleading for pebbles when there are mountains to move?

We focus on the material when all of eternity is at stake.

Paul asks for two specific things:

1) An Open Door

The first things Paul desires is the opportunity to present the gospel.

He desires the chance to talk with the guards, the civil officials, the other inmates.

He wants to be able to get the word out to whoever will listen.

Do you pray for God to open doors?

Are you praying that God will give you opportunities to reach others?

Do you pray for our church that we might be granted a hearing by the people of this community?

Are you praying for our young people that the doors might be opened to share with their friends?

Do you pray that doors would open in the in government, in our schools, in the workplace?

Do you pray for open doors in your own family and neighborhood?

Paul also asked for a Clear Presentation of the Gospel.

Paul is so practical.

He understands that God needs to be at work in every area of life if it is going to transform anyone.

Paul does not even trust his own ability to communicate the truth clearly.

He asks that the Colossians pray that he is clear in presenting the truth.

Conclusions

My intention this morning has not been to make you feel guilty. That's the work of the Holy Spirit

I want to spur you on. I want to challenge you and me

And I want to spur myself on.

Do you understand that all the talented people and creative programs we can muster as a Church and a staff cannot make the impact that God's people can make as a result of their prayers?

That's why we need you to Pray!

The Lord is the one who changes hearts and lives.

He alone can strengthen us in the times of darkness.

It is only the Lord who can give us guidance and wash us our sins as white as snow.

It is not political clout, but the Holy Spirit of the Lord that can alone turn our country/world around.

He's the one who restores relationships, and gives us hope in the storm.

We need His help. And that's why we must cry out for Him to come to help us.

It's time to open our hearts to the Father.

Let the defenses come down.

Dare to be honest about how helpless you really are.

Devote yourself to the one who is Devoted to you.

Will you be challenged to join our Church Family in Prayer?