

Oct. 18, 2020

The Mindset of Every-Member Ministry

Colossians 4:2-6

Mature Christians don't merely go to church. They live on mission.

LTS: Rom. 12:9-21

At Calvary Bible Church one of our core values has always been what we might call Every-Member Ministry. When people encounter this congregation for the first time my hope is, they would quickly discover that ours is church of four pastors and three hundred ministers. This was apparently Paul's vision for the church when he explained to the congregation in Ephesus that God had gifted the church with "evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry..."

So, when you think about the ministers of the church, think of all of the members of the congregations actively serving and caring for one another and for those who visit on any given Lord's day. This is how a healthy church - a biblical church – grows deep and bears fruit.

You see, Mature Christians don't merely go to church. They live on mission. They don't show up at the meeting place strategizing for what they want to get from others but what they might offer to others on behalf of Christ. Thankfully, there are a lot of people at Calvary Bible Church who live On Mission. It's not difficult to identify them. Look for the man standing between the pews 15 minutes after the service with his hand on a brother's shoulder praying for the restoration of his marriage. Look for a group of women huddled up in the back weeping with the young mom who has just experienced her third miscarriage and is grieving more deeply than she ever thought she could.

If you have eyes to see, you may spot a couple of teenage boys asking each other accountability questions in a mutual effort to keep their minds pure and their hearts in the word of God.

Behind the scenes people on mission are counseling with the Scriptures. Others are administrating details that most of know nothing about. There are gifted evangelists and even more gifted coffeemakers determined to help the Spirit keep the congregation alert during those LONG sermons!

In a healthy church, hundreds of acts of ministry take place every Sunday and every day of the week by mature Christians who Live 'On Mission.' This is the normal attitude of the mature believer. But for many Christians – perhaps some who are here today – what I am describing is a New Attitude for an Old Relationship. The OLD Relationship is the one you have with Christ and His church. The new attitude, however, is one that calls us to live "on mission" all the time.

Perhaps you have never considered this before. Maybe you have always attended churches that have had low expectations of the believers who attend. If that happens to be you this morning, then I'm here to tell you that the Lord wants to motivate you for ministry. He wants you to slip out of the cheap seats and get down on the field where the game is being played. O beloved, God is at work calling all men everywhere to repent and believe. He is seeking and saving a world of sinners. He is building His church and populating the Kingdom of His Son. And the truly amazing thing is that that He insists on completing this mission through the likes of weak, inadequate, unremarkable, ordinary people like me and you.

Friends, if you intend to sink your roots in this little church – Calvary Bible Church – you need to understand that our expectation is that you will buy into the idea of Every-Member Ministry and live “On Mission.”

Consider what it would be like if there really were only four ministers in this church (Rod, Russ, Jason and myself). Our church would be in sorry shape. Can you imagine Russ leading the worship team. Can you imagine Me doing the financial accounting, or Jason handling all the maintenance? Or Rod handling the... well, come to think of it, Rod could probably do all those things – but NOT all at the same time! We are one body with many members and ALL the members (i.e. everyone who calls Calvary their church home) is equipped by the Lord to serve – to Live “on mission.”

Paul has already communicated these things to the church in Ephesus, and I think that's what's on his mind here at the end of his short letter to the believers at Colossae. (Allow me to explain). He wants all Christians to play their part in God's plan for Gospel Growth and the maturity of the church. But for most of us, that requires a shift in mind-set – a new attitude about Christian life and Christian ministry.

But you may ask, what specific mindset is Paul calling for? How Does God want me to change? And that's a good question. In fact, there are probably a number of changes God may need to make in our thinking to bring about the attitude of Every-Member Ministry in the church. But in the passage before us this morning there are Three attitudes (or mind-sets) that the Lord expects us to cultivate as members of His church.

Specifically, Paul is teaching us that living On Mission requires that we adopt a mindset that is Prayerful, Plural, and Personal.

Let's begin by grounding this message in the Scripture. Would you stand with me? Turn to Col. 4:2-6

Read Col. 4:2-6

Now the first thing we observe in this passage is that ...

I. Our Mission-mindset Must Be Prayerful:

1. Paul say (2), “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it.”

2. The first obvious thing we should notice here is that God wants Christians to pray. If someone were to ask you, “What should I do to begin really living on mission as a follower of Christ?” You might say,

- “Well, why don’t you start by volunteering for Children’s ministry on Sunday mornings here at the church? They always need help.”
- Or you might say, “How about joining the evangelism team that goes downtown on Friday nights to share the gospel with strangers?” That would really jolt you into a mission mindset! But neither of these would be the first to come to Paul’s mind. The first and perhaps most important thing is the priority of prayer.

3. Prayer is the most basic and most productive ministry a Christian can do. I mean, what more powerful practice can we engage to further gospel growth than to ask God to accomplish what He alone has the authority and power to do? And frankly, it is something every believer can do. You don’t need special talents. It doesn’t require a certain giftset. In fact, any believing child can engage in the practice of prayer. What’s more, the call to prayer comes with a promise. Toward the end of the N.T. James encourages us to prayer by reminding us that “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (NASB).

4. Do you believe that prayer accomplishes much? If you do, then you should know that this is the place where Every-Member ministry begins. This is the start-gate for living On Mission. God wants us to pray.

5. But what exactly is prayer? Well, in its most basic sense, prayer is simply asking God for what we want or believe we need. In fact, the word pray in English means “to ask.” But of course, prayer involves more than simply asking for what we need.

Illustration:

In the late 1800’s D.L. Moody was a world-renown evangelist out of Chicago. On one occasion he was doing an evangelistic crusade in Britain and was invited to speak to a large group of school children in Scotland. When Moody arrived, he thought, “What shall I say to a group of children, and his answer was, “Well, I’ll talk about prayer because that’s very basic. He began his talk by asking the group a rhetorical question: “What is Prayer?” And to his utter amazement about 500 hands went up. He was stunned! So, he calls on a boy in the front row and asks, “O.K. son, what is prayer. And the kid stands up and says, : “ Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, by the power of His Spirit, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.” And he sat down.

Moody was absolutely stunned. He realized that this was the 98th question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism "What is Prayer?" And Moody looked at the boy and said, "Be thankful, son, that you were born in Scotland. Because it was a place where they took catechism seriously."¹

6. Now we don't have time to unpack that lengthy definition of Prayer. But notice that in this definition, prayer is the "offering up of our desires before God." And there is good reason why Christians offer up our desires to God in prayer. It is because, as those who have been chosen, called, and justified by grace alone through faith alone, we understand that we are utterly and completely dependent on God for everything.

7. "Dependency is the heartbeat of prayer."² The very act of praying is an acknowledgement that we are not self-sufficient. Jesus is the Vine, and we are the branches. When we depend on him, we bear much fruit. Apart from Him we can do nothing.

8. I wonder how much "ministry" we do in the church that amounts to nothing in the eyes of God because we fail to pray. We fail to ask God to do for us - and the people around us - what we could never do for ourselves. We present ourselves as Christians, and though we haven't stopped believing in God, perhaps we have allowed ourselves to become functional deists, living with God at a distance."

9. Beloved, as a church, we need to understand that Every-member Ministry begins with dependent prayer. Living "On Mission" is grounded in dependent prayer. So, we should be people who pray. But what attitudes should characterize the Mature Christians prayer?

10. Well, Paul tells us in this verse. First he says:

A. Pray "Steadfastly" (NAS: "Devote yourselves to prayer"). This is a strong word means "courageous", or "Persist;" "To hold fast and not let go." The idea is that we must pray and keep on praying – ask and keep on asking – NOT because he is reluctant to give but rather because he delights in our coming and asking! Listen to this:

1) Prov. 15:18 "The prayer of the upright is His delight."

2) Isa. 65:24. "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer and while they are still speaking, I will hear." This is the Lord sitting on the edge of his seat eagerly waiting an opportunity to answer the petitions of His children. Why would

¹ John Piper, Sermon, *Devote Yourselves to Prayer*; on Desiring God.org. Last visited on 10/09, 2020. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/devote-yourselves-to-prayer>

² Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life*, (Colorado Springs, Nav Press, 2009),24

we ever be reluctant to pray? So, we should pray Steadfastly or Devotedly.

- 3) Isa. 62:6-7 we read, On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen. All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves and give him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

B. Watchfully: (NAS – “keeping alert in it, or to STAY AWAKE!” What is Paul getting at here?)

- 1) Literally, to “stay awake!” Don’t pull the cover over your head and go back to sleep!
- 2) Don’t be distracted: Illustration:
 - I forgot that its trash day.
 - Look at the mess on that table. Ill just straighten that up first (OCD)
 - Ill just take a peak at the election news and THEN Ill pray.
- 3) Be alert to other people’s spiritual need even if they don’t offer it as a prayer request.
- 4) BTW: The word for “Watchful” or Alert” here is gregorew from which we get the name Gregory. In the early years of the church it was common for parents to name their sons Gregory – one who is vigilant and watchful.
- 5) O my friends, God delights in bold, persistent, tireless, disciplined, alert and watchful prayer. So, we should pray Steadfastly and Watchfully. Third, we should pray...

C. Thankfully: Paul says (2), “With Thanksgiving.”

- 1) This is the same apostle Paul who commands, “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thess. 5:18).
- 2) If we believe that God is completely sovereign, infinite in wisdom, and perfect in love, we will be thankful in everything and for everything. And that thankfulness will find its rightful expression in prayer.

11. This is where living “On Mission” begins. We pray. We pray Steadfastly; we pray watchfully, and we pray thankfully. There are things God intends to do that He will NOT do apart from

prayer. Paul knew that, so he prayed a lot! Listen to how he describes his own practice of prayer:

- Without ceasing (Rom. 1:9-10)
- I give thanks always for you (1 Cor. 1:4)
- I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers (Eph. 1:16)
- Praying at all times in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18)
- We have not ceased to pray for you (Col. 1:9)
- Always struggling on your behalf (Col. 4:12)
- Constantly mentioning you in prayer (1 Thes. 1:2)
- We thank God constantly for you (1 Thes. 2:13)
- We pray most earnestly, night and day (1 Thes. 3:10)
- We always pray for you (2 Thes. 1:11)
- I remember you constantly in my prayers, night and day (2 Tim. 1:3).
- And this is how Paul wants Christians to pray. We know that because of the verse we are looking at today: “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving...”

12. Someone will say, Pastor, this is kind of new for me, or I’m a little rusty in prayer. Can you just offer a practical word or two about how to pray? I’m glad you asked.

A. However you pray, always approach God as a child. Come with a dependent attitude. Come believing that he is your Father, and he accepts you unconditionally in Christ and because of Christ.

1) Since you are his child, talk to him about everything. Don’t get bogged down in lists of things to pray for. There is a place for that, but first of all talk to him about what’s on your heart? Psalm 62:8 “Pour out your heart before Him!” What do you need? Forgiveness? Wisdom? Fellowship? Is there something to thank him for? Does your heart overflow with worship? Are you anxious, disappointed, depressed, confused? jubilant? Are you grieving? Do you need to lament? Don’t worry so much about structure, just talk to God about what matters to you.

2) Paul Miller offers an appropriate insight when he writes:

Jesus did NOT say, "Come to me, all you who have learned how to concentrate in prayer, whose minds no longer wander, and I will give you rest. NO! He opens his arms to his needy children... The criteria for coming to Jesus is weariness. [So] Come overwhelmed with life. Come with your wandering mind. Come messy.³ You will find a loving Father who cares about everything that's on your mind.

3) This week I found a wonderful treatise on prayer written by the beloved John Newton (former slave trader-turned-pastor, and composer of the song, Amazing Grace). In it, he writes about certain hindrances to prayer. In one place offers this simile.

The studied addresses with which some approach the throne of grace remind us of a stranger coming to a great man's door; he knocks and waits, sends in his name, and goes through a course of ceremony, before he gains admittance, while a child of the family uses no ceremony at all, but enters freely when he pleases, because he knows he is at home.⁴

4) What a beautiful and helpful picture of prayer this is to us who desire to learn to pray. Come to God like a child.

5) It might also be helpful here to remember that "when Jesus describes the intimacy he wants with us, he talks about joining us for dinner. 'Behold (Jesus says), I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.'⁵ (Rev. 3:20)

6) These are but illustrations of the absolute and unhindered accessibility of Jesus for those who pray. So, come to him as a Child. Pour out your heart upon his listening ear.

B. Create a Prayer Plan:

1) Spontaneity and freedom in prayer is wonderful, but there is also a place for structure in prayer. People who devote themselves to prayer usually have a plan to fall back on – a prayer plan.

³ Paul Miller, p. 34

⁴ Mark Water, [*The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations*](#) (Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishers Ltd, 2000), 778

⁵Paul Miller, p. 34

2) Examples:

- A.C.T.S.

3) Prayer lists (mine is here in my Bible)

4) Concentric Circles

- Myself
- My marriage,
- My children,
- My church
- My extended family
- My unsaved friends and neighbors
- My country
- Our world
- These are a few examples of how to employ a prayer plan.

C. Establish a place and routine.

- 1) I find it helpful to have a time and a place for prayer. My best prayer times are usually early morning (preferably before sunrise). I get up, grab my prayer list and a flashlight and walk through the neighborhood.
- 2) I walk partly because I need daily exercise and partly in obedience to Pau's command to "Stay Awake!" This may not be true for everyone, but I find it difficult to fall asleep while walking.

D. Pray the Scriptures.

- 1) (Hos. 14:2) "Take words with You and return to the Lord." The best words to take with you as you go to prayer are words of Scripture.
- 2) Use a passage you know like Col.1:9-13)
- 3) When you use a Scripture to pray for someone else, send them a text or note to tell them

how you were praying for them. They will be very blessed to hear how you have been praying for them.

E. Pray from the heart:

- 1) Puritan Pastor, Thomas Brooks wrote, “God hears no more than the heart speaks. If the heart be dumb, God will certainly be deaf. No prayer takes with God, but that which is the travail of the heart.”⁶

13. Now, I know that there is a lot more we can say about prayer, but suffice it to say that living On Mission begins with prayer. If we are going to live up to Paul’s ideal of Every-member Ministry, the 300 ministers of Calvary Bible Church must be people of Steadfast, Watchful, and Thankful prayer.

Mature Christians don't merely go to church. They live on mission.

⁶ Elliot Ritzema and Elizabeth Vince, eds., [*300 Quotations for Preachers from the Puritans*](#), Pastorum Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).