

Cornerstone Baptist Church

Devoted To Prayer

April 24, 2022

Colossians 4:2-4

Pastor Jody Cross

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Cornerstone. It's great to be back again and see you all today – new faces and familiar ones. Alex and I have missed being with you. It's been about 18 months since I've left, after 10 wonderful years of serving here on staff.

You are in my thoughts and prayers regularly. I feel pretty connected to SBC as I keep my ear to the ground and connect with Pastor Rob with the TGC Podcast we host 2x monthly, and keep in touch with staff and hear reports from Alyssa.

Thank you to Pastor Paul for the invitation to come today and preach God's Word while He is away. Today is a switcheroo - Pastor Paul is preaching at Jesse Stewart's (former CBC intern's church in Kentucky, Ryan is preaching at Southshore in Barrie - and I am here. We tried to get Pastor Levi into the mix but he couldn't do it this time. He and I will be doing a pulpit swap in July and that will also be a wonderful opportunity to see the Redeemer folks again.

Thank you for your prayers for us, and for Southshore as you think of us. It is such an encouragement to hear that people are praying for us. We need it and appreciate it very much. Let me give you a quick overview of what the Lord is doing in the south of Barrie...**REPORT...**

We are just one-week past Easter – it's over and now we can move on, right? NO! || We never move on from Easter! We are a resurrection Easter people - people of the Risen King, a people sent by the Risen King with the Great Commission mandate.

After Jesus' resurrection, what did He say to His disciples in Acts 1? To wait for the promise of the Father. What did they do? They gathered, waited on the Lord DEVOTING THEMSELVES TO PRAYER, and they were EMPOWERED - Empowered to be God's people and do God's work, That's the need and that's the call.

Our FOCUS today is PRAYER.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, 19th Century English Poet wrote these famous words, *More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.* ||

When we pray, we are communing with the Everlasting God, who is powerful, and personal, and our provider. Our invitation to pray comes from this God. Our love for prayer flows from knowing, and being with, the God who loves us.

There is POWER IN PRAYER. As people pray – God works powerfully - Blind eyes open. Prison doors open. Chains fall off. The devil is defeated. The lost come home. Hearts are transformed. Lives are made new.

This morning I hope with the great help of God's Spirit to awaken in you:

A deep appreciation of the privilege of prayer and

To stir in you the desire to be someone who is devoted to prayer.

A church can be known and respected for many things – *love, faithfulness to the Word, passionate singing, love for children, and many other important things...* I wonder though, is a praying church on our list of what we would like to be known for?

After all did Jesus not say...*My house shall be a house of prayer?* (Luke 19:46)

Watching Jesus' prayer life and seeing the central place of prayer in one's relationship with God the disciples said, "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" (Luke 11:1). That's a great place to start being a person of prayer or a praying church, PRAY THAT THE LORD WILL TEACH YOU HOW TO PRAY.

But let's admit. Prayer doesn't come easy to us. Many of us struggle with prayer – actually doing it, knowing what to say, feeling like we fumble in our words, getting distracted when we pray. Many of us sense our lack of prayer with some regret and shame. Is that you? Let's be encouraged this morning as we ask the Lord to do a work in us to deepen our prayer lives.

Learning to pray and becoming a person of prayer is a journey. We're all on it, and we're in it together to grow in our prayer lives and to BECOME A PRAYING CHURCH. That's exciting!

That's a good prayer because prayer is FUNDAMENTAL. Prayer is to the spiritual life, as breathing is to the physical life. FUNDAMENTAL.

Praying to the Living God, talking with Him, communing with Him in prayer is an immeasurable PRIVILEGE. Listen to His invitation, to come, to seek Him and to find Him and His help,

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16 ESV)

As we look at a simple but profound text this morning, let's turn our hearts to the Lord now as we prepare to hear His Word. **Let's pray...**

Prayer

God our Father, we thank You for the gift of prayer. Thank You that we can come before you now in the name of Jesus, who loves us, who died for us, was raised and who now is interceding for us. Lord, we now seek Your face and ask for Your help. Lord, I need your your help as I preach this message. I submit myself and these words to You that You might bless them and use them for Your glory.

Father send Your Spirit to come and do a new work in us. Do what only You can do. Speak to us. Give us the ability to hear. Grant that this time together before You in Your Word would be life changing as we hear the living Word of God speaking to us. In the name of our triumphant Saviour Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Open your Bibles to Colossians 4. Hear now the Lord of the Lord - Colossians 4:2,

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. Col. 4:2 (CSB)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

This is a simple but profound passage of scripture. In this passage we learn how to press on to Christian maturity in prayer,

Our focus is this one verse, 10 words, and 3 points. Understood and practiced, **it will change our lives, change this church, and change the world.** ||

Here's the first thing,

1. **Make it Continual**

In Colossians, the section from 3:5-4:6, Paul concludes the letter by telling the church how to live out the Lordship of Jesus in daily life. In other words, "How do I follow Jesus, and live out my faith and move toward maturity in Christ, which is a key theme in Colossians"?

In this letter, specifically - How do I live a life of purity? How do I put to death that in me that which fights against holiness? How do I live in relationship with others in the family of God? How do we grow a thriving marriage? How I relate to my parents? How do I raise my kids? How do I relate to my boss? ||

Here he gives us the answer; the very next thing he says at the end of exhortations is this, church, start with this - **PRAY!** Pour out your hearts to God.

Devote yourselves to prayer

Devote in the ESV is translated, "*Continue steadfastly.*

The idea here is to pray CONTINUALLY. How about this for a definition of devote

Unrelenting persistence

Paul didn't write this verse for the prayer team in the Colossian church. || It was for EVERYONE. This is a command from the Lord, Christian – do this, have an unrelenting persistence in your prayer life.

Jesus taught His disciples the necessity of constancy in prayer,

And he told them a parable to the effect that they **ought always to pray** and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1 ESV)

Dick Lucas notes, “A characteristic mark of the earliest Christians is their devotion to intercessory prayer.” They devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14. 2:42) and the Apostles devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 6:4).

Paul calls the believers to the same thing in Romans 12:12,

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, **BE CONSTANT IN PRAYER.** (Romans 12:12 ESV)

Jesus commands it, Paul commands it, the early church is faithful to do it.

:: This **always, constantly** means that we are praying about

All sorts of things, in all sorts of places at all sorts of times. ||

Monday at 7 am, or Thursday at noon, or Saturday at 9:30 pm, at home, at work, walking the dog, over coffee with a brother from the church.

This is what is to characterize the life of an individual, and the life of a church – a commitment to the absolute IMPORTANCE OF, AND PRACTICE OF unrelenting persistence in prayer.

You may know that CBC believes this firmly – your website has these words,

Everything that we are and everything that we do at Cornerstone depends on the gracious blessing of God. So we seek diligently and humbly to devote ourselves to prayer.

Prayer is the foundation FOR ALL WE DO. Psalmist says, *Unless the Lord builds the house... what...we labour in vain (Psalm 127:1)*. On the night before His crucifixion Jesus told His disciples “Apart from me”, you can do what? You can do nothing.

Because we recognize the need in our life for God’s enabling and because we want to live a life that is pleasing to Him, we need to be devoted to prayer.

:: We get this idea of devotion, continually giving yourself to something – i. **a grandma** who is devoted to her grandkids. Time, effort, thought, money, attention. ii. A person devoted to **intense training** for a high level of sport. Drive, choices, commitment, sacrifice, discipline.

Devotion to do something requires time and effort, but we do it gladly and joyfully because of the love we have for that thing.

We are devoted to prayer because, let me give you 2 reasons:

i. Because He is faithful

Richard C. Trench wrote,

Prayer is not getting man’s will done in heaven, but getting God’s will done on earth. It is not overcoming God’s reluctance but laying hold of God’s willingness.

That’s so good! Prayer is laying hold of God’s willingness!

The God to whom we pray to is not a distant, cold, disinterested superpower, but our Almighty God and infinitely good Father who rules all of creation and who loves to give good gifts to His children.

He loves to meet our needs. He is not stingy. He is Emmanuel the God who is with us and for us. Through what Jesus has done on the cross we can always come before our Abba Father and His throne of grace to find the mercy and grace we need. We are devoted to prayer because that's who He is!

2nd, because this is who we are:

ii. Because we are need-full!

The day to day demands of life, our fragile health, the season of COVID we have navigated and still navigate, any number of things remind us constantly that we are not in control. || We don't know what tomorrow brings, or even what the rest of today brings.

We are finite creatures who have been designed by God to be strategically needy. We have been designed to be dependent, living with God as our source and supply.

Therefore in all of our NEEDS and NEEDINESS, we should see prayer NOT as a LAST RESORT, but as our FIRST RESPONSE. Did you hear that? we should see prayer NOT as a LAST RESORT, but as our FIRST RESPONSE.

God is the *resource-full* Giver, and we are *needy* receivers. God loves to hear His children, asking, seeking, knocking in a child-like dependency upon His goodness.

This confident dependency evidences itself in all of our life;

- We pray in the morning when we rise and start the day, in the evening when we lay down to rest in gratefulness for God's help.
- On the days when we are so aware of our weakness that we know our strength comes from God alone.
- When we need courage to walk the path that's difficult.

- When the way is clouded, and we need God's direction.
- In all these details of life, we who are so needy, but so loved by our God, prayer expresses our dependency on the life-giving character of God.

Brothers and sisters, this is God's will for us - to have this unrelenting persistence, to be devoted in prayer, dependent on our faithful, powerful, providing Heavenly Father.

Let this be our prayer, "Lord make me a person devoted to prayer." ||

After telling the church what to do, he gives them two attitudes as they pray. That leads us to our next 2 points.

In our journey to press on to maturity through prayer, Paul's tell the church, be watchful!

2. **Be Watchful**

It may sound like an obvious statement, but if we are going to be devoted, to pray continually, we have to stay awake, to be alive, to stay alert, to be on guard, to remain vigilant. The Colossian church had grown sleepy and NEEDED TO WAKE UP! They were failing to watch and pray.

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it... (Col. 4:2 CSB)

Have you ever fallen asleep while praying? Drift off in delirium? The disciples did, on a night, THE NIGHT when Jesus needed them the most. The word "stay alert" in the CSB is the same word "be watchful", the same word Jesus used to call the disciples to support Him in prayer when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus warned them for **THEIR OWN SAKE** because of their weakness, **to stay alert in prayer**, for their own protection and strength, against all the devil would throw at them. We find this in Mark 14:38,

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14:38 ESV)

And he needed them to stay awake and **PRAY FOR HIS SAKE**,

Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”
(Matthew 26:38 ESV)

You know the story - the disciples grew sleepy in prayer and fell asleep. || As sentries posted to stand guard and do battle in prayer for their on the night of His betrayal and arrest – they fell asleep. They dropped the ball, in the hour of Jesus’ great agony. They failed because of physical and spiritual lethargy. Let’s therefore heed Jesus’ warning to stay awake and alert.

Stay awake, stay alert and don’t fall asleep. I think we can take this both literally and figuratively. If we are going to be a people devoted to prayer, we have to physically stay awake and alert, AND we have to spiritually stay awake and alert.

:: Alertness is a state of careful watching. You remain physically alert when??

- In uncertainties when there may be surprises, and you need to stay alert and agile.
- In danger, with an imminent threat, you need to be alert to protect that which is in your care.

God calls us to spiritual alertness in prayer, when?

- To be alert when temptation comes
- To be ready speak or act in response to opportunities that He puts before you
- Not to be caught off guard, when the Lord returns (1 Thes. 5:4-6, Matthew 25:13)

Peter has sounded the call for the church to be alert, to be watchful, to stay awake IN PRAYER. He writes,

Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. (1 Peter 5:8 ESV)

Friends, the Christian life is not an all-expense paid trip on a big cruise ship to heaven. || It's a battleship cutting through the chaotic waters of a world opposed to Jesus. ||

There is great opportunity at hand but there is danger all around but there's a spiritual battle going on around us, all the time. Have you felt it this past week?

We are in a battle, on mission, serving our King, in a war for souls. On every side we face spiritual warfare. Our fierce adversary is a defeated foe, but the enemy of our souls is seeking to devour us and keep people blind to their need of Christ for salvation.

The days in which we live are evil, temptation keeps knocking, and trials are abounding,

So, we **WILL** stay alert and prayer, and not slumber.

The harvest is ripe, and people are desperate and dying without Christ.

So, we **MUST** stay alert and prayer, and not fail at our post.

We have a fierce enemy but we have a **BIG** God who at the cross crushed the evil one! Our Risen Saviour Jesus is at work and answers when we pray. In your journey to maturity through prayer, this is Paul's 2nd admonition, **STAY ALERT!**

And here's the final one, be thankful!

3. Be Thankful

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with **thanksgiving**. Col. 4:2 (CSB)

Memorize this, let's say it together...

Finally, Paul tells the church to pray with an attitude of gratitude. It's not just THAT YOU PRAY, but HOW YOU PRAY. Praise and prayer go together. One fuels the other.

In Colossians THANKSGIVING IS A BIG DEAL. It is one of the dominant characteristics of this letter. This is the 7th time in this letter the idea of thankfulness appears. Paul speaks of this right at the outset of the letter, linking it with his praying. Listen,

We **always thank God**, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **when we pray for you**. (Col. 1:3 ESV)

What is Paul thankful for? He is OVERFLOWING with thankfulness for who God is and what He is doing, and for the believers in Christ at Colossae, and how they are growing in their faith. AND what's more he has this attitude of thanksgiving even when he's writing this IMPRISONED IN ROME!

Be thankful WHEN YOU PRAY. I am thankful for the power of prayer. When God's people pray, He hears and answers! The Living God listens to the prayers of His children answering those who put their trust in Him.

If you are needing a reminder today of why we have EVERY reason to be thankful; if you need to have your gratitude tank filled up and your prayers saturated with an attitude of thanksgiving, let me give you 4 reasons:

1. Be thankful for the price Jesus paid. He is a saving God who has rescued us from hell and for eternity to be with Him forever.

We are alive in Christ; our sins are forgiven, and we are destined for a glorious eternal future. This is the message of the Gospel and we have every reason to pray with an attitude of thankfulness!

2. Be thankful for God's provision. He is our Jehovah Jireh who meets all our needs.
3. Be thankful for God's promises. He is the faithful God and we can fully trust Him.

4. Be thankful for God's people. He has brought up into this loving community of faith that loves Him, His Word, and one another.

:: I am thankful for the PRAYER GROUPS IN THIS CHURCH. For the Monday night prayer group - faithfully worshipping and interceding for you, and staff and elders, and me! There are few people I'd love praying for me more than this group.

:: For the pastoral team and elders who pray regularly for you, for the prayer groups – coming before the throne of grace in devoted, in expectant prayer!

:: Mary Moffatt – my prayer team warrior in the battle! Mary agreed to pray for me while I was away for the 7 weeks of the mission. The Lord used her prayers in powerful ways. We clearly saw God's hand protecting us and working to bring many people into a saving knowledge of Christ. 2 years later when I wasn't just a student attending the church, I was now one of the pastors, one morning after the service, Mary came up to me and said in a conversation we were having these words, "YOU KNOW I STILL PRAY FOR YOU EVERY DAY." I was stopped in my tracks, in that moment realizing the profound privilege and inestimable value of the prayers of this godly woman who was devoted, who persisted in prayer, who was alert by God to continually lift my life up before the Lord, always struggling on my behalf in her prayers.

Perhaps you have a Mary Moffatt in your life, or someone on Monday night or Tuesday is praying for you - **be thankful for them.**

Perhaps you are a Mary Moffatt or in a prayer group praying for many others - **be thankful for the ministry the Lord has given you.**

Perhaps you need a Mary or John to be praying for you OR you need this week to find one of the prayer groups and stand shoulder to shoulder with them in intercessory prayer to become a Mary for someone else.

How do you grow into maturity as a believer, in prayer? Make it continual. Be watchful! Be thankful!

CONCLUSION

Finally in our pursuit to be devoted to prayer, pray like this (prayer in Colossians)

- i. Pray with gratitude for the work of God in each other's lives, with unceasing prayer for them (1:3-5)
- ii. Pray to be filled with power and wisdom to walk worthy and be fruitful (1:9-12). Make it a daily prayer. Powerful.
- iii. Pray for open doors to tell the good news of the gospel (4:3). Effective evangelism begins with persistent, unrelenting prayer.
- iv. Pray in imitation of those who faithfully wrestle in prayer (4:12). Paul at the beginning, and Epaphras at the end (4:12), bookend this letter with the emphasis on prayer.

Pray: Lord, make me a person devoted to prayer. Lord, make us a praying church

My Pursuit

Q. What do you need to do to move the needle forward one notch? What is the Lord impressing upon you today in your prayer life?

Area of a routine of prayer?

Area of praying with another person? Spouse? Friend?

Area of unrelenting persistence?

Area of being spiritually alert?

Area of being thankful?

APPLICATION

Cornerstone, let the heartbeat, the burden, and passion and love for prayer characterize everything you do.

For the glory of God, the good of His people and the going forth of the Gospel to the whole world,
by the power of God at work in us,

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. Col. 4:2 (CSB