

Colossians 4:2-6.

New Year's is a wonderful time of year that we get a reset. Even the world recognizes it, the freshness of all the possibilities of 2023. Most people are ready to move on and close the old year out. It is a time of refreshing, do over, refocus.

How many have made some New Year's Resolutions? What are some of them? What are some New Year's traditions that you got happening?

In our text today, Paul challenges the church in Colosse to continue to pray with devotion so that the gospel message will go out clearly and give out grace to those who do not yet know Christ.

Sometimes it is hard to know what to pray for. Since October we have closed our church service out with corporate prayer. There have probably been some Sunday's where some of us just sit quietly not sure what to pray for.

Let's read our passage today and see what Paul has to say about prayer.

Read Colossians 4:2-6.

Our text falls naturally into two parts.

- **Prayer: Speaking to God about people (verses 2-4)**
- **Evangelism: Speaking to people about God (verses 5-6)**

Now, before you shut down and take your mental guilt trip at the mention of prayer and evangelism, let's allow the Holy Spirit to blow New Year's freshness through this passage. We've all heard messages on the need to pray and the need to witness and yet most of us struggle because we know we're not doing enough, nor can we ever. We do know that prayer makes a difference, and that we have access to the God of the universe, and that we can have peace as we pray, and that without prayer, we are powerless.

I find that there is nothing that my flesh resists quite as much as being still and seeking the Lord. Though communion with the Lord is life's greatest pleasure, I often neglect it as if it were not even a priority.

In one sense, prayer is simple; yet it is also the most difficult part of the Christian life. Ask any believer about their battles, and nine out of ten will tell you that maintaining a warm and deepening prayer life is one of their greatest challenges.

I can think of several obstacles to prayer.

- We may not have a true relationship with God. To experience the joy of answered prayer, it's essential that you can call God your Father. You can do that only if you've received Jesus Christ into your life.
- We may be more focused on asking for things than on knowing God. **James 4:3: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."** tells us that sometimes we don't receive because we're asking with wrong motives.

- We're too proud. If the truth were known, some of us don't really feel like we need any help. **James 4:6: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."**
- We view prayer as a chore. When we see something as a "have to" we often fight against it. Most of us know through experience that guilt trips are usually dead ends because guilt is a lousy motivator. Only grace can truly bring us to our knees.

Speaking to God About Others (verses 2-4).

Read **verse 2** again, we discover three helpful guidelines in this verse.

1. Pray with devotion.

- **"Continue earnestly in prayer,"** In the Greek translation verse 2 says, **"prayer be persevering, watching in it with thanksgiving."** Paul is challenging the believers in Colosse to continue to pray, to persist, be devoted to it.
- Being devoted in prayer is like cheering on your sports team, regardless of whether they are winning or losing.
- Don't bail. Don't give up. Be faithful. You may have dry times and days when you don't know what to say but keep praying anyway.
- Paul is saying, "Always be ready to break into prayer, and do it instantaneously, at all times." That's precisely the admonition in **1 Thessalonians 5:17** where we're exhorted to **"pray without ceasing."**
- Paul doesn't leave us with just an exhortation. He also gives a couple tips on how to remain devoted in our praying.

2. Pray with vigilance.

- Vigilance means to be watchful, attentive, aware, being alert, eyes open, against spiritual drowsiness or distracted.
- Paul told the believers in **1 Thessalonians 5:6** to not go asleep but to instead **"watch and be sober"** be alert and self-controlled as the time approaches for the Lord's return.
- This exhortation recalls the words of Jesus to His disciples the night before He was crucified in **Mark 14:34, 38: "Stay here and watch...Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."** Watchful prayer provides the spiritual fortitude to face down temptation. Could it be that because Peter could not stay awake when he was supposed to pray, he gave in to temptation and denied Christ a few hours later.
- Because we're in a spiritual battle, we need to always stay on high alert. **1 Peter 5:8 paints a real picture of the war we are in: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."**

3. Pray with thankfulness.

- We should never pray without thinking of at least one thing to thank God for. Gratitude is a stimulus to prayer. When we see answers to prayer, we will pray more.
- He's given us so many things. We can thank Him for His presence, His provision, His pardon, His promises, and for His purposes.
- Look at Paul's example in this book. **Colossians 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15,17.**
- How are we to pray? With devotion (being persistent), watchful (alert), with thankfulness.

Verses 3-4 tell what we should say when we pray.

1. Ask God to open doors for the gospel message to be given out.

- It's amazing to me that while Paul is under house arrest he doesn't ask for prayers for his release, or for better food, or anything else like that. He simply wants an open door for the gospel message. Even though he was locked up he was able to minister effectively - but he needed the prayers of God's people for the doors to open.

2. Ask for clarity.

- Once God opens a door, it's essential that we can proclaim the mystery of Christ with clarity. The goal of evangelism is to make the cloudy clear. The mystery is that Christ has died for the sins of the whole world, and that when we receive Him by faith, He comes to take up residence in our life as **Colossians 1:27 states: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."**
- Would you pray for me? I need to be constantly looking out for open doors and the clarity of mind to share the mystery of the gospel. Please pray that I can share God's Word with clarity.
- If you don't pray for me and I preach a confusing sermon, it's really your fault! Seriously, I can't think of anything more comforting and assuring than to know that many of you are praying for your pastors every day.

Speaking to Others About God.

In **verses 5-6** we'll gain some insight into how to speak to others about God. This is where prayer dovetails with evangelism.

1. Be Wise.

- **"Walk in wisdom..."** To be wise in the way we walk means that we're careful not to say or do anything that would make it difficult to share the gospel. Often this simply means that we need to remember that those who don't yet know Christ are watching us.
- When Jesus sent his disciples out to spread the good news, he told them,

Matthew 10:16, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

Romans 16:19, "For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil."

- We need to be careful about the way we act because people are making decisions about the truths of Christianity based upon how we're living. When we pray, God will give us open doors. Let's not shut them by our behavior.

2. Look for Opportunities.

- **"Redeeming the time."** This phrase is a commercial term and means to "buy up." It's the picture of finding something on sale and buying all you can afford because the price is so good. Likewise, we're to buy up every opportunity to speak for Christ when we see one.
- Am I making the most of the opportunities I have every day? I need to try to accomplish as much spiritual good as I can in all my relationships.

3. Be Gracious.

- **“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”**
- It’s important that we communicate with words of grace when we speak with those who don’t know Christ. Unfortunately, many times believers go off on people who are living in sin. Or we let loose about a moral issue in our culture, forgetting that there may be someone listening who is caught in that particular sin. When we’re filled with anger and rage people feel judgment, not hope.
- We need to be more like Jesus, who was the perfect embodiment of both truth and grace. Even when He dealt with sin, He spoke words of grace.

Luke 4:22, “And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph's son?”

4. Be Refreshing.

- Our conversations need to be seasoned with salt. Salt enhances flavor and makes food appetizing “Salty speech” in Paul’s day referred to witty and clever discussion.
- Salty speech makes people thirsty for more. We should be talking about Christ in a way that makes someone’s mouth water! Be appetizing!

5. Be Ready.

- When we choose to mix it up with people who don’t yet know Christ, we need to be ready to give them an answer when they ask us some questions. Another way to say it is that when we are gracious and appetizing, people will want an explanation.
- We must resist being the same as the world, so when we mix it up with others, as believers we are to set the standard, be different, in a humble, lowkey way.
- And be ready to give the answers that they are looking for.

1 Peter 3:15, “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,”

- We must be ready to answer everyone. You can do that any number of ways. First, simply tell your story. Talk about how you became a Christian. Secondly, tell His story. Focus on Jesus, explaining why He had to die on the cross and the need for us to respond to what He has done. Thirdly, invite your searching friends to a Sunday morning service or an event that is specifically designed to be a tool for you to use.

Conclusion

Do you know Jesus, personally? He came to give us what we need the most and seek the most, forgiveness and belonging.

Now, before you leave here feeling beat up because you don’t pray enough and you don’t say enough, let me encourage you to cancel your guilt trip.

The real answer is to cultivate intimacy with God by bowing to the supremacy of Jesus. We won't really pray until we see prayer as a way to express our love to Christ and recognize that He is even more eager to meet with us than we are to meet with Him.

Likewise, it's impossible to salt our speech with the deliciousness of Jesus when we haven't been enjoying the taste ourselves. If evangelism is what spills over when we bump into someone, then we must make sure that what bubbles over is appetizing.

Prayer and evangelism flow out of relationship. Are you growing in your love for Him?