

Before the Apostle closes his letter to the Colossians with greetings, he has some final instructions. The first is ² *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.* The NIV translation of those first words is "Devote yourselves to prayer". It is important to understand just how the word was used so we can get a better grasp on what Paul was asking them to do. Strong's Greek Dictionary defines the compound word used here in a number of ways. I believe they all apply. "The word means to be earnest towards, to persevere in, be constantly diligent, or to attend *assiduously all the exercises, or to adhere closely, to attend (give self) continually, continue in, wait on continually.*"

I'll be the first to admit that I don't feel like this describes my prayer life. I pray all the time, but I rarely take hours of continual prayer. I so appreciate those who do, and I would like to do so more often. I also appreciate those who pray for my ministry of preaching. I pray throughout the day, but I usually take the time to really wait on the Lord when in a trial or sermon preparation. But I'm not your perfect example, far from it. Our example is Jesus. Let's take a brief look at His prayer life.

³⁵ *And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.* Mark 1:35 (ESV) Jesus took time to be alone with His Father and commune with Him. The disciples got up that morning and couldn't find Jesus. He had gone before the dawn, while it was still dark. One of the best times to pray is when the Lord wakes you in the night. It's quiet and without distractions. (Psalm 63:6; 119:148) I have nights when I wake at 2 or 3AM and can't go back to sleep. I used to just lay there and keep trying to sleep, and finally around dawn I'd go back to sleep for a few minutes. What a waste of good prayer time! Get up! Go to where you usually pray. You do have a place don't you? Open your Bible and your heart and talk with Jesus.

When there are not urgent matters on your heart, you can go through the Lord's prayer, elaborating as you go. Or you can use the acronym ACTS to help, Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. You'd be surprised how quickly the time flies. When you're prayed up, you'll be pleased to see how quickly you fall back to sleep.

My favorite verse about Jesus praying is from Hebrews. We went over it recently in our Hebrews Bible study. ⁷ *In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.* Hebrews 5:7 (ESV) The Greek word used in the passage for "loud cries" is that involuntary sound that comes up from the depths of your being when you are overwhelmed with emotional pain. You've probably heard

Commented [Paul1]: Psalm 63:6 (ESV)

⁶ when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;

Commented [Paul2]: Psalm 119:148 (ESV)

¹⁴⁸ My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise.

or personally experienced that involuntary sound of pain. Imagine the intensity of prayer that would produce this kind of an involuntary cry. I think Jesus must have prayed like that many times, though the writer is probably referring to the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:38-39) Jesus was heard because he reverently surrendered His will to that of the Father. **That is an important ingredient in prayer, submission to God's will in our circumstances.**

Prayer should be a two way communication. Though we should tune our heart to hear the still, small voice of the Lord, we also need to test everything with the Word of God. The vast majority of the time the Lord speaks to my heart, it is through a passage of Scripture. That is His voice. Whatever He speaks to your heart will be Scriptural if it is His voice.

It saddens me to hear the family of God command God to heal or to save or any number of things. There is a verse in Isaiah in which God asks if we will command Him (45:11). In the King James translation it sounds as if God is asking us to command Him. (45:11KJV) In almost all more recent translations the phrase is a question asking if we would dare to command Him! When we ask of the Father something in the name of Jesus, we are asking with Jesus' authority which means that it is His will. We pray God's will into the earth, not our own. (1John 5:14) **Prayer is aligning our heart with the Father's.**

The Apostle goes on to say that we should be watchful in it. This may mean that we should take care not to fall asleep. The Greek literally means to be wakeful. Paul may have been recalling the stories of the Transfiguration (Luke 9:32) and the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:40). **Vigilance is implied. It's not something we do with a half-hearted effort.** Prayer is something that we should give our whole heart to on a consistent basis. Prayer should be a way of life. (1Thessalonians 5:17) **If Jesus is our life, we should be in constant communion with Him.**

The Apostle then adds the now familiar command to be thankful. I believe this is the sixth time in this short letter he has told of the necessity to be thankful. I can't add anymore to what I have already said so I'll repeat myself. **Gratitude is the heart of the genuine believer.** If we are not thankful something is very wrong with our spiritual life. We are saved from judgment! We have a world-wide family that would die for us and for whom we would die. We have the opportunity to labor with our Creator and lay up eternal rewards. We have a full heart of love and peace. What more could we ask? The trials of this life can't even begin to compare to the glory that will be revealed in us! (Romans 8:18) **Praise Him! Thank Him! Quit siding with the enemy of your soul by**

Commented [Paul3]: Matthew 26:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."
³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

Commented [Paul4]: Isaiah 45:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: "Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands?"

Commented [Paul5]: Isaiah 45:11 (KJV)

¹¹ Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.

Commented [Paul6]: 1 John 5:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

Commented [Paul7]: Luke 9:32 (ESV)

³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

Commented [Paul8]: Matthew 26:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Commented [Paul9]: 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV)

¹⁷ Pray without ceasing.

Commented [Paul10]: Romans 8:18 (KJV)

¹⁸ For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

murmuring (Philippians 2:14) and get out of your selfish old nature and praise the living God for who He is! Amen?

Commented [Paul11]: Philippians 2:14 (NIV)
¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing.

³ *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison*— Paul goes on to add, “While you are praying in this vigilant way, pray that God would open a door for the Word to get through to those they are trying to reach.” One commentator reminds us that it is interesting what Paul did not ask us to pray.¹ He did not ask that we pray that he might be released from prison, or that they might remove his uncomfortable chains. He did not ask to be spared from execution. He didn’t even ask that his daily necessities be met or for the support of the Colossians. Paul asked for prayer that he might carry out the task that God gave him, to declare the mystery of Christ... ⁴ *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

Commented [Paul12]: Barclay’s Daily Study Bible (NT)

Paul made a request that was in line with what he asked in verse 2 and consistent with our interpretation. He was asking that God fulfill the mission through him. (1:25-26) Clear communication differs from culture to culture and even person to person. That is why we must rely upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul wanted to do it to the best of his ability, to communicate it clearly, because that is how it should be done. He understood that the revelation of Christ as Messiah that paid our sin debt, both for Jew and Gentile, was a very important message. (Romans 16:25-26) He didn’t want to teach cheap grace, nor did he want to teach something that was earned through works. Our understanding of what Christ accomplished on the cross comes mostly from Paul’s writings, an answer to this prayer request.

Commented [Paul13]: Colossians 1:25-26 (ESV)
²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,
²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Although not nearly as urgent or important as Paul’s request, I ask that you do the same for my speaking and writing. I want to make the message of Scripture clear, and say it in a way that communicates it clearly. I would especially make that request for my upcoming book that teaches the divinity of Christ from the Gospel of Matthew. We know God wants people to know Jesus is divine so we can know we are praying God’s will. Of course our will is involved too. We can hinder the answer to prayers by our unwillingness to yield to God’s enabling power. However, we can even pray that God will help us yield to His Spirit and put His will above our own. (Luke 22:42)

Commented [Paul14]: Romans 16:25-26 (ESV)
²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages
²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—

Whatever your gift or calling, you can pray that you exercise it as you ought. You can pray that you exercise it in a way that glorifies God. You can pray that others see Jesus in your service. That, we know, is God’s will.

Commented [Paul15]: Luke 22:42 (ESV)
⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”

We prayed for a year and a half that my son Daniel would find a doctor that understood what was wrong with him. We didn’t know for certain that was God’s will, but we thought that was how God was leading us to pray. He found the only doctor in the

world that was aware of the particular protozoa that had colonized his blood stream. He isn't completely well but he is much better and now has hope of being free from headaches and fatigue. We continue to pray for his complete healing if that will glorify God.

As a church, we are praying the prayer from the beginning of this letter to the Colossians. We pray that God will strengthen us according to His glorious might for all endurance in every circumstance and patience with every relationship, with joy, giving thanks to the One who called us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. (1:11-12) We know it is His will because it is according to His Word.

Paul's next instruction was to ⁵ *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.* The world is always looking for excuses to discount Christianity. The enemy of our soul is always looking for ways to discredit your testimony of what Jesus has done in you. That is why this command is important. We should live in a way that is as non-offensive as possible. (Luke 17:1) We even give up some of our freedoms in Christ so as not to stumble others who are watching. (Romans 13:13)

Walking in wisdom means that we look to God for how to act in relationship with others. We should be sensitive to what is offensive to them, and yet never compromise the Gospel message. I cringe at times when I hear people think they are being a bold witness when in fact they are being an offensive witness. I have had people ask me to keep so and so away from them because they keep trying to cram Jesus down their throat. One of my best friends used to complain about Christians always telling him he had to get saved today or he may go to hell. Those Christians were sincere and their message was true, but that friend was won by patient love rather than zealous human preaching.

The wisdom that comes from above is peaceable, gentle, and open to reason, wrote the Apostle James. (James 3:17) The message that may be needed for Pharisee is not what is needed for a "sinner". Walk in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to glorify God. It costs us more to invest our time in the lives of others, but love takes time and bears fruit.

Make the best use of the time. This is something God instilled in my life from an early age. If we have but this short life to invest in eternity, what are we doing sitting around twiddling our thumbs? There is so much that we could be doing. At the same time we need to learn God's balance of rest and enjoyment. God doesn't drive, but He does lead continually, and sometimes He leads to still waters. (Psalm 23:2)

I just came back from a time of refreshing. It took me a long time to learn that that too can be the best use of our time. He created a Sabbath rest (Genesis 2:3) because He

Commented [Paul16]: Colossians 1:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,
¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Commented [Paul17]: Luke 17:1 (KJV)

¹ Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!

Commented [Paul18]: Romans 14:13 (ESV)

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Commented [Paul19]: James 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

Commented [Paul20]: Psalm 23:2 (ESV)

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

Commented [Paul21]: Genesis 2:3 (ESV)

³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

loves us and knows that we are more productive for the Kingdom of God when we take those times of rest. Best use of time sometimes means down time. Are you investing for eternity?

The phrase "best use of the time" in Greek literally means to redeem, or buy back, time. Opportunities come our way by the hand of God. We can buy them up by using them to advance the kingdom, or we can lose them forever. God has planned these gracious opportunities to bless us with a chance to work with Him. (Ephesians 2:10) Buy them up! Don't let them pass. Invest in them for His sake and for your eternal future.

Paul's final instruction goes right along with walking in wisdom. ⁶ *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.* Much of the wisdom we need with outsiders is connected with the way we express ourselves. But even with fellow believers, our speech should always be gracious. We can use graciousness as a gauge to measure whether or not we should say what is coming to mind. Of course, if you have the mind of Christ, (1Corinthians 2:16) it will always be gracious. There are so many ways to say things; always choose the more gracious expression. C.F.D. Moule commented on this passage. *"The Christian must commend his message with the charm and the wit which were in Jesus himself. There is too much of the Christianity which stodgily depresses a man and too little of the Christianity which scintillates with life."* **"Scintillates with life"** – what a great way to express what Paul was conveying.

You might ask if some of the sharp rebukes that Jesus gave the Pharisees were gracious? (Matthew 23:27) Sometimes the truth expressed in love can be very pointed and clear. Where is the grace in that? It is much more gracious to speak the truth than to remain silent when the truth needs to be told. It is more gracious than saying something that is flattering but is a lie. (Proverbs 27:6) When you read gracious, don't always think of easy or acceptable. The conviction of the Holy Spirit is an expression of the grace of God in our lives! (John 16:8)

The other expression is "seasoned with salt". Salt gives flavor and leaves us wanting more. Think about what you are about to say and let the Holy Spirit flavor it. There is a little Mexican treat called a saladito. It's a dried plum that is thoroughly salted. It leaves you with pucker on your face but wanting more. Holy Spirit filled expressions can be like saladitos. Not everyone likes them. Not everyone likes what the Holy Spirit has to say, even when it is an expression of love. Yet, that is how we are supposed to speak. Every individual is different and what one person needs to hear is not what another

Commented [Paul22]: Genesis 2:3 (ESV)

³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Commented [Paul23]: 1 Corinthians 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Commented [Paul24]: Matthew 23:27 (ESV)

²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

Commented [Paul25]: Proverbs 27:6 (ESV)

⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

Commented [Paul26]: John 16:8 (ESV)

⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

needs, however, full of grace and seasoned with salt applies to how we should speak to everyone at the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's closing instruction to the Colossians and to us is to have a life of prayer, pray for the kingdom to advance, for your gifts to be used, walking in wisdom, using the opportunities God presents, and speaking flavorfully with grace. Can we do it? Only if Jesus is our life! We search for the perfect witnessing formula. It would be easy if I could give you a 1,2,3 on relating to those who do not believe, but the Biblical answer is to die to self and live in Christ. Devote yourself to prayer. To walk in Jesus is to walk in wisdom. Let the Holy Spirit lead you to make the most of your time as you speak to others with His grace and flavor that scintillates with life!

Questions

- 1 What kind of prayer was Paul commanding?
- 2 How can we be watchful in prayer?
- 3 Why does Paul keep telling us to be thankful?
- 4 What were Paul's two prayer requests?
- 5 Will you pray this for those who preach the Word?
- 6 What is the mystery we declare?
- 7 What price was Paul paying?
- 8 What is the next imperative command?
- 9 What is the connection with the first command?
- 10 How do we make the best use of our time?