

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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July 13, 2025
COLOSSIANS – Hope of Glory
Continue in Prayer
Colossians 4:2-4

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This morning, we are continuing our verse-by-verse study of the book of Colossians. Since we have been in this book for over 5 months, I hope you are becoming familiar with the major themes that serve as the foundation for everything Paul is teaching. For those of you who haven't been with us in this study, there's a verse that summarizes what Paul is teaching in his letter to this church.

Colossians 1:27

To [the saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The mystery isn't referring to a riddle we have to solve or figure out. In the New Testament, that word refers to truth that was once unknown or veiled or not understood that has now been made known by God. And this particular truth is that for every man, woman, and child, God has provided hope of attaining glory. We can have a glorious future in heaven. We can have a glorious experience of God's power in our lives on earth. We can have a glorious transformation that's as radical as being raised from death to life. And what is the hope, or confident expectation, for that kind of glory? It's Christ in you.

The truth of the gospel is that when we place our faith and trust in Jesus, He comes to live within us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus will be Jesus in us as we trust in Him.

Everything Paul teaches in this book is connected to that truth. All the commands aren't just God telling us how to live. They are invitations from Jesus on how He will live in us as we trust in Him. He will enable our obedience – that's the only way we can actually obey.

That's the foundation of Colossians. It's the foundation for the entire Christian life. And, with that in mind, let's look at our text for this morning.

Colossians 4:2–4

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 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— 4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

What does it look like when Jesus lives like Jesus in you? It looks like a life of persistent prayer. Just think about the life of Jesus during His earthly ministry. From beginning to end, Jesus' life on earth was marked by consistent and persistent prayer.

This is going to be one of our next series of studies after Colossians. We will spend about 6 weeks in the book of Proverbs. Then, we are going to spend 6 weeks or so studying the prayer life of Jesus. When Jesus lived on this earth as one of us, His life was marked by constant prayer. And that's how Jesus desires to live in you. He desires to empower your life of prayer. And that's exactly what Paul

is describing in our text. It's the kind of prayer life Jesus invites you to experience through the power of His life in you.

And that brings us to the big idea of our text.

BIG IDEA: AS JESUS LIVES IN US, HE WILL EMPOWER PERSISTENT PRAYER THAT IS WATCHFUL, THANKFUL, AND MISSIONAL.

What kind of prayer life will Jesus empower in us? Persistent. Watchful. Thankful. Missional.

1. JESUS EMPOWERS PERSISTENT PRAYER

Colossians 4:2

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

The primary command in this text is to continue steadfastly. That phrase translates a word in the original language of the New Testament that means "to persist, to continue doing something with intense effort despite the difficulty." It was a word that was used to describe a persistent cough. Have you had one of those coughs? We usually describe them by saying "this cough just won't go away." They just keep coming back.

That's the kind of prayer life Jesus desires to empower in you. Not a once-in-a-while life of prayer. Not a quick bedtime and before meals life of prayer. He wants your prayer life to be like a persistent cough, where the Father would say about you, "This one won't go away."

And that's not just the teaching of this text. That's what the whole New Testament says about prayer.

- Romans 12:12 - *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*
- Ephesians 6:18 - *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 - *pray without ceasing,*

The desire of God the Father is that His children would come to Him over and over and over again in prayer. Think of that for just a moment. The God who made this universe and everything in it. The Source of life and strength and all good things. Nothing is impossible for Him. THAT God wants you to come to Him today. He wants you to come back to Him this afternoon. He wants you reach for Him more often than you reach for your phone.

Dwight L. Moody said, "Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. The way to trouble God is not to come at all."

Matthew 7:11

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

If you are trusting in Jesus, that makes God your Father. And our Father is committed to give good gifts and only good gifts to His kids when they ask Him. This doesn't mean we get everything we ask. We don't always know what the best thing is the way God does. Often, He has good things planned

that we could not have known or planned in advance. However, there are many good things He desires to give us when we take Him at His word ask for them in prayer.

- Eternal life (Romans 10:13)
- The power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13)
- Wisdom (James 1:5)
- Rest (Matthew 11:28-30)

God desires to pour out His blessings on those who seek His face in passionate and persistent prayer.

In 1836, George Muller started an orphanage in Bristol, England. He and his wife took in 30 orphaned girls from the streets. Over time, his care for orphans expanded to over 10,000 children. In addition, he started 117 schools that provided education for over 120,000 children. Those statistics are amazing for any period of time, but particularly for the mid-1800s.

But what made Muller's ministry to children so unique was a personal conviction that he would never advertise the needs of the ministry or ask anyone for help but God. Every morning, he would write down His prayer requests to the Lord in a prayer journal. When God answered his prayers, he would go back to His prayer journal and write down the details of how and when the Lord answered.

- One morning, Müller's orphanage had no food. Müller gathered the children to pray. As they finished, a baker knocked at the door, saying he felt led to bake bread for them. Moments later, a milkman knocked. His cart had broken down outside and he had a cart full of milk to give away before it spoiled.
- During winter, the orphanage boiler broke. Repairs were urgent, but funds were lacking. Müller prayed, and within days, the needed money arrived unsolicited. In the meantime, their city experienced an unseasonable heat wave that kept the orphans from freezing in the cold.
- Another time, Muller had 300 incoming orphans but didn't have funding to take them in. Instead of fundraising, he went before the Lord in passionate prayer. By that very evening, donations of money, food, and clothes arrived from various sources without those people ever being asked.

Muller's journal includes over 50,000 instances of answered prayers, with 30,000 or so being answered within 24 hours. Muller was passionate and persistent in prayer. Every morning, he rose early and normally spent the first several hours praying from the Scripture.

And the plain reality for most of us is that we want 50,000 answers to prayer without being persistent in prayer.

Please don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying you are only persistent in prayer if you spend your first few hours a day praying. That's just not the case. However, many of us know without being told that our prayer lives aren't truly constant or persistent.

So, let me give you a few practical ways to become more consistent in prayer.

Make an appointment with your Father.

We tend to plan for things that are important. We plan meal times and family outings. We plan meetings with important people about important things. Do that with God. Make an appointment each day to meet with God in prayer. Put it on your calendar. Treat God like He is a real person and meet Him every day.

Learn to stop and go

What I mean is that many of us go from one thing to the next throughout our days. Most days, I have a series of meetings or tasks that I have to get accomplished. Rather than just going from one thing to the next, use those transitions as a time to stop and pray before you go on to the next thing. It doesn't have to be long to be meaningful.

See big power in little prayers

Think about the prayers of Jesus.

- Lord's prayer takes less than 30 seconds to pray
- When Jesus thanks the Father for revealing Himself to little children, it lasts 15 seconds
- His prayer standing outside the tomb of Lazarus just before He raises him from the dead is about 10 seconds
- The prayer He prays from the cross, asking the Father to forgive the people who killed him takes less than 5 seconds

You can be constant in prayer. Prayer is often a matter of direction and not duration. When your heart is Godward all throughout your day, you will be constant in prayer.

Here are a few prayers that are small in words but big in power...

- Help me
- Guide me
- Thank You
- Be glorified in me

You can spend most of your waking hours (and your working hours) in prayer with just those four.

The main command in our text is to be persistent in prayer. But there are three statements he makes about what our persistent prayer should look like.

2. PERSISTENT PRAYER IS WATCHFUL

Colossians 4:2

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

The word "watchful" originally meant "to stay awake." It's possible that Paul is simply encouraging them not to fall asleep while they're trying to pray. But I think there's more here than that. The word "watchful" occurs quite a few times in the New Testament. Most of the time it's talking about being alert and on guard. I think that's what Paul means here. It's a call to pray with a sense of alertness. Let me show you a couple of ways the New Testament tells us to stay alert.

Be alert to the activity of God's enemy.

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

We are in a spiritual war with a spiritual enemy who is seeking to destroy our lives and every good thing in them. And prayer is a lifeline to the power of God. (Ground troops in WW2 calling for air support)

So, Paul says we should be alert to the ways the enemy is at work around us and fight against him on our knees. It's in prayer that we find help in our time of need and the power of the Spirit of God.

William Cowper, the 18th Century English poet and hymnwriter, wrote, *"When we don't pray, we quit the fight. Prayer keeps the Christian's armor bright. And Satan trembles when he sees. The weakest saint upon his knees."*

Samuel Chadwick, who was a great Methodist pastor in the 1800-1900 said, *"Satan dreads nothing but prayer. His one concern is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, he mocks our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray."*

So, where is the enemy on the prowl in your life today? How would you pray if you believed the very power of God would be poured out in your life if you persisted in prayer?

But the Bible doesn't just tell us to be watchful of the activity of God's enemy. We are to...

Be alert to the Reality of Christ's return.

Matthew 24:42

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Matthew 25:13

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Jesus is coming again. It might be today. And we are to live with that reality in mind. We are to live like this world and our lives are coming to an end. This world is temporary, and Christ's Kingdom is eternal. That should impact the way we live each day AND it should impact the way that we pray.

Just think how your priorities in prayer would change if you prayed as though you believe this life and the things of this world are temporary, but Christ's kingdom is eternal, and He might come again today.

1. Would the health of our bodies be as important as the health of our souls?
2. Would our career path be as important as the souls of our coworkers?
3. Would the amount of money in the bank be as important as the amount of treasure we are storing up in heaven?

How would your priorities in prayer change if you lived and prayed alert to the reality of Christ's return?

Persistent prayer is watchful.

3. PERSISTENT PRAYER IS THANKFUL

Colossians 4:2

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

The basic meaning of the word “pray” is “to ask.” And for many of us, that’s largely what we think of when we think of prayer. We ask God to do what only God can do. And we’ve already seen that God wants us to ask things of Him in prayer.

So, why does the Bible so often link the reminder to be thankful with the call to prayer? I believe there are many reasons why, let me share two.

Thankfulness glorifies God.

- It honors God when we acknowledge how He has already given us more than we deserve.
- If you are trusting Jesus, you are going to spend eternity in heaven and not hell. You will be reunited with everyone you’ve loved and lost who was trusting in Jesus. You will spend eternity enjoying the presence of God, the fulness of joy and pleasure forevermore. That’s reason to be thankful.
- If you are trusting in Jesus, you are being transformed into the image of Christ through the trials of this life. That’s reason to be thankful.
- If you are trusting in Jesus, you can be certain God will supply all your needs. That’s reason to be thankful.

When you thank God for what He has already done or what He has promised to do it glorifies His goodness and faithfulness.

Thankfulness reminds us that God is good.

When you thank God for all He is and all He has done and all He has promised to do, it turns your attention from the difficulties of life (that you are like praying about) to the goodness of God. And that’s important for our hearts. If we become fixated on the difficulties of life, we will become joyless people. And joyless people are miserable people. They complain and criticize and turn bitter and hard.

But thankful people are joyful people. Even when they are asking God to work in the midst of their trials, they are joyful when they think about the good things God has already done and has promised to do.

I had two conversations this week: 100-year-old church member and an amazing teenager who is part of our church family.

100 year old – It sneaks up on you...ie- it’s a vapor.

She was telling me about how God has been changing her perspective on some of the trials she is facing. She said, “I’ve been thinking that even if I live to be 80 or 90 years old, this live is nothing compared to eternity. It’s all going to be over in a minute, no matter how long I live on this earth. But I’m going to forever. No matter what happens, I’m going to spend eternity in Heaven. So, why would I worry or be anxious? Why wouldn’t I just be thankful and enjoy what God has given me?”

Church, we could learn a lot from some of our teenagers. Thankfulness transforms our perspective in the midst of trials by reminding us that God is good. And the goodness of God compels us to keep going to Him in prayer.

Persistent prayer is watchful and thankful.

4. PERSISTENT PRAYER IS MISSIONAL

Colossians 4:3-4

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— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

These verses transition into our text for next week, so this is where we will pick up next time. But what I want you to see this morning is that prayer reveals our priorities. We pray about the things that matter most. And, when Paul asks for prayer, you see His priority. He's in prison. He's suffering. He's deprived of freedom. He's writing this letter while being changed to a Roman soldier as a prisoner.

But he doesn't ask to be set free. He doesn't ask for a more comfortable life. He doesn't ask for a new Emperor to come into power who will change the political climate. It's not that those things would be wrong, it's that those things aren't as important to him as the mission of Jesus.

So, he ask them to ask God to do what only God can do, to open doors for the word of the gospel and to open His mouth to speak the words of the gospel clearly.

Take a moment to compare Paul's priority in prayer with your own. Does your prayer life reflect the heart of God for this world and the mission of Jesus among the nations?

Who's Your One? Are you praying for open doors to tell them the gospel and for the words to say that would make the truth about Jesus clear to them?

Earlier, I told you about George Muller. In 1844, he began praying daily for 5 of his friend to come to faith in Jesus. For over 50 years he prayed despite years of no visible change – that's called persistence. Over time, three of them came to Christ—one after five years, another after ten, and a third after 25 years. Müller continued praying for the remaining two until his death in 1898. One of them was saved shortly after Müller died, and the last came to faith years later.

God used the persistent, watchful, thankful prayer of George Muller to advance the mission of Jesus in His world. And God desires to do the same through you.

Application

1. Trust in Jesus.
2. Ocean Baptism
3. Pray
 - a. This week – persistent, watchful, thankful, missional
 - b. This morning – Give thanks. Who's Your One? Others'?