

**Devoted to Prayer**  
**Colossians 4:2**  
**ABC 1/12/20**

Why are sports followers called *fans*? Because they're *fanatics*. They're persistent, steadfast, & loyal in their love for their team. A couple of examples: A Turkish man was so devoted to his team, that when he was banned from their stadium for 12 months, he rented a crane & viewed the games from there, outside & above the stadium. Then there's the guy who loved his soccer club so much that owning a jersey wasn't enough, he had it tattooed onto his body.<sup>1</sup> & then there are Sacramento Kings fans. Although they've lost the most games in the NBA over the last decade (517 games) & are the only NBA team not to have made the playoffs even once in those 10 years, fans still have faith in them! People are devoted to all sorts of things: celebrities, cars, causes, their bodies, political parties, hunting, fishing, golf, etc. Let me ask, what are you devoted to? Are you devoted to prayer? Are you a prayer fanatic? If you're anything like me, the answer is no. Our text comes from Col 4:2, only 4 words, **devote yourself to prayer**. Or we could go to 3 words as we find them in Romans 12:12, **devoted to prayer**. These words raise more guilt than almost any other subject in the Bible. I'm not sure any of us could honestly say, *this verse describes me*. Studies have shown that 90% of Christians feel they don't have a praying life & most feel guilt, confusion, & frustration because of it.<sup>2</sup> Ever feel guilty because of your prayer life? Me too! & then we hear of people like Athanasius who prayed 5 hours a day. Augustine reportedly once set aside 18 months to do nothing but pray. Bernard of Clairveaux wouldn't begin his daily activities until he'd spent at least 3 hours in prayer. Martin Luther commented, *I have so much business I cannot get on without spending 3 hours daily in prayer.*<sup>3</sup> This morning, I don't want you to feel guilty about prayer (guilt is a horrible motivator) but to be inspired, motivated, & encouraged in your prayer life. I want this to be practical & helpful, for myself as well as for you. I want to encourage us all, by God's grace, to become more devoted to prayer. As FB Meyer said, *The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.*<sup>4</sup> Instead of prayer being something we do every day, like breathing,

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<sup>1</sup> [www.distractify.com/humor/2018/05/10/Z2dPrj6/sports-fans-mvps](http://www.distractify.com/humor/2018/05/10/Z2dPrj6/sports-fans-mvps)

<sup>2</sup> Paul Miller, [www.desiringgod.org/messages/helping-your-people-discover-the-praying-life](http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/helping-your-people-discover-the-praying-life)

<sup>3</sup> George Grant, [www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/normal-prayer/](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/normal-prayer/)

<sup>4</sup> *The Secret of Guidance*

eating, & walking & talking, it seems to have become like that little glass covered box on the wall that says, *break in case of emergency*. It's true that we often pray only when we have a crisis in our life. Prayer is, for the most part, an untapped resource, an unexplored mine where untold riches remain to be unearthed. Prayer is talked about more & practiced less than almost anything. & yet, for the Christian it's one of the greatest gifts our Lord has given us. Paul was somebody who understood prayer & its power. Prayer was a part of his life & he assumed it would be a part of every Christian's life. You can't really be a good Christian & not pray, just like you can't have a good marriage if you don't talk to your spouse. You can be a Christian & not pray, just like you can be married & not talk to your spouse. But in both circumstances you'll be miserable. Prayer is the pipeline of communication between God & His people, between God & those who love Him. **Col**

#### **4:2-4 PRAY**

Prayer is both the easiest & hardest discipline of the Christian life. It's the easiest in that the youngest child & newest Christian can pray. But prayer is also the hardest because it's the most difficult to maintain. In other words, it's easy to enroll in the school of prayer but we'll never graduate. Prayer isn't to be some small thing in our life. It isn't some marginal, optional thing. Like reading Scripture, prayer is part of our communion & fellowship with God. The 2 go hand-in-hand. We inhale God's Word & exhale our prayers to Him. We live by the Word & by prayer the same way we live by inhaling & exhaling air. George Mueller, known as a great prayer warrior, had this to say about prayer:

*It is a common temptation of Satan to make us give up the reading of the Word & prayer when our enjoyment is gone; as if it were of no use to read the Scriptures when we do not enjoy them, & as if it were no use to pray when we have no spirit of prayer. The truth is that, in order to enjoy the Word, we ought to continue to read it, & the way to obtain a spirit of prayer is to continue praying. The less we read the Word of God, the less we desire to read it, & the less we pray, the less we desire to pray.<sup>5</sup>*

Or as John MacArthur put it,

*There are two ultimate tests of true spirituality. One is the study of the Word of God & two is prayer. Those are the two ultimate tests of true spirituality, & I personally believe - & I think the Bible supports this - that the study of the Word of God comes first. Why? Because we will not even know how to pray unless we know what the Bible teaches about God, about God's will, about our lives,*

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur T Pierson, *George Mueller of Bristol, 1805-1898*, p 462

*& our problems. Therefore, it is the study of the Word of God that gives birth to a meaningful prayer life.*<sup>6</sup>

**1. What is Prayer?** Prayer isn't just an emergency parachute to be used as a last resort. It's to be an unbroken conversation built around a living, loving relationship with God. What is prayer?

There's a story about DL Moody making a visit to Scotland in the 1800's & opening one of his talks at a grade school with the rhetorical question, *What is prayer?* To his amazement, hundreds of children's hands went up. So he decided to call on a boy near the front, who stood up & said, *Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of His Spirit, with confession of our sins, & thankful acknowledgment of His mercies.* This is the answer to question #98 in the Westminster Catechism. To this Moody responded by saying, *Be thankful, son, that you were born in Scotland.*<sup>7</sup>

Think about that answer: *Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God.* That's the main meaning of prayer. *With confession of sins & with ... thankful acknowledgment of His mercies* go along with these desires. God's will is that we, His creatures, ask Him for things. & it isn't just His will, it's His delight. He loves to be asked for things. Prov 15:8 says, **The prayer of the upright is His delight.** He's so eager to hear prayers & respond to them that He says in Isaiah 65:24, **It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; & while they are still speaking, I will hear.** In fact, He takes special steps to see to it that He's constantly pestered, & I say that reverently. Isaiah 62:6-7 tells us, **On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day & all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; & give Him no rest until He establishes & makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.** God loves being asked for things so much that He appoints people to **give Him no rest** but to **remind the Lord & never to keep silent.** This means that God, the Creator of the Universe, our Father, who holds our life in His hands & rules the world, is the kind of God who loves to be asked for things by His children. Why does God not only will that we ask Him for things, but delights in it? What's behind this delight in our asking Him for things? Because God is love & it's His very nature to be a Giver. As Paul said in Rom 11:35-36, **who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him & through Him & to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever.** God is always the Giver (Acts 17:25). That's what He loves to be. & the last phrase of Rom 11:36 says why, **To Him be the glory forever.** It's more glorious to be a Giver

<sup>6</sup> [www.gty.org/library/print/sermons-library/2233](http://www.gty.org/library/print/sermons-library/2233)

<sup>7</sup> Dr Ken Baker, *Colossians*, p 60

than a getter. Getters are needy. Givers are self-sufficient. So God ordains prayer because He wants us to see Him as gloriously self-sufficient & ourselves as totally needy. So He says in Ps 50:15, **Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, & you will honor Me.** God answers our call for help so that we get the rescue & He gets the honor. Similarly in Jn 14:13 Jesus says, **Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that what? the Father may be glorified in the Son.** *Ask for things in My name! Why?* So that the Father may be glorified. So He may look as glorious as He really is. God is a Giver who wants us to come to Him with our needs. & yet, so often, we don't pray as we know we should. Prayer is often a struggle. Yet without it, we can do nothing. Churches stop being vibrant expressions of the living God without prayer. Instead, they become gathering places with no supernatural power. They're just a group of people going through the motions, Sunday after Sunday without the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is to be a priority. It's God's will that we pray to Him. Sometimes we struggle to know the will of God for our lives. But there are some things that we don't have to struggle to know. One of them is that God's will is that we pray to Him. He commands it. There are also other commands in the Bible regarding prayer. We're to **pray without ceasing** (1 Thes 5:17), which means we should live a lifestyle of dependence on God's power that's only found through prayer. We're to pray persistently (Lk 11:1-13; 18:1-8), regularly (Eph 6:18; Phil 4:6; Col 4:2, 12), fervently, & passionately (Js 4:16). If we don't pray, we don't have power from on high. God promises to answer (Jer 33:3), but only if we call out to Him. Are you calling on Him or are you relying on yourself & your own efforts? My simple goal this morning is to encourage us all to pray more than we already do. This is my goal because this is what the Bible calls us to do. We're all to be **devoted to prayer**, constant & faithful in it. All are aspects of the word **devoted**. The word is used in Mk 3:9 where it says that Jesus told **told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crowd Him.** A boat was to be set apart, devoted for the purpose of taking Jesus away in case the crowd became threatening. We're to persist in, adhere firmly to, remain devoted to prayer. Of the 10x this word is used in the NT 5 of them have to do with being devoted to prayer. Besides Col 4:2 & Rom 12:12, Acts 1:14 says of the disciples before Pentecost, **These all with one mind were**

continually devoting themselves to prayer. After Pentecost, we read of the early church, **They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching & to fellowship, to the breaking of bread & to prayer** (Acts 2:42). Later, rather than getting distracted by waiting on tables, the apostles declared, **we will devote ourselves to prayer & to the ministry of the word** (Acts 6:4). Persistence in prayer isn't an option for the Christian, it's an order from the Lord Himself. Paul gives his own example of persistent prayer in Col 1:3, where he says he's **praying always for you**. He adds in vs 9, **For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you & to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom & understanding.** Referring to his prayers for them, he adds, **For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf** (Col 2:1) & he mentions that Epaphras was **always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers** (Col 4:12). Paul was only following in the footsteps of Jesus who also taught persistent prayer, specifically in two rather humorous parables. In the first a guy & his family are in bed at midnight when his friend starts banging on the door, asking to borrow some bread for a visiting guest. The guy in bed tells him to go away, but he won't stop knocking. So finally, he gets up & gives him what he's asking for (Lk 11:5-8). In the 2<sup>nd</sup>, a widow bugs an unwilling judge to give her legal protection from her opponents. At first he resists, but finally, because of her perseverance, he relents & grants her request (Lk 18:1-8). The point of both parables is NOT that God is unwilling or unconcerned about our needs, but rather that we should persist in asking until He grants our requests. Lk 18:1 says, **Now He was telling them a parable to show them that at all times they ought to pray & not to lose heart.** Lk 11:9 is where we find the promise that says, **ask & it shall be given to you; seek & you shall find; knock & it shall be opened to you.** It could be translated, **keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.** In other words, **be devoted to prayer,** be persistent in it. Persistence means not giving up. Some people give up easy, they quit because they don't feel like praying. But we aren't to live by our feelings but by the commands of our Lord who tells us to pray without ceasing. Let these truths behind prayer strengthen your resolve to pray this year. God wills that you pray. He wills that you ask Him for things. & not just wills it, but delights in it.

**2. Why Pray** We could spend a lot of time here, but here are 3 simple reasons why we must pray.

**A. God tells us to. Be devoted to prayer.** If we aren't, we're disobedient to the Scriptures & to our God. That's foolish & dangerous. If prayer doesn't come easy to you, consider yourself normal, fallen & sinful along with the rest of us. Then fight. Don't let your sins & weaknesses & worldly inclinations rule you. God says, **Be devoted to prayer.** Fight for this.

**B. The needs of life, family, churches, missions, & society are huge.** In many cases heaven & hell hang in the balance, faith or unbelief, life or death. Remember Paul's grief & anguish for his lost kinsmen in Rom 9:2 & remember that in Rom 10:1 he prays for them earnestly, **Brothers, my heart's desire & prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.** Salvation hangs in the balance when we pray. May God open our eyes to see & feel the needs around us & the great potential of prayer.

**C. God acts when we pray.** We all know this but often ignore it. God can do more in 5 seconds than we can do in our own power in 5 decades! So pray more this year than you did last year. Why? God commands it, the needs are great, & God acts when we pray.

**3. What Does Prayer Look Like** For the rest of our time this morning I want to talk about the *how* of prayer. I want to try to help you with practical, biblical possibilities that you may not have considered, or tried & then failed to persevere. This is an effort to sketch what it means to be **devoted to prayer** without a narrow my-way-or-the-highway mentality. We're all very different. Our schedules are different. Our families are different. We're in different stages of life with different demands on our days. But all of us can move forward. Paul loves to write to the churches & say, *You are doing well, but do so more & more* (Phil 1:9; 1 Thes 4:1, 10). & if there's any place where the *do so more & more* applies, it's in our devotion to prayer. We must pray often & pray regularly. Prayer is not to be infrequent or hit & miss. Being **devoted to** prayer means that you aren't haphazard in it & you aren't forgetful about it. It means you take steps to see that it's part of your regular life, the same way eating & sleeping are. I say, *you take steps*, because it's always ongoing, we've never arrived. The normal Christian life is to be a life **devoted to prayer**. So ask yourself, *Am I devoted to prayer?* Is there a pattern of praying in your life that can be called **being devoted to prayer**? I think most of us would agree on some kinds of praying that wouldn't be called being

**devoted to prayer.** Praying only when crises come wouldn't be devotion to prayer. Praying only at meal times is a pattern, but it isn't being **devoted to prayer.** A short *now I lay me down to sleep* prayer at the end of the day isn't **being devoted to prayer.** Hit & miss, **Help me, Lord,** in the car as you need a parking place isn't being **devoted to prayer.** All these things are good, but I think we'd agree that God wants more. If prayer is so great & central to God's purpose, it's not surprising that God would tell us, **devote yourselves to prayer.** John Piper has helped me in this with the following advice.<sup>8</sup>

**A. Prayer is Free & Formed** In other words, we're to have structured & unstructured prayer. Being **devoted to prayer** means what you say in your times of prayer will often be free & unstructured & often be formed & structured. If you're only free in your prayers, you'll probably become shallow. If you're only formed in your prayers, you'll probably become mechanical. Both ways of praying are important. Not either-or but both-and. By free I mean you'll pour out your soul to God. You won't want any script or guidelines or lists or books. You'll have so many needs that they tumble out freely without any structure. This is good. Can you imagine a marriage or friendship where all the communication is from lists or books or spoken only in memorized texts? On the other hand, don't think you're so spiritually deep that you can do without the help of forms. Here are 4 kinds of forms you can make use of.

**1) The Bible** When you find yourself wondering what to pray for, pray Scripture. Your prayer time & Bible reading don't have to be & shouldn't be separate times. God's Word reveals God & His will. What you want for yourself & those you pray for is more of God & more of His will. As you see Him in His Word, pray that God would make this seen & known & loved in the lives of the people you pray for. & as you see His will, pray that God's will would be done in the lives of those you pray for. For example, if you want to pray for somebody, pray the beatitudes:

*Father, grant that Nate would recognize his poverty of spirit. Let him mourn for his sins & not be indifferent or unconcerned for his own soul. Work a meekness into his heart. Grant him to be hungry & thirsty for righteousness. Give him the heart of a peacemaker & a reconciler. Make him pure & keep him pure, O Lord. & if you will for him to be persecuted, give him grace to count it all joy & to remember that his reward in heaven is great.*

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<sup>8</sup> [www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-devoted-to-prayer](http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-devoted-to-prayer)

Praying like this will be mighty in the Spirit, because it is the Spirit's own Word & the Spirit's own will you're praying. Look at Paul's prayers for the churches & pray for those same things. A few of those are listed in your sermon notes insert. The point is to pray biblical prayers. Pray the Lord's Prayer & as you pray it put each phrase in your own words & apply it to the people you're burdened about. Pray the commands of the Bible. Pray the promises of the Bible. Pray the warnings of the Bible. Open your Bible in front of you & put one elbow on either side & pray back its praises & petitions.

**2) Lists** I need lists otherwise I have no idea what I'm getting at the grocery store. If you can remember all the people & needs you should be praying for without a list, good for you! But most of us need to use lists, some in your head & some on paper of people & needs. Keep some kind of prayer folder or notebook or files or phone app.

**3) Books** Pray through books like *Operation World* or *Pray for the World*. Each gives a country, & the cause of Christ in it, every day or two. What a powerful way to get a God-sized heart & vision for His kingdom. Pray through a book like *The Valley of Vision* or *Piercing Heaven*, both books of Puritan prayers. Pray what saints of the past have prayed. We're foolish if we think we can't learn from others. Another good book to pray through is the church directory.

**4) Patterns** Develop patterns of prayer that give you some guidance of what to do when you pray. One pattern would be to structure your prayers around each of the petitions of the Lord's prayer or praying concentric circles starting with your own soul & then moving outward. Pray for your own needs 1<sup>st</sup>. Not because you're more deserving than others, but because if God doesn't awaken & strengthen & humble & fill our own soul, we can't pray for anybody else's. So confess your sins & pray that God would make you more faithful. Then go to the next bigger circle, your family & pray for each of them. Then move to the next circle, including your neighbors, co-workers, friends, & church, or however it works for you. Then go out from there to different concerns & groups: missionaries, other churches, the persecuted church, etc. You get the idea. Include your local schools & teachers, your city, state, nation, & the cultural & social issues of the world. Obviously, you can't pray for everything every time. So there need to be differences. & your heart will dictate



much of your burden. Some days one family member or one crisis will consume most of your time. But if you have a pattern, you won't waste time wondering where to start. Without some form or pattern we can freeze up or wander off & go nowhere. Pray with free flowing needs & thanks & praise & structured with helps like the Bible, lists, books, & patterns. If you're **devoted to prayer** you'll pursue freedom & form in your prayer life.

**B. Alone & Assembled** Being **devoted to prayer** also means you'll regularly pray alone & with other Christians. Obviously, we must meet with God alone. There's no Christianity without a personal trust in & communion with God through Jesus. While we might struggle with this, I think praying with other believers is probably even more neglected than praying alone. The NT is full of corporate prayer gatherings. In fact, most prayer in the NT is probably thought of in terms of gatherings for prayer. Being devoted to prayer includes praying with God's people. How are you doing in this? This isn't advanced Christianity. This is basic. Growth groups are a great place to do this.

**C. Desperate & Delighted** Being **devoted to prayer** means we come to God in prayer sometimes desperate & at other times delighted. In other words, prayer is a place for meeting God with your deepest heartaches & fears & prayer is a place for meeting God with your highest joys & thanks. Because God is a prayer-hearing God, we along with Paul, can be **sorrowful yet always rejoicing** (2 Cor 6:10). & often that joy will overwhelm the burdens of this fallen world, as it should. The Father wants to meet you at those times too. Be devoted to prayer in desperation & in delight, not either-or, but both-and.

**D. Explosive & Extended** How long should we pray? If you're doing nothing, do something. Start where you are & take a step. Then ask God to grow you into a faithful prayerful person. It doesn't have to be one long session. It can be several planned shorter times. For example, there's the example of Daniel, the Jewish high ranking political official in Babylon. He had enemies & they passed a law that no one could pray except to the king. Dan 6:10 says, **Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); & he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying & giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.** Not only do we see the courage & commitment of

Daniel to pray in the open when his life was threatened for it, but we see he was **devoted** to it 3x a day. You might do it differently. For example, Ps 119:164 says, **Seven times a day I praise You.** With smart phones, you can easily set yourself any kind of prayer schedule. But don't do nothing. Devote yourself to prayer. Do whatever you have to do to see that you meet God in a focused way to hear from Him in His Word & to offer up your desires to Him in prayer. If you're **devoted to prayer** you'll explode regularly with prayers of praise & thanks & need & they may only last a few seconds. & if you're **devoted to prayer** you'll have times when you linger for a long time in prayer. If you love Christ & lean on Him for all things & treasure Him above all else, you'll meet with Him often with explosive prayers & often with extended prayers.

**E. Spontaneous & Scheduled** What's the difference between this & *free & formed* or *explosive & extended*? *Free & formed* is in the content of our prayers, what we say when we come to pray. *Explosive & extended* refers to the length of our prayers. *Spontaneous & scheduled* relates to when we pray. You may say, *I don't want a compartmentalized life with prayer in one devotional compartment & the rest of my life in other compartments. I want an integrated life with prayer saturating all I do.* Amen to that but it won't work to choose between a time of prayer in solitude & prayer soaking the rest of your life, as though they're alternatives. If you want to walk in prayer all day long, you need to linger in prayer in times of quiet communion with God. Why? Because you can't get deep with God on the run, fitting Him into the cracks of your day. But you can enjoy continual fellowship with God on the run if you've gone deep with Him in the stillness of prayer. So yes, by all means make it your aim to have your whole day a walking conversation with God. & the way to **be devoted** to prayer like that is to be devoted to regular, daily times of prayer. You'll go deep with Him in the moments of quiet focus & this depth will make God real & close the rest of the day. So decide on a place & a time for this meeting with God in prayer. If we're **devoted to prayer** we'll also pray spontaneously throughout the day & night, without ceasing, as Paul says. No plan will govern when you speak to Him. It will happen dozens of times in the day. This is normal & good. This is being **devoted to prayer**. But the rich fruit of spontaneity grows in a garden that's

well-tended by the discipline of having a schedule. So I ask, have you built times of prayer into your schedule?

God's will for us is that we be **devoted to prayer**. We know this, so why aren't we? In *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, DA Carson discusses 6 excuses we make for not praying more than we do.

Any of these sound familiar?

*I'm too busy to pray*  
*I feel too spiritually dry to pray*  
*I feel no need to pray*  
*I'm too bitter to pray*  
*I'm too ashamed to pray*  
*I'm content with mediocrity*

All these excuses don't amount to anything. The truth is we don't pray because we don't want to pray. If we wanted to pray more, we would. All the excuses you can come up with don't erase that truth. *I'm too busy* is the most common excuse. But we all make the time for things we want to do. Do you want to pray? Then pray. Think of it this way: You are where you are today because somebody prayed for you. Somebody prayed & you came to Christ. Somebody prayed & your marriage was saved. Somebody prayed & you didn't give up. Somebody prayed & you made the right decision. Somebody prayed & you experienced God's power. Do for others what they've done for you. When we can serve people in no other way, we can, & must, pray for them.

Years ago, the China Inland Mission discovered that the number & spiritual strength of the converts at one station far exceeded anyone's expectations & couldn't be accounted for by anything exceptional about the personnel there. The mystery remained unsolved until Hudson Taylor visited England. There, at the close of Taylor's message, a man from the audience stepped forward to greet him. In the ensuing conversation, Taylor learned that the man had detailed knowledge of this station.

*How is it, asked Taylor, that you are so conversant with the conditions of that work?*

*Oh, he replied, for four years I have corresponded with my missionary friend there. He has sent me the names of inquirers & converts, & I have daily taken these names to God in prayer.*

Taylor realized the answer to the puzzle: the daily, specific, prevailing prayer of this man had brought eternal fruit for God's glory.<sup>9</sup>

Pray more this year than you did last year. Work at & make it your goal to be **devoted to prayer**.

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<sup>9</sup> Steven J Cole, [bible.org/seriespage/lesson-28-private-prayer-public-witness-colossians-42-6](http://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-28-private-prayer-public-witness-colossians-42-6)