

Colossians 4:2-4

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 August 2015

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] We'll read to you Colossians 4, 2-4. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 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.

This is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and for our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Now, as we've been working in Colossians through chapter 3 and into chapter 4, we've seen Paul lay out for the Colossian believers and now for us as recipients of God's Word, the way in which the new life will look.

Having put off the old self, having been changed in Christ, the doctrinal word for this would be regeneration. Those who have placed faith in Christ are now new creations.

No longer the old, now the new. And Paul lays out this listing of exhortations for how the new life should look. The new self shouldn't look like the old self.

[1 : 15] It should now look differently. And he's been working in this kind of ever-narrowing way as we go through 3 and into 4. Chapter 3, verses 5-17 are particularly exhortations for how the new self should function in relationship with the church.

Those who also are in Christ, the Christian church. Verses 18-4-1 for how the new self should function in the Christian household.

And then for our context regarding slaves and masters in the workplace. And then here we find in 4-2-6, for us today 2-4, an ever-narrowing scope for the individual.

How then is each of us as individuals meant to live? And how should we be connecting that to the mission of God? And so you can see how it narrows down here at the close of his letter.

Now over the next two weeks, as we look through verses 2-6, there will be basic four activities, lifestyles of the new self.

[2 : 29] And they are this, and we're going to cover just the first two, maybe a bit of the fourth today as we get into verse 4. But they are the prayer of the new self, found in verses 2-3.

The opportunity of the new self, found in the last half of verse 3. The activity of the new self, found in verse 5.

And the speech of the new self. You can see this in verse 4 and in verse 6. So today let's look at the prayer of the new self.

Verse 2 through the first part of 3. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us. And there's a simple overarching exhortation for this beginning to one and a half verses.

And that is pray. He starts off verse 2 by saying, continue. So, the Colossian believers are, in fact, praying.

[3 : 30] And every believer should be given to prayer. It is the right and proper activity of the Christian person that they should pray. Here we find, before Paul's exhortation to pray, Remember, the church at Colossae is not a church that was established by Paul.

It's not a church that was visited by Paul or ever was that we know of. But he's merely writing to them to correct some doctrine. And he finds already that there are prayers.

He says, continue steadfastly in prayer. So, all of us who are found in Christ should be given to prayer. The quote on the front of your bulletin this morning by Spurgeon.

I have a new quote book by Spurgeon, which is why you're going to get a lot of those in the coming months. In case you're wondering, I also love Spurgeon. We love the babies.

Truly. Spurgeon said, we cannot all argue, but we can all pray. We cannot all be leaders, but we can all be pleaders.

[4 : 33] We cannot all be mighty in rhetoric, but we can all be prevalent in prayer. You see, God designs His purposes, the way that God is functioning and working in the world, to be dependent on the prayers of His people.

He designs His purposes to be dependent on the prayers of His people. Now, our God is sovereign. Our God can do whatever He pleases.

And He does not need us for any of His purposes in this world to be accomplished, except that He has decided to use us to that great end. He has decided to enact His plans in this world through the prayers of His people.

And this is because He loves us. Without developing that entirely for you this morning, you need to know that the invitation for the Christian to pray is an invitation into a relationship with God because He loves to work through the prayers of His people that His people might experience Him, that they might know Him.

The story we read to the children this morning, the great tragedy of that story is that when Adam sinned, death was ushered into this world in a final way. At the end of their lives, they would die.

[5 : 50] We see that experience that all around us. Things are degenerating. They're falling apart. They will die. But the greater and higher tragedy of that is that the wonderful union they had with God, the ability to walk with Him and to talk with Him was severed.

They were cast away from God. And now we find in Christ that being redeemed, the ability again to be in relationship with our Creator.

And the way we do that is through the reading of His Word. He speaks to us and we pray to Him. It should be a major activity of the Christian life to pray.

God draws us in to the things that He's doing through prayer. And let me just say, in past experience, recent experience, I hope that many of you enjoyed this with me, we were able to be brought along in God's work in the funding of the Zwimpies heading to Germany.

There's a family in our church that just recently, a few weeks ago, headed to Germany to work for a boarding school for missionary children there. And they had a great deal of funding to raise, to be able to go and to do this thing.

[6 : 59] In fact, the school itself was very, very doubtful. Those of you who experienced and walked through that with them, when they actually raised the money, there was no housing available for them because the school didn't actually think that they were going to be able to meet the funding goal because it takes most families 18 to 24 months to raise the funding necessary to come.

In this case, it only took nine. And many of us were invested with the Zwimpies in prayer. The only thing that Sam and I could do physically for them was a little bit per month, right?

We devoted to give a little bit to this huge sum to be accomplished, but we also gave ourselves in prayer. And what a joy it was to see God move and work through His people, both here and beyond, to see the Zwimpies able to go.

That we could rejoice in them with that was a wonderful invitation from the Lord to be in relationship with Him and to witness His work in the world. Now, prayer is an incredibly difficult thing.

I find that American Christians are not given to tackling difficult tasks. If it's easy and attainable, we'll throw ourselves at it. But if something is of challenge to us, we tend to not do so.

[8 : 10] It's very difficult to pray, to devote ourselves to prayer. There are things working against us for us not to be prayers. The world, our old selves, and Satan do not want us praying.

God enacts His purposes, uses the prayers of His people to put His purposes in motion, and everything that is said against God does not want God's people to pray.

You have to recognize this and oh how often we hand victory over to these elements. We just give it back away. We ignore altogether that prayer is of great importance.

John Piper once said, when we pray, we kneel in a hornet's nest of evil. It stirs it up. And for those of you who work on this property some, you'll know there's a huge hornet's nest on the eve way down here, which has not been affecting the coming and going out that bottom door.

So we've just been trying to figure out exactly how we're going to get it down and deal with it. But the other Saturday morning, a group was up here mowing the grass. The leadership of Parker White was doing that, and Parker had a little bit of spray with him, a little bit of spray in the can.

[9 : 21] In fact, I picked up the can and went, this is not going to be enough. And he said, let's just give it a shot. So we put a huge ladder up on the side of the building, and Parker bravely climbed up there and went, pssh, and quickly climbed down the ladder.

I know not all of you were there, but just if you can picture this scene happening, and the nest got stirred up. It was just enough to really make them mad, and they began to come out.

In some coming weeks, maybe you can be up here when we actually take care of the whole thing with finality, right? But prayer is powerful. It is effective, right?

God wants his people praying so that he can accomplish things through his people, and I wonder so often if things aren't happening in our church and in churches around us because God's people don't pray, right? He's just asking. He's just saying, come into this relationship with me.

I have such wonderful things I want to do, and I want you to be part of it, right? The invitation is there for us to pray, and it should be a major part of the life of every Christian.

[10 : 22] But not just to pray, as the overarching exhortation here in the text. So certainly pray, right? You walk away one thing, right? If you're a believer, if you're found in Christ, pray. Put an exclamation mark on it in your notes.

Pray. But there are some ways in which we're meant to pray. Firstly, we're to pray persistently. He says, continue steadfastly in prayer.

Steadfastly means with devotion. Some of your translations may say that. The Greek word, most rightly rendered, means with courageous persistence.

Persistence. Which is why this point is to pray persistently, with courageous persistence. We're elsewhere instructed to pray at all times. You'll find that in the parallel text in Ephesians 6, 18.

1 Thessalonians 5, 17, Paul says to pray without ceasing. This doesn't mean that we go away someplace to a quiet hilltop, and we never stop praying, that we become monastic, and we don't engage in the world, but rather that we carry about us a spirit of prayer.

[11 : 25] We connect everything that we're doing as we're walking through the world to God's good purposes, that we're constantly talking to Him. We're constantly aware that He exists. He does. We're just cognizant of that.

We look through this lens of God's activity in the world, and as we're going through the day, we're asking that He would bless a particular conversation, that He would change something for His glory. Constantly in the spirit of prayer. But also, we're meant to be in particular times of prayer. I think this is what Paul means here when he talks about continuing steadfastly, that there's this encouragement to particular times of prayer, both corporate and individual, that we gather as God's people together to pray, and that we spend time in the closet of prayer, that we get on our knees before the Lord in a persistent manner.

Jesus tells two parables, one of which is found in Luke 18, in order to illustrate the importance of persistent prayer. If you will, turn to Luke 18. This has the potential of being a familiar parable to you.

It's the parable, it's often called, of the persistent widow. Chapter 18, verse 1, it says, And He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

[12 : 45] And I so love Luke's writing because he so often gives us the commentary for the text itself, right? Why does this parable exist? So that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart.

And so we dive into it with that in mind. He said, In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. He wasn't a good judge. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, Give me justice against my adversary.

For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.

And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?

I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? So you see that there's this unjust judge, doesn't fear God, doesn't respect man, but because he no longer wants to be annoyed, he will do what is right.

[13 : 54] And what Jesus is doing, he's juxtaposing this unjust judge against God who is just, who does do what's right. He's not suggesting that if we have something we desire, and we just pester God to death, he'll give us what we want.

What he's saying is, that if you ask for things that are just, if you ask for justice, if you seek justice in your prayer, surely God will answer. We are to persist in prayer.

We see another wonderful example of this in Acts 1. Jesus is walking now. He's been crucified.

He's resurrected. He's walked now for 40 days amongst the disciples.

In Acts 1.8, we see a command. He says, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

And with that, he ascends. So this is the last thing that is recorded that Jesus says to them, and then he ascends. And can you imagine living in that day, being the apostles, and not knowing what to do next?

[15:09] He's given us a command. We're meant to be witnesses in these varying places, these varying spheres of influence that we have. We're going to receive power when the Holy Spirit comes.

What do we do? So they go back to the upper room. And we find them there with a number of others, about 120 in total, in verse 14 of chapter 1, doing what?

devoting themselves to prayer. They went and they consistently, they persisted across the span of time where the Spirit had yet to come in prayer.

And the Spirit comes. And you know the story, I hope, of Pentecost. If not, read on in your text.

What a wonderful thing that God works in them by the Spirit. And thousands and thousands come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But they don't stop there. They don't go, oh, we have the Spirit now. Now we can stop praying. You see the activity of the early church in chapter 2, verse 42, still devoting themselves to the prayers.

[16:10] We never outgrow our need of the Lord's intervention. It is God who works. It is God who can accomplish. It's by His power that things happen in this world.

So we never outgrow it. So we are to pray persistently. Persistently. Secondly, we are to pray watchfully. He says later there in verse 2, being watchful in it.

Keeping alert in your praying. In the most basic sense, I think there is some understanding here of physical alertness. That we are to stay awake.

That we are not to get distracted. Matthew 26, 40 and 41. It's seen as the Garden of Gethsemane before Jesus' arrest and His later crucifixion.

Verse 40, it records, And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, So could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

[17:11] The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. How often do we go into times of prayer and fall asleep?

I'm guilty. How often do we go into times of prayer and we're so very easily distracted? Beloved, one wonderful subset of benefit to gathering together with God's people to pray is the practice of focus.

Gather with a group of people for an hour or so and pray together. And I hope you're not looking at your phone. There's nothing distracting you that you're engaging in what's going on because you're not simply taking turns praying, but you're praying together.

We as a people are losing our ability to focus. Two years ago at our men's retreat, we were off and away at this incredibly tiny cabin for how many of us there were. We were packed into this little space and we required as part of that time in the morning that all of the men take some time to themselves, some time to study, some time of prayer.

And I had gotten up extra early. A couple of us did. Some of the elders, we got up extra early and we did that time and then we were cooking. So we were trying to be quiet in this little kitchen cooking up bacon and biscuits and some other things that we had.

[18:29] And I cannot tell you how many times I looked out across a group of men who were meant to be taking time to study their word and pray to God and how many of them were on their phones. Put it away.

Throw it away if you have to. Some wonderful features on your phone where you can just tell it not to bother you. It's a fantastic thing. So in the most basic of senses, you need to learn to devote yourself to prayer.

Being watchful in it. Setting aside the distractions and devoting yourself in it. In the broader sense, and I think this is what Paul particularly means. He's primarily aimed at saying that believers should

be aware of the things that they should specifically pray for.

They should be watchful. They should be looking around at the world around them and aware of what it is they ought to be praying for. I hear so many prayers that are so grossly general. Catch-all prayers. And the greater includes the lesser, but the exhortation here to be watchful is to pray specifically for things. Paul gives us an example of a specific thing to be prayed for.

[19 : 42] It's very difficult to pray persistent prayers that are vague. I found that to be true in my own life. If I'm only asking that God would do these huge general things.

God, work in our church for the sake of your glory. It's a wonderful thing to pray. Please, Lord, work in our church for the sake of your glory. But if this is all I ever pray, it's very difficult to persist in that. But if I say, God, work in our church for the sake of your glory, and here's the ways that I believe you need to work. These are the ways that I think you want to work. Will you use these prayers to do this work in our church?

And he so often answers those prayers specifically. So pray persistently. Pray watchfully. Pray thankfully.

Pray thankfully. Thankfully. Last part of verse 2 says, with thanksgiving. With thanksgiving. Pause for a moment just for a quick aside.

[20 : 39] I'm told that I mispronounced the word thankful because I say it the thankful instead of thankful. It's one of the things that I get picked on by my wife, so I'm really, my mind is self-conscious as I'm about to say.

Thankfully and thanksgiving a thousand times, so I'm just not going to worry about it. But pray thankfully. I'll say it the way I want to. With thanksgiving.

This is the fifth time that Paul has mentioned thanksgiving in Colossians. The fifth time. It's developing here thematically. Those of you who have been here have seen me.

I've talked about this a couple of times. You see it in chapter 1, verse 12. Chapter 2, verse 6.

Chapter 3, verse 15. And in verse 16. So for the fifth time, he's talked about being thankful, the importance of being thankful.

Why? I believe it's because thanksgiving has perspective-shifting power. It reminds us of who our God is. And not only just who He is, but who He is to us.

[21 : 46] We're reminded that God is faithful and just, that He is loving, that He cares about us when we're thankful, when we think about all of the things that He has accomplished for us. When we stop and ponder those things and when we approach Him, we begin with these hearts of thanksgiving.

Lord, You have done so much on my behalf. We could just pray prayers of thanksgiving for the rest of our lives and never run out of things to thank God for. But thanksgiving helps us.

It encourages us to turn and pray bold prayers before our God. Prayers of thanksgiving thanksgiving are fuel for asking for the supplication for what God would do in our world.

And there are some things, specific things, that we ought to be thankful for. Generally thankful for and thankful for in our prayers. Five kind of all-encompassing things.

And I'll just thank John MacArthur for making these, this alliteration work. So, they are God's presence. We ought to be thankful for God's presence.

[22 : 54] Psalm 75.1 says, We give thanks to You, O God. We give thanks for Your name is near. We recount Your wondrous deeds. We have a relationship with God.

He is near to us and we are near to Him. We can, in fact, go to Him because of the work of Christ. Because Christ intercedes for us. When God looks at us, He sees Jesus.

We can enter into His presence and we can pray. We ought to be thankful for God's presence.

Secondly, we should be thankful for God's provision. This includes many specifics, but generally for God's provision.

When Paul was adrift at sea in the midst of a storm, he was thankful for the food that God provided in the midst of a scary, horrible situation. Acts 27.35 records, And when he had said these things, he took bread and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat.

Thankful for the things that God provided even in the midst of a situation that was terrifying.

Thankful for the food, for God's provision. Thirdly, we are to be thankful for God's pardon.

[24 : 08] Romans 6.17. Paul writes, But thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.

We have been delivered because of the work of Jesus Christ. Right? We have placed faith in that and therefore we are saved and we are to be thankful for God's pardon.

Fourthly, for God's promises. 2 Corinthians 1:20. Paul writes, For all the promises of God find their yes in Him.

That is why it is through Him that we utter our amen to God for His glory. We are to be thankful for His promises. And beloved, if you don't know your Scriptures, you don't know His promises. Right? You don't have the undergirding and the great encouragement of who God is to you if you don't know your Scripture.

Get in it. Saturate yourself with it. Know God's promises to you. You can walk through so many difficult things in life just simply by meditating on that.

[25 : 14] And what a fuel then it becomes to ask that God would deliver you through whatever it is that you're dealing with. Know God's promises. Many of you who know me well know that one of my spiritual heroes is a man named George Mueller from Bristol, England.

My father introduced me to him. I'm so thankful that he did. An amazing man of faith did so many things for the kingdom of God. The primary thing that most people know him for is he ran a number of orphanages.

Cared for thousands and thousands of kids across his lifetime. But he saw his primary ministry was to show that God was a God that could be trusted for his promises.

That we could place faith in God and that that faith would never be disappointed if we believed in God's promises. So he did some very peculiar things with this ministry to the orphans.

He did many other things. He was a pastor of a church. Many people forget that he did that across his life. He had an organization that was a funding organization for missionaries all over the world. Did some wonderful work in that regard.

[26 : 19] And he oriented the way he did things in a way so that he could always easily trace the monies that came and the other resources that came directly to answer prayer from God.

I can't get into all the particulars of that for the sake of time. But a wonderful example of this. He saw that as his primary ministry to show the church that we can believe the promises that God makes.

And the very best biography written about him was written by a man named A.T. Pearson and this is from that biography. He wrote, Thus, under his great teacher being God, did this pupil early in his spiritual history learn that supreme lesson that to every child of God the word of God is the bread of life and the prayer of faith the breath of life.

That we are sustained by these things. Feasting on the word of God and breathing in and out through prayer. Fifthly, we're to be thankful for God's purpose.

Romans 8:28 Hope it's familiar to you. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good. For those who are called according to his purpose. So we're to pray with thanksgiving.

[27 : 31] Thanksgiving will change the way that you pray. Take a quick look at this. When the disciples ask Jesus how should they pray, he responds like this.

This is so cool. I think you're familiar with this. Matthew 6:9-13 This is Jesus' answer. Christ, Lord, teach us how to pray. And he says, Pray then like this.

Like this, not this. I'm going to make that distinction for you. There's nothing wrong with repeating the Lord's Prayer, but pray then like this. He's giving us a pattern for prayer. Notice the things that I've said that we ought to be thankful for in that.

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Presence. Our Father. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Purpose. Verse 11, Give us this day our daily bread. Provision. Verse 12, And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Pardon. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[28 : 32] Promises. How cool that is that that works together in that way as Jesus explains to us. So we get some further fleshing out, some further understanding as we read the rest of the Scriptures.

What is it that we're supposed to be praying for? What is it that we're supposed to be thankful for? It's all running together in this way. So we're to pray persistently. We're to pray watchfully. We're to pray thankfully.

And we're to pray intercessory prayers. I desperately wanted this point to be pray intercessory. But it is not a word. And I really looked.

I was really hoping somewhere, some source out there would tell me it was okay to say intercessory. But if you care to make up a word, you can pray intercessory or pray intercessory prayers.

Verse 3, the very beginning, says, at the same time, pray also for us. So he's not negating here. Paul's not saying that all of your prayers have to be for others.

[29 : 30] Right? Because he says, at the same time, so as you're praying these prayers, pray also for us. So pray for yourself. Pray for those circumstances that you're walking through, that you're in the midst of.

Pray for your community. And at the same time, pray also for us. Intercessory prayer or intercession is just that.

It's praying on behalf of someone else. It's praying for someone else. It's praying for a lost friend or a family member or a co-worker. It's praying for other believers.

It's going to God on their behalf. It's expressing kingdom-oriented desire for them. It's a very wonderful way to serve others. Please pray for me.

Number one on my list of things you can do for me, pray for me. Pray for me. Put me on the top of your list of things that you're praying for. Those specific, persistent things, I want to be on that list.

[30 : 26] I need your prayers. It's a wonderful way to serve me. I find so often that people's prayers are altogether consumed with themselves. Experience that, praying with people.

And they never pray for other people. They only pray for themselves. giving prayer requests. Prayer requests are all about them. They're never about what's happening in the world around them. And it's a shame.

So many of us are so selfish. If you will begin to think about others, if you will begin to look at the world around you, look at the hurts of others, it so draws ours own into perspective.

I just find that so often, one thing I try to make a clear habit of doing is praying for the pastors in our area and meeting with pastors in our area. And the more I do that, the more thankful I am for this church.

You guys are great. How many of these guys are walking through some challenges around us that I don't even know? I don't know how I would bear up under some of the things that they're going through. And so I pray for those men.

[31 : 27] And it's such a wonderful reminder that God's at work in our congregation. It shifts my perspective. And I know that those men appreciate the prayers that I offer up on their behalf.

We ought to be praying for those around us and beyond. Both abroad and home. Your bulletin, I know it doesn't change from week to week, but your bulletin reminds you of some things that we need to be praying for together as a church.

The Whetstones, the Stewards, the Zwimpies, you guys ever look at any of this over here? I hope. I'm making a list for you. I'm starting a list off for you. You should be in prayer for those things that are happening around the world.

I hope you know more and more people who are out and beyond that we can be praying for.

Praying for those things that are happening at home. Our community outreach groups are a place that should be places of prayer.

You should be investing in one another. You should be remembering each other throughout the week and praying for one another in this way. Praying for others shows a maturation in your Christian life.

[32 : 35] You know, when we have babies, those of you, especially with really young ones, we don't really expect a lot from them in the form of communication. We get a whole lot out of them. Some of us will teach our kids sign language.

They could tell us simple things like more, thank you, little sign language things that we do. They begin to develop their words. We want them to be communicating with us, but we don't expect a whole ton out of them in that regard, but we definitely expect them to grow in their ability to communicate to us.

God wants to see the same. Last Sunday evening, we had our welcome home dinner. If you weren't here, I'm sorry. It was a lot of fun. You should have been. And at the very end, we were playing a game called Inception Duck, Duck, Goose, where you have a big game of Duck, Duck, Goose

going and the people who get tagged have to go to the middle and then once there's enough people, they get a game of Duck, Duck, Goose going, going the opposite direction and pretty soon you have these multiple games of Duck, Duck, Goose.

It's kind of maddening, happening in the middle of the room. And I was so very, very thankful that my sons decided they wanted to play Cade 5, Judah 3, sitting in this big circle, primarily of college students.

And everyone's running around, going insane. And I just jumped in on the game because Cade hadn't been tagged yet. I know he was kind of sitting there itching, ready to go. And so I tagged him.

[33 : 51] We ran around the circle. He caught up to me. I let him catch up to me and tag me. Okay? So I'm out of the game and it's Cade's turn to go around. And I was so proud of him.

Beaming father, my five-year-old, decides to tag his little brother. So he tagged Judah. And off he goes and very clearly let him catch him. Like he very clearly let Judah catch up to him and catch him to make Judah feel good about the game.

It was a wonderful, wonderful thing to experience him giving up winning for the sake of his little brother. So that's Cade. He's five. Then Judah goes around and I think, I think was it Hannah McDonald, I think?

Oh, you want to hear? I don't remember who he tagged then. He tagged somebody. Judah did. Did not try to let be kind. He was, but at three, I was really proud of him.

He was full, he was leaning into it. He was going as fast as he possibly could go. And the gracious person he tagged let him get back around to the other side, which was also wonderful to see.

[34 : 52] But there should be this maturation, right? Like, cool for Judah to full on out and go. Right? Great that Cade grew up a little bit. Thought of someone else in this process of this game.

We should be growing in our prayer process. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a wonderful book called Life Together. And he said this of praying for one another.

A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me.

His face that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died.

The face of a forgiven sinner. So you see how this perspective even changes in our life together in a Christian fellowship. We need to be praying for one another.

[35 : 53] Turn to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. I'm going to show you an example. A biblical prayer, a record of prayer that contains in it all of these elements, all of these things that I've said.

Persistently, watchfully, thankfully, and in an intercessory fashion. Nehemiah is after Ezra before Esther. That helps you.

If you only have a New Testament with you, you only have one-third of your Bible. Nehemiah is a Jew living in exile.

Israel was punished for their unfaithfulness to God. They were judged by God through a war with Babylon. Babylon came, captured, carried away.

This is now some generations later. Persia is now the world power. Power has shifted. Persia has conquered Babylon and Jews are now living in exile under Persian rule. There have been some Jews that have returned back to Israel, but an edict has been passed by the current king, King Artaxerxes, in this state, the son of the King Artaxerxes.

[37 : 05] He's passed this edict that they cannot rebuild Jerusalem. Cannot rebuild Jerusalem. But all the same, it seems that Nehemiah expects that those who have gone back would have rebuilt it anyway.

That they would have disobeyed the command of the king and they would have rebuilt Jerusalem all the same. Because he receives word at the very beginning of Nehemiah 1 that it hasn't happened yet, that the city still lies in shambles.

And I'll pick up in verse 4. Nehemiah writes, As soon as I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days.

Now he did so because God's glory in those days was manifest. It was seen by how God's people were doing. Right? By the wealth, the might of how God's people were doing.

And so he warns this. Right? Not because he cares so much about the Israelites, about his people, but he cares about God's name. He goes on, And I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

[38 : 07] Right? You see the persistence found in there? He continues fasting and praying. In fact, he found out in the month of Chislew and he addresses the king you see at the beginning of chapter 2 in the month of Nisan.

This is roughly four months. Four, four and a half months that he continues fasting and praying before the God of heaven. Verse 5, And I said, O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.

You see the giving of thanks. Right? Like I know who you are. I know how you interact with your people. He's thankful for that. Verse 6, Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayers of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel, your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel which we have sinned against you.

Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. Do you see the intercession on their behalf?

Praying on behalf of the entire nation of Israel. Verse 8, Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses saying, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. But if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen to make my name dwell there.

[39 : 37] They are your servants and your people whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. You see the giving of thanks once again? Oh Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayers of your servants who delight to fear your name and give success to your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.

He's referring to the king. He's praying watchfully. He knows what it is and how it is that he ought to pray. And up in verse 6, you'll see that he's doing so day and night.

That he's physically being watchful as well. And the last verse, verse 11, ends, Now I was cupbearer to the king. God had, in his sovereignty, placed him to be a servant to the king.

He drank the king's wine to be sure that the wine wasn't poisoned. So he had access to the king. And you see in chapter 2, the king asks him one day what's bothering him. You see a repetition, a brief, so I prayed in chapter 2.

And then he spills it. Ask the king to go against this edict that he had delivered, which this was not a thing that you asked a king to do. For a king to undo something he had done would be to admit his own fault and his own failure.

[40 : 50] So this is a major deal. Nehemiah, likely from the human perspective, stood to be killed for the thing that he asked the king to do. Falsify yourself, is what he was saying to the king.

Make yourself less than you think you are. You're not the king, you're just a guy who made a decision. It was a bad decision. This is an offense that would have been punishable by death.

And so he prays. And he prays this persistent, watchful, thankful, intercessory prayer. And God gives him great success. He's able to return, rebuild the wall.

Read the rest of the book. It's one of my favorite Old Testament stories. So we see here the prayer of the new self. We are to pray persistently, watchfully, thankfully.

And we're to pray intercessory prayers. Secondly, and in closing, you see the opportunity of the new self in the last part of verse 3.

[41 : 49] That God, pray 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. You see, often in the New Testament this idea of a door equals opportunity.

An example of that is in 1 Corinthians 16, 8 and 9. Paul says, but I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost for a wide door for effective work has opened to me and there are many adversaries. So door equals opportunity. So there's an opportunity for the new self which we see expressed in Paul's life even as he's in prison. And the overarching exhortation here is to seize every opportunity. You see here that Paul is in prison. He declares that at the end. We're not 100% sure on which imprisonment is happening. Some commentators will say it with confidence but we don't know for a

fact that this is his Roman imprisonment but it likely is.

Most of the evidence adds up to that. So he's more than likely in his Roman imprisonment and he's seeing that even this is an opportunity. His primary concern is that he would be able to declare the mystery of Christ.

[43 : 03] How many of you would ask for others to pray for them found in such a situation that they would just be able to share Christ with those around them? Seems to me that most of us would ask that the church would pray that we be set free from prison.

This is not where I want to be. This is not a situation I want to find myself in. Pray for that. Pray for me and the things that are going on with me. But here Paul says no, pray that I'll have an opportunity to share the mystery of Christ.

The mystery of Christ as we saw earlier in the book is simply referring to that which was hidden in the Old Testament but now is revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It's the gospel. He just wants an opportunity to preach the gospel.

Open up this door. Pray that God would open it. That I would have opportunity to do so. Believers are to pray for open doors as it is God who opens them.

It's God who brings about these divine situations where we are able to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. Revelation 3-7 describes Jesus as the one who opens and no one will shut and who shuts and no one opens.

[44 : 13] An example of this is found in Acts 16 verses 9 and 10. Luke records that a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there urging him and saying come over to Macedonia and help us.

And when Paul had seen the vision immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. They took it as a door open for going and preaching the gospel.

If you read on in Acts there was a great deal of people turned to God by their work there. Paul's Roman imprisonment was not the end of his ministry.

Just like wherever you are now is not the preparing point for your ministry. If you are found in Christ if you are a disciple of Jesus Christ you are to invest in the things that Jesus Christ cares about.

The redemption of souls the redeeming of his church the gathering in of that number. The summation of Paul's Roman imprisonment is found in Acts 28 verses 30 and 31.

[45 : 17] Luke writes he lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him. It was a house arrest that he was under. Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

So there's this wonderful opportunity laid before him and he has the eyes to see that this is the case. God has brought me by his good plan and his good purposes to this place to share the gospel to seize the opportunities that God has placed before me and the same is true of us.

While we don't find ourselves in prison UNG might feel like a prison it's a place for you to serve and to work for the sake of our King. Colossians 3 1-4 This is the very beginning of this entire dialogue that Paul's been taking us to.

He says if then you have been raised with Christ if you are found in Him seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your minds on things that are above not on things that are on earth for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

And then verse 4 when Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with Him in glory. You see that the new self is entirely reoriented.

[46 : 39] We no longer serve the world we no longer serve ourselves but we serve Christ. Christ is our life. Paul certainly saw this to be the case. Willing to go anywhere and always seeking an opportunity to share the mystery of Jesus Christ and beloved our lives do not line up to this in so many ways.

I want you I want me in the moments of our days as we walk out into this next week to be able to echo what Paul says in Philippians 1.21 for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain because I get more of Christ.

That we treasure Him to the degree that all that we do is oriented in that direction. We're going to hold verse 4 into next week for the sake of time.

So let me conclude with this kind of summary statement. As new creations in Christ we are given great opportunity to share Him with the world. The blessing of getting to carry out His mission in the

world.

This ought to be the great desire of the redeemed. To share the work of our Redeemer. And as such we should be pressed into prayer. Asking, pleading with God that He would work in our efforts for the sake of His name.

[48 : 03] So pray and seize every opportunity to experience, proclaim, and display the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things to all peoples.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together.